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Lup, D., Beauregard, T. A., & Adamson, M. (2018). The many faces of gender inequality at work. *Work, Employment & Society*, 32(4), 623-628.

THE MANY FACES OF GENDER INEQUALITY AT WORK

In January this year, the day to day editorial work for *Work, Employment and Society* (WES) moved from the University of Leicester to the Middlesex University team, for the period 2018-2020. We are an interdisciplinary team, with members from four departments within Middlesex University. In addition to dedication to the core sociological approaches of the journal, the team members have been selected to reflect the increased interdisciplinary character of the journal. Members bring a wide range of research interests and perspectives, with particular emphasis on the growing research areas of labour process, new forms of work, precarious work, globalisation, diversity, mobility, labour migration, and psychosocial studies.

To capitalise on our diverse research expertise, we have decided that, whenever possible, we will create thematic issues of WES and preface them with short editorials. In doing this, we hope to better focus the attention of academic and practitioner communities with an interest in a specific theme, to foster dialogue, and to signal potential areas for further research.

Introducing the Thematic Issue

The collection of articles included in this first thematic issue addresses gender inequalities, a theme that has featured intensively in the public sphere in these past months, including high profile revelations about gender pay discrimination such as those at the BBC and others in the UK, the #MeToo and #TimesUp campaigns, and ongoing debates about gender inequalities in the global labour market. Our assembling of this particular issue also coincides with UK

employers' compulsory reporting, for the first time, on the gender pay gap and the solutions they envision for closing this gap, including plans around increasing the number of women in the upper echelons of organisations.

In our view, all the articles in this issue have a link to this pressing problem, in that they highlight how solutions to gender gaps depend on factors that reside not only within the organisation, but also at family and societal levels. Moreover, these factors are constantly reshaped by changing economic contexts and national policies. The articles we present in this issue cover not only a variety of factors and contexts, but also document the sources and outcomes of gender inequalities across six countries from four continents, including a cross-country analysis. Together, they provide a snapshot of the rich empirical evidence available to researchers interested in further developing our theoretical understanding of gender inequalities.

The Articles in this Issue

Three articles in this issue investigate how macro-level social and economic forces shape the gender structure of labour markets. In '*Good, Bad and Very Bad Jobs for Women?*' Tracy Warren and Clare Lyonette analyse changes in the quality of women's part-time jobs in Britain in the post-recession period. What makes their analysis of part-time jobs particularly relevant for gender inequalities is the fact that Britain has a high percent of part-time jobs and that women have traditionally dominated this labour segment. Using data from the UK Skills and Employment Survey series, Warren and Lyonette's analysis zooms into 12 distinct aspects of job quality related to pay, skills and training, promotions, job autonomy, security and intensity. They also differentiate jobs by position in the Standard Occupational Classification. While at an aggregate level it appears the pre-recessionary narrowing of the gap in quality between part-time and full-time jobs has been maintained, the analysis by occupational position paints a more complex picture. On the one hand, there has been an

increase in the number and some positive change in the quality of part-time jobs for women employed in higher-level occupations. However, the women in this category were also the most likely to feel that their jobs were at risk and to work overtime. On the other hand, women in low-level jobs have seen a worsening in job quality on almost all dimensions, and this drop in quality is observed for both part-time and full-time jobs. These findings raise questions about the way in which economic conditions shape gender inequalities in labour markets.

In '*Dynamics of Gender Earnings Inequality in Reform-Era Urban China*', Guangye He and Xiaogang Wu also investigate the link between economic context and gender inequality. Their innovative aim is to parse out the effects of 'economic growth', measured as GDP per capita, from 'marketization', captured by percent employment in the private sector, using a large size dataset from the 2005 mini-census conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics. Their analysis demonstrates that economic growth reduces the gender gap in earnings, while marketization exacerbates this gap. These findings suggest that the socialist state's push for introducing more market mechanisms in the planned economy seems to have a negative impact on women's wages. More generally, He and Wu's results call attention to both marketization and economic growth as distinctive factors that shape resource allocation and social stratification in modern societies.

