**PRECARIOUS PRESENTS, OPEN FUTURES**

**Being Open to Care, Being Open about Care: Working Motherhood under Neoliberalism**

Stream Convenors:

Nkechinyelu Edeh*, Aberystwyth University*

Dr Claire English, *Queen Mary, University of London*

Dr Patrizia Kokot-Blamey, *Queen Mary, University of London*

Dr Aylin Kunter, *Middlesex University*

Sarah Marks, *Queen Mary, University of London*

Sara Masoud, *University of Reading*

Liz-mari Welman, *University of Reading*

Adrienne Rich (1976) is credited with the theoretical distinction between motherhood as a patriarchal institution and mothering as experience and practice. O’Reilly (2016) notes that this was an important breakthrough as it allows us to both critique motherhood “as defined and restricted under patriarchy” (Rich, 1976: 14) while simultaneously recognising the value of mothering and the ways it can be a “site of empowerment” for women (O’Reilly, 2016: 20). The role of neoliberal motherhood (Rottenberg 2018) and the associated pressure to be a mother who has it all, a super mum, a mother who knows how to ‘lean in’ (Sandberg, 2013), to be both present and at home as well as active in our workplaces and constantly available is not only draining but simply impossible. For middle-class and working-class mothers alike, the joys of the micropolitics of care are diminished by the ever-increasing number of balls that must be juggled in order to ‘get it right’. Corporations attempt to mediate this sense of impossibility by convincing us that reproductive ‘techno-freedoms’ framed as ‘inspired by feminism’ such as egg-freezing technologies could potentially render talk of women’s biological clock anachronistic… but should delaying parenthood in favour of putting in more hours at the office really be considered part of feminism’s emancipatory legacy? Should maintaining a model of care that relies upon the labour of poorer racialized women working in childcare centres and as childminders really be the linchpin of career-success for middle class women?

From an *Organisation and Management Studies* perspective, much of the existing literature focuses on critiquing motherhood as institution and unveiling the ways in which mothers are side-lined and ‘mommy-tracked’ as well as being subjected to a substantial motherhood wage penalty, which, in fact, makes up most women’s wage gap (Jensen, 2014; O’Reilly, 2016, Perrons, 2016 ). Yet women’s experiences of mothering as a site of empowerment are often hidden and silenced (O’Reilly, 2016) and a prominent strategy to cope with the discrimination mothers experience, is to enable us to hide our status as mothers. In the university we find that by making policies to promote work-life balance or ‘request for flexible working policies’ available to anyone without having to give any reason as to why we are making a request, we render their refusal as ‘neutral’ and based on each ‘business case’ rather than acknowledging that workers with care responsibilities are more likely to need flexible working arrangements.

But to what extent is this strategy denying the centrality of care (Bueskens, 2016) and what is lost when we hide our status and experience as mothers?

O’Reilly proposes a matricentric feminism, a feminism which focuses on all those who carry out mother work - who may have come to maternity in a variety of ways - and which acknowledges that becoming a mother is often an important turning point in women’s lives, because care- and our relationship to it- is transformational.

In this stream we seek to think about ways towards developing an openness towards maternity from a matricentric feminist perspective and ask questions such as, but not restricted, to:

* What might be gained from being open about being a mother at work? What might be lost?
* What would a feminist model of child-rearing look like? What changes would this necessitate in the institutions we work in?
* What would it mean to resurrect the 70s demand for wages for housework as part of the considerations for a Universal Basic Income? What might monetising our relationship with our children do to ‘care’?
* What is it about maternity that is transformational and how can we acknowledge and capture the ordinary joys and challenges of working while carrying out mother work?
* What is at stake when we embrace reproductive ‘techno-freedoms’ and how do women experience the ways in which corporations involve themselves in our reproductive capacity?

Please submit a 500 word abstract (excluding references, one page, Word document NOT PDF, single spaced, no header, footers or track changes) together with your contact information to changingmotherhood2019@gmail.com. The deadline for submission of abstracts is January 31st 2019, and we will notify you of our decision by the end of February. We look forward to hearing from you- Nkechinyelu Edeh, Claire English, Patrizia Kokot-Blamey, Aylin Kunter, and Sara Masoud.