

# **Work, Employment and Society Annual Conference 2026**



**Abstract Book  
Friday 11 September 2026**

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then alphabetically by Stream name**

# WELCOME

Welcome to the Work, Employment and Society Annual Conference 2026 at University of Bath. The theme of the 2026 conference is 'Work and Employment in the Great Reshuffle: Navigating the Polycrisis'. It is a pleasure to announce our two plenary panels:

Our opening panel 'AI, Digitalisation, and Labour in the Polycrisis: Global and Institutional Perspectives' will be given by Mohammad Amir Anwar and Valeria Pulignano.

Our closing panel 'Precarity, Inequality, Migration, and Worker Agency in a Changing Political Economy' will be given by Patrizia Zanoni and Gabriella Alberti.

The programme also includes a variety of special events, journal events and PhD Showcase presentations.

This conference offers a rich and challenging programme and it is hoped that every delegate will find sessions of interest.

A conference of this breadth depends on the efforts of many committed individuals. Significant thanks are due to all those who have helped with the organisation of the conference, particularly the committee members:

Mariachiara Barzotto, *University of Bath*

Deborah Giustini, *Hamad Bin Khalifa University and Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven*

Alvaro Martinez-Perez, *University of Sheffield*

Aditya Ray, *University of the West of England*

Mayra Ruiz Castro, *Queen Mary, University of London*

Wen Wang, *University of Leicester*

# PAPER SESSION 8

## 09:00-10:30

### Algorithmic work and data justice - Room 0.23

#### Stratified Hiring in Global Online Labour Markets

*Arnaud Lelievre*

*(Radboud University)*

Online gig platforms such as Fiverr, Upwork, and Freelancer are commonly portrayed as efficient, borderless marketplaces that match global labour supply and demand. While existing research has focused primarily on worker-side outcomes, comparatively less is known about the demand side—specifically, whether posted jobs result in hiring and under what conditions. This gap is particularly striking given the extreme labour oversupply on these platforms, where millions of workers compete for relatively few jobs. In principle, such conditions should facilitate matching; yet, in practice, most postings do not result in a hire.

This paper asks how hiring decisions are structured in transnational online labour markets, and to what extent they are shaped by systematic differences in how employers are evaluated and selected.

Drawing on socio-economic theories of markets and research on statistical discrimination, the paper conceptualises hiring as a process structured by uncertainty and socially embedded evaluation practices. In these online markets, actors operate under profound informational asymmetries: clients face uncertainty about worker quality and commitment, while workers question client reliability and payment intent. Market outcomes therefore depends not only on supply–demand conditions, but also on how credibility and risk are mediated through platform signals.

Empirically, the study analyses over two million job postings from two major global freelancing platforms using a logistic regression of hiring outcomes. The analysis examines the role of client characteristics (e.g. payment verification, reputation, geographic location), job features (e.g. category, payment structure, premium visibility), and competition (number of applicants). Qualitative digital traces from online forums are used as supplementary material.

The findings challenge assumptions of efficient matching. First, high participation does not translate into high matching: most job postings remain unfilled despite receiving applications. Second, client-side signals—especially those tied to payment security (e.g., verified payment method or deposit made)—emerge as the strongest predictors of hiring. Third, hiring probabilities vary systematically across regions: jobs posted by clients from the Global North are significantly more likely to be filled than those from the Global South, even when controlling for platform signals and job characteristics. Notably, this disadvantage is strongest for South Asian clients, despite the region being both a major source of demand and the primary supplier of online gig labour.

Qualitative evidence indicates that workers selectively avoid clients from certain regions, often refusing to apply to their job postings. These practices are justified through a combination of economic reasoning (e.g. expectations of low pay), perceived risk (e.g. non-payment), and culturally coded evaluations (e.g. communication styles or work practices).

The paper makes three contributions. First, it shifts attention to the demand side of digital labour markets, showing that employers are unevenly positioned in their ability to secure labour. Second, it demonstrates how hiring outcomes are shaped by selective avoidance and reputational stratification, extending theories of statistical discrimination to employer evaluation in digital labour markets. Third, it provides new evidence on how global inequalities are reproduced through everyday hiring practices in ostensibly borderless digital markets.

[Research stage: data collection complete, preliminary analyses conducted, further analysis and theoretical development ongoing.]

### **Contextualizing Datasets: Deepening Awareness of Data Biases through Critical Reflection**

*Angie Zhang, Min Kyung Lee*

*(University of Texas at Austin)*

Towards more participatory algorithmic design, researchers urge supporting individuals to probe datasets for problematic biases or behaviors that technologies might amplify. For instance, technologies deployed for HR candidate screening may exacerbate historical biases of discriminatory applicant selection; and workers on digital work platforms frequently face opaque algorithms, designed to overlook their physical and psychological well-being in favor of maximizing their output.

Critically probing for these types of biases and implications of algorithmic design requires first recognizing that the underlying data is not neutral, an objective achievable through data contextualization---understanding data contexts including its origin and contents to recognize opportunities or shortcomings. Drawing from literature around critical data literacy and data feminism, we created a web-tool, "Contextualizing Datasets", that helps users contextualize data by guiding them in data exploration and different stakeholder interactions. We applied this to an educational case study with a graduate class. Our findings suggest the tool helped scaffold students in contextualizing data to critically question data curation methods and stakeholder representation, with the local case study context supporting them to draw from lived experiences. From our results, we share ways to improve and re-purpose Contextualizing Datasets to help workers gain critical awareness about data justice and algorithmic work. In particular, we suggest how this tool could help workers investigate work-related data to deepen their critical awareness about how algorithmic work impacts well-being and worker rights, an important precursor to supporting worker-centered technology design and worker collective advocacy.

### **Will the Real Employer Please Stand Up? OSH Responsibility in Algorithmically Managed Work**

*Johan Holm, Virpi Kalakoski, Karin Hennum, Virginia Gunn, Penny Williams, Pille Strauss, Carin Håkansta*

*(Umeå University)*

As managerial authority is increasingly exercised through algorithmic systems, a central question for the regulation of work becomes harder to answer: who is responsible for the working environment? Algorithmic management systems are used to allocate tasks, monitor performance, structure incentives, and direct workers' behaviour, often through tools supplied by third-party vendors. Occupational safety and health (OSH) law has traditionally attached responsibility to the employer on the assumption that the employer organises, directs, and controls work. This paper argues that algorithmic management unsettles that model by redistributing practical control across employers, digital systems, and technology providers.

The paper develops this argument through a control-based framework for analysing OSH responsibility across different work arrangements. Focusing on legal form, control over the workplace, and control over work performance, it shows that formal responsibility and actual control do not always coincide in fragmented employment relations. Algorithmic management intensifies this mismatch. Digital systems may shape work pace, performance metrics, behavioral nudges, surveillance practices, and psychosocial pressures, while the actors designing and supplying those systems remain largely outside the traditional structure of OSH duties. Managerial power thus becomes more dispersed, more opaque, and more difficult to locate within existing models of legal responsibility.

The central claim is that employer-centred OSH regulation remains necessary but is increasingly insufficient where labour-process control is technologically mediated and organisationally fragmented. If digital management systems materially shape working conditions and workplace risks, responsibility for preventing harm cannot rest solely with the contractual employer. The paper, therefore explores three possible regulatory responses. The first is to articulate clearer OSH-related duties for developers and providers of algorithmic management systems. The second is a broader functional approach under which responsibility attaches to any actor exercising substantial influence over the working environment, regardless of formal contractual status. The third is to articulate clearer OSH-related duties for employers as the actors who decide whether, how, and for what purposes algorithmic management systems provided by external developers and suppliers are introduced and used in the workplace. This, in turn, points to the importance of AI and algorithmic management literacy among

employers, since meaningful responsibility presupposes sufficient understanding of how such systems shape working conditions and workplace risks.

The paper contributes to debates on algorithmic work and data justice by showing that algorithmic management is not only a matter of surveillance, fairness, and data governance, but also a question of how legal responsibility for health and safety should be allocated when managerial control is increasingly fragmented, externalised, and embedded in digital systems.

## Care infrastructures, social reproduction and the crisis of care 1 - Room 0.18

### **The Care Trap: Gender, Social Reproduction, and the Time Divide in India**

*Shruti Priya, Indrajit Bairagya*

*(Institute for Social and Economic Change)*

The persistence of gender inequality in contemporary labour markets cannot be understood without examining the unequal distribution of unpaid care work. In India, unpaid caregiving encompassing childcare, eldercare and other emotional and supervisory support forming the core of social reproduction and for reproducing labour power across generations. Yet, this work remains largely invisible, unrecognized, and disproportionately performed by women. Women dedicated an average of 47 minutes to unpaid care work in 2019 which increased to an average of 61 min per day. On contrary men spent an average of 15 minutes per day approximately between 2019 and 2024. Further, the issues of demographic shifts, changing family structures, and limited public provisioning of care, signal an intensifying crisis of care, raising critical questions about the future of work and gendered labour participation.

This paper investigates the patterns, determinants, and gendered distribution of unpaid care work in India using nationally representative data from the Time Use Surveys (2019 and 2024). The novelty of the study is use of a conceptual distinction between core (time-binding) care and non-core (flexible) care. The empirical analysis focuses on individuals aged 25-59 years and combines descriptive and econometric approaches. To account for the censored nature of time-use data, Tobit regression models are employed to estimate the determinants of time spent in unpaid care work. Further, a Tobit Blinder-Oaxaca Decomposition analysis is undertaken to distinguish between inequalities arising from differences in observable characteristics and those rooted in structural and normative factors.

The findings reveal a persistent and substantial gender gap in unpaid care work, with women bearing a disproportionate share across both core and non-core categories. Core care likely emerge as the most rigid and unequal domain, strongly associated with marital status, household size, and women's position within the household, particularly for those identified as spouses or daughters-in-law. Age exhibited a life-cycle pattern, with women in the 25 to 45 age group experiencing the highest care burden. While higher education and urban residence reduced the intensity of physical care, it fails to eliminate women's responsibility, instead shifting their roles toward nurturing and managerial aspects of care. Importantly, the decomposition show that a significant portion of the gender gap remains unexplained by observable characteristics, pointing to the enduring influence of patriarchal norms, gendered expectations, and institutional constraints. The paper argues that the crisis of care is not merely a consequence of rising demand, but of the continued reliance on women's unpaid labour to sustain both households and economies. Without structural interventions, such as public investment in care infrastructure, redistribution of care responsibilities, and recognition of unpaid work, the future of work will remain deeply gendered. In this sense, the "care trap" represents not only a constraint on women's time, but a fundamental challenge to achieving equitable and inclusive development.

## **From Choice to Constraint: The Binding Power of Calling in Volunteer Work**

*Leanne Greening*

*(Swansea University)*

How voluntary is volunteering? Voluntary work is widely understood to be freely chosen and readily reversible, with volunteers presumed to have discretion over whether, when and how they participate (Collins et al., 2024; Nichols and Ralston, 2011). However, this assumption sits uneasily alongside evidence that volunteers often find it difficult to reduce or withdraw their participation, particularly in forms of work oriented toward care and support (Andersen et al., 2021; McAllum, 2017; O'Toole and Grey, 2015). This tension matters because many organisations depend heavily on volunteers to deliver services that address significant social needs, from high-stakes crisis support to other forms of care and support. In many contexts, volunteers work alongside or in place of paid staff, filling the 'caring gaps' left by state retrenchment and shielding the state from the full costs of social reproduction. Understanding how formally voluntary participation becomes difficult to step back from is therefore critical for explaining how such systems are sustained. This paper examines how participation that begins as freely chosen becomes experienced as morally binding over time.

The paper brings the concept of calling into dialogue with volunteering. Calling highlights how morally motivated work can come to be experienced as a moral imperative rather than a matter of individual preference (Berkelaar and Buzzanell, 2014; Bunderson and Thompson, 2009). While both are associated with moral commitment and service to others, volunteering has rarely been systematically examined through this lens. Existing research shows how participation is socially structured (O'Toole and Grey, 2015; Overgaard, 2018), yet pays less attention to how obligation becomes attached to participation over time. Building on critical accounts of calling (Cinque et al., 2020; Dean and Greene, 2017), the paper conceptualises obligation as the mechanism through which participation becomes stabilised beyond preference. The analysis draws on qualitative interviews with 40 volunteers at a suicide prevention charity across England and Wales.

The study traces participation as it evolves through sustained engagement with callers, fellow volunteers and the organisation. Participation initially framed as an expression of personal values becomes anchored in accumulating obligations to concrete others. Through repeated encounters and ongoing reliance, volunteers come to experience their role less as something they can step back from and more as something they feel responsible to continue. Feelings of guilt, particularly when contemplating reducing shifts or stepping away, reinforce this sense of obligation and make disengagement morally problematic.

The paper makes three contributions. First, it advances research on calling by conceptualising obligation as the process through which participation becomes morally binding over time, responding to calls to examine how calling is enacted in practice and extending work beyond paid employment. Second, it contributes to volunteering research by advancing critiques of agency-centred accounts, demonstrating how participation can remain formally voluntary while progressively narrowing what individuals experience as possible to refuse, reduce or relinquish. Third, it contributes to broader debates on work and employment by showing how labour is stabilised in the absence of material dependence through moral attachment and responsibility to others in high-stakes care contexts.

## **Building Resourcefulness, Moral Responsibility and Collective Citizenship in Urban Precarity**

*Helen Traill, Stephanie Anderson, Andrew Cumbers, Robert McMaster, Deirdre Shaw*

*(University of Glasgow)*

As the omnipresence of a language of crisis highlights, the everyday is now a meeting point of multiple acute challenges. This paper takes as its starting point a community organization working in area of high urban deprivation as a perspective from which to view the confluence of these multiple crises. With the historic retreat of direct state provision in areas of public services, workers in such third sector bodies experience increased demands in various ways, including an expansion in their range of activities into terrains of explicit care and support, increasing emotional and time commitments. Understanding the lived experiences of workers supporting deprived communities is urgently required as a window onto the strain faced on the frontlines of precarity. Using an ethnographic case study of an organisation in an area of multiple deprivation in a UK city, we investigate how workers manage increased demands, their ways of adapting and increasing resourcefulness, and means of coping with

emotional strains. Our study explores the ways workers share moral responsibility with those they work with, to enable them to adapt and cope. Drawing on an analysis of responsabilisation, we point to the ways organisations promote resourcefulness and a more collective sense of citizenship that balances the needs of workers and the wider community.

### **Public Crisis and Private Burden: Unpaid Care Work and Health Depletion among Women Workers in Sri Lanka**

*Kowsalya Duraisamy, Nata Duvvury*

*(University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka)*

Crisis of care work in the present world necessitates increased attention towards invisible infrastructures that sustain economies through unpaid labour. Especially, as highlighted by Feminist Political Economy scholarship, women's disproportionate responsibility, time and labour towards social reproduction remains systematically undervalued and requires due policy attention. This paper, by situating women's lived health experiences within broader debates on care infrastructure, examines how working women's unpaid care work results in their health depletion. It brings evidence on how women's bodies, time and labour are used as 'shock absorbers' that compensate structural care deficiencies through patriarchal household labour arrangements. It foregrounds women's time poverty and diminished selfcare resulting from unpaid care work as critical yet neglected dimensions of women's health crisis.

This study adopted an explorative qualitative study design to capture the lived health experiences of women workers across diverse socio-economic contexts. It used an intra-paradigm qualitative mixed-method approach: Qualitative surveys and in-depth interviews that enabled rich narratives on women's unpaid labour, time use patterns and health outcomes. The study sample consisted sixty women workers from formal and informal agricultural, service and industrial sectors from four districts of Sri Lanka. The analysis employed thematic analysis guided by multiple feminist themes inspired by key feminist political economy frameworks, such as, 'second shift', 'patriarchal bargaining' and 'depletion of social reproduction'. This approach allowed an intersectional understanding on how patriarchal and capitalist gendered power dynamics along with deficits in care infrastructure exploit women's time, labour and health.

Findings of this study reveal historically built 'double burden' of women workers that persistently results in chronic time poverty. Most of these women's extensive unpaid care labour begins before dawn and extends beyond late night on a daily basis, leaving only less than six hours for sleep. More intensified sleep deprivation is reported among mothers of young children due to fragmented night-time sleep. This study clearly evidences that unpaid care work remains highly feminized despite women's paid labour contributions, whereas their male counterparts' contributions are very minimal and framed only as 'help'. It also highlights how women have culturally been conditioned to internalize care work related gender-roles and engage in self-sacrificial care labour that erodes their capacity for rest and recovery.

Additionally, infrastructural deficits, such as lack of childcare and elderly care services, absence of labour protections and flexible work arrangements intensify women's health depletion resulting from their care labour. Normalization of such exploitative patriarchal and structural dynamics result in multiple health impacts of women, such as, chronic fatigue, persistent headaches, musculoskeletal pain, stress, and burnout, alongside symptoms specifically associated with prolonged sleep deprivation. This study further highlights how domestic violence and coercive control with regard to forced care work exacerbate women's health deterioration through constant policing of their time, mobility and rest. Overall, this paper argues that intersecting forces of capitalist and patriarchal systems structurally compel women's unpaid care labour at the cost of their health. Addressing this crisis of care work therefore requires both redistribution of unpaid care labour and social provisioning through robust care infrastructure welfare.

# Care infrastructures, social reproduction and the crisis of care 2 - Room 0.19

## PhD Showcase

### **A Lopsided Bargain: Women's Employment and the Persistent Gender Gap in Unpaid Work in India**

*Sunny Ladkat, Karan Babbar, Gaurav Dhamija*

*(Indian Institute of Technology, Hyderabad)*

This study investigates how women's employment shapes the division of unpaid domestic labor within Indian couples. Despite gains in female education, Indian women still perform a vastly disproportionate share of household and care work. It raises the critical question of whether women's employment alleviates this unequal burden of domestic work. Using nationally representative data from the 2024 Indian Time Use Survey (TUS), we analyse time-use patterns in married couples. Our results show that employed wives spend significantly less time on unpaid work than their counterparts, with the most significant reductions seen among regular salaried workers and those with longer paid work hours. However, this adjustment is significantly one-sided. Husbands' contributions increase only marginally. The spousal gap in unpaid work narrows, but almost entirely because women do less and not because men do more. To explain this persistence, we examine the mechanism of gender deviance neutralization, which aligns with the "doing gender" framework. Even when both spouses are unemployed, or when wives spend more time in paid work than husbands, men contribute substantially less to unpaid domestic labor. Along with this we find that there is intra household substitution by the other adult and elderly females from the household. This pattern reflects the resilience of gender norms, where household work remains culturally assigned to women, and men's limited participation serves to reinforce traditional masculinity. While women in full-time, salaried jobs experience the largest reductions in unpaid work, the rebalancing remains incomplete, leaving them with a "double shift" of paid and unpaid labor. This unequal distribution not only affects women's well-being but also constrains their career investment. The study highlights the stark limits of women's employment as a pathway to gender equality within the household. While a job may lighten a woman's domestic load, our results demonstrate that deep-seated gender norms ensure the responsibility for unpaid work remains firmly on her shoulders.

