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GWO2016 Call for Abstracts

**Precarious work in knowledge societies:  
Exploring gendered power relations**

**Stream Convenors:**

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The aim of this stream is to advance contemporary thinking about *gender and precariousness* by bringing together international scholars with an interest in the new economy, knowledge work, and the conditions of flexible labour in times of austerity.

In the new economy, work is increasingly characterized by job insecurity, as well as demanding teamwork, career maps and networking (Williams, Muller, and Kilanski 2012). Such conditions also have consequences for production and reproduction of social inequalities in the twenty-first century workplace. Large rises in the use of temporary employment have led to a growing academic interest in precarious work and its gendered effects (Vosko, 2009; Puar, 2012). In particular, the *flexibilization, feminization and de-materialization of work* are phenomena which combine to generate diverse and multiple interactions between individuals and organizations. Flexibility and precariousness cannot therefore be treated as a dichotomy: on the one hand, as a source of greater freedom and autonomy; on the other, as a discontinuous acquisition of skills with varying social and economic risks. This leads us to question how different occupational groups (differing by gender, age, culture, training, background, etc.) are affected by, and respond to, such transformation (Brophy and de Peuter, 2007; Gherardi and Murgia, 2013). Moreover, economic and social transformation stimulates the development of a new representation of precariousness. Going beyond the debate surrounding 'atypical' or 'non-standard' work, precariousness spills over, extending beyond a descriptor of work to the sense of self and identity of dependent employees. Precariousness thus occurs as an existential condition concerning young people, women and migrants as exemplars of underserved populations only barely protected by a welfare system patterned on a Fordist model (Armano and Murgia, 2013).

Following our interest in the flexibilization, feminization and de-materialization of work, this stream welcomes academic research focused on *gender and precariousness* in knowledge societies.

Within the field of knowledge work, we recognize that academia represents a privileged observatory from which to study how gender relationships and precariousness intertwine (Archer, 2008; Murgia and Poggio, 2015), and how insecurity impacts upon identities at work (Clarke and Knights, 2015; Knights and Clarke, 2014). Indeed, increased insecurity within the academic labour market as elsewhere, the processes of commodification and the decrease of resources invested in research and development have shifted the management of human resources within universities (Ylijoki, 2010). Consequently, women in academia often occupy precarious positions, either part-time or in posts that lack stability or the opportunity for progression, that is, not tenured (Bagillhole and White, 2013; Broadbent, Troup and Strachan 2013). Further, the economic crisis together with entrenched New Public Management practices have affected academia and research centres, their organization and culture, in, for example, the weight ascribed to international rankings, excellence, research production criteria and fundraising (Van den Brink and Benschop 2012). These new practices entail fewer permanent positions and more temporary work based on project-length contracts.

Not confined to academia, the spread of very short-term positions across all forms of knowledge work may hinder the potential for change among new generations, leaving many workers with unstable career trajectories at a stage in the life-cycle where important choices are made, for example and particularly in the case of women, decisions concerning motherhood. Consequently, lack of professional stability is not gender neutral but may affect women and men's creativity and autonomy differently. This interdisciplinary stream invites theoretical and/or empirically informed papers that deepen our understanding of precarious work, knowledge work and its gendered effects. We welcome papers that examine any of the following, or related, questions:

- How do changing patterns and conditions of knowledge work affect the lived realities of works at multiple intersection of class, race, ethnicity and gender at multiple geo-political locations?
- How can we reflect critically on the concept of knowledge work, in the light of austerity?
- How does capitalism go beyond labour? What kind of gendered power relations are produced and reproduced?
- How do knowledge workers represent and deal with their precarious positions?
- How does insecurity affect gender identities at work?
- How does resistance emerge from social movements concerned with precariousness in knowledge work and how are gender differences addressed?
- How gender and precariousness are intertwined in the specific context of academia, and how might we, as academics, reflect upon the conditions and consequences of (our) precariousness?

**Abstracts of approximately 500 words** (ONE page, WORD NOT PDF, single spaced, excluding any references, no headers, footers or track changes) are invited by **1st November 2015** with decisions on acceptance to be made by stream leaders within one month. All abstracts will be peer reviewed. New and young scholars with 'work in progress' papers are welcomed. Papers can be theoretical or theoretically informed empirical work. In the case of co-authored papers, ONE person should be identified as the corresponding author. Note that due to space restrictions, multiple submissions by the same author will not be timetabled. In the first instance, abstracts should be emailed to: [annalisa.murgia@unitn.it](mailto:annalisa.murgia@unitn.it) Abstracts should include full contact information, including your name, department, institutional affiliation, mailing address, and e-mail address. *State the title of the stream to which you are submitting your abstract. Note that no funding, fee waiver, travel or other bursaries are offered for attendance at GWO2016.*

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