BSA Network
Recording the working lives of sociologists for over 40 years **Issue 142, Autumn 2022**

Explain or describe?

Defining the task of sociology today

Also in this issue:

- **REF and RAE 'have made British sociology less diverse'**
- **Medsoc runs 'brilliant, lovely, funny and scary' event**
- **Sociologists take their place on the picket lines**
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BRITISH SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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Autumn 2022

Main feature:

Should social science explain or just describe the world? Sociologists consider the purpose of their work

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graphic: adapted stock imagery

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Network:
©2022 BSA Publications Ltd
ISSN: 2634-9213

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Network is published three times a year:
Spring
Summer
Autumn

Available online to members:
www.britsoc.co.uk

Longer versions of some *Network* articles can be seen at:
https://www.britsoc.co.uk/members-area/network *(login needed)*

Book tracks Mafia's spread in the world

University of Essex: Professor Anna Sergi has drawn on her upbringing in the south of Italy to write about the spread of the mafia across the world.

In her new book, *Chasing the Mafia: 'Ndrangheta, Memories and Journeys,* she explores how the mafia group has expanded from Calabria to Australia, Canada, the United States and Argentina, taking over drug trafficking, extortion and money laundering there.

The book blends travelogue, memoir, investigative journalism and academic analysis to reveal how the 'Ndrangheta became the most powerful crime group in Italy and one of the largest in the world, eclipsing the Cosa Nostra, based in Sicily, and the Camorra in Campania.

Professor Sergi relates her childhood in the region, writing: "This book has been in my head since 2015, on a day when I was watching a beautiful summer over Aspromonte mountains in Calabria.

"I felt deep inside the need to explain how a beautiful place like the one I grew up with has been made famous by a criminal organisation which crosses borders and commits crimes all over the world.

"The publication of *Chasing the Mafia* is the result of my professional journey as a researcher and my personal journey as a Calabrian. It is dedicated to my region and to all the honest people there."

In it she describes how "there was a man in my father's village who used to sit at the bar

Professor Anna Sergi

when I was little. Everyone went to kiss him and greet him and I was never, ever, supposed to even look at him, let alone accept anything paid for by him or from people around him. This is one of many behaviours normally done with good intent that can be twisted and used in mafia culture."

The book is published by Bristol University Press and was released in June.

Human rights work leads to OBE for scholar

University of Leeds: Professor Paul Johnson has been awarded an OBE for services to equality, diversity and human rights.

Professor Johnson, Executive Dean of Social Sciences at the university, is a sociologist concerned with the relationship between law, human rights and sexual orientation.

His work has included drafting amendments to parliamentary bills that will for the first time allow people who were convicted in Northern Ireland of consensual sexual acts and who are still alive to be pardoned and have their convictions disregarded.

He also drafted amendments to ensure that posthumous pardons will be granted to those convicted of consensual sexual acts in Northern Ireland between 1634 and 2008.

Professor Paul Johnson

Drug arrests project is studied

University of Kent: A £1.8 million project will evaluate a scheme that gives the police alternatives to arresting people found in possession of small amounts of illegal drugs.

Diversion Schemes give the police the option of referring the drug user to education and treatment without charging them. The schemes are in operation in the Thames Valley, Durham and the West Midlands.

In other countries, such schemes have been shown to reduce re-offending and to save police time and money. They also have the potential to improve health and reduce ethnic disparities in law enforcement.

The researchers are working with the College of Policing on studying the scheme, funded by the Government's Evaluation Accelerator Fund. They will use data collected by the police, the NHS and drug treatment services to assess the impacts of the schemes on crime, hospitalisations and engagement with drug treatment. The outcomes for people eligible for the schemes in the three areas in operation will be compared to the outcomes of drug-involved suspects in matched areas that do not yet use it.

Interviews and focus groups will also be carried out with people who work with the schemes, including police officers, drug treatment providers, and service users and their families, to find out how the system works in practice.

The project partners include: the universities of Loughborough, Sheffield and York and the Open University; the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities; the Office of the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner; Thames Valley Police; Durham Police; and the charity User Voice.

The research project will conclude in March 2025. Its findings will be published in a report, practical guidance documents and academic articles.

£1.5 M for hair research

University of Kent: Dr Sweta Rajan-Rankin has been awarded a £1.5 million grant for a project entitled 'Hair and care'.

The funding, a Future Leaders Fellowship award by UKRI, will allow her to explore how "Black hair is curated, manifested, disciplined and experienced by children and young people in social care and education settings", the university says.

Future Leaders Fellowships provide long-term support to talented early career researchers to tackle major global issues.

Vegan event posts video

The third annual meeting of the International Association of Vegan Sociologists, co-founded by Dr Corey Wrenn, took place in October. Recordings of the talks are posted on its Youtube channel. Several BSA members took part and the event ran a panel on British vegan sociology:
https://tinyurl.com/4bzknfj4

Parents too poor to take kids on holiday 'compensate with snacks'

City, University of London: Parents who cannot afford to take their children to play-centres or on holiday try to make up for this by buying them unhealthy food, research shows.