### **Au Pairs in the UK after Brexit**

*Laura Rosa Berro Yoldi*

*(University of Leeds, People, Work, Employment Department)*

In the United Kingdom, one of the aspects of the global care crisis was centred around childcare due to similar reasons: unequal childcare redistribution between men and women, who often shoulder the childcare demands and tasks; lack of universal and accessible childcare policies by consecutive UK governments; and the commodification of childcare, with high costs of private provision particularly in the early years education sector. One of the cost-effective and flexible solutions that local families in the UK have utilised to cover their childcare needs is hiring Au Pairs.

Au Pairs have traditionally been understood and framed under diverse regulations as young migrants undertaking a cultural exchange, an activity halfway between work and education. This experience, hypothetically, consists of living with a host family in a foreign country, where they learn the language and the culture. In exchange for free accommodation and food, they help with childcare and light housework, which is symbolically paid. However, due to sexual and gender roles and the evolution of neoliberalism, most Au Pairs are female migrants who are used as cheap childcare.

Due to historical and regulatory reasons, European Union citizens have been the primary source of Au Pairs in the UK, who have always been required to hold a residence and work permit. After the end of free movement of labour for EU citizens in January 2021, European citizens who had not applied for their right to live and work in the UK were no longer able to legally work as Au Pairs. However, demand

for Au Pairs from UK host families, as well as for people worldwide to undertake this role in the UK, remained very high.

Despite UK regulations, entering the country as tourists and working irregularly as Au Pairs has been a common strategy among young women from around the globe. After Brexit, it appears that young EU citizens have also been adopting this practice, being hired by local host families who need affordable childcare. At the same time, there seems to be an increase in the number of Au Pairs under the Youth Mobility Visa Scheme in the UK. In addition, since April 2024 in the UK, Au Pairs have ceased to be labelled “members of the family” and are now recognised as domestic workers, with access to the National Minimum Wage and worker rights.

Consequently, the scenario has changed significantly for Au Pairs in the UK since 2018, when the last academic research on this phenomenon was published (Cox and Busch, 2018). Since then, due to the convergence of the childcare crisis, major regulatory changes in the migrant and labour regimes, and global uncertainty and instability, it appears that, following Brexit, Au Pairs' working and living conditions, and their experiences, may have changed. Consequently, this research aims to understand the general experiences of Au Pairs in the UK after Brexit, the ways in which different visa types shape these care workers, and how the lack of worker status affects their experiences and working conditions.

### **Who Cares? Undoing Gender at the Household Level in Pakistan**

*Zoha Aamir*

*(Queen Mary University of London)*

Over the years scholars have shown that unpaid care work, including care of persons and housework, is one of the most gendered spheres of social life where equality is hard to achieve. Yet, some couples are able to push gender boundaries and achieve a more egalitarian division of carework. Studying these couples could potentially reveal the mechanisms that allow men and women to overcome traditional conceptions of paid and unpaid work. However, much of the existing scholarship focuses on the persistence of these gendered patterns, with limited attention to how couples actively challenge and renegotiate the division of labour. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by proposing a multi-level framework to answer a central question: How do couples ‘undo’ gendered divisions of socially reproductive labour to create more egalitarian households? Focusing on both structural and individual levels, this study explores how dual-earner couples in Pakistan negotiate domestic responsibilities, challenge or reinforce traditional gender norms, and navigate the factors that enable or constrain more egalitarian arrangements amid the growing crisis of care.

Using a constructivist epistemological approach grounded in feminist theory, this study adopts a mixed methods design. It combines time-use diaries with semi-structured interviews conducted in two phases: first, joint interviews with couples, followed by individual interviews. The dataset comprises 30 dual-earner couples (60 individuals) with children under 18, based in Lahore, Pakistan. This methodological approach allows for an in-depth analysis of both structural constraints and individual agency in shaping household labour division.

Findings reveal a paradox: while men's involvement in housework and childcare has increased compared to previous generations, deeply embedded gender norms continue to structure care work. The relative absence of formal care structures intensifies constraints on households and reinforces reliance on informal arrangements. These informal arrangements often involve extended family networks or outsourcing domestic help, which help sustain women's employment. The breadwinner-homemaker ideology remains firmly intact, with men still perceived as primary earners even when women contribute financially. Interestingly, couples rarely cite gender as the reason for these inequalities. Instead, they attribute the unequal division of care work to employment-related constraints, such as long work hours, framing men's lower involvement as a consequence of time limitations rather than gendered expectations. Nonetheless, fathers engage more actively in caregiving activities, suggesting emerging shifts in masculinity and the potential for change in household gender dynamics.

This study makes two key contributions. First, while much existing research focuses on women's experiences, this study brings men into the conversation, capturing how they navigate and negotiate their roles in care work. Second, by shifting the focus from the persistence of traditional norms to the potential for change, this research opens new avenues for examining the valuation and redistribution of care work in Pakistan. As data analysis progresses, these findings will contribute to broader

discussions on gender, work, and family in the Global South, offering insights into changing household dynamics in contexts where patriarchal constraints remain strong.

## **Intersectional inequalities, precarity and labour market stratification 1 - Room 0.08**

### **Managing by Precarity: An Intersectional Analysis of Organization of Work in the Polish Warehousing Sector**

*Aneta Pieczka, Miłosz Miszczyński*

*(Kozminski University)*

Precarity has become a central concept in contemporary analyses of work and employment, evolving from its association with the erosion of social institutions to encompass a wider array of processes fueling the rise of insecurity among workers. While traditionally, precarity has been understood as a linear, static continuum ranging from decent work to extreme exploitation, more recent works see it as a recursive and relational process, shaped and sustained by institutional, political, and organizational forces.

In this article, we explore how precarity functions within the organization of work, examining relationships between workforce and management. We concentrate on managerial discretion, analyzing how managers recognize and understand workers' precarious positions when hiring and organizing work. We argue that precarity is not a side effect of organizational activity but is operationalized through managerial practices, becoming particularly evident in logistical chains, where efficiency imperatives are translated into labour insecurity. In doing so, we adopt intersectional perspective to explain how various social categories such as gender, origin, class, age and economic status are interrelated and mutually shape one another, at the same time being central to managerial discretion.

To show the centrality of management in producing precarity we rely on a qualitative research that we have conducted in three warehouses in Poland, including 64 interviews. In our analysis precarity emerges as an implicit yet shifting organizational imperative operationalized to adapt, control and structure the workforce. We show that within this configuration organizations play a key role by exploiting favorable policy frameworks, group-specific identities and the infrastructures of migration shaped by geopolitical crises, thereby directly contributing to the creation and reinforcement of precarious working and employment conditions.

Drawing on intersectional theory, we aim to contribute to the debate on precarity by broadening its conceptualization. This study advances the literature by processually uncovering how management, through daily operations, leverages intersecting identities as instruments of organization, moving beyond systemic understanding of precarity as mere labour insecurity. In doing so, we highlight how precarization emerges through the overlapping systems of oppression embedded in workplace practices, intertwined with institutional and migratory frameworks that shape power relations. Our analysis also shows how precarity operates within Poland's patchwork capitalist economy.

### **From Enrolment to Qualification: Cadet Retention, Precarity and Support in UK Maritime Training**

*Helen Devereux*

*(Warsash Maritime School, Southampton Solent University)*

This paper examines the experiences of UK Merchant Navy cadets as they transition through the various periods of time from enrolment to qualification, focusing on financial precarity and workplace support across college and sea-based training phases. Drawing on survey data collected from cadets at the UK's four largest maritime training colleges, the study explores how employer and institutional arrangements shape early career trajectories within a strategically vital yet labour-short sector.

Respondents, predominantly men aged 18–25, identified the UK Government's Support for Maritime Training (SMarT) scheme as critical in lowering barriers to entry. However, many reported that existing financial remuneration is insufficient to sustain living costs, particularly for those with dependents or without access to familial financial support. These findings highlight how access to maritime careers may be stratified by socio-economic background, raising questions about equality of opportunity within vocational pathways.

The paper also identifies significant disparities between experiences during college-based learning and sea phases. While colleges were generally described as structured and supportive environments, accounts of shipboard training frequently included excessive working hours, inadequate mentoring, and, in some cases, exploitative practices. These experiences illuminate the realities of labour process dynamics whilst working at sea in a transnational environment.

By situating cadet attrition within broader debates in the sociology of work on precarity, labour market entry, and workplace regulation, the paper argues that retention challenges reflect structural weaknesses in training governance and employment conditions. The findings contribute to discussions on labour in global industries that operate beyond national boundaries.

### **“We always ride a little bit slower than men”: Understanding the Gendered Labour Precarity in China's On-demand Food-delivery Platform**

*Yukun Sun*

*(Bielefeld University)*

The spread of the algorithm-mediated platform economy has profoundly reconfigured work and employment, and a substantial body of scholarship has examined the precarious labour conditions associated with platform work. Yet far less attention has been paid to how precarity is unevenly experienced along gendered lines, particularly in location-based platform work, where manual labour and urban mobility remain central, and where the workforce is predominantly male. Addressing this gap, this paper draws on scholarship on Marxist feminism to examine how food-delivery platforms generate gendered forms of precarity by privileging speed, responsiveness, and continuous availability as core organisational principles. The research is based on an 11-month hybrid ethnography conducted in Shenzhen, China, between late 2024 and 2025, combining participant observation through the author's own experience working as a female food-delivery worker with 65 in-depth interviews. This paper empirically captures how platform power is encountered, negotiated, and embodied in everyday gendered labour processes. As female platform workers navigate platform temporal regimes alongside childcare, domestic responsibilities, and other forms of reproductive labour, they are positioned within spatiotemporal configurations of work that differ significantly from those of their male counterparts. Their working time is more fragmented, interruptible, and spatially constrained, making it more difficult to conform to the platform ideal of uninterrupted speed and constant availability. In this sense, women's different experiences of platform work cannot be understood simply as matters of individual preference, productivity, or capability. Rather, the platform's algorithm regime amplifies unequal labouring of social reproduction and care. By foregrounding the nexus of platform temporal regimes and the gendered labour of care, this paper theoretically argues that gendered precarity is an ontological experience rather than merely a kind of labour condition. Taking Chinese food delivery platform workers as a case, this paper highlights the heterogeneity of platform labour and its gendered dynamics in the context of the Global South.

# Intersectional inequalities, precarity and labour market stratification 2 - Room 0.09

## The Layered Inequalities Impacting Senior Autistic, Menopausal Women at Work

*Gemma Gray, Kate Sang, James Richards*

*(Heriot-Watt University)*

Despite policy development, training initiatives, a growing desire for change and increasing cognition of women's vital contribution to the workforce, multi-level workplace gender inequalities continue. As a woman's seniority at work increases, the impact of inequality becomes heightened, affecting career progression and financial equity, as inequality increases at higher levels of power for all but white men. Seniority at work elicits an increasing gender pay gap, negative attitudes about ageing, and is further impacted by the onset of menopause. In conjunction, every workplace, unless specifically designed from inception to be neuro-inclusive, is, by default, neurotypical, further hindering the retention and progression of autistic women specifically.

Examining the intersection of gender and autism in the workplace, we uncover multi-layered inequalities as an autistic woman's marginalisation is compounded by being both female and autistic. Drawing on the social relational model of disability, we recognise that neurodivergent women are disabled by gendered neurotypical working practices, policies and norms and that their consequential workplace decisions when not supported (removal, reducing hours, shifting to junior roles and declining promotions) are financially, socially and emotionally precarious.

Although gender inequalities in senior leadership and professional autistic women at work are under-researched, extant literature suggests barriers are primarily due to gender stereotyping. This is too simplistic an interpretation as attitudes and biases cannot be examined in isolation. Instead, the workplace environment and HR Practices must also be considered as re-examination reveals multi-layer, complex barriers to equality and equity for autistic women.

To elicit meaningful, lived experience led research, participatory Steering Groups with professional autistic menopausal women in both Scotland and Canada were used. This emancipatory research resulted in method choices and creative research approaches being developed and employed in the pilot phase (the main phase of research will take place later this year). Designed to counter traditional research that can fail to capture nuanced experiences of multiple-marginalised groups, this research prioritised the voices of the underrepresented (menopausal, autistic women). The resultant observations add neurodivergent and age-related nuance to theory relating to disability, gendered ageing and intersectionality.

Three key contributing themes were defined from contemporary literature and contextualised by results from the pilot study to allow for greater analysis of the workplace marginalisation of autistic, menopausal women: 1: Organisational Structure 2: Human Resource Management 3: Attitudinal Bias

This multi-layered re-interpretation highlighted the complex, myriad barriers to equity that exist in the neurotypical workplace. A comprehensive, descriptive framework (Framework of Autistic, Gender-Specific Workplace Inequality) was developed bringing together seemingly disparate observations to provide a more expansive reasoning for prevailing inequalities. Tackling organisational structure, HRM or bias alone is unlikely to be successful in bringing about meaningful change for menopausal, autistic women. Menopause is not a woman's individual responsibility; it is a workplace issue requiring supportive workplace practises and policies to be enacted. Without an interdisciplinary, layered approach, the neurotypical workplace, already an uneven playing field for men and women, becomes almost unnavigable for autistic women.

## **Reproducing Occupational Sex Segregation: Drivers of Gendered Turnover Patterns among Dutch Police Officers**

*Gemma Geuke, Amy Nivette, Isabelle Van Der Vegt, Eva Jaspers*  
(Utrecht University)

Despite major changes in gender inequalities in the labour market, occupational sex segregation remains common in European labour markets. For masculine occupations, this is not only driven by less women entering, but also by more women leaving these occupations. This disproportionate attrition is difficult to tackle: while efforts are taken to increase diversity, stereotypes on women in masculine occupations remain and are reinforced in complex ways.

This study focuses on the complex role of the professional, social and work-life related disadvantages in the reinforcement of sex segregation. To stay in an occupation, employees need various resources, such as room for development, policies to balance work and family, and social support from colleagues. Research on turnover finds associations between turnover intention and disadvantages in these resources, such as lack of recognition for their work, lack of flexibility in work schedules or harassment from colleagues. Women in masculine occupations, however, likely weigh these disadvantages differently from men in their leaving intentions: building on Role Congruity Theory, we expect that women anticipate and partly internalize prejudice, leading to, for example, lower expectations in terms of professional resources and higher reliance on social support than men. As such, we expect that disadvantages affect women differently from men, meaning that turnover numbers likely show us the tip of the iceberg in terms of gender inequality in occupations.

In our study, we focus on a traditionally and culturally masculine occupation: police work. Dutch police officers provide an interesting case: in the last decades, various gender diversity policies have been implemented and female representation has increased towards 40%. Moreover, the need to retain trained staff is even more pressing in police organizations, as an increasing share of police workforces is approaching retirement age and demands are increasing. Nevertheless, women are still found to leave the Dutch police more often than men. As such, this case can provide insight in what hurdles may remain in the desegregation of a key public service occupation with the explicit aim to diversify.

Using survey data of 2,323 police officers, we investigate to the differential effects of professional, social and work-family related disadvantages on turnover among female and male police officers. By combining the survey with administrative employment data, we not only examine leaving intentions at the time of the survey, but also explore realized turnover in the three years after survey completion.

## **Development and Validation of the Occupational Stigma Scale for Female Gig Workers: An Intersectional Perspective**

*Zhenduo Zhang, Jianing Guo, Zhenduo Zhang, Gang Qu, Qi Zu*  
(Dalian University of Technology)

Female workers' psychological well-being and job attitudes, including emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions, are critical during the rapid expansion of the gig economy. The emergence of platform-based employment forms represents a profound structural shift for marginalized workers. Yet, limited research explains how the specific characteristics of this shift, conceptualized as a gendered occupational stigma and characterized by physical, social, and algorithmic dimensions, shape these negative workplace outcomes. Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding regarding the specific measurement tools needed to capture this complex, intersectional process.

To address this gap, the current study develops a measurement tool and tests a framework explaining the profound impact of occupational stigma by treating gig work as a gendered and algorithmically controlled environment. Drawing on intersectionality theory and the "dirty work" framework, we propose a multidimensional stigma model. High occupational stigma activates severe defensive psychological states. Defensively, it increases female employees' perceptions of emotional exhaustion because algorithmically driven and physically demanding systems constantly challenge their professional dignity and personal safety. This exhaustion subsequently weakens job satisfaction and enhances turnover intention.

To rigorously capture this phenomenon and test the proposed model, we employed a mixed-methods design. Study 1 was a comprehensive scale development study combining extensive qualitative interviews, focus groups, and rigorous expert evaluations among female gig workers. This study captured real-world dynamics and established the baseline measurement tool, the 33-item Occupational Stigma Scale for Female Gig Workers (OSS-FGW). To address downstream consequences and correlational relationships, Study 2 utilized a three-wave field survey among 500 female gig workers across various platform organizations. This empirical approach strictly validated the core variables and isolated the impact of the newly developed scale on worker well-being.

The empirical results consistently supported the scale structure and the main theoretical effects. Study 1 significantly confirmed a robust, gendered three-dimensional stigma structure consisting of physical stigma, social stigma, and algorithmic stigma. Consequently, in Study 2, high occupational stigma significantly hindered job satisfaction, whereas it strongly facilitated emotional exhaustion and subsequent turnover intentions. The data also revealed the robust and critical impact of the newly conceptualized algorithmic dimension. Across the analyses, algorithmic stigma successfully acted as the primary driver of the defensive pathway, significantly exacerbating the negative psychological states of female workers by highlighting the gender-blind nature of algorithmic management.

This research unpacks the intersectional nature of new employment forms by simultaneously examining the physical, social, and algorithmic dimensions of gendered occupational stigma. It advances the organizational behavior literature by identifying the unique, structural concept of algorithmic stigma. Practically, while platform managers cannot entirely eliminate algorithm-driven work assignments, organizations should deploy gender-inclusive algorithms and transparent feedback systems primarily as a protective mechanism to alleviate status-related threats, mitigate emotional exhaustion, and sustain worker well-being, rather than solely treating gig workers as fungible data points.

