17th Equality, Diversity, & Inclusion conference

Gender Equality across the Gender Spectrum

May 27-28-29, Seville, Spain

Stream:

**Tackling gender inequality and vulnerability by unveiling invisible work**

Convenors

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The concept of invisible work was initially coined by Arlene Kaplan Daniels (1987) to describe women’s unpaid labour such as housework and volunteer work. Since then, the concept has been expanded to encompass a wide range of devalued work beyond women in the home. More recent conceptualisations of invisible work understand it as being physically out of sight, ignored or overlooked, socially marginalized, economically and/or culturally devalued, legally unprotected and unregulated or some combination thereof (Hatton, 2017). Invisible work is unseen, unacknowledged and neither defined nor recognized as labour or compensated as such (Kaplan, 2022). Erin Hatton (2017) argues that work is made invisible through three intersecting sociological mechanisms which she refers to as cultural, legal, and spatial mechanisms of invisibility. Though they differ in function and degree, each of these mechanisms obscures the fact that work is performed and therefore this contributes to its economic devaluation.

In this stream we return to some of Kaplan’s (1987) initial theorising assuming a gender perspective of invisible work. Mothering practices, for example, are clear manifestations of how invisible working is produced in a physical and non-physical dimension. We intend with our discussions to move beyond simply exploring the physical labour of caring and motherhood, the domestic corporeal work, to include also the more cognitive elements that involves emotion work and the mental load. The mental and emotional work involved in caring and mothering can in fact be more exhausting than the physical. This type of work, sometimes defined as “cognitive labour” (Daminger, 2019), involves anticipating needs, thinking, scheduling, planning, and organising (Hays, 1996; Offer, 2014). Daminger (2019) goes on to define cognitive labour as having three specific elements: the assumption of responsibility for tasks whether you’re involved or not; the cultivation and upkeep of expected standards; as well as the long-term co-ordination for household tasks. The cognitive element is invisible, underappreciated and boundaryless, which means that it can be performed anywhere at any time, making this type of work all consuming and relentless (Daminger, 2019; Robertson et al., 2019) and always “for free”. It also involves managing one's and others' emotions (Dean et al., 2021). Indeed, traditional definitions of work often exclude invisible unpaid labour (Jütting, et al., 2008), disproportionately affecting those who bear the brunt of caregiving responsibilities (Baxter and Hewitt, 2013; Campaña, et. al., 2020).

In most societies, caring and motherhood work often needs to remain unnoticed in order not to compromise the semantics it´s semantics: love, sacrifice, full time disposition, volunteerism, non-reciprocal action, etc. Acknowledging that invisible work as indeed labour that should be compensated is a sort of taboo, as it could imply a break in the gift-counter gift cycle (Mauss, 1990 [1924]). This is why practices of invisible work like childcare, child adoption, surrogacy or ova and embryo donation are permanently under scrutiny in respect of their need to be considered retributed (Finger et. al, 2010; Marre et al, 2018; Vora, 2015) or for free (Constable, 2016; Hochschild, 2003; Reddy and Patel, 2015).

This stream welcomes contributions addressing any gender intersectional perspectives related to the invisible work. The stream is open to any kind of articles, including those reflecting from empirical, theoretical, and methodological perspectives. We are particularly interested in articles that:

* Incite discussion of the reasons, discourses and narratives that justify why some work practices remain invisible and unrecognised
* Develop our understand of invisible work in a broad range of care work – both paid and unpaid.
* Explore invisible work like those of mothers before, during, and after maternity
* Unpick the difficulties of balancing care work with paid work and other activities

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*Submissions to this stream can be in the form of long abstracts (up to 1500 words), developmental papers (3000-5000 words, including references) or full papers (no length restrictions) by the deadline of 23 March 2024. Please process your registration and paper submission online via the EDI registration page. Paper submissions for this stream to be emailed in Word format to* [*jenna.pandeli@uwe.ac.uk*](mailto:jenna.pandeli@uwe.ac.uk) *and* [*hugo.gaggiotti@uwe.ac.uk*](mailto:hugo.gaggiotti@uwe.ac.uk)*. The deadline for feedback to authors about paper acceptance or rejection is 8 March, 2024.*