Juliane Stahl and Pia Sophia Schober investigate the impact of parental leave and childcare policies on mothers' work-care patterns in Germany, comparing mothers with different educational levels. They also compare the uptake in formal childcare in East and West Germany, which historically had different norms for women's employment and formal childcare: in East Germany early maternal employment was the norm, while in West Germany mothers were more likely to interrupt their careers to care for young children at home. Their study '*Convergence or Divergence? Educational Discrepancies in Work-Care*

Arrangements of Mothers with Young Children in Germany’ focuses on the period between 2004 and 2013 and uses data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study and a supplementary data set on households from Families in Germany. Stahl and Schober show that the impact of parental leave and childcare policies on mothers’ work-care arrangements depends on mothers’ education. Specifically, both employment and day-care uptake increase strongly among families with more educated mothers, with the gap between the higher- and lower-educated categories widening between 2007-2013. This pattern is present in both East and West Germany. In unveiling this pattern, Stahl and Schober’s study draws attention to how government policies and social class interact in shaping gender-related work opportunities. The warning sounded by their study is that while parental leave and childcare policies work to the advantage of some women, for others – the least educated – these same policies increase the risk of economic insecurity and further social exclusion.

A further group of three articles emphasises the role of organisations in shaping patterns of gender inequality by looking at how particular gender equality policies are put in place at the organisational level. In *‘The Good, the Not So Good and the Ugly: Gender Equality, Equal Pay and Austerity in English Local Government’*, Hazel Conley and Margaret Page focus on the impact of austerity on the implementation of the Gender Equality Duty (GED) and the Single Status Agreement (SSA) in English local authorities between 2008 and 2010. Introduced in 2007 (and later transferred with some modifications in the Equality Act 2010), GED placed a statutory duty on public authorities “to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment and to promote equality of opportunity between men and women” in all their functions. In turn, the Single Status Agreement of 1997, a national collective agreement between local government and unions meant to develop a common pay scale for all jobs based on the premise of equal pay for equal value, was supposed to be in place by 2007 but was severely delayed.

Conley and Page show how, under the threat of budget cuts, instead of GED and SSA jointly informing measures to address the gender pay gap and the structural and institutional contexts that contribute to this gap, they became split targets of two distinct teams: equality and human resources, respectively. In their interviews with representatives from local authorities, Conley and Page find that the HR teams handled the equal pay issues, but did not actively use insights generated under GED to address a wider array of factors that contributed to gender inequality. The article's findings draw attention to the importance of organisational resources as a moderator of the impact of national gender equality initiatives.

In a similar setting, that of local authorities, but in Finland, Paula Sanberg, Maria Tornroos and Roosa Kohvakka investigate the role of collective agreements in institutionalising the undervaluation of work performed by women. Unlike the UK, where the SSA has, by and large, contributed to the harmonization of wage determination practices, Finland's local government employees are covered by several collective agreements, with multiple methods of wage determination. In *'The Institutionalized Undervaluation of Women's Work'*, the authors show that, within the same organisation and controlling for human capital endowment, employees covered by collective agreements that represent jobs typically performed by women receive lower wages than employees covered by agreements that represent male-dominated jobs. Moreover, even controlling for collective agreement, women's compensation is still lower than men's.

In the third article to draw attention to organisations as critical sites in which gender inequalities are reproduced or attenuated, Sylvia Fuller and Lynn Prince Cooke investigate variations in fatherhood wage premiums across Canadian firms. *'Do Formalization and Performance Pay Matter?'* inquire the authors. Using linked employer-employee data from the Canadian Workplace and Employee Survey, Fuller and Cooke show that in organisations

with more formalized structures of decisions around wages and promotions, such as human resources departments and collective bargaining agreements, the fatherhood wage premium is lower than in organisations without such structures. This evidence suggests that formalization might reduce opportunities for gender biases and group-based privileges to impact employees' compensation.

The final set of articles in this issue highlights the ways in which the employment status and working arrangements of employees' partners contribute to patterns of gender inequality in responsibility for unpaid domestic work and in earnings from paid work. In '*Flexible Men and Successful Women: The Effects of Flexible Working Hours on German Couples' Wages*', Laura Langner examines the use of flexible work hours among German employees and the outcomes of flexibility for wage growth. Contrary to the popular belief that women are the typical category of employees to require flexible working, she finds that flexible work hours are not more likely to be taken up by women or by parents, but instead by men. Both men and women benefit in terms of increased wages from adopting flexible work hours, and domestic partners of flexible workers also experience an increase in earnings. The link to gender inequality emerges with the finding that among those using flexible hours, the wage growth effect occurs later for women than for men. The implication here is that women working flexible hours need to prove their continued commitment to the employer before increased productivity is financially rewarded. Their male counterparts, however, do not.