## **Exposures to Poor Job Quality for Workers with Health Conditions and Disabilities in the UK**

*Niamh Bridson Hubbard, Baowen Xue, Anne McMunn*

*(University College London)*

Across the UK and other advanced economies, policy responses to labour shortages and rising levels of economic inactivity have increasingly focused on raising employment rates, specifically among people with long-term health conditions and disabilities. This agenda is often justified by the assumption that participation in paid work promotes health and wellbeing. However, such claims frequently overlook substantial variation in job quality and the potential for poor-quality work to exacerbate existing health conditions or undermine sustained labour market participation. At a time where growing ill-health is driving falling workforce participation and increasing demands for care, understanding who is exposed to poor-quality work is central to evaluating whether employment expansion strategies support healthy and sustainable working lives.

This paper examines inequalities in exposure to poor-quality work among workers with long-term health conditions and disabilities in the UK, with a particular focus on how these inequalities intersect with other demographic and employment-related factors which contribute to labour market stratification. Drawing on sociological research on job quality, labour market segmentation, and intersectional inequality, the study conceptualises job quality as multidimensional and socially structured. Rather than treating health status as an isolated factor, the analysis examines how it interacts with gender, ethnicity, occupation, industry, and place to shape workers' positions within labour markets and their exposure to poor-quality employment.

The analysis uses data from 2023-2025 captured within the UK Annual Population Survey and focuses on employees aged 18 and over in paid work. Health status is classified into four groups: no long-term condition, non-limiting condition, limiting disability, and severely limiting disability, with additional disaggregation by type of main condition where sample sizes permit. Job quality is measured using both individual indicators and a multidimensional index for the psychosocial aspects of work. Descriptive analyses document differences in job quality across health-status groups, followed by multivariate Poisson and logistic regression models estimating associations between health status and exposure to poor-quality work. Interaction analyses examine how these relationships vary across gender, ethnicity, occupation, industry, and region, identifying where inequalities are compounded.

Preliminary findings indicate that workers with limiting and severely limiting disabilities are disproportionately concentrated in poorer-quality jobs, particularly those characterised by lower pay, and adverse psychosocial working environments. These inequalities are not evenly distributed across the workforce but are intensified at the intersection of health status with other forms of labour market stratification, including gender and occupational position.

By foregrounding the intersection between health status and other axes of labour market inequality, the paper contributes to sociological debates on stratification in work and employment. It also contributes to policy debates on disability employment and healthy working lives by demonstrating that increasing employment participation alone is unlikely to improve outcomes for workers with long-term health conditions if inequalities in the quality and organisation of work persist.

## Open Stream - Room 0.24

### **Gendered Gold, Credit and Working Capital: A Sociological Study of Small Business in West Bengal, India**

*Rittika Saha, Anindita Chakrabarti*

*(Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur)*

Contemporary capitalism induces uncertainty, including financial volatility, shifting labour markets, and institutional arrangements. In this context, economic decisions depend on material stabilising expectations about the future of work. A few studies demonstrate that household gold serves as critical capital for small industries (Joseph 2018). Our research shifts the analytical focus on gold jewellery from liquidity to household strategies of intergenerational business continuity. We ask what role household gold jewellery plays in shaping small family businesses to reproduce economic futures over time in contemporary capitalism. We use ethnographic fieldwork to show how gold jewellery is mobilised from the household to the market as working capital for the sustenance and expansion of family businesses. Gold jewellery is an intermediary resource between the traditional system of value storage and the modern work culture, including volatile financial situations and shifting forms of labour organisation.

Engaging with the current debates on the polycrisis and the restructuring of work, we argue that gold jewellery, as a form of family wealth, sustains the intergenerational continuity of small enterprises. The analysis draws on Jens Beckert's concept of imagined futures, emphasising that economic decisions are fundamental to sustaining life in uncertain futures. We move beyond uncertainty and examine continuous processes that sustain business reproduction over time. Gold jewellery serves as a future-oriented household asset that enables households to sustain and expand their family businesses. Families constitute and circulate gold jewellery through prestation and ritual exchanges, especially in marriage, through which it becomes gendered family wealth. Household gold jewellery also operates as a financial resource that links household economies to the market. The interlinkage between household and market economies enables families to organise and design their economic futures. Therefore, this research contributes to sociological scholarship of work, finance, and intergenerational wealth transfer. Small family businesses reproduce work in contemporary capitalism that depends not only on formal financial institutions but also on household strategies that mobilise socio-culturally embedded assets to imagine economic futures.

### **Juggling as Norm, Not Choice: Feminine Capital and the Gendered Load in Women's Entrepreneurship**

*Trang Vu, Jane Parry, Nguyen Phuong Minh Tran, Sajeda Pervin, Brian Hracs, Peter Rodger*

*(University of Southampton)*

Growing recognition of women's expanding participation in entrepreneurship across the Global South, alongside increasing acknowledgment of the economic significance of women's entrepreneurial activities (Omran & Yousafzai, 2023), has intensified scholarly attention to the structural inequalities and distinct challenges they face (Corrêa et al., 2022). These include issues related to the work-life interface, gendered stereotypes, and socio-economic class-based structural constraints (Arun & Arun,

2023). Yet, the long-term effects of diverse family contexts and women's life courses on their entrepreneurial trajectories remain insufficiently understood. Drawing on the working lives of female entrepreneurs in Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Vietnam, our research examines the relationship between gender capital (Arun & Arun, 2023) and the unequal gendered division of labour (Craig et al., 2012).

Findings from fieldwork with 50 women running micro and small enterprises across these three countries show that feminine capital—associated with traits such as caring, diligence, altruism, selflessness, and meekness—was frequently ascribed to them. However, adopting a critical feminist perspective to analyse their family contexts and life histories reveals that this feminine capital is double-edged. It is socially constructed through gender norms that naturalise women's unpaid labour, compelling them to juggle domestic responsibilities alongside the demands of their businesses. This dynamic produces persistent time poverty and double-shift burdens, experienced across participants to varying degrees—from severe strain to a more resigned acceptance.

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#### **Diffraction Methodologies and the Embodied Politics of Disability in Employment Tribunal Reasoning**

*Rebecca Jiggins, Liz Oliver*

*(University of Leeds, The Work Inclusion Project)*

This paper introduces diffractive analysis as a methodological intervention into the study of employment law, foregrounding the entanglement of embodiment, affect, and legal reasoning in the context of the polycrisis of work. Drawing on Barad's theory of agential realism (Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 2007), the paper conceptualises employment tribunal judgments as material-discursive practices that actively produce particular configurations of the disabled worker. Through diffractive readings of case law alongside cultural and socio-political texts, including Ryan's *Crippled* and Pring's *The Department*, the analysis demonstrates how legal narratives reconfigure or erase experiences of pain, fatigue, and neurodivergence. This erasure is theorised through Garland-Thomson's concept of misfitting, which highlights the relational production of disability within environments structured around normative bodies (Garland-Thomson, "Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept" (2011) 26 *Hypatia* 591, 591–609). The paper argues that methodological innovation is necessary to apprehend how the polycrisis is lived at the level of the body and governed through legal processes, offering diffractive analysis as a means of rethinking socio-legal method beyond representational critique and contributing to debates on embodiment, identity, and inequality in contemporary work.

# Worker subjectivities, experience and agency 1 - Room 0.11

## **PhD Showcase**

### **Career Identity and Embodied Disruption: Narrating Careers in the Context of Chronic Illness**

*Mila Jones, Stefanie Gustafsson, Simona Giorgi, Katharina Chudzikowski*

*(University of Bath)*

Chronic illness is long-term, fluctuating, and unpredictable, with the potential to disrupt individuals' sense of self and working lives. While prior research in management and organisation studies has examined chronic illness at work primarily through accommodation, disclosure, and stigma, less attention so far has been paid to how it may reshape career identity. Drawing on 40 life-story interviews with professionals living with chronic illness, this paper adopts a narrative identity approach to examine how people make sense of their careers amid ongoing embodied disruption. Rather than requesting specific stories, we invited participants to recount the trajectory of their working lives and the role of illness within them. We encouraged them to describe their career histories, critical turning points, and experiences of managing chronic illness in the workplace. This approach was chosen to enable illness to emerge organically in relation to their career events, revealing how participants situated their embodied realities within broader biographical contexts. We identify three self-narratives: performing stoicism, in which individuals conceal illness and sustain performance; adaptive reauthoring, in which careers are redefined to accommodate bodily limits; and seeking recognition, where narrative coherence depends on social validation of illness-related difference. These narratives reveal distinct, situated forms of narrative agency through which professionals preserve, revise, or contest their career identities. This paper makes the following contributions. This study contributes to chronic illness research by foregrounding career identity as a central site through which chronic illness is made sense of and given meaning, extending prior work that has focused primarily on disclosure, accommodation, and stigma. By identifying distinct career narratives through which individuals endure, reauthor, or seek recognition, the study shows how people living with chronic illness exercise varied and embodied forms of agency rather than simply adapting to bodily limitation. The paper also contributes to career identity scholarship by theorising chronic illness as a form of embodied disruption that destabilises the taken-for-granted bodily foundations of career narratives. In doing so, it demonstrates how career identities are actively constructed through ongoing narrative work that reconfigures professional worth and agency in relation to fluctuating bodily capacities.

### **Visibilising the Invisible: Exploring Sex Work and Space in Kerala**

*Alinda Merrie Jan*

*(Indian Institute of Science Education and Research Mohali)*

Controlling women's bodies and their sexuality has been inextricably linked with the sense of dignity and status reproduction in Kerala. This stems from the unique caste practices distinct to Kerala. Malayali families' status reproduction was closely associated with women's ability to remain indoors. Chanthappennu (literally meaning women of the market) was used to refer to those women of lower class and caste backgrounds who had to engage in the labour force, the term being synonymous also to women with "loose morals". This resulted in women categorically being kept away from public spaces and the creation of a private and public upon women's bodies. Though modernity saw women occupying public spaces for education, work, and activism, sex workers' bodies cease to exist as a privately accessed and owned (by a man) body and become public, open to anyone who is willing to enter into an agreement with them. This sense of publicness is viewed as culturally immoral and is often a source of abomination, stigma, and the invisibility of sex work and sex workers.

Traditional sex work in Kerala is dispersed and mostly street-based. This paper explores the spatial interaction of street-based sex workers in the city space of Kochi, Kerala. The modes through which the visibilisation of sex work and sex workers have been happening in Kerala's literary, cultural and social spaces, and the dialectics of visibility and invisibility in the city spaces, have been explored. The researcher used the historical understanding of women's spatiotemporal interaction with public spaces and found her ethnographic observations congruent with those of sex workers in modern city spaces.

The paper analyses spatial patterns of movement for labour, contestations, and solidarity among women sex workers sharing the space. Space is used as an analytical frame, and the different nuances of space - from individual bodies to physical and digital realms - are understood as the background and as active agents in the relationship with visibility.

### **Influence of Role Models on the Self-efficacy and Work Aspiration of Female Workers in India: A Mixed Method Study**

*Poonam Panda*

*(University of Warwick)*

This study examined how work aspiration and self-efficacy of women from lower socio-economic background in India was shaped by the role models they identify with in their lives. The study was done with migrant women who were working in factories in the city of Bangalore. Drawing on a mixed method study, combining a survey and qualitative interviews, this study attempts to understand how work aspiration is mediated through a woman's self-efficacy; and how their ambition for their future work is based on their observation of other people from their network.

Building on Bandura's theoretical framework of self-efficacy, this study highlights the different ways of vicarious learning and how future work aspiration is shaped among these female migrant workers. It extends the existing research on the influence of women's social connections and networks on their labour market participation. This is done by examining what the study participant aspires to do in future and who have influenced their decisions and how.

Initial analysis explores the relevance of self-efficacy of an individual in mediating the effects of a role model on their work aspirations. Preliminary findings also suggest that along with role model influences, other dimensions like social expectations, familial obligations and reputation in the community impact women's decision to continue working in these workplaces.

This study contributes to the literature of how social connections and role models in the lives of women affect their willingness to continue in labour market. Additionally, this study also takes a different methodological approach to understand the larger picture of work and other obligations and responsibilities of women from economically disadvantaged section in India.

### **Beyond Precarity: Relational Dignity and the Alienation of Kapwa in Informal Work**

*Kyrie Eleison Munoz*

*(University of Queensland)*

Extant dignity-at-work scholarship has conceptualised dignity as intrinsic or as secured through autonomy, fairness, and recognition within the formal employment sector (e.g., Blustein & Allan, 2025; Hodson, 2001; Lucas, 2015). However, these perspectives offer limited insight into dignity in informal economies, whose workers operate outside labour regulations and taxation systems. In the informal sector, work is often shaped by precarity, exclusion, and socio-cultural hierarchies. By privileging autonomy, rights, and organisational recognition, current literature remains anchored in formal employment, overlooking contexts where such protections are absent. This paper addresses this limitation by conceptualising dignity erosion as both material and relational, foregrounding the alienation of kapwa—a Filipino ontology of shared personhood.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork with informal tourism workers in Palawan, Philippines, and guided by Filipino practice-based methods grounded on pakikipagkapwa (shared innerself), this paper identifies intersecting macro-level tensions and conditions that simultaneously constrain livelihoods and fracture the relational dynamics of shared personhood. Poverty and capital dependence position workers in asymmetrical relations where survival overrides reciprocity, rendering kapwa conditional and instrumental. Privatisation and environmental control displace communities from shared spaces, severing collective claims to land and eroding communal belonging. Seasonality and illicit labour destabilise livelihoods, weakening continuity of social ties and undermining mutual support. Institutional neglect and social exclusion marginalise Indigenous, elderly, and LGBTQIA+ workers, denying recognition and fracturing inclusion within broader social structures. Power imbalances and regulatory control privilege tourists and elites, producing guest–host asymmetries in which locals are surveilled,

displaced, and excluded from decision-making. These conditions are further embedded in gendered roles and cultural appropriation, where identities and cultural labour are commodified, reducing relational recognition to spectacle and exchange.

These findings build on extant studies showing that dignity is not only diminished by material deprivation (e.g., Giddy, 2021; Madera et al., 2023; Wilson & Dashper, 2022) but also by the systematic alienation of relational life. As kapwa is displaced by commodification, exclusion, and asymmetrical power, reciprocity becomes transactional, recognition becomes conditional, and shared humanity is eroded. Thus, this paper advances a relational and decolonial reconceptualisation of dignity at work, demonstrating that macro-level forces reshape not only material conditions but also the moral foundations of work. By foregrounding kapwa, this paper challenges individualised and organisation-centric models of dignity and calls for more culturally grounded approaches to theorising work, inequality, and dignity in informal economies. As a policy implication, governments must move beyond formalisation and mandate the inclusion of informal workers in tourism governance, including representation in planning, zoning, and decision-making processes. Governments should likewise guarantee equitable access to public spaces and enforce protections against arbitrary displacement and exploitative regulation. Interventions should also fund and support community-led organising structures, strengthening existing systems of mutual aid and collective coordination rather than replacing them with top-down programmes.

## **Worker subjectivities, experience and agency 2 - Room 0.13**

### **A Study of the Emotional Labor of Frontline and Non-frontline Nurses During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic**

*Natalia Baisha*

*(Centre for Comparative Research of Social Well-Being, National Research University Higher School of Economics)*

The presentation is devoted to the study of the emotional labor of Russian nurses involved in the pandemic crisis on the front line of the fight against COVID-19 and caring for patients not on the front line of the fight against COVID-19. The experience of nursing labor at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19 is characterized by extraordinary, as is the COVID-19 pandemic itself, considered as a historical event that complicated the work of representatives of the health system, regardless of their involvement in the fight against COVID-19. We are faced with the task of finding and describing similarities and differences in the experience of managing emotions, in practices and opportunities for support by nurses safe working conditions in different zones of the hospital space. The presentation is based on the materials of 60 interviews with frontline and non-frontline nurses from Volgograd hospitals. As a result, it is shown that the emotional labor of Volgograd frontline nurses, despite the uncertainty, general anxiety and chaotic nature of what was happening during the pandemic, was carried out in more favorable conditions than after it. Emotional involvement in patient care helps non-frontline nurses overcome sense of inequality and internal resistance to unfair working conditions both during and after the pandemic. The presentation contributes to an understanding of the emotional working conditions of Russian nurses, helps to identify their practices of managing sense of inequality.

### **Pedalling Resistance: Parallels between 20th Century Bicycle Messenger Organising and Contemporary Platform Courier Organising**

*Morgan Rhys Powell*

*(University of Leeds)*

Food delivery platform work is frequently cited as a paradigmatic example of novel, digitally-mediated work, made notably precarious by the imposition of non-standard employment status. Instances of conflict and efforts at worker organising are taken to be signs of a subversive precariat constituting itself as a 'new dangerous class'.

Building on counter-arguments which relate platform work to far longer histories, this paper argues that it is possible to identify a pre-history to conflict in this sector, and that doing so offers valuable insights for understanding the nature of contemporary platform workers' organising efforts. Focusing on Britain, parallels are drawn with the employment relationship, working conditions, and organising efforts of bicycle messengers in the late 1980s and the 1990s, where strikes and unionisation initiatives emerged in a sector characterised by piece-rate pay and self-employed status.

The paper draws on the early stages of research on 20th century messengers' struggle – conducting documentary analysis of texts from the period – with data collected in ongoing ethnographic research in platform courier organising efforts since 2019.

A particularly noteworthy parallel is identified in the challenge of combining workers' self-organised collective action with sustainable, long-lasting unionisation efforts – a challenge which continues to characterise conflict in the sector today.

### **Between Sympathy and Solidarity: Lay Morality, Moral Ambivalence, and Workers' Struggles in Manesar, India**

*Charvaak Pati*

*(Indian Institute of Management Ranchi)*

This paper examines how moral questions animate workers' struggles, drawing on Andrew Sayer's concept of lay morality which is defined as the ordinary evaluative reasoning through which people judge what is right and wrong. Lay morality is also marked by ambivalence: people feel moral obligations they cannot always act on, and structural conditions determine how much space exists between recognising what is right and being able to act on it. The paper develops this argument through the Maruti Suzuki workers' struggle in Manesar, Haryana, between 2011 and 2017. Maruti Suzuki India Limited, a subsidiary of the Japanese automobile giant Suzuki and one of India's largest car manufacturers, became the site of wildcat strikes, a violent industrial incident that left a senior manager dead, mass arrests, and a protracted legal battle.