The study, by the Centre for Food Policy, sheds light on the food buying habits of low-income parents across England.

It says that when parents are unable to afford social activities with their children, they are driven to compensate with family treats, such as unhealthy food.

Examples of such routines identified in the study include family visits to fast-food outlets like the local chip shop, kebab shop or burger restaurant, or family snacks in front of a film or board game.

The participants were 56 women and four men on low incomes in deprived neighbourhoods in Great Yarmouth, Stoke-on-Trent and the London Borough of Lewisham. They were aged over 18, a parent of a child in school or nursery, and the primary shopper in the family.

Participants took part in semi-structured interviews and in a 'photo elicitation exercise' in which they took images of things that made it harder or easier for them to buy the food they wanted for their families. Twenty-two of the participants also took part in a 'shop-along' interview where they guided the interviewing researcher around the shops of their choice and what they bought.

Professor Corinna Hawkes

The researchers' policy recommendations include replacing unhealthy food promotions and food service outlets with healthier alternatives.

Further recommendations include: increasing the number of affordable family activities available in deprived local communities; making existing activities more affordable, through the availability of discounts; and addressing the broader social need to lift families out of financial insecurity through more extensive benefit schemes, living wage policies and action on insecure work provision.

Professor Corinna Hawkes, who led the research, said: "Given the wonderful food available in this country, it's a travesty how many people's health is damaged by poor quality diets. This study shows that the pathway forward involves understanding how people experience food in their everyday realities. Policy to address inequalities will only work if it recognises that food is more than just nutrition and must meet a wider range of people's needs, such as social and economic wellbeing."

The study, 'From healthy food environments to healthy wellbeing environments', is published online in the journal, *Health & Place,* https://tinyurl.com/2rwnbyuf

The project was part of the work of the National Institute for Health Research Obesity Policy Research Unit, which conducts independent research to inform government policy.

New staff join Northumbria

Northumbria University: Five new sociologists have joined the university. They are: Dr Aarti Ratna, who was previously at Southampton Solent University; Dr Nafhesa Ali, previously at the University of Manchester; Dr Gwyneth Lonergan, previously at Lancaster University; and Dr Sarah Ralph-Lane and Dr Caroline Burns, who join from other areas of the university.

The appointments boost the university's strengths in the areas of migration, race and ethnicity, gender, and qualitative and creative methods.

Dr Ali has co-edited a collection entitled *Storying Relationships: Young British Muslims Speak and Write about Sex and Love,* available in paperback from Bloomsbury.

In other Northumbria news, Dr Ruth Lewis published a book entitled *Digital Gender-Sexual Violations: Violence, Technologies, Motivations* with Dr Matthew Hall, of the British University in Egypt, and Professor Jeff Hearn, of the University of Huddersfield.

Dr Edmund Coleman-Fountain joined the current editorial team of *Sociological Research Online*, which edits the BSA journal until January, when there is a change of teams.

Dr Carol Stephenson gave a key note speech at 'Mind the gap', the Public Relations and Communications Association annual conference in July, speaking on the stigmatisation of activists against open cast coal mining in County Durham.

Dr Maria Laura Ruiu became a member of the Media Sociology Committee, which will organise an International Communication Association Media Sociology post-conference in Toronto in May. She has become a member of the editorial board for the Palgrave Studies in Digital Inequalities book series.

Dr Nafhesa Ali

Book notes TV industry changes

City, University of London: A book that explores how the TV industry has changed under the impact of globalisation and digital technologies is being published.

Television in the Streaming Era: The Global Shift, by Professor Jean Chalaby, looks at the emergence of tech giants and streaming platforms.

It takes in the infrastructure and technology behind the current TV industry, such as communication satellites, sub-sea cable networks, data centres, machine learning, cloud computing and streaming software.

The book, published by Cambridge University Press, combines empirical data gathered during 20 years of researching the industry and conveys insights from television and tech executives.

Jean Chalaby, Professor of International Communication at City, is author of books and articles on the sociology of media and communication, including *The Format Age* in 2017.

More details of the book are at: https://tinyurl.com/kwh6d35b

Community, complexity and crime at recent Surrey events

University of Surrey: The Department of Sociology was host to two key events recently.

The British Society of Criminology's three-day annual conference attracted 350 delegates from around the world to engage with research, debates and perspectives in contemporary criminology.

The themes tackled at the event, the first in-person major conference hosted by the society since the pandemic, included: the future of crime, responses to the pandemic, changes in the criminal justice system, and developments in science and technology.

The event featured more than 200 panels, roundtables, book launches, a bespoke programme for postgraduates and an extensive programme of social events.

More information can be seen at the conference site: https://bsc2022.co.uk The next conference will be held at the University of Central Lancashire: https://tinyurl.com/2p86xwbv

The sociology department also hosted its hybrid Summer Showcase event, with the theme of communities. This half-day event included speakers from the university and elsewhere talking about their work in sociology, criminology and communications.

