

Feminism(s) in the Age of Covid-19 and Beyond: An Interdisciplinary Conference

Friday, 24 September 2021 (online)

Invited speakers:

Dr Heejung Chung (University of Kent)

Dr Aviah Day (Birkbeck, University of London)

Prof Alison Phipps (University of Sussex)

The Covid-19 crisis has been and still is a collective challenge for humanity. We have been dealing with loss and grief on a mass scale and had to adapt to new modes of being and not being with each other. Many of us lost our jobs, and saw our livelihoods threatened in more than one way.

Although data shows that men die of Covid-19 at a higher rate (Global Health 50/50 2021), women have been impacted by the crisis in multiple ways. Very often, for women, staying inside means being exposed to the dangers that lurk within the walls of the home. In April 2020, the UN Women registered an increase in violence against women and girls as a result of the lockdown measures set in place to fight the pandemic. In addition, there is evidence that these measures tend to reactivate traditional gender roles. As a consequence, many women have been pushed to consider leaving their jobs, as paid work and care work at home are still unevenly distributed between men and women (Neely 2020). Since the beginning of lockdowns in February and March 2020 in various parts of the world, studies have shown that women have mostly carried the burden of home-schooling and caring for children (Adams-Prassl, Boneva, Golin, and Rauh 2020). This is notably true in academia, where women have published less and started fewer research projects since the beginning of the pandemic (Deryugin, Shurchkov and Stearns 2021). Although the pandemic has revealed our reliance on essential workers, many of which are women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, their important work remains largely undervalued (Guerrero et al. 2020, 574). Not only are they underpaid, but very often their frontline jobs do not even allow for paid leave (Neely 2020). The creative industry has also suffered a considerable blow during the crisis, with venues closed down and some traditional forms of expression extremely affected by lockdowns.

With the prospect of our lives being radically changed for months and potentially years to come, we would like to ask in the context of this conference: what forms can feminism take in the age of Covid-19? We believe feminist theory and practice are particularly relevant to

interrogate and investigate our current crisis and situation in the home. Feminist thought has historically produced some of the most important critical tools to problematize the domestic sphere. Feminists have dismantled the “natural” association between women and the home. Minnie Bruce Pratt, for instance, uses the metaphor of the home to demonstrate that the sense of safety that was generally associated with it and the identities it created, were in fact based on forms of repression and exclusion (Weir 2008, 5). At the same time, more fluid conceptions of the home have emerged in women’s writing and Sara Ahmed goes as far as claiming that “feminism is homework because we have much to work out from not being at home in a world. [...] Feminist housework does not simply clean and maintain a house. Feminist housework aims to transform the house, to rebuild the master’s residence.” (Ahmed 2017, 7). For many of us, working from home means spending more time online. Considering that feminists have been actively experimenting with the possibilities offered by the web, from the use of the #MeToo hashtag which generated a global feminist reckoning, albeit one “in which white bourgeois women have co-opted the ideas and resistance of women of colour” (Phipps 2020, 38), to the mushrooming of feminist and queer webzines and blogs in recent years, we want to explore the feminist online response to the crisis. The pandemic is not only changing our relationship to the home, but also to the outside, with our basic right to be out and about drastically limited by health measures. At the same time, the recent gatherings in memory of Sarah Everard in the UK remind us that women are always at risk of violence. Yet, women and feminists still find ways to come together outside the home, even if they are brutally repressed. We want to ask: What kinds of new forms of feminist creativity and activism can our move online foster? How can we think about homeworking in a feminist and inclusive way? In other words, how can feminism transform our homes in the current crisis and beyond, but also in what material ways can we engage as feminists in the age of lockdowns and acute control? What forms do feminisms take in our local, national, or cross-border communities?

What forms can feminism take in the age of Covid-19? Contributions include but are not limited to the fields of literature, visual arts, philosophy, performance, sociology, psychology, and political and medical sciences.

Topics may include but are not limited to:

- Caring for children, parents, students, each other
- Inclusive/feminist pedagogies before/during/after Covid-19
- Exhaustion and burn-out
- Gender and its intersection with sexuality, race, class, and/or disability at home/online/in lockdown
- Health and (gendered) discrimination
- Feminist activism on/offline
- (Online) Creative expression/outlets

- Online support systems for women
- Feminism as homework/homeworking in a feminist way

We particularly welcome interdisciplinary and intersectional (Crenshaw 1991) approaches to these questions, and we would like to encourage feminist scholars, artists and activists to submit proposals reflecting on the lived experience of BAME, LGBTQI and/or disabled as well as early career colleagues.

Submission:

To submit a proposal, interested scholars should email an abstract (up to 300 words) and a biographical note (up to 100 words) for a 20-minute presentation in English to the organisers. The deadline for submitting the abstract is **Friday, 30 April 2021**.

Organisers:

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A publication stemming from the conference is planned.

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