Drawing on fieldwork and interviews with workers, the paper traces the moral arc of the struggle across three interconnected moments. On the shop floor, solidarity forged in collective struggle produced a moral community whose commitments found expression in workers' insistence on parity between permanent and contract workers, a demand that defied the prevailing norm in India's auto industry. This moral community was violently disrupted in July 2012, when workers were criminalised by the state and condemned by wider society, prompting a 300-kilometre march across rural Haryana through which they fought to reclaim moral recognition from a community that had been turned against them. After 2014, however, the spatial reorganisation of the workforce, state coercion, and the structural pressures of precarious employment progressively narrowed the space in which workers' moral agency could operate, producing the ambivalence that Sayer's framework illuminates.

The paper shows that lay morality is not a fixed set of values but a living terrain of evaluation and ambivalence, one that is produced in solidarity, tested in struggle, and continuously negotiated between the moral claims of workers and the structural power of capital and the state.

### **Learning within Plastic Communities of Practice: Agencies, Subjectivities and Contestations within Mandated Degree Apprenticeship Relationships**

*Frances Myers, Kristen Reid, Sarah Bloomfield*

*(Open University)*

In current UK apprenticeship programme design, formal learning communities are established in workplaces for the duration of a qualification. These comprise an apprentice, their line manager/mentor, and further/higher education tutor. Such apprenticeship tripartite arrangements disrupt both traditional dyadic relationships between student and tutor and shift physical spaces of learning to the workplace, generating major implications for the economy, for employers and for students themselves. This paper is based on findings from a British Academy funded project focused on the functions of such communities as sites of workplace learning, negotiation, and power relationships within wider governmental frameworks for national renewal and competitiveness.

Moving away from considering traditional organic communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), our study explores these workplace relationships via a lens of mandated communities. This allows us to define current apprenticeship micro-ecology as having both bounded membership as well as externally-formalised purposes of development, pastoral care and assessing competence.

Apprenticeship programmes operate in a fluctuating environment where two decades of polycrisis have wrought many changes to working lives. These come via technological enhancements and platform economies affecting activities at work, post-pandemic remote working changing the nature of relationships at work, and ongoing market volatility increasing precarity in the aftermath of the financial crisis, austerity, and the Brexit vote. In the wake of such changes, formal work-based learning programmes are presented as a key UK policy lever to benefit employer and market prosperity alongside being a crucial intervention for tackling widespread youth unemployment and acknowledged national skills gaps.

The additional promise of work-based learning agreements made with employers is that in return for providing and funding such schemes, they are in the driving seat of gaining skills needed for growth. However, in practice employers, and more saliently individual line managers (with varying degrees of readiness and existing mentorship capacity) are being asked to carry the burden of shaping the skills of a future generation of workers towards externally agreed competences.

In terms of learners, forty years of neoliberal conceptualisations have progressively eroded the equilibrium between educational gain and associated social returns, making work-based learning programmes such as apprenticeships, an attractive option for school leavers. With the rise of contingent working and portfolio careers, wage-stagnation and increasing inequalities of outcomes, perceptions of educational benefits are under threat.

We have undertaken over 80 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholder groups, including apprentices, line managers, employer delivery leads, policy wonks, charities and higher education experts.

We plan to present early study findings in terms of 'plastic' communities of practice, including what this means for a) individual line managers and their visibility in the workplace, b) fairness and equity in offerings made to workers and learners and c) wider conceptualisations of labour market changes and anticipatory governance. This will then lead to a novel framework for understanding what is going on in the apprenticeship ecosystem. We will contribute empirically by mapping the different aspects of skills policy in action, enhancing understanding of what states might gain from governing-by-proxy in workplace settings.

# PAPER SESSION 9

## 11:00-12:30

### Algorithmic work and data justice - Room 0.23

#### PhD Showcase

##### **When Labour Turns Towards the Algorithm: Visibility Mechanisms and the Restructuring of Content Creators' Labour Practices**

*Ben Xu*

*(University of Leeds)*

Within the tradition of labour theory, labour has been framed in different ways: in Marx's political economy, it is understood as organised around production and value creation; in Weber's discussion of rationalisation and the ethic of vocation, it is conceptualised as a form of social action grounded in specific bases of legitimacy; and in contemporary creative labour scholarship, it is often associated with self-expression and self-realisation. However, amid the rapid expansion of the digital platform economy, content creators have emerged as a new category of cultural workers whose livelihoods are highly dependent on the allocation of visibility. In China's highly algorithmic platform environment, labour opportunities and professional trajectories are progressively configured around mechanisms of algorithmic visibility. This transformation not only reorganises labour conditions but may also unsettle the organising principles and value references of labour practice. Although scholarship on algorithmic visibility and creative labour has documented these structural dynamics, their broader implications for labour theory remain insufficiently articulated. When labour operates through the distribution of visibility, is the practical logic of creators undergoing a structural reorientation?

Understanding this transformation requires a framework capable of linking value, legitimacy, and practice. Bourdieu's field theory offers such a lens. Field highlights how rules and capital distribution structure spaces of action; capital captures the convertibility of value forms; habitus explains how practice is formed under structural conditions; and symbolic power points to the constitution of legitimacy. Within the digital platform field, visibility becomes a central form of capital, institutionalised through algorithmic recommendation systems as a hierarchical mode of allocation. This stratified visibility order establishes new competitive rules for creators' practical space.

Within this framework, visibility mechanisms do more than allocate resources: they reshape labour practice. Scholarship on algorithmic governance and creative labour has demonstrated how creators adjust their posting rhythms, content formats, and interaction strategies in response to platform metrics. Rather than treating these adjustments solely as strategic adaptation, this paper reinterprets them as indicative of a deeper transformation in the orientation of labour itself. Through quantified indicators such as engagement rates and conversion performance, algorithmic systems establish hierarchies that define the criteria of success. Under sustained competitive pressure, adaptive strategies gradually sediment into durable dispositions and become internalised as a specific labour habitus.

This analysis suggests that when creative decisions prioritise recommendation probability and data feedback, the organising principles of labour are displaced: creative activity becomes oriented less towards content and more towards the acquisition of visibility. As the purpose of work shifts from audience communication to algorithmic optimisation, labour turns towards the algorithm. This reorientation not only restructures practice but also enables the continuous reproduction of the visibility order through habituated action. From the perspective of labour theory, this reorientation of purpose cannot be reduced to mere technical adaptation; rather, it may be understood as a new form of labour alienation, in which the direction of practice becomes increasingly subordinated to algorithmic evaluation standards rather than to expression, communication, or cultural production as primary value criteria.

## **The Interplay of Trust and Distrust in Artificial Intelligence-driven Information Systems Artefacts: A Systematic Review**

*Babajide Oyewole*

*(University of Galway)*

**Rationale:** Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming organisational operations and decision-making through a wide range of autonomous systems (Li & Hahn, 2022). Managers now increasingly use AI for decisions such as promotion and dismissal of employees (OECD, 2025; Zhou et al., 2021). The use of AI in the workplace continues to generate concerns, as a recent survey of U.S. employees found that only 29% express enthusiasm about their organisations adopting AI (Pew Research Centre, 2024). The EU has classified workplace AI as high-risk, requiring stringent regulatory supervision (AI Act, 2024). Unlike traditional IS technologies, AI comes with unique organisational challenges and risks (Benbya et al., 2021).

Despite this complexity, most research focuses solely on trust, overlooking distrust as a distinct construct in human-AI interaction (Lacity et al., 2024). This imbalance is significant because trust encourages risk-taking by de-emphasising perceived harm, whereas distrust draws attention to potential risks and prompts protective actions, and together they offer complementary perspectives for assessment, design, and governance (Scharowski et al., 2025). Also, prior studies often generalise AI technologies, limiting the ability to build correctly on earlier findings (Benbya et al., 2021). This may have constrained a deeper view of how different system attributes or use contexts trigger distinct judgements in human-AI interactions, which may help explain why prior studies focused predominantly on trust.

This SLR examines how trust and distrust in AI are currently conceptualised and operationalised in IS research and develops a research agenda to advance understanding of how each uniquely shapes human-AI interactions in the workplace as advanced algorithms increasingly drive AI artefacts, particularly in high stakes contexts.

**Method:** This study employs a systematic literature review guided by well-established procedures that ensure methodological rigour and transparency (Okoli, 2015). It also follows recent IS methodological guidance that requires AI systems to be clearly defined by type and technical characteristics to avoid category errors (Riemer et al., 2026). We used VOSviewer for bibliometric mapping to establish conceptual connections, thematic clusters, and trends in the field (Donthu et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2024). The literature search relied on Scopus and the AIS eLibrary.

**Preliminary findings:** Preliminary findings indicate that the literature focuses predominantly on conversational and generative AI with limited attention to organisational AI systems, such as embedded AI-driven evaluation tools. Distrust in AI is more pronounced in high-stakes use contexts. Most studies rely on simulations, prototypes, or intention-to-use scenarios rather than real-world deployments, resulting in limited evidence from actual system interaction.

**Implication of findings:** These findings highlight the need to broaden AI trust research beyond conversational and generative systems to include embedded organisational evaluation tools and mandatory AI. Furthermore, it points out the need for real-world empirical studies to advance the field beyond simulation or intention-to-use-based designs.

**Originality:** This review contributes to originality by applying recent IS methodological guidance to clearly define AI artefacts and avoid category errors. It shifts attention from the dominant focus on conversational and generative AI to overlooked organisational systems and highlights the limited real-world evidence in existing empirical studies.

## **Effects of Algorithmic Management on Safety and Health: A Mixed-methods Case Study in Logistics Work**

*Ruben Lind, Lisen Löwstedt, Pille Strauss, Nuria Matilla Santander, Lluís Mangot Sala, Carin Håkansta*  
*(Karolinska Institutet)*

Algorithms are changing the 'world of work', including the tasks that constitute work and how work is organized and governed. As digitalization and artificial intelligence increasingly permeate sectors and occupations, the lack of knowledge about the impacts of algorithmic management (AM) – the use of

digital technologies to automate and augment management functions at work – on workers health and wellbeing pose a societal challenge. This deficit is particularly pronounced outside of platform work, in sectors such as logistics where the use of AM is growing rapidly.

To deepen our understanding of how AM is experienced by workers as well as how it affects their safety and health, this explorative mixed-methods case study investigates how AM functions in practice, how organisational members experience its effects on the work environment, as well as its associations with safety and health outcomes. Set in the context of a large Swedish logistics company, the study combines qualitative data (28 interviews with workers, managers, technical experts and union and safety representatives) and quantitative data (a company survey, N=450). The qualitative findings elicit perceived risks and opportunities with AM in the study context, and are used to inform the development and implementation of the survey which test for associations between AM exposure and safety and health outcomes.

AM is a complex sociotechnical phenomenon which reshapes work organisation, combines social and technical dimensions, and has implications for the work environment. Moreover, given its multifaceted nature and variations in use and characteristics across contexts, AM cannot be understood through stories or numbers alone. The mixed-methods approach seeks to address this challenge by investigating AM's effects in situ, by triangulation of subjective experiences and measurable relationships to deepen our understanding of risks and mechanisms.

### **Data-driven Labor Control and Worker Health: Psychosocial Pathways in Algorithmically Managed Logistics Work**

*Karin Hennum, Pille Strauss, Kathryn Badarin, Emelie Thern, Ruben Lind, Ninni Norlinder, Nuria Matilla-Santander, Carin Håkansta*

*(Karolinska Institute)*

In the context of broader transformations associated with technological acceleration, economic restructuring, and intensified cost pressures, the rapid expansion of e-commerce has transformed logistics into a central infrastructure of the digital economy, characterized by high volumes, tight delivery times, and strong competitive pressures. In this context, many workplaces have adopted algorithmic management (AM) systems to allocate tasks, monitor performance, and optimize work in real time. While such systems can support coordination in complex supply chains, they also reshape the conditions and organization of work, while simultaneously raising concerns about how this data-driven form of worker governance affects workers' health and wellbeing.

This paper examines how exposure to AM is associated with psychosocial working conditions and explores potential pathways to ill health among logistics workers. The analysis draws on cross-sectional survey data collected among drivers and warehouse workers in Sweden ( $n = 970$ ). Structural equation modelling (SEM) is used to examine relationships between exposure to AM, psychosocial working conditions, and psychological distress. The SEM model is informed by the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework, conceptualizing algorithmic management as shaping key psychosocial conditions such as work pace, social support, and autonomy, through which associations with worker health are explored.

Data collection has been completed and analysis is currently underway. Preliminary findings will be presented at the conference.

By exploring potential pathways within the social and organizational work environment which may link AM to worker health, the paper contributes empirical insights to sociological debates on digitalization, data-driven labor control, and worker wellbeing in the ongoing transformation of work.

# Care infrastructures, social reproduction and the crisis of care - Room 0.19

## **Against the 'Micro' and 'Macro' Divide: Towards Pluralistic Archives of the Everyday in Care and Social Reproduction Research**

*Malena Bastida Antich*

*(London School of Economics and Political Science)*

The literature on care and social reproduction inspires us to examine how everyday life is both reflective and constitutive of global capitalism; to connect the structural with the subjective in the pursuit of a dialectical analysis of the social (Ferguson, 2016: 39). But how can care and social reproduction scholarship make these connections, in practice? In my research on the impact of immigration law on the lives of informal migrant domestic workers in Barcelona (2023-2027), I elucidate these connections through a methodological strategy that includes interviews with workers and employers, shadowing in an immigration legal clinic, textual analysis of legislation, and archives of immigration casework. In this paper, I discuss the specific analytical challenges that arise from working with a pluralistic research archive, including the risk of de-centring workers' stories, or the challenge to develop thematic structures that compile insights from different sources and scales of analysis. To explore the advantages and pitfalls posed by methodological pluralism, I showcase what different sources —interviews, archives, observations—, brought to my study of how informal domestic workers negotiate contracts with potential employers. In this paper, I argue that conducting a “political economy of the everyday” (Elias and Rai, 2019) requires us to develop a multi-methods analytical strategy that can identify and explain the contradictions and tensions between different sources' narratives.

## **Exploring Polycrisis and Work through the Lens of Social Reproduction: The Case of the Early Years Education and Care Sector in England**

*Thomas Haines-Doran, Xanthe Whittaker, Ed Yates*

*(University of Leeds)*

Marxist feminists understand social reproduction (SR) to mean the mechanisms by which labour power is replenished within capitalist society, which is necessary for the exploitation of labour and the reproduction of capitalism itself (Bhattacharya et al., 2021; Mezzadri et al., 2022). SR is a central, but often neglected, strand of the 'polycrisis', in which economic, ecological and political crises intersect and exacerbate one another (Lawrence et al., 2024). In the current era of 'financialized capitalism', wage and public service cuts, accompanied by a new feminist politics which tied women's liberation to market values, encouraged more women into paid employment and to substitute their domestic labour by purchasing SR services. But financialized capitalism has steadily eroded SR, through long working hours and debt, leading to suppressed consumer demand, economic stagnation and declining fertility rates (Bhattacharya, 2017). In this paper, we address contemporary crisis tendencies involving SR, and its relationship with employment, through a case study of the problematic expansion of the early years education and care (EYEC) sector in England.

State investment in EYEC provision reflects deep, interlinked systemic crises affecting social reproduction. Long-term fertility decline, caused partly by inadequate social protection, has created labour shortages, further exacerbated by Brexit and COVID-19. Expanding EYEC provision through state subsidies promises the release of women into constrained labour markets.

Yet these plans are failing. Our Systems of Provision (SoP) analysis (Bayliss and Fine 2020) reveals an EYEC sector centralising into large chains owned by international financial institutions. Chains target wealthier areas, marginalising state-run and not-for-profit providers. State-run providers, unlike private providers, employ qualified teachers and staff more likely to be unionised and on better pay and conditions. Privatisation has led to de-skilling, job degradation and increasing levels of extraction through profit. Workers face poor pay and training, despite children's increasingly complex needs, creating a recruitment and retention crisis.

This case exemplifies capitalism undermining its own reproduction—“eating its own tail” (Fraser, 2023)—amid converging epidemiological and political crises, with particularly negative consequences for the conditions and value of women’s work.

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#### **Resource Inequalities, Flexible Work, and Working Mothers’ Experiences with Child Care Packaging**

*Kim De Laat, Sylvia Fuller, Manlin Cai, Grace Gletsu, Donna Lero*

*(University of Waterloo)*

Across Canada and other liberal welfare states, parents are required to solve care gaps in a context of high maternal employment and shortages of childcare availability. Feminist care scholars describe these dynamics as part of a broader crisis of care, in which social reproduction remains essential but the infrastructure that makes care reliable, affordable, and sustainable are unevenly distributed. One under-examined feature of this crisis is care packaging: the use of two or more concurrent non-parental childcare arrangements (e.g., combining centre-based care with relatives, neighbours, or paid providers) to cover the full span of working time and family needs. While prior research has largely treated care packaging as an outcome driven by work schedules and childcare constraints, we argue that it should also be treated as a consequential process that generates additional logistical and cognitive labour - work that is gendered and often absorbed by mothers.

Using the 2023 Canadian Survey on Early Learning and Child Care (CSELCC), a nationally representative dataset collected by Statistics Canada, we examine how care packaging intensity relates to working mothers’ reported (1) family-to-work interference and (2) satisfaction with work-life balance. Building on Beckman and Mazmanian’s concept of scaffolding, we theorize care packaging as one strategy through which households assemble supports that make paid employment possible under conditions of care scarcity; critically, we also theorize that successful scaffolding has prerequisites. The capacity to maintain care packages is contingent on resources that are unevenly distributed across households and jobs. We therefore test whether three resource domains moderate the association between care packaging and work-family outcomes: financial resources (household income), relational resources (partner status and partner employment as a proxy for potential availability), and job-based temporal and spatial resources (access to schedule flexibility and remote work).

We estimate linear regression models and show that mothers relying on multiple non-parental care arrangements report significantly higher family-to-work interference and lower satisfaction with work-life balance compared to mothers relying on a single arrangement. Resource contingencies are central: Income buffers the association between multiple arrangements and family-to-work interference in ways that concentrate strain among mothers in the lowest income quintile. Relational resources provide only modest buffering for work-life satisfaction when a partner is not working, consistent with gender scholarship emphasizing that time availability does not automatically translate into responsibility for managerial care work. By contrast, schedule flexibility emerges as the most consequential moderating

resource: among mothers with flexible schedules, the penalties of care packaging for both interference and satisfaction are substantially reduced and, in some cases, effectively neutralized.

