



Gender and Class at Work

Event report

2nd of March 2016

The workshop entitled '*Gender and Class at Work*' was held on the 2nd of March 2016 at the University of Birmingham coordinated by [Holly Birkett](#) and [Maria Villares](#) from the University. The event attracted researchers interested in the area of gender, work, employment relations, migration, and entrepreneurship. The workshop was funded by the [Enterprise and Diversity Cluster \(EDC\)](#) at the [Birmingham Business School](#) and co-organised with the [Gender and Enterprise Network \(GEN\)](#), [Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship \(ISBE\)](#). The discussion and presentations on the day brought participants up to date with current debates and empirical findings related to the role of class and gender at work. The aim was to place class at the centre of our understandings of gender and work, and analyse its intersections with other key socio-cultural relations. This focus follows the increasing awareness that inequalities related to class have been overlooked in the study of work, whilst other forms of social difference such as gender or ethnicity have gained much more attention in recent decades. Drawing on keynote presentations and a rich panel

discussion, the workshop encouraged reflection on how different class processes impact on gender structures, roles and identities in the work place.



[Harriet Bradley](#) (University of the West of England) opened the workshop with a keynote which focused on the potential of an intersectional approach to the gender and class relationship, particularly in light of the current climate of austerity. [Julia Rouse](#) (Manchester Metropolitan University) and [Dilani Jayawarna](#) (Manchester Metropolitan University) gave presentations reflecting on the centrality of class resources and background in relation to entrepreneurial outcomes. Specifically they argued that class position has a significant impact upon business start-ups and earning rates from entrepreneurial activities, although their



findings had shown these were mediated by childcare responsibilities.



[Sara Nadin](#) (University of Liverpool Management School) then presented a paper looking at in-work poverty for the self-employed. Using a case study methodology, Nadin revealed the different ‘coping strategies’ of those on low earnings and its intersection with welfare reforms. [Maja Cederberg](#) (Oxford Brookes University) looked at the intersection of gender and class through the narratives of social mobility and the status migrant women in the UK. Her findings showed the way in which gendered structures intersect with class trajectories in relation to wider biographical accounts.

The paper presentations were followed by a round table discussion facilitated by [Professor Monder Ram](#) (University of Birmingham) on the relevance of unpacking class when looking

at gender at work. The panel discussion featured [Andreas Giazitzoglu](#) (Newcastle University Business School), who linked the debate to his research on masculinities and entrepreneurship; [Natalia Vershinina](#) (University of Birmingham Business School), who discussed the way in which Russian female entrepreneurs relate to their social mobility paths; [John Kitching](#) (Kingston University), who reflected on the importance of context and regulations when understanding class dynamics; and [Haya Al-Dajani](#) (Plymouth University), who underlined how looking at the intersection of class and gender is a useful tool to understand entrepreneurial behaviour, identity and outcomes.



The presentations and thought provoking discussions which followed showed the need for re-thinking the multiple categories of difference and its impact on work. This report



summarises some of the key themes emerging from the discussions which might help to move forward this research agenda:

Understanding class together with other categories of difference. The paper presentations and discussions established the advantages of an intersectional/positional approach to research the world of work and enterprise. This would facilitate understanding categories of difference and their impacts. Bradley looked at different theoretical frameworks (capitalist patriarchy, dual systems theory, etc.) and how they have conceptualised the interaction of class and gender. She proposes an intersectional framework to bring class back to the analysis of work and employment. The intersectional aspect was also presented by Cederberg, who looked at the role of different class positions in the countries of origin and destination for migrant women, and its impacts when looking at social mobility trajectories. Rouse also considered the advantages of an intersectional approach by analysing the relationship between class background and child-caring and their impact upon business start-up and entrepreneurial income. Further discussions highlighted how intersectionality can help us understand how gender and social class intersect to influence the experiences of migrant entrepreneurs. The presentations and the broader discussions throughout the event highlighted a real desire for more work into

how class intersects with other key factors, particularly gender and ethnicity, to impact both entrepreneurial but also broader business and societal outcomes.



Looking at class through the lens of 'austerity'. The presentations and further discussion explored the impact of deepening austerity measures and the coping strategies workers utilised in the face of increasing austerity. Bradley reflected on the different strategies that workers utilise to deal with austerity according to gender and class, proving that the current socio-economic climate is a timely lens to understand this intersection. Nadin discussed how the withdrawal of the state through austerity measures has different impacts on experiences of self-employment and potential outcomes in terms of in-work poverty. She specifically explored her respondents



'capacities to cope' in the face of in-work poverty in relation to the vulnerability faced, and, the sources of resilience at their disposal. These strategies were influenced by socio-economic background, social capital, gender and mental health amongst other things. The broader debate around these issues highlighted the need for further research into the relationship between austerity and class.

- Potentially an edition of a special issue or edited volume in the area of gender and class at work.

For more information about GEN please contact: <https://isbegen.wordpress.com/>

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Next steps

The event proved useful to develop on-going collaboration among scholars working in this field. Some of the initiatives that will be developed as a result of the workshops are:

- Focusing on other axes of difference in forthcoming events
- Exploring new avenues for funding to set up a seminar series on issues related to gender and class, and the impacts of austerity measures.