The article by Robyn Mayes and Paul Koshy, '*Transnational Labour Migration and the Place of Reproductive Labour: Trailing Wives and Community Support in Boddington*', examines the experiences of women from Asia, Europe, and South America who migrated to rural Western Australia to accompany partners who have taken up work in a local gold mine. The authors' interviews with both migrants and non-migrant community members show how

the organisation of work in the gold production industry contributes to creating a gendered experience of migration. Mines rely on male workers who are mobile and employed for the short rather than long term at relatively remote work sites where 24-hour production is the norm. This generates migration patterns in which accompanying wives have few opportunities to continue their own careers or to undertake any paid employment. In turn, ‘trailing wives’ feel compelled to perform a disproportionately large share of the household’s domestic labour and emotion work while their spouses work long hours. The authors clearly demonstrate how industry practices reinforce these unequal divisions of paid and unpaid labour within migrants’ households, the local community, and the workers’ camp.

Finally, in *‘Unemployment and the Division of Housework in Europe’*, by Tanja van der Lippe, Judith Treas and Lukas Norbutas, we again see discrepancies in the proportion of household labour shouldered by women compared to men. Analyses of data from 28 European countries demonstrate that both women and men spend more time on housework when they are unemployed, but women do so to a much greater extent. This “gendered reaction to joblessness” identified by the authors extends to partners’ unemployment as well. While men’s participation in unpaid household work is not linked to their partners’ employment status, women with unemployed partners engage in more unpaid domestic labour than women whose partners are in work. The effects of unemployment on the allocation of household work thus precipitate even higher levels of gender inequality for heterosexual domestic partners than is usually the case.

Future Work

Developing the theoretical understanding of the mechanisms that generate gender inequalities proposed in the articles requires further research. Below, we draw attention to a number of avenues for further investigation that the articles in this issue suggest as worth pursuing. We

hope that these suggestions will be of interest not only to researchers, but also to practitioners and policy makers.

All the articles in this collection refer, directly or indirectly, to policies meant to address gender inequalities. Most of the papers show how, under certain conditions, the impact of these policies is either lacking or creating further inequalities. While the insight that the successful impact of policies depends on how they are translated and enacted by various actors is not new, it appears to us that more focused research effort is needed to shed light on this aspect. Specifically, future research could look more systematically at how the impact of policies meant to address gender inequalities is moderated by organisational characteristics and resources. Are organisations with resource constraints less likely to pay attention to the careful implementation of gender equality measures, in the way suggested by Conley and Page? Does the gender composition of an organisation or of its uppermost echelon matter for the speed with which gender equality measures are adopted and on how they are enacted in practice? Are measures meant to address gender inequality more likely to be introduced in certain industries?

Similarly, family norms might moderate the way in which parental leave, childcare allowances, or other measures intended to address gender inequalities in the labour market affect women's wages and career progression. For instance, we may need to pay more attention to cross-partner effects and how the work experiences of household members interact to produce or reproduce gender equality or inequality; employees do not work or live in a vacuum, and workplace and household factors intersect. Relevant questions for future research could focus on cases that challenge traditional gender roles. How do 'trailing husbands' contribute to domestic work and emotional labour in the family's host country post-migration, and how do these household contributions influence their female partners' work activity and experiences? Do men who work flexible hours participate in domestic work

to a greater extent than those on traditional schedules, and does this help to account for the increase in their partners' wages?

Third, as suggested by Warren/Lyonette and Stahl/ Schober's studies, women's socio-demographic characteristics, including occupational class and education levels, also shape work experiences and outcomes. While the call to study inequalities at the intersection between gender and other socio-demographic characteristics is not new, our emphasis here is on understanding how women's socio-demographic characteristics affect the way in which they are able to seize the opportunities offered by policies geared toward reducing gender inequalities in the labour market. For instance, since September 2017 the childcare offer under the Free Early Education Entitlement in the UK has increased from 15 to 30 hours. It appears to us that investigating how different categories of mothers are able to access and use this childcare provision would be a question well suited to work and employment scholars interested in gender inequality.

Finally, the international breadth of the articles in this issue suggests the need to develop a finer-grained theoretical understanding of how gender inequalities are constructed and operate across a variety of national and cultural contexts. Such theoretical developments would allow us to explain why certain policies to reduce gender inequalities succeed in a particular national context, but not in others; they could also guide practitioners in devising more efficient equality strategies. We also make a call for expanding research on work-related gender inequalities to under-researched countries from the Global South.

We hope that this thematic issue may yield insights that will contribute to innovative research with practical impact.

On behalf of the Editorial Team:

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