This paper is a work in progress in advance of journal submission. It contributes to sociological debates on care infrastructures by showing how fragmented care arrangements translate into uneven work-family strain and by identifying schedule control as a key workplace support that can reduce the costs of navigating the crisis of care. It also suggests that expanding access to child care must be paired with workplace reforms that increase time autonomy if policies are to support mothers' employment and well-being.

### ***On the Front Line***

#### **The Fragmented Bodies: From Gestation to Lactation and the Alienation of Surrogate Mothers in India**

*Namreeta Kumari*

*(Jaypee Institute of Information Technology)*

The paper interrogates the sociological dimensions of commercial surrogacy in India which lies at the intersections of gender, reproductive labor and bodily autonomy. The paper explores the lived experiences of surrogate mothers, tracing the physical and emotional journey from gestation to lactation and examining the socio-cultural and economic forces that contribute to their alienation. While surrogacy is often framed as a contractual or medical arrangement, it profoundly transforms the surrogate's embodied experience, creating a sense of fragmentation between her reproductive labor and her social identity. Drawing on qualitative interview with a woman acting as a surrogate mother in one of the clinics in Gujarat, the paper highlights how surrogate mothers navigate the tensions between bodily exploitation, maternal labor, and societal invisibility. By interrogating the structural inequalities underpinning surrogacy in India, the study underscores the ethical, emotional, and political implications of commodified reproductive labor, advocating for understanding the experiences of surrogate mothers which are often not part of the academic discourses. As these narratives unravel the lived realities which are often uncomfortable and dehumanizing.

## **Intersectional inequalities, precarity and labour market stratification - Room 0.08**

### **Constructing a Museum Career: A Bourdieusian Analysis of the Capital-enhancing Strategies of UK Museum Workers from Working-class Backgrounds**

*Samantha Evans, Rebecca Whiting*

*(Royal Holloway, University of London)*

This paper seeks to examine the strategies that individuals from working-class backgrounds take to enhance their capital and consider how this is shaped by, and shaping of, the ideal career norms of a particular field. This enables us to respond to calls to better understand how occupational structures contribute to class inequality (O'Brien, 2020).

We investigate this within UK museum work, a field that is marked by inequalities. Data varies but suggests that only 5.2% of the 100,000 museum workers (DCMS, 2024) in the UK come from a working-class background (McAndrews et al, 2024). The museum field is also a field in flux, shaped by three logics: a) a foundational logic, of 'keeping collections special' which idealises the symbolic capital of specialist knowledge and experience, b) a neoliberal market logic valorising 'discursive capital' (ability to generate profile), and entrepreneurialism and c) a public service logic, valorising an 'activist' habitus, and a focus on audiences and diversity (Evans & Whiting, 2025).

The epistemological approach to the study was social constructionist, which aligns with Bourdieu's constructivist view of social reality (Bourdieu, 1992). Data was collected via 56 interviews between March and August 2018. We analysed the data using discourse analysis. We view discourse as a set of ideas by which certain objects, subjects and relations come to be known (Fairclough, 1992). We

looked at how different types of capital were constructed, identified the type of strategies participants adopted and considered how these related to idealised career norms.

In this initial analysis we highlight three overarching strategies that working-class participants adopt to maximise their capital a) Accumulating b) Converting and c) Re-constituting.

**Accumulating capital** Accumulating describes the ways working-class participants built limited stocks of capital, using their own time, energy and labour; for example: accumulating cultural capital: Participant one: I've always been doing courses to try and ...claw my way out.

**Converting capital** Converting capital describes a) exchanging one form of capital for another for example: swapping economic for symbolic:

Participant two: I took a pay cut, but it was the kind of closest job I could get while still having a foot in the door of the museum sector

**Re-constituting capital** Re-constituting capital describes how participants turn their lack of capital into valued capital for example turning lack of economic capital into a benefit: Participant three: Despite having no money, the gift my parents gave me was thrift; I was attracted to organisations that didn't pay much as I could turn them around.

Next steps: Fuller analysis will provide a more detailed typology of the strategies that participants adopt, which will aid our understanding of Bourdieu's (1987) concepts of accumulation, conversion, and potentially changing the 'rules of the game' through re-constituting capital.

It will also show how these strategies are shaped by, and shaping of, the field logics and ideal career norms in an occupational sector. It thus elevates our analysis of the way occupational fields and structures contribute to class inequality (O'Brien, 2020).

## **Gendering Neurodivergence in Employment: ADHD, Masking and Intersectional Inequalities at Work**

*Sena Sar, Daniela Lup*

*(École Supérieure de Commerce de Paris)*

Despite an increasing number of studies on neurodiversity in the workplace, the gendered organization of neurodivergent employment remains insufficiently theorized. This study explores the experiences of ADHD individuals in the workplace with a gender intersectional lens. Our specific research question is: how are workplace inequalities produced at the intersection of ADHD and gender, and through what specific mechanisms? Second, sensitized by the increase in the number of migrant workers in the European workplaces, we ask a follow-up question: whether and how does migrant status further affect the gendered identity work of ADHD individuals?

Our study brings together Acker's (2006) concept of inequality regimes with theories of internal identity asymmetry (Meister et al., 2017) to examine how neurodivergent workers are differentially recognized, misrecognized, and valued. We also examine coping mechanisms during times of misidentification at work, including methods for resolving conflicts and managing stressful situations. We argue that ADHD is not simply an individual characteristic that workers manage, but rather a social identity that is interpreted through gendered assumptions about sociability and emotional regulation. This makes work such as masking more than a personal coping strategy and more a form of labour through which workers attempt to 'read and estimate' both neurotypicality and normative gender performance in order to be accepted as competent workers. We also argue that an individual's migrant status intensifies the identity work.

Our analysis draws on a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with ADHD workers with professional experience in Europe, including the UK. The findings show that identity asymmetries are experienced differently, with distinct positive and negative gendered aspects. Differences in experience and perception between ADHD men and women stand out particularly during times of conflict. Most participants admit to masking at work nearly all the time, and, in some cases, respondents describe a 'masking spiral' to blend in and feel accepted. The need to conform to gender norms, such as masking to "behave like a woman would," stands out among the findings. In addition, women's accounts indicate that workplace inequality may extend beyond lack of recognition to include heightened exposure to

sexualized interactions. Our findings also suggest that the tendency to mask ADHD is further exacerbated by cultural differences.

The study contributes to the sociology of work and employment in three ways. First, it extends research on neurodivergence at work by specifying a mechanism through which gendered inequalities are reproduced, that is, by differentially sanctioning and disciplining ADHD workers through both neurotypical and gendered norms. Second, while masking has been studied by psychologists and therefore understood primarily as a coping mechanism, we show that masking also needs to be understood sociologically as identity labour generated by inequality regimes. Third, our study demonstrates the value of considering additional intersectional layers, such as one's migrant status, which generates, in the limit, the need for additional masking and identity work. Lastly, our study provides some practical insights and suggestions to responsible employers who aim to provide more inclusive workplace settings for neurodivergent workers.

### **Overwork, Social Reproduction, and the Body: A Marxist Feminist Analysis of Gendered Inequalities among Single Mothers in China's IT Sector**

*Chunhong Zhou, Győző Molnár*

*(University of Worcester)*

Overwork has been institutionalized in China's IT sector, mainly through the "996" work regime, which normalizes consistent long working hours and heightens labour control (Li, 2023). While this regime influences employees broadly, its consequences are disproportionately distributed. Divorced single mothers (DSMs), an increasing demographic in post-reform China, face severe constraints in negotiating paid work with childcare responsibilities, thereby creating salient time poverty and limited access to workplace resources, such as physical activity (PA) resources. Existing research demonstrates that DSMs face gendered barriers to workplace PA, largely due to masculine organizational cultures (Zhou, Bairner, & Molnár, 2025).

However, this perspective insufficiently theorizes how labour process demands and social reproduction jointly shape these inequalities. Drawing on Marxist feminism, this study re-conceptualizes limited PA participation not as an individual or organizational issue, but as an outcome of the interactions between overwork, care responsibilities, and gendered labour regimes in China's IT industry.

By situating these dynamics within China's socialist market economy, the study examines how institutional arrangements — particularly the normalization of overwork, limited support for social reproduction, and gendered workplace norms — systematically constrain DSMs' access to time and bodily autonomy. It contends that these dynamics do not merely subordinate DSMs but actively reinforce their marginalization within the labour market by perpetuating gendered inequalities in both production and social reproduction.

Drawing on 22 semi-structured interviews with DSMs working in China's IT industry, this study employs thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) along with an intra-categorical intersectional approach (McCall, 2005). Grounded in Marxist feminism, the analysis examines how overwork, care responsibilities, and gendered workplace norms intersect to generate inequalities in bodily autonomy, time use, and access to PA.

Findings show that DSMs' limited PA participation is not a personal choice, but a structural outcome of intersecting labour and social reproductive constraints. First, the normalization of overwork in China's IT sector curtails employees' control over time, rendering DSMs with little capacity for rest or PA. Second, sole responsibility for childcare further exacerbates time poverty, disproportionately restricting DSMs' access to both workplace and PA-based resources. Third, gendered workplace norms and male-dominated organizational cultures limit DSMs' access to workplace facilities and flexible arrangements, reinforcing unequal bodily autonomy.

These dynamics are intensified by job insecurity and financial pressure, which reduce DSMs' motivation for PA and prioritize economic survival over well-being. The findings demonstrate how labour process demands and constrained social reproduction collectively create embodied inequalities, where DSMs' time, energy, and health are systematically devalued. PA thus appears not as a lifestyle choice, but as a site where gendered labour inequalities are reproduced in China's market-oriented economy.

This study contributes to ongoing debate on intersectional inequalities and labour market stratification by revealing how gendered inequalities are produced through interplay of labour process demands and social reproduction in China's socialist-market context. By centering the body as a site of labour inequality, it extends Marxist feminist analyses of work and emphasizes how time, health, and well-being are differentially distributed under contemporary labour regimes.

## Open Stream - Room 0.24

### PhD Showcase

#### **Unionising “Capitalism’s Favourite Child”: A Conjunctural Analysis of the Emergence of Fashion UK**

*Hannah Buckler*

*(Goldsmiths, University of London)*

This paper presents the launch of BECTU's 'Fashion UK' in 2024 - “the first-ever union branch solely for UK-based non-performing Fashion Creatives” - as marking a significant shift in the organising potential of the historically non-unionised British fashion sector. Existing research on the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs) emphasises the depoliticisation and de-unionisation of the UK workforce under New Labour and characterises CCI workers as the ‘poster children’ of neoliberal policy making (e.g. Banks, Gill, McRobbie, O'Connor, Ross). Organising efforts amongst the CCI workforce in general are limited but with the fashion sector described as ‘capitalism’s favourite child’, creative fashion workers are understood as particularly resistant to forming a collective identity or developing channels for collective action compared to other groups.

Drawing on early-stage doctoral research and autoethnographic data from over twelve years of professional experience in the luxury fashion sector, the paper argues that the formation of Fashion UK challenges dominant understandings of a depoliticised fashion workforce. It offers a conjunctural analysis of political and popular cultural events to explain the union's emergence at this specific moment, including the de-glamourisation of fashion labour during the Covid-19 pandemic, restrictions on free trade and movement following the Brexit vote and the high profile 2023 Hollywood Writers' Strike, which I contend has served as a touch stone for collective action from workers typically associated with desirable labour.

The paper outlines the unique challenges presented by unionising fashion workers, including the feminisation and hyper-visibility of fashion labour, alongside reliance on freelance, project-based and other forms of non-standard employment seen across the CCIs more broadly. It analyses Fashion UK's current unionising strategies, paying close attention to how traditionally masculine organising models are being adapted to mobilise a feminised, young, increasingly self-employed and chronically 'online' workforce.

#### **Negotiating Work-Life Balance: The Experiences of Hong Kong Single Mothers Living in the UK**

*Ze Liu*

*(University of Nottingham)*

Contemporary labour markets are increasingly shaped by intersecting pressures arising from demographic change, migration, and growing strains on everyday life under conditions often described as a polycrisis. Economic uncertainty, institutional transformation, and changing labour market structures have intensified the challenges individuals face in negotiating the boundaries between work and life. These pressures are particularly visible for single parents who must navigate employment, personal responsibilities, and everyday life without the support of a partner. Within this context, the experiences of migrant women navigating work and life in new institutional environments represent an important yet underexplored issue in the sociology of work.

While research on work-life balance (WLB) has expanded considerably in recent decades, much of this literature focuses on dual-earner households within Western institutional contexts. Consequently, the experiences of single mothers remain relatively marginalised in mainstream organisational and labour

market research. This gap is especially evident in relation to migrant women, whose experiences of WLB are shaped not only by gendered expectations and family structures but also by migration trajectories and the institutional conditions of host labour markets. As a result, there remains limited understanding of how migrant single mothers negotiate the relationship between work and life after migration.

This paper presents the research design of an ongoing PhD project examining how single mothers from HK who have migrated to the UK perceive and negotiate WLB in their everyday lives. Drawing on insights from the sociology of work, intersectionality theory, and migration studies, the research investigates how gender, parental status, and migration experience intersect to shape migrant women's experiences of work and life within the UK labour market. The study asks: How do HK single mothers living in the UK perceive and negotiate WLB after migration? In particular, the research explores how migrant women develop strategies to manage work and life responsibilities in the context of changing conditions and organisational practices.

Methodologically, the project adopts a qualitative research design based on semi-structured interviews with HK single mothers currently living and working in the UK. Participants are recruited through migrant community networks and social organisations. The research focuses on participants' lived experiences of employment, everyday life, and organisational support within the UK labour market. Data collection is currently in preparation.

The study contributes to debates in the sociology of work and employment in three ways. First, it expands WLB research by foregrounding the experiences of migrant single mothers, a group largely overlooked in existing research. Second, the research introduces an intersectional perspective to the study of work and migration by examining how gender, migration status, and family structure interact to shape everyday negotiations between work and life. Third, by examining migrant single mothers' perceptions of organisational policies and their lived experiences of negotiating work and life, the study provides insights into how workplace policies may be better designed to promote greater equality and inclusion in contemporary organisations.

## **Workplace Inequalities in the Age of GenAI: A Framework Beyond Technological Determinism**

*Julian Kettl*

*(Copenhagen Business School)*

This article presents the conceptual framework of an ongoing PhD project on labour market inequalities in the age of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). It develops a framework for empirically studying the heterogeneous effects of GenAI adoption across occupations in Europe by combining measures of GenAI adoption with indicators of the social organisation of work, including autonomy, teamwork, and routine.

The rapidly increasing adoption of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools has intensified debates about how they will affect workers across occupations and skill levels. Some studies suggest that AI adoption can reduce inequalities by disproportionately enhancing the productivity of lower-skilled workers, while others argue that it primarily benefits high-skilled and well-paid workers, thereby widening disparities and contributing to labour market polarization. However, existing measures mostly rely on estimates of (Gen)AI exposure that focus narrowly on the share of job tasks these systems could theoretically perform. In doing so, they overlook real-world adoption and cannot account for the crucial role of the social organisation of work.

From a sociological perspective that moves beyond technological determinism, studying the implications of technological change for workers requires attention to how work is socially organised (Williams 2019). Empirical evidence from past and ongoing waves of technological change shows that labour market institutions and power structures shape their consequences for workers. Recent studies, for example, indicate that employees' voice significantly affects how AI-related benefits are distributed across workers (Schulz et al. 2025). Accordingly, this article conceptualises GenAI-related technological change not as a process driven solely by technical capabilities, but as a reconfiguration of task bundles whose consequences are moderated by the social organisation of work.

Against this backdrop, the article develops a framework for studying the workplace effects of GenAI beyond task content by integrating two analytical axes: (1) recent measures of GenAI adoption, and (2)

occupational indicators of the social organisation of work. Specifically, exposure measures based on expert or LLM assessments of GenAI task performance are combined with recent measures of observed work-related GenAI use derived from empirical studies (Eloundou et al. 2024; Handa et al. 2025). These are linked to variables from a validated taxonomy that operationalises the social organisation of work along three dimensions: autonomy, teamwork, and routine in work processes (Fernández-Macías and Bisello 2022). To create a framework for studying GenAI's implications across European workplaces, all components are harmonised and linked to ISCO-08 codes using established crosswalk procedures. This enables linkage with major European and national survey datasets and provides a basis for analysing how the consequences of GenAI adoption are shaped by work organisation.

Empirically, the article illustrates how GenAI adoption is associated with work-organisational characteristics and highlights occupations in which the risk of adverse workplace effects may be higher, for example where high GenAI adoption coincides with low worker autonomy, as in the case of receptionists, information clerks, and customer service representatives.

### **Who Controls the Forest? The Politics of Logging Concessions and Climate Policy in the Brazilian Amazon**

*Barbara Wanderley*

*(University of Strathclyde)*

This research explores how land control mechanisms are implemented in western Pará, Brazil, particularly through logging concessions in riverine communities and Munduruku indigenous territories. The study investigates the legal frameworks governing these concessions, as well as international environmental policies arising from global climate agreements aimed at addressing the impacts of the climate crisis. This study is grounded in a critical theory perspective, focusing on how power structures the relationship between communities and their territories. In this process, the state plays a central role by creating and operating legal mechanisms for forest compensation, which tend to deepen inequalities in the production of space (Olivera, 2010; Nepuceno, 2017). While these mechanisms are often justified as regulatory responses to illegal land-use dynamics associated with illegal mining, the power infrastructure behind these shapes how space is experienced and reproduced by local communities (Borras Jr. et al., 2005; Frederiksen, 2024). As a result, territory is understood in relation to power not only as a space of belonging but also as part of a frontier construction that functions as a mechanism of land control (Guernsey, 2024). Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative, multi-method approach based on grounded theory, aligning with its theoretical and conceptual aims. Within this, data collection includes semi-structured interviews, focus groups, field observations, informal discussions, and secondary qualitative data on environmental policies and climate governance. A total of 10 participants were interviewed face-to-face, comprising 5 men and 5 women. This gender balance was not predetermined but emerged during the fieldwork and reflects the diversity of community roles, environmental defenders, and community leaders. Participants were adults under 60, drawn from riverine communities and indigenous peoples. Additionally, six focus groups were conducted with open-ended questions. The focus groups took place during fieldwork in Oriximiná and Santarém, where 23 adult participants first attended a community meeting in Nova Macedônia, Oriximiná. Participants included men and women aged 30 to 70, representing various social roles, such as community members, religious leaders, educators, and international delegates, mainly from local and neighbouring communities. The discussions focused on experiences with logging concessions, with participants sharing personal narratives about their livelihoods and territorial violations. Data were analysed thematically to identify key patterns and themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Tuckett, 2005; Bradly, 2015; Lamba et al., 2022). The methodological choices in this thesis were guided by two theoretical problems: first, to understand the experiences of Munduruku Indigenous people and riverine communities with logging concessions in Brazil under the 2006 forest management plan; and second, to offer a refined definition of metabolic rift in relation to territorial metabolism. Overall, this study advances ongoing debates on environmental governance and political ecology by combining community perspectives with structural analysis, providing new insights into how climate crises influence land control across multiple scales in the Brazilian Amazon.

# Worker subjectivities, experience and agency 1 - Room 0.11

## Where is the Love? Hiding Love in the Workplace

Louise Lecomte, Marjan De Coster

(Université Lyon 3 Jean Moulin, iaelyon School of Management)

Workplace romance — consensual intimate relationships between co-workers — has been studied across organizational behavior, HRM, and law. Scholarship focusing on romantic relationships at work have on the one hand focused on the impact thereof on work, identifying benefits and risks. More critical studies have, on the other hand, focused on how hierarchical relationships raise concerns regarding power asymmetry, especially where boundaries between romance and harassment may become blurred (Gutek, 1985; Williams, Giuffre & Dellinger, 1999).

*The literature barely addresses the way employees navigate workplace romances themselves. It thus aligns with stereotypes about work: “discourses of professionalism have privileged formal terms such as male, public mind and rational over their informal opposites – female, private, body and emotional”, which are considered “constituted as “other” in organizational life” (Threthewey, 1999, p. 426; Mumby and Putnam, 1992). Disciplined into a professional body, the ideal worker should not overflow or show emotions (see also Acker, 1990). The concept of the ideal worker theorizes how employees discipline their bodies along a disembodied professional ideal, one that is not hampered by bodily or private demands (e.g. De Coster et al., 2025, Steffan & Loretto, 2024). Employees actively engage in forms of body work (Lawrence et al., 2023) to align with this ideal, performing and maintaining professionalism continuously.*

Through 15 interviews with workers, we try to understand how workers navigate romance at work while trying to align with the ideal worker. Based on our interviews, we identified that workers evaluated individually what they felt could be appropriate or not. Doing so, they align with the ideal worker that is imposed on them. While evaluating what is appropriate, they tend to make a choice between hiding the relationship or disclosing the relationship to colleagues or managers. A second aspect is the impact that these choices might have on their relationships.

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## Silent Fractures: Emotional Estrangement and the Reconfiguration of Voice in UK Academia

Nelarine Cornelius, Mustafa Ozturk, Chidozie Umeh

(University of York)

Contemporary analyses of the “Great Reshuffle” and wider polycrisis emphasise labour mobility, insecurity, and new forms of managerial control, as well as transformation within professional workplaces.

Alongside this restructuring, a quieter shift is emerging. In employment settings that remain relatively secure yet characterised by continuous evaluation and intensified competition, the relational conditions that once sustained collegial voice appear to narrow. Drawing on research with Black academics in the UK, this paper asks why, in highly evaluated professional environments, the exercise of voice becomes strategically bounded and selectively deployed rather than routinely sustained through collegial life.

The paper aims to explore this shift by examining how competitive individualisation reorganises horizontal workplace relations and reshapes where and how professional voice is exercised. The analysis focuses on UK higher education as a critical site of professional labour transformation, where marketisation, audit regimes, performance metrics, and intensified competition for recognition and resources have restructured academic work. While sociology-of-work scholarship has documented labour intensification and managerialism in universities, it has paid less attention to how these pressures reorganise relations laterally, altering how trust, collaboration, and participation are negotiated among peers as well as through hierarchy. It has paid even less attention to how such shifts are lived through subtle racialised exclusions and microaggressive workplace dynamics.

The study draws on semi-structured interviews conducted between 2025 and 2026 with Black academics across multiple UK institutions and career stages, as part of a wider project on intersectionally inflected microaggressions and forms of racialised marginalisation in UK academia. Black academics provide a critical vantage point because, situated within institutions that espouse inclusion yet operate through competitive evaluative regimes, they often encounter heightened uncertainty over recognition, sponsorship, and belonging. Participants describe sustained commitment to teaching, publishing, and institutional contribution alongside deliberate modulation of engagement: carefully chosen collaborations, reduced participation in departmental forums, and increased reliance on individually managed opportunities and networks. Voice, in this context, becomes situational and risk-managed across organisational settings.

To account for this pattern, the paper develops the concept of emotional estrangement. Unlike alienation (detachment from work), isolation (absence of connection), or strategic silence (withholding dissent), emotional estrangement describes a relational adaptation within competitive professional fields, where individuals remain committed to their work yet become more guarded in collaboration, recognition-sharing, and expressive participation. Through Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, and symbolic capital, universities are conceptualised as sites of ongoing evaluation in which recognition is scarce and career progression uncertain, encouraging actors to invest voice selectively rather than collectively.

The paper contributes to the sociology of work and employment by showing that contemporary restructuring reshapes managerial control and the peer relations through which participation, recognition, and influence are organised. It introduces emotional estrangement, showing how competitive individualisation relocates rather than extinguishing voice, making expression a selectively deployed and risk-managed resource. This reframes labour-process transformation as a relational phenomenon and identifies collegial interaction itself as a central site through which work is experienced, and inequalities are reproduced in professional settings.

### **Facing Insecurity in the UK Frontline Private Security Industry: Where “lives are at risk for a pittance”**

*Birgit Den Outer, Guy Huber*  
(Oxford Brookes University)

Despite regulatory advances in the UK private security industry, frontline security work continues to be characterised by precarity. This presentation explores the frontline experiences of Mollie, a long serving “doorman” in the night-time economy. We invited Mollie to talk not only about her work, but also how it made her feel about herself and others, through questions intended to elicit ‘identity talk’. With nearly 30 years of experience and skills acquired in the industry, she describes not only the physical dangers of managing conflict and ensuring safety in volatile environments, but also the emotional and existential challenges associated with her role. These include dealing with public hostility, navigating unpredictable and unsociable working hours, and coping with a lack of recognition. Yet, rather than being defined solely by these challenges, Mollie constructs a positive identity grounded in her role as a protector. By framing her work as keeping others safe, helping her fellow human beings in need, and training others she produces meaning and self-worth in an otherwise precarious occupation. Mollie's story therefore

highlights how she navigates forms of insecurity through identity work to craft a positive identity based on keeping others secure.

The broader context of Mollie's experience reflects ongoing tensions within the UK private security industry. Since the establishment of the Security Industry Authority in 2003, the sector has been subject to increasing regulation aimed at professionalisation. However, this process has been uneven and incomplete. Today, approximately 450,000 registered frontline security workers operate within a labour market characterised by precarity. A significant proportion of the workforce is drawn from migrant populations, now estimated at around 47%, while zero-hours contracts remain widespread. Pay levels are typically low, and pathways for advancement are limited, reinforcing the perception of security work as a marginal occupation. Inequalities within the sector further compound these challenges. Gender disparities are particularly stark, with women making up just under 11% of the workforce. At the same time, the fragmented and ad hoc deployment of security personnel across different organisational settings increases vulnerability, especially for migrant workers. Evidence of these issues is visible in recent inspections targeting labour exploitation, as well as surveys highlighting experiences of discrimination and racism within the industry. Mollie's testimony brings these structural conditions and dynamics to the fore while also providing an illustration of the centrality of security in how we think about ourselves and others. Her account therefore shines an important light on a topic and industry still under-investigated in domains relating to work, employment and society.

## Worker subjectivities, experience and agency 2 - Room 0.13

### **In the Name of Cinephilia: Film Festival Workers, Rhythmic Precarity and the Performance of Passion**

*Jeremy Vachet*

*(Audencia Business School and LabSIC)*

Sociological research into the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) often highlights how 'passionate work' masks systemic exploitation. This paper expands on this critique by exploring diverse working conditions within this field, particularly the temporal insecurities inherent in the film festival sector—a domain where work revolves around high-stakes, short-term events and periods of inactivity. It also investigates how the structural instability of creative careers is concealed by 'cinephilia' (used as an authoritative discourse) and the 'exceptional' nature of events, which requires an 'authentic' performance of self that normalises self-exploitation.

The research is based on observant participation across several editions of a film festival and 15 longitudinal interviews conducted over the past ten years. While the analysis of this extensive fieldwork is in its early stages, initial patterns identify cyclical rhythms of precarity, where the constant pressure of the industry manifests differently across the project timeline. The fieldwork documents cyclical rhythms of precarity, where the constant pressure of the industry manifests differently throughout the project timeline: periods of extreme adrenaline and overwork during the event are followed by profound post-project exhaustion and social withdrawal. Preliminary findings suggest a "temporal trap": the adrenaline and perceived prestige of the festival—and of cinephilia—provide a sense of purpose that justifies a long-term absence of financial and professional security. By documenting the social and psychological fallout that remains once the event concludes, the paper argues that festival labour represents a frontier of contemporary exploitation where the celebration of 'creativity' and 'passion' actively facilitates the degradation of long-term worker wellbeing. This study contributes to debates within the sociology of work by politicising the temporal dimensions of precarity and challenging the sustainability of event-based employment models.

## **What's Wrong with 'Good' Side-jobs? Subjective Negotiations in Precarious Creative Careers**

*Jeremy Vachet*

*(Audencia Business School and LabSIC)*

While precarity is recognised as a defining feature of contemporary cultural work, academic literature often portrays side jobs as mere "humdrum" necessities, "commitment devices," or symptoms of a failed artistic career. Such perspectives frequently dismiss non-artistic work as "bad jobs" that divert individuals from their "true" calling, failing to systematically analyse why certain employment is sustainable—and even beneficial—from the worker's perspective.

This presentation challenges these assumptions by proposing a systematic framework identifying the specific factors that define "good" versus "bad" side jobs for creative workers. Based on a decade of interviews and participant observation conducted with twenty independent musicians across the United States, France, and Sweden, the research shifts the focus from the nature of the work (music-related vs. non-music-related) to the workers' subjective negotiations with daily life struggles to ensure career longevity.

The proposed framework is organised around three core themes: Stability, Flexibility, and Compromise. By examining these factors, the research demonstrates that musicians are not "passive dupes" or "failed artists," but rather workers navigating systemic precarity within the cultural industries and beyond. A "good" side job is redefined as a form of subjective career alignment that provides economic security and temporal flexibility while protecting "art-for-art's-sake" legitimacy and long-term creative purpose.

Findings suggest that when side jobs offer sufficient stability and flexibility, they act as "shields" against precarious working lives, allowing artists to resist compelled entrepreneurialism and a loss of creative meaning without abandoning their practice. By moving beyond descriptive accounts of portfolio careers, this presentation provides a sociological perspective that connects musicians' labour strategies to broader literature on work, subjectivity, and coping mechanisms in an era of structural instability and polycrisis.

## **The Accidental Manufacturer: Unexpected Pathways into Manufacturing**

*Jana Stefan, Anna Uhlin, Arianna Marcolin, Alison Hirst, Chris Ivory*

*(Anglia Ruskin University)*

Accelerating technological change within a constant state of polycrisis has fuelled increasingly speculative claims about the future of work. Intrigued by the mismatch between speculations about (unavailable) future skills (Frey & Osborne, 2017) and the realities we observed through a multi-sited ethnographic study across European manufacturing firms, we ask who the contemporary manufacturing worker is, and how they came into manufacturing. We find that there are pathways into manufacturing for people who have experienced various setbacks in life, appearing as unpromising candidates at first glance – e.g., individuals needing parental support at job interviews due to neurodiversity, or stumbling upon industrial apprenticeships at a careers event due to missing the talk about joining university. We thus understand pathways into manufacturing as shaped by disruption, and combined efforts by workers and organisations to 'make the accident work' for both parties. However, our findings also show that these informal pathways are not open to women or ethnically minoritised people in some contexts.

Our thematic analysis of multi-sited ethnographic data excavates the recurring threads that shape how workers arrive and remain in European manufacturing. Across field sites, occupational change emerged not as a purely economic shift but as an emotional and identity-based process. To make sense of these dynamics, we draw on work orientation (Goldthorpe et al., 1967) and the concept of the accidental career (e.g., Baruch et al., 2025). Work orientation highlights how individuals bring their own interpretations and values into work, shedding light on how workers choose jobs not only considering workplace factors, but also nonwork dimensions including family responsibilities, life stage, past experiences, and leisure interests. The accidental career describes a trajectory that unfolds unexpectedly, not only outside formal HR planning, but also outside career planning of the worker. Although accidental careers have been examined in white-collar professions, they have rarely been applied to blue-collar work. Our analysis shows how workers enter manufacturing accidentally and how skills and attachment to work emerge post-entry through doing, not pre-existing qualifications. Employers value attitude and fit over credentials, nurturing potential.

Recognising accidental pathways into manufacturing as a vital source of recruitment, we argue that building the organisational capacity to respond appropriately the 'accidental manufacturer' (e.g., by recognising transferrable skills and potential, building skills in-house) are essential to maintaining a resilient manufacturing sector that can navigate the polycrisis effectively.

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# PLENARY PANEL

13:30-14:30

Lecture Theatre 0.17

## Precarity, Inequality, Migration, and Worker Agency in a Changing Political Economy

**Patrizia Zanoni**, *Hasselt University*

**Gabriella Alberti**, *University of Leeds*

### Whither precarity? Labour flows, surplus populations, and failing social reproduction under late capitalism

In her speech, Patrizia Zanoni will argue that precarity should no longer be conceptualized as the mere deterioration of the standard employment relation of large segments of the labour force, who are formally free but too weak in their relation with the employer. In late capitalism, precarity is not produced by market exchange, but through the multiplication of coercion. Such coercion unevenly and intermittently extracts value from labour, increasingly turning it into a surplus population whose social reproduction is no longer guaranteed by the wage.



**Patrizia Zanoni** comes from the Alps, has four kids and strong opinions. She is a Full Professor of Organization Studies at the School of Social Sciences of Hasselt University (Belgium), which she co-founded and where she teaches sociology of work and organization, grand challenges, and diversity and social change. Her research draws on contemporary strands of Marxism (e.g., feminist Marxism, Open Marxism, Black Marxism, critical border theory) to investigate work, difference and value in and beyond capitalism. She also writes regularly on alternatives and on building academic infrastructures to foster social change. Between 2020 and 2025, she was one of the Editors in Chief of *Organization*. In 2022, she received an Emma Goldman award from the Flax Foundation for her work on inequality. None of the above could have happened without the generous support of her family, her partner and the Italian and Belgian welfare states.

### Migration and Precarious Work: The Contested Terrain of Mobility in Multi-crisis UK

Professor Alberti's plenary note will address an ongoing global challenge and increasingly central topic in the sociology of work concerning the intersection of migration management and the growth of precarious work. She will focus on the case of the UK as a country that has faced overlapping socio-economic crises, the exit from the EU and ongoing political instability. Drawing from her long standing research on migrant labour in low-paid sector and her recent book that centres migrant agency to questions of international mobility and labour turnover (Alberti and Sacchetto 2024), she will discuss recent changes that have affected the British immigration regime and its turbulent effects on labour markets and employment relations. Her main argument is that without understanding the unsettling nature of migrant mobility power across borders and occupations, and the actions of state and employers juggling contradictory mobility dilemmas, it is impossible to explain the constant changes in migration regulations and their effects on the politics of precarious work. Applying a "de-national lens" (Anderson 2021) to the field of labour sociology, she will also argue that the field of social reproduction represents a critical terrain to re-building solidarities for migrants and non-migrant precarious workers

increasingly pushed to the margins of the welfare state. Migrants and disenfranchised citizens' livelihoods and their legitimate presence in the territory are made increasingly uncertain and conditional on their "contributory" affordances, amidst the intensifying politicisation of migration as significant social cleavage within and beyond processes of racialisation.

**Gabriella Alberti** is Professor of International Labour Migration at Leeds Business School. Her research interests span across the sociology of work, migration and employment relations, focusing on international mobility, intersectionality, platform work, trade unions strategies towards precarious migrants, community organising and trade union renewal. She has published in international journals including *Work Employment and Society*, the *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, and the *Global Labour Journal*. She is editor of *Work Employment and Society*. Her recent UKRI research project 'Labour Mobility in Transition' investigated responses to post-Brexit migration regulation across food manufacturing, warehousing, hospitality and social care. She is a member of the Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation and Change and leads the Leeds Migration Research Network at the University of Leeds. She has recently published the co-authored book: *The Politics of Migrant Labour*: Bristol University Press (2024) and the co-edited collection "Migration and Social Reproduction" (Edward Elgar 2025).



# **PAPER SESSION 10**

## **15:00-16:30**

### **Intersectional inequalities, precarity and labour market stratification 1 - Room 0.08**

#### **Constrained Mobility and Institutionally Managed Precarity in Regional Refugee Settlement**

*Annika Kaabel, Dimitria Groutsis*

*(Estonian Business School, University of Sydney Business School)*

Regional refugee settlement in Australia is shaped by a central contradiction: refugee families are directed to labour-short regions on the assumption that local demand will support employment and long-term settlement, yet many encounter unemployment, underemployment, insecure work, and discrimination (Boese, 2023). Under polycrisis conditions, this contradiction sharpens. Labour shortages coexist with housing stress, retrenchment of welfare supports, fragmented local services, and the broader instability associated with displacement and resettlement. Focusing on families initially settled in regional areas, this paper compares those who later moved to urban centres with those who remained, asking how these intersecting pressures produced divergent employment, settlement, and mobility trajectories.

The analysis adopts a three-pronged framework. First, polycrisis captures refugee settlement as shaped by overlapping and mutually reinforcing disruptions rather than a single integration challenge. Second, institutionally managed labour market precarity explains how settlement policy, employer demand, and uneven local support infrastructures channel refugee families into labour markets where work may be available. Still, it is often insecure, low-paid, and weakly protected. Third, marginalised stakeholder theory (Chowdhury, 2026) provides the normative lens for the policy contribution by positioning refugees as stakeholders in settlement and labour market governance whose lives are profoundly shaped by institutional decisions, yet whose interests and voices remain subordinated to employer demand, regional development priorities, and cost-constrained welfare systems.

The argument draws on a four-year (2018–2021), three-stage longitudinal mixed-methods study of recently arrived refugee families from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan settling in various locations in Australia. The study combined longitudinal surveys, semi-structured family interviews, 20 key stakeholder interviews, and documentary analysis. A total of 246 families participated in Round 1, with 162 retained across all three rounds.

Findings show that families initially settled in regional locations were incorporated into labour markets marked by labour demand but weak job quality, insecure work, and limited prospects for advancement, while housing shortages, fragmented services, and constrained welfare supports undermined longer-term settlement. Comparison between those who remained in regional areas and those who moved to urban centres shows that onward mobility was shaped not only by work, but by the broader capacity to secure housing, care, education, transport, and support. Movement to urban areas was therefore not simply a matter of preference or failed integration, but a structured response to institutionally managed precarity.

The paper contributes to debates on work, migration, and precarity by showing how regional refugee settlement is organised through the interaction of labour market demand, weak conditions of social reproduction, and fragmented governance under polycrisis. Drawing on marginalised stakeholder theory, it reframes policy evaluation around representation, accountability, and stakeholder justice rather than narrow measures of employment entry or regional retention. The analysis is based on a completed empirical study and presents findings from an advanced stage of interpretation.

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### **Capital Variability in Professions: Mapping Structural Distinctions across Borders**

*Karina Pavlisa*

*(University of Bristol)*

Prior literature discusses the ‘local versions of professionalism,’ and calls have been made for research into the political economy of professional identity. Institutional landscapes instil norms and expectations that shape the local versions of professionalism. Studies synthesising Bourdieu’s framework with comparative capitalism show that professionals’ capital portfolios may vary across national contexts and models of capitalism. This paper advances this line of research by explaining and illustrating cross national differences in professional identities. Using the well-established link between expenditure patterns and capital strategy, this paper explores the structural distinctions in capital variability across professional-managerial groups in the UK and France. The paper explains how the cross national differences in professional identities, understood as variations in capital composition and shared dispositions prioritised within local professional fields, are shaped by institutional environments. To illuminate structural distinctions in capital variability, this study investigates and tests the distinctiveness of professionals’ dispositions to manifest particular forms of capital across the UK and France, drawing on large-scale national surveys and focusing on business professionals, technical professionals, and education professionals. The findings show that British business professionals are more distinctive, relative to other professionals, in their manifestations of social capital compared to their French counterparts. French education professionals demonstrate stronger distinctions among the other local professional domains in their dispositions to acquire cultural capital, compared to their British counterparts. In Britain, technical professionals are less active in manifesting their status, compared to other professions within their local context, than in France. By illuminating the differentials in the relative prioritization of capitals, this study also provides insights into the cross-national differences in the shared strategic interests of professional groups. The paper argues that national institutional structures shape how capitals interact, convert, and are valued in professions. Capital variability, understood as differences in capital composition, convertibility and prioritisation, thus, represents a legitimate dimension of cross national differences in professions. The study yields new insights for understanding professional identity, social structures, and inequality, and has practical implications for cross-border professional mobility and firms’ internalisation of talent.

### **Digging for Dirt in the Digital Economy: A Critical Review**

*Katharina Chudzikowski, Deborah Brewis, Anna Roberts*

*(University of Bath, School of Management)*

In a landscape shaped by the dramatic expansion of technology corporations and the rapid digital transformation of work, debates about the future of work continue to focus on automation, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and robotics. These innovations offer enticing opportunities, yet they also generate serious concerns about data ethics and concentrated politico economic power (Wood et al., 2019). Scholars in the sociology of work have long examined the dark side of organising (Linstead et al., 2014), and many now warn that digital work intensifies longstanding inequalities (Curchod et al., 2020). The emerging world of work displays glamour at the top and precarity at the bottom (Bulut, 2015). Early promises of more democratic, transparent, and accessible digital labour markets (Papacharissi, 2002) have largely collapsed, giving rise instead to a contested digital frontier (Brewis and Mitchell, 2017).

Rentiership has re-emerged: ownership of digital assets enables digital “landowners” to capture, control, and appropriate value. These actors depend on the visible work of privileged professionals but cannot operate without a growing frontline workforce that forms a new precariat. Some scholars argue that this shift signals capitalism’s mutation into “technofeudalism,” a system in which capital and markets evolve into more extreme forms (Varoufakis, 2023; Pitt, 2020). Research on this dark and hidden side of the digital economy has grown, particularly with emphasis on the work by the precariat in gig work settings

(Tirapani and Willmott, 2023; Caza et al., 2022; Duggan et al., 2020; Gandini, 2019; Ashford et al., 2018). Yet, the disembodied labour of digital workers such as Amazon Mechanical Turkers, Uber drivers, content moderators, content creators, and crowdworkers (Hatton, 2017; Graham and Anwar, 2018) also underpin the digital economy where invisible workers often protect organisations from moral or emotional taint (McMurray and Ward, 2014) and bear heavy psychosocial and economic burdens across both the Global South and the Global North (Idowu and Elbanna, 2021; Johnston et al., 2018; Spencer et al., 2019; Baum and Wallace, 2022).

However, scholars have rarely examined the hidden dirty work embedded in high tech industries and the wider digital economy. With this review paper, we conduct a critical synthesis of literature on the dark side of digital work to identify this gap and articulate the dimensions of emerging “digital dirty work.” Drawing on the dirty work tradition in critical management studies, we investigate the forms of “dirt” that shape labour in the contemporary digital world and outline how these forms create new configurations of stigma, moral ambiguity, and embodied labour.

Our review contributes to current debates (Schor et al., 2023) by centring workers’ experiences within the dark side of the digital economy and analysing how new forms of dirty work and working identities materialise in ostensibly “glamorous” high tech sectors. By mapping fragmented literatures and integrating insights from organisational behaviour, sociology, critical management studies, and digital labour research, we offer a research agenda that advances theoretical understanding of digital dirty work and provides pathways for future inquiry.

### **The Institutionalisation of Polycrisis: The Business Cases for Underemployment versus Good Employer Practices**

*Vanessa Beck, Tracey Warren, Levana Magnus, Daiga Kamerade, Vanesa Fuertes, Luis Torres*  
(University of Bristol)

This paper considers the ‘business case’ for underemployment. While underemployment is typically framed as a labour-market problem, there are significant numbers of firms that use it as a business strategy, actively benefiting from and reproducing underemployment. From a business perspective, underemployment offers three strategic advantages. First, time underemployment can be utilised to maximise flexibility for the organisation by using (short) part-time hour contracts, with possibilities for additional hours and over-time when demand requires. Second, firms can use wage underemployment by paying as close to (or even below) the statutory minima as is possible to keep business costs low. And third, they can utilise skills underemployment by recruiting individuals who have higher qualifications or more experience than is required for the job: firms gain efficiencies via the cheap use of experienced staff who may also be able to undertake work that is not strictly speaking part of their formal remit at no extra cost. Skills underemployment may also involve not promoting workers who acquire skills and experience, and can reduce investment in training and development opportunities. One or multiple forms of underemployment are used across the labour market but are particularly entrenched in sectors such as health and social care, hospitality, and retail and wholesale. The use of underemployment seems, in fact, to be institutionalised via anything from welfare and employment support requirements to the lack of societal health and care provision, all of which force workers into jobs that are not ideal for them but seem to work very well for organisations. We reframe underemployment not only as a labour market inefficiency problem but also as a rational, and often profitable, part of contemporary business cases.

Empirical data from a mixed-methods project on underemployment in the UK show how widespread the use of underemployment as an organisational strategy is, but also the downsides of this approach. The diverse findings allow us to establish for whom a strategy based on underemployment makes business sense, especially for small employers in hospitality and retail, and who has good practices and suggestions as to how underemployment can be avoided and what alternatives there are, especially among large employers and in health and social care. Our findings suggest that employers do not necessarily have ‘free’ choices as to their business strategies. The paper has implications for organisations, employers, and the workers they employ, but also for employment policy, especially considering the recent Employment Rights Bill, and, for example, the recent rise in business tax rates that were frequently mentioned during our interviews with employers.

# Intersectional inequalities, precarity and labour market stratification 2 - Room 0.09

## **Saudi Women's Investment Practices: Crafting Economic Agency in a Transforming Saudi Arabia**

*Sarah Bloomfield, Norah Almubarak*

*(Open University)*

Women are experiencing a period of unprecedented and accelerated transformation within Saudi Arabia. As part of the country's Vision 2030 strategy, longstanding structural barriers have been lifted to enable women to participate more fully, and autonomously, in economic and professional life. Alongside increasing labour market participation, some affluent Saudi women are beginning to deploy their personal wealth as Business Angels, supporting entrepreneurial ventures that expand women's participation in emerging employment ecosystems. The paper contributes to debates on intersectional inequalities in work and employment by showing how gendered economic agency and entrepreneurial investment are reshaping opportunities for women within a rapidly transforming labour market.

The research question guiding the study is: What are the conditions enabling and constraining women to make a difference as Business Angels within Saudi Arabia? The rapid pace and recency of socio economic change offers a rare opportunity to study a system at the moment of its formation, enabling close examination of both the emergent practices of women investors, and the evolving structures that inform their participation. This provides an unusually intimate perspective on how new economic spaces are created, negotiated, and inhabited in ways that reconfigure existing gendered inequalities.

While research on Business Angels is growing, limited attention has been paid to how minoritized individuals - particularly women - become empowered and enabled to start angel investing, or to the practices they mobilise as they do so. Existing studies of entrepreneurial activity remain heavily centred on Western contexts, despite profound global diversity in economic arrangements and socio cultural norms. This paper responds to these gaps by foregrounding the experiences of women operating within a markedly different institutional, cultural, and political environment, where gender, class, cultural identity, and national narratives intersect in distinctive ways.

The study adopts an interpretive approach, complemented by a practice architecture lens, to illuminate how women experience and enact their emerging roles as Business Angels. Multidimensional qualitative methods enable analysis of intersecting structural, cultural, and institutional forces, while attending closely to the lived practices through which women navigate these forces day-to-day. An explicit intersectional lens highlights how gendered and class-based inequalities continue to shape access to investment ecosystems, even amid reforms that appear to expand opportunity.

Emerging findings indicate that many affluent Saudi women are not only financially able but deeply motivated to deploy their wealth in early-stage entrepreneurial ventures that generate positive societal impact. These insights challenge prevailing Western narratives that portray Saudi women as financially and socially constrained, instead revealing a cohort exercising financial autonomy, strategic foresight, and a strong sense of civic responsibility. Yet their practices remain anchored in – and to some extent constrained by – the cultural and identity-based values they choose to preserve, reflecting ongoing tensions between opportunity and obligation. Their engagement with angel investing thus exposes both new possibilities and persistent precarity within a rapidly transforming socioeconomic landscape. The paper contributes to debates on intersectional inequalities and labour market stratification by showing how gendered economic agency is being reconfigured within this unique moment of structural change.

## **Gendered Dynamics of Workforce Localization: Revisiting Bahrain's Labour Market Challenges**

*Emilie Rutledge, Maryam Janahi*

*(Open University)*

Gender sits at the centre of Bahrain's labour market challenge. Despite Bahraini women's consistently higher educational attainment and concentration in vocationally oriented fields aligned with knowledge intensive sectors, they remain markedly underutilised in the country's transition from oil dependency to

a knowledge based economy. This paradox—high female human capital alongside low private sector absorption—underscores the need to place gender at the core of labour nationalisation debates. Against the backdrop of enduring labour market segmentation between a public sector dominated by nationals and a private sector reliant on expatriates, and a policy landscape that has not explicitly integrated gender equality, this study reassesses the determinants of private sector hiring in Bahrain through a gendered lens.

Drawing on thirty one semi structured interviews with Human Resource managers and revisiting the Forstenlechner et al. (2012) framework, we examine how socio cultural, economic, regulatory, educational, and motivational factors have evolved over the past decade. We find that while regulatory, economic, and educational reforms have strengthened the enabling environment for Bahrainisation, gender related constraints—manifest in norms regarding suitable work, working hours, mobility, childcare, and workplace practices—alongside socio cultural expectations and motivational considerations, persist as substantial deterrents to hiring nationals. These dynamics compound for Bahraini women, whose credential advantages are frequently undercut by organisational cultures, regulatory gaps, and nationality based biases, positioning them at the margins of private sector employment. The result is a reinforcement of gendered labour segmentation and a blunting of nationalisation objectives. By centring gender, the paper clarifies how employer preferences, worker incentives, and policy design interact to shape hiring decisions. We conclude with policy recommendations to mainstream gender within nationalisation strategies and to dismantle intersecting barriers, thereby unlocking the full economic potential of Bahraini women.

### **Employability beyond the Individual: Tribal Ties and Wasta amongst Autistic Employees in Saudi Arabia**

*Faisal Alkadi*

*(King Saud University)*

Research on disability and, more recently, neurodiversity in HRM literature has increasingly moved beyond deficit-based approaches toward strengths-based perspectives, inclusive job design, and organisational awareness of difference. While these developments have advanced understanding of inclusive hiring practices, they offer limited insight into how hiring decisions are shaped in contexts where informal and relational processes operate alongside formal inclusion mechanisms, influencing how employability is recognised in practice. This paper examines how autistic adults are rendered hireable through relationally mediated processes, with particular attention to how tribal ties and wasta shape access to and experiences of employment in Saudi Arabia.

Drawing on 40 qualitative semi-structured interviews with three groups—autistic employees (n=15), their parents (n=15), and HR specialists involved in hiring and subsequent management of the autistic participants—the study aims to unpack how access to employment is negotiated across societal, organisational, and individual domains. In Saudi Arabia, interactions between candidates, families, and organisations are often shaped by broader tribal structures that influence access to trust, legitimacy, and opportunity. Informed by emerging HRM perspectives on neurodiversity, the analysis specifically focuses on wasta as a culturally embedded form of relational brokerage, often operating through tribal ties and kinship networks in employment.

The findings advance four main arguments. First, employability emerges not as an individual attribute but as a collectively assembled accomplishment, co-produced through the interactions of employees, families, and organisational gatekeepers. Second, HR specialists' accounts suggest that hiring decisions are shaped not only by formal qualifications or disability status, but by assessments of anticipated manageability, including whether employee's relational assurances exist to support the employment relationship. Third, families engage in employability labour, extending beyond care to include brokerage, advocacy, translation of difference, and ongoing stabilisation of employment. Fourth, in this context, wasta operates as a culturally embedded mechanism of risk absorption, through which families—often drawing on tribal ties—translate uncertainty into socially recognisable employability. Yet access to such mediation is uneven, such that the same relational mechanisms that enable entry into work may also reproduce stratified patterns of access across families.

The paper contributes to HRM research on neurodiversity by showing how candidates become hireable through socially embedded processes shaped by tribal ties, wasta, and broader relational dynamics. It specifically shows how organisational decisions are structured through informal processes of legitimacy

and risk management beyond formal inclusion policies. Finally, it treats employability labour as an analytic lens to capture the activities through which families produce, translate, and stabilise employability under conditions of organisational uncertainty.

## Open Stream - Room 0.24

### **When Social Movements Stall: Informal Power, Invisible Labour and the Limits of Institutionalising Sustainability**

*Christoph Wu*

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Firms across multiple sectors are facing increasing pressures from regulators, investors and civil society actors to align with dominant corporate sustainability (CS) and governance frameworks, yet how the institutionalisation of these frameworks unfolds inside organisations is less well understood.

This paper draws on social movement theory (Benford and Snow, 2000; Millward and Takhar, 2019) to explain how individuals mobilise network resources in early processes of new CS institutionalisation. Social movement theory serves as an anchor to describe how these implementations are framed, but the reliance on network resources also highlights both the socio-legal and socio-spatial lens of invisible labour (Daniels, 1987; Hatton, 2017), in that informal network mobilisation represents the social cost of early institutionalisation. What may seem like a purely internal role of CS, quickly extends into mobilisation within external environments.

Data were collected during a multi-year investigation into CS initiatives in multinational companies. I conducted longitudinal interviews, observations and ego-network analysis through a social survey (Burt, 1984). Ego network data are used to identify key supportive ties in the ego-networks of leaders and provide insights into the content of such informal alliances through feedback seeking, expert advice, relational support and framing.

This mixed-method study of CS initiatives in multinational firms shows that early institutionalisation relies on invisible labour and supportive informal networks of leaders. The findings underline that while framing, mobilisation and collective action can lead to early institutionalisation, such initiatives may stall over time and require workers to rely on informal networks to cope. Current global governance systems are therefore called into question and require long term commitment from organisational role holders.

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### **Stories (of Sorts) of Labour Market Organisations and Shifting Societal Relations Around Work in Finland**

*Anna Maaranen, Paula Koskinen Sandberg, Meri Frig*

*(Aalto University School of Business)*

In this paper, we examine how labour market organisations and shifting societal relations around work are made sense of by the online public. In June 2023, the new conservative-right government in Finland published its government programme outlining several labour market reforms, stating that they were to be 'prepared on a tripartite basis, drawing on the expertise of business organisations and employee organisations' (Finnish Government, 2023 p. 60), as is customary to the Finnish corporatist system.

However, national media soon reported on evident similarities between government programme entries and Finnish employer and business organisations' written goals for the government programme. This sparked fiery discussions on such organisations' roles in Finnish policymaking and the 'leaking' of business influence into the territory of labour market politics.

Most interestingly, it triggered a messy sensemaking process (Weick et al., 2005) around "What is the story?" (p. 410) of labour market organisations and overall societal relations around work in today's Nordic welfare state. This was particularly evident online. Finland's moving away from the long-standing Nordic tradition of tripartite negotiations and towards labour market reforms conducted through government-led (and, in this case, assertedly business-informed) legislative initiatives (Kaitila et al., 2022) sparked a debate which adopted story-like but disorderly elements. These warrant attention within organisation studies and employment relations research, two literatures crucial for understanding the ever-more complex realms of contemporary world of work.

Our findings suggest that online, sensemaking unfolds through fragmented and fragmenting storytelling episodes. We propose extra-organisational sensesattering as a novel concept and offer three entwined contributions. First, we add to extant research on extra-organisational sensemaking (e.g., Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2020) by highlighting the non-coordinated sensemaking around matters which puncture the boundary between organisational and societal realms. Second, we contribute to antenarrative sensemaking studies (e.g., Boje, 2011) by illustrating how stories-in-the-making emerge and participate in extra-organisational sensemaking. Taken together, these contributions let us direct attention to the role of labour market organisations in Finland where a long-standing 'story' of the Finnish corporatist model might be taking a new turn (e.g., Sorsa et al., 2024). Empirically, our work-in-progress study uses critical discourse analysis and antenarrative analysis to examine online newspaper comment sections (4,533 comments) where this debate played out over 1.5 years.

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### **Spaces of Survival: When Work Disappears, but Organisation Remains**

*Toma Pustelnikovaite*

*(Cardiff University)*

This paper examines how a 500-year-old Scottish organisation, TradeInc, navigates the contemporary polycrisis through processes of adaptation, memory work and spatial reconfiguration. Founded as a craft guild, TradeInc has historically been guided by principles of autonomy, solidarity, responsibility and morality—values embedded both in its social mission and organisational practices. Over time, regulatory changes have reshaped its role from protecting master craftsmen to functioning primarily as a charitable organisation, with distinct financial challenges. At the same time, its constituent trades—hammermen, bonnetmakers, glovers, shoemakers, weavers, bakers, butchers, tailors, and dyers—have experienced long-term decline, with some becoming marginalised or disappearing altogether. These overlapping pressures—economic, occupational and cultural—place TradeInc within the broader context of the polycrisis, as it confronts existential questions about its purpose and future.

The paper focuses on how space is mobilised as a resource for navigating this polycrisis. Historically embedded in the civic and religious fabric of its city, TradeInc once held influence in local governance and contributed to the construction of a church. While formal privileges of a guild have eroded, elements of these relationships persist. However, the organisation has lost its physical location, leaving it without

a fixed place and forcing it to rely on dispersed urban sites, symbolic artefacts, and collective memory. This loss of place alongside occupational community reflects wider processes of urban and occupational transformation characteristic of the reshuffling of social orders.

To conceptualise this condition, the paper draws on organisational liminality (Söderlund and Borg 2018; Garsten 1999), positioning Tradelnc between past and present, survival and decline, and secular and sacred domains. This liminal perspective highlights how organisations endure amid intersecting crises by continuously negotiating identity, space and meaning.

The study is based on a year-long ethnography, including observation of 19 events and meetings (approximately 75 hours), site visits to locations associated with Tradelnc (a cemetery, church, and exhibition), and 40 semi-structured interviews with members (approximately 45 hours). These data are complemented by archival and contemporary textual materials, as well as visual artefacts documenting organisational spaces and objects.

Findings show how Tradelnc engages with civic, private, spiritual, and digital spaces to reassert relevance, selectively mobilising its history to respond to contemporary challenges. The analysis underscores the generative role of absence (Giovannoni and Quattrone 2017) - particularly the loss of a central physical site - in shaping new forms of communal organising and solidarity. By examining how an ancient organisation responds to overlapping crises, the paper offers insights into the role of space and memory in sustaining organisational and occupational continuity amid profound transformation.

## **Worker subjectivities, experience and agency 1 - Room 0.11**

### **Negotiating Managerial Identity with the 'Technological Other': Exploring Supervisors' Boundary Work in AI-enabled Management**

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*(Finnish Institute of Occupational Health)*

As AI tools increasingly take on evaluative and decision-making functions, supervisors confront emerging uncertainty about what remains distinctly 'managerial' in managerial work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The incorporation of AI into supervisory practice unsettles established notions of expertise and authority while simultaneously enabling new technology-driven forms of management. In this context, the digital transformation of managerial work is not merely a technical or interpersonal shift. Rather, it unfolds through ongoing negotiations that emerging technologies both provoke and reshape.

Drawing on actor-network theory (ANT) and the notion of the technological other (Irwin, 2005; Latour, 2007; Law, 2008), this study examines how supervisors negotiate their professional identities in the context of AI-enabled managerial work (Brown, 2014; Westen & Graça, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). Empirically, the analysis is based on qualitative interviews with 18 supervisors in U.S. knowledge-work organizations overseeing ICT-sector employees.

Preliminary findings indicate that supervisors respond to AI's ambiguous role through boundary-making identity work, constructing sharp dichotomies between human and technological capacities to make sense of AI's role in managerial practice. Through this future-oriented boundary work, managers discursively highlight certain moral, relational, and human-centric elements of their role while legitimizing AI's role in selected analytical or procedural functions. For example, when AI is framed as complementing legitimized managerial activities ("AI frees me to focus on people"), supervisors embrace its use; when it appears to challenge valued aspects ("AI cannot replace the human element in managerial work"), they restrict its application.

By examining how supervisors construct boundaries between themselves and the "technological other" of AI, we conceptualize identity work as an emergent effect of human-technology relations rather than a purely individual or role-based attribute. By showing how managerial sense-making and identity work intertwine with technology implementation, shaping which forms of AI use are legitimized, constrained, or resisted, the study advances sociological understanding of digital transformation and highlights how

everyday identity negotiations participate in steering organizations' sociotechnical trajectories and future-making efforts.

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### **Worker Voice, Organisational Context, and Technological Change: Healthcare Workers' Attitudes towards AI**

*Catherine Mobley, Catherine Mobley, Xia Jing, Tareq Khan, Shelia Cotten, Emma Wituk*

*(Clemson University)*

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes more embedded in healthcare, understanding how healthcare professionals interpret these technologies is essential for responsible implementation. While prior research often emphasises individual beliefs about AI, a worker voice perspective directs attention to the organisational conditions that shape workers' influence over technology-related decisions. In healthcare, practice setting and location may affect which stakeholders are involved in AI adoption decisions and whose perspectives carry influence. Using this framing, we treat attitudes towards AI at work as a function of the organisational contexts that structure workers' opportunities for voice and participation in technological decision-making.

Using cross-sectional survey data from practising healthcare professionals in the United States ( $n=349$ ), we analysed whether perceived influence over technology-related decisions, geography of practice (urban, suburban, rural), and practice setting (hospital, solo practice, group practice, other) were associated with two AI attitudes: personal utility (perceived usefulness of and positive affective responses towards AI use at work), and job insecurity (concern about job loss due to possible replacement by AI). Multiple linear regression models were estimated for each outcome.

For personal utility, the overall model was significant,  $F(6,342)=2.28$ ,  $p=.036$ , explaining a small proportion of variance ( $R^2=.039$ ). Perceived influence over technology-related decisions was a significant predictor ( $b=0.14$ ,  $SE=0.06$ ,  $p=.03$ ), while geography was not. Practice setting did not significantly improve model fit; however, respondents in "other" practice settings (e.g., medical school, virtual care companies, and managed care organisations) reported significantly higher personal utility than respondents in hospital settings ( $b=0.29$ ,  $SE=0.14$ ,  $p=.047$ ). Respondents in solo and group practice did not differ significantly from those in hospital settings.

For AI-related job insecurity, the overall model was significant  $F(6,342)=2.93$ ,  $p=.02$ , explaining a small proportion of variance ( $R^2=.044$ ). Practice setting was significantly associated with AI-related job insecurity, while geography and perceived influence were not. Specifically, respondents in group practice settings reported significantly higher concerns about AI-related job insecurity than those in hospital settings ( $b=0.34$ ,  $SE=0.13$ ,  $p=.008$ ). The contrasts for solo and "other" practice settings were not significant.

Exploratory ANOVA analyses examined whether perceived influence over technology-related decisions differed across practice settings. Results indicated significant overall differences,  $F(3,345) = 6.46$ ,  $p<.001$ . Post hoc Tukey comparisons revealed respondents in solo practice reported significantly higher influence than those in hospital ( $p<.001$ ) and group practice ( $p=.01$ ) settings.

Overall, these findings suggest that healthcare workers' responses to AI are shaped less by geography than the organisational settings in which technological change unfolds. Results further indicate that different dimensions of attitudes are associated with different features of the work environment, with perceived influence more closely linked to personal utility and practice setting more closely linked to job insecurity. Taken together, practice setting appears to condition how AI is framed and experienced in healthcare work and whether AI is experienced as a workplace resource or a source of insecurity. From a worker voice perspective, perceptions of AI as useful or threatening are not simply individual reactions to a new technology but may reflect how organisational structures distribute opportunities for participation and influence in technological decision-making.

### **Postcolonialism and Work Inequality in the Indian IT Industry: The Case of Agile**

*Moon Narzary*

*(University of Manchester, Alliance Manchester Business School)*

In 2001, seventeen software practitioners gathered at a ski resort in Utah to find a better way to deliver software to customers. The outcome was called the Agile Manifesto. Two decades later, software workers in India begin their working day with a standup, plan their fortnight in sprints, and measure their worth in velocity. What began as a manifesto has now become an ideal way of working and a particular vision of how work should be organised. This ideal has travelled, with considerable authority, from the Global North to the Global South.

This interview-based qualitative research explores how Agile is understood, practised, and lived by software professionals in India. It draws on 104 semi-structured interviews conducted across a large multinational corporation in a metropolitan Indian city, a small IT company in a city new to corporate IT, and a wider sample of practitioners recruited across India and internationally. Interview participants range from junior developers and Scrum Masters to architects, coaches, HR professionals, and senior executives. These participants encounter Agile from very different vantage points within the same industry.

What the research finds is that Agile does not arrive in India neutrally. It arrives as a concept already authorised by Western certification bodies, by globally recognised institutions, by client relationships forged at a distance. Against this inherited authority, Indian universities, regional IT organisations, and locally developed ways of working are consistently narrated against this benchmark. Real Agile, proper Agile, professional Agile: these are located elsewhere. The practitioners in this study know exactly where elsewhere is.

The research draws on Ravishankar, Pan and Myers' (2013) postcolonial analysis of IT offshoring in India, on Boussebaa et al.'s (2014) account of colonial legacies in the Indian workplace, and on wider debates about knowledge, legitimacy, and the global circulation of management ideas (Roper et al. 2022) to make sense of what the data surfaces. The framework is postcolonial, not as polemic, but as a structural description of a field in which knowledge flows in one direction and compliance is demanded in the other.

### **Job Satisfaction and Attitudes towards Automation Predict Willingness to Continue through Increasing Work Role Automation**

*Jenna Van Fossen, Shubham Agrawal, Shubham Agrawal, Elizabeth Mack, Sicheng Wang, Chu-Hsiang Chang, Shelia Cotten*

*(Clemson University)*

Automated technologies are currently being adopted across industries, replacing human workers in performing some tasks. Workers have displayed mixed reactions in response to the adoption of automated technologies, from optimism and willingness to work with them to pessimism and resistance. A prime example is automated trucks in transportation. It is important to understand workers' willingness to continue through the adoption of automated technologies to minimize workforce disruption and support workers' careers and well-being. Informed by theory on change readiness, we argue that job satisfaction will predict lower willingness to continue with increasing change to the current work role. Workers who are highly satisfied with their current role may be more likely to view change from their role negatively, as greater change to their current ideal role comes with greater risk that this role will no

longer satisfy their needs. We further argue that positive attitudes towards the automated technology itself will predict greater willingness to continue. There is ambiguity surrounding the exact nature of work role changes that will result from the adoption of automation, and workers (including truck drivers) are able to perceive both positive and negative potential work role changes that could occur. Thus, we expected that having more positive attitudes towards the automated technology may lead workers to be more optimistic regarding the adoption of the technology, engendering greater willingness to continue in their role through its adoption. To test these hypotheses, we surveyed (N = 277) truck drivers in the U.S. We conducted a growth model to estimate how drivers' willingness to remain changes at increasing work role automation. Drivers rated their likelihood of continuing in their role at increasing levels of automation (specifically, if 25%, 50%, 75%, and 100% of their work role functions were automated). Job satisfaction predicted overall higher willingness to remain. Yet, as expected, job satisfaction related to lower willingness to remain with increasing automation. Attitudes towards automated vehicles related to greater willingness and but not increased willingness at higher levels of automation. We clarify how attitudes function as antecedents to willingness to continue through change with recommendations to promote employee readiness for automated technologies.

## **Worker subjectivities, experience and agency 2 - Room 0.18**

### **Worker Identity Transitions in Alternative Pathways into Medicine: Experiences of Healthcare Professionals' Career Transitions on Graduate Entry Medicine Programmes**

*Aoife McKenna, Jeni Harden, Zoe McElhinney, Robert Scully*  
(University of Edinburgh)

The labour crisis in the NHS has accelerated in recent years, however the shortage of GPs in particular in Scotland was deemed a significant issue in 2015. To address this shortage, two graduate entry medical programmes were subsequently developed to offer alternatives to the standard 5-6 year full-time undergraduate programme as a pathway into medicine: Health Care Professionals-Medicine (HCP-Med) [started 2019] and Scottish Graduate Entry Medicine (ScotGEM) [started 2018]. Those working as healthcare professionals have been identified as a core group with significant potential to offer as doctors. All HCP-Med students, and a proportion of ScotGEM students, were already working as healthcare professionals in a variety of roles including: nurse, pharmacist, physician associate, paramedic. However, we know little about the experiences of this unique group of students and their career transition from their original healthcare profession role towards medicine.

This qualitative longitudinal cohort study took place between 2020 and 2025, and followed students from both HCP-Med and ScotGEM for the duration of their course. Students from the first HCP-Med cohort and from the third ScotGEM cohort were invited to participate in one interview per year until course completion. Biographical methods were employed, and interviews were semi-structured, in-depth and conducted online. Data were analysed thematically paying attention to changes over time across the interview waves. A total of 64 interviews were conducted in five waves, involving 10-16 participants in each wave. 10 participants were interviewed in all five waves.

This research mapped out participants' shifting 'mature student' and 'worker subjectivities' at various points across their career transition. Most participants continued in their healthcare roles during their medical training, so existed in a liminal state 'betwixt and between' different identities (Gordon, Rees and Jindal-Snape, 2020) and positions within the healthcare hierarchy. Social theory illuminates how this occurs at multiple levels and contexts: embodied habitus, workplace dynamics, interpersonal relationships, and institutional belonging. Results demonstrate how participants integrate or shift from one professional epistemic framework to another during this process, whilst also balancing the 'medical school framework' alongside their lived realities of healthcare practice. Findings reflect the direct impact that wider workforce structural shifts had at the individual level during a particularly distinctive moment in medical education and healthcare professional history.

As the NHS workforce is being actively reshaped to address the labour crisis, the potential to encourage healthcare professionals to retrain in medicine is highly relevant. While it may be challenging for mature students to re-enter education, the transition for these students is somewhat unique given the

knowledge and experience they bring to the role of medical student and doctor. Their career transitions provide a distinctive perspective on both medical education itself and healthcare workers' subjectivities. The findings from this research contribute: 1) to sociological theory on mature students, healthcare professional identities and career transitions, and 2) to the development of future programmes offering alternative pathways into medicine.

Reference: Gordon L, Rees CE, Jindal-Snape D. Doctors' identity transitions: Choosing to occupy a state of 'betwixt and between.' *Med Educ.* 2020; 54: 1006–1018.

### **Forms of Employee Resistance in Higher Education in the Face of Uncertainty: A Case of a State University in Zimbabwe**

*Ruth Mubanga*

*(Midlands State University)*

Education 5.0 was rolled out in Zimbabwean Universities in a bid to drive innovation and industrialisation. However, it was introduced against the backdrop of a severe economic crisis, characterised by plummeting real salaries, inadequate research funding and poor infrastructure. Such factors lead to resistance and affect the implementation of Education 5.0, which comprises five pillars: Teaching, Research, Community Engagement, Innovation, and Industrialisation. The study is critical as the Zimbabwean Government has identified Universities as one of the engines driving sustainable development and has been given the mandate to drive innovation and industrialization. Degree programmes have been rebranded in line with the agenda, and innovation hubs have been introduced at State Universities. This intensifies the work and, hence, the need to identify the challenges encountered throughout this change to establish the forms of resistance and their impact on achieving the goals. It is thus critical to identify the forms of resistance in Universities, as these changes occur in an environment of economic decline, uncertainty, and the State's intolerance toward trade unions. The primary focus of the research was to establish how the change process has been managed in State Universities and the forms of resistance encountered during the process; and the impact of resistance on the drive toward Education 5.0. The study employed a case study approach over a one-month period at the university. Lecturers used self-administered questionnaires; however, due to a very low response rate, the researcher was unable to analyze them. Core data was thus generated through ethnographic observation during the month-long placement in the organization. The researcher had the opportunity to engage in informal conversations with lecturers in communal staff areas and to observe departmental and faculty dynamics. The researcher was granted permission to attend and observe key staff meetings, lectures, and student activities, allowing for direct observation of interactions and decision-making processes. The study established that there are more covert forms of resistance, including lecturers withdrawing and not participating actively in university activities, thereby undermining the capacity to deliver the 5.0 goals of education. The study recommended improving academic employment terms, rebuilding trust, and fostering a more collaborative and supportive academic ecosystem.

### **Representing the New Working Class in Times of Crisis: On the Arenas, Actors and Practices of Contemporary Labour Struggles**

*Davide Pero*

*(University of Padova)*

Globalization has entailed transformations in the sphere of production, such as the move to a post-industrial economy characterised by the growth in outsourcing and precarious employment, as well as changes in the composition of the labour force, with the rise in migrant workers moving from a growing range of countries and with different legal statuses. These transformations have raised questions regarding the representation of this changing constituency as well as its analysis. These include, who can promote the interests of highly precarious migrant workers and how, especially when mainstream unions have been slow in taking up their representation? How are industrial conflicts – once sited in the workplace – being staged in this changed scenario? To what extent are persisting analytical dichotomies that rigidly separate industrial conflict from protests in the socio-political arena still meaningful?

Drawing on the experiences of contentious representation (and self-representation) of these new constituency of workers observed in contemporary Britain, the paper sets out to address the above questions and challenge the basis for these dichotomies as they do not appear to reflect accurately

what goes on in current labour conflicts. In particular, the paper reflects on the labour struggles of highly precarious migrant workers exploring some of the key characters, arenas and practices involved. Grounded in ethnographic fieldwork conducted in London on a range of campaigns and formations over the years (Justice for Cleaners, LAWAs, the Cleaners' campaign at the LSE, UVW and IWGB), the paper analytically describes the arenas of struggle and the range of actors involved in confronting more effectively the exploitative arrangements of outsourcing introduced by contemporary management. In doing so, the paper shows the emergence of a new and diverse working class composed by migrant, racialized and other precarious workers who can fight together in innovative and effective ways. The paper also illustrates how their practices call into question the rigid analytical distinction between labour and social conflicts.