Dr Roos Pijpers

The event began with an international keynote panel on 'Communities: complexity and change'. This featured talks by Dr Eleanor Formby, of Sheffield Hallam University, on 'LGBT+ communities', and Dr Roos Pijpers on the complexities of implementing LGBTI inclusivity schemes in housing and care. Dr Anna Tarrant, of the University of Lincoln, spoke on strategies for establishing and sustaining dialogues with diverse communities.

Speakers from Surrey's sociology department then talked about their research. Professor Nigel Gilbert presented work by himself and Dr Alex Penn on participatory systems mapping and its uses for understanding complex social and policy systems.

Dr Kavin Narasimhan spoke on data, computational modelling and knowledge co-production for and with communities.

Professor Christine Hine presented on ethics as community responsibility in the development and use of smart care, while Professor Rachel Brooks and Dr Jihyun Lee talked about an investigation of student experiences across six European countries.

Ellen Harris spoke on young women and the meaning of pornography, Dr Giulia Berlusconi on a study of men who pay for sex in England and Wales, and Adnan Mouhiddin on the legitimacy of community crime prevention among Syrian youth.

Head of Department Professor Andrew King and Director of Research Professor Rob Meadows said the event had showcased some of the many highlights of research in Surrey sociology. More details at: https://tinyurl.com/53wmjahs

Role of nature in helping migrants explored

Manchester Metropolitan University: The role of nature in helping migrants integrate into UK communities will be explored in a new study.

The project, 'Nature-based integration: connecting communities with/in nature' will show how nature can foster a sense of belonging among immigrants and improve their health and wellbeing.

The two-year project is a collaboration between Manchester Metropolitan**,** Kingston School of Art and Anglia Ruskin University, and will be conducted in partnership with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Researchers will work in the Scottish Highlands and Islands, Blackburn with Darwen, and Greater London to develop a map of the sites that migrants can use, identifying routes, activities, and safe and unsafe spaces.

Dr Caitlin Nunn, Research Fellow at Manchester Centre for Youth Studies at Manchester Metropolitan, said: "The natural environment is a powerful resource for migrant integration, with the potential to foster connections to places, practices and communities. While this is increasingly recognised in research and practice, it is yet to be realised in UK policy."

Dr Azadeh Fatehrad, of Kingston School of Art, which is leading the study, said: "We wanted to explore how we can use parks, woodlands and rivers as areas of integration, focusing on the various processes of interaction and adaptation when migrants arrive and begin carving out a new life in a different country."

In other MMU news, a new introduction to social theory that illustrates ways of examining contemporary social life will be published in March. *Welcome to Social Theory*, by Dr Tom Brock, examines major theoretical traditions from Marxism to poststructuralism, and feminism to postcolonial theory, new materialism and posthumanism.

It appraises classical ideas and debates in social theory and traces their impact through discussion of major contemporary theorists, including Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Margaret Archer, Judith Butler, bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Bruno Latour, Gilles Deleuze and Rosi Braidotti.

The book tackles issues including the gig economy, everyday sexism, digital black feminism, animal and environmental activism, stigma and discrimination against migrants, the need to decolonise the sociology curriculum and more.

• A paper by Dr David Calvey has won an Emerald Literati Award for Outstanding Paper.

The paper, 'Sensory ethnography: a creative turn', describes the rise of sensory ethnography – an approach to research that incorporates the full range of senses – as a creative method. It is published in the *Journal of Organizational Ethnography* https://tinyurl.com/vwf54hda

The Emerald Literati Awards celebrate outstanding contributions of authors and reviewers to its journals and books.

Dr Calvey's earlier research has studied resistance and disobedience at work, and martial arts.

Dr David Calvey

Death and grief during pandemic are charted in new free book

Open University: A free book which collates essays, poems, and reflections by university students, staff and alumni on their experiences of grief and loss during the Covid pandemic has been published.

Narratives of Covid: Loss, Dying, Death and Grief during Covid-19 is by Dr Erica Borgstrom and Dr Sharon Mallon, both medical sociologists at the university and members of the BSA Social Aspects of Death, Dying and Bereavement study group.

This collection of 30 narratives highlights some of the many different experiences that arose from individual circumstances and will resonate beyond the university.

Dr Mallon said: "As death researchers, we noted that although death was highly visible in public discourse, individual accounts were strangely absent, hidden or sensationalised.

"Our concern over these representations, as well as over the changes that would come with the passage of time, led us to collect narrative responses to loss during Covid-19 in the form of essays, poems and reflections.

"The narratives included in this edited collection uniquely capture the rawness of these experiences. Individually, each narrative documents a moment in time, when the pandemic was still in an acute phase, highlighting some of the different experiences that arose from individual circumstances. Collectively, they provide an opportunity for reflection of the impact on Covid on individuals and wider society.

"It is proving to be popular as a teaching tool and we are keen to ensure that it is highlighted to sociologists as a free resource."

It is published as a free eBook on a range of platforms and as a pdf. A print-on-demand paperback is available via Amazon for £4.99. The collection has been supported by Open Thanatology Research Group at the Open University. Enquiries to sharon.mallon@open.ac.uk

Dr Erica Borgstrom

Feminism and food: sociology news round-up

Loughborough University: Abby Davis and Matt Padley have been appointed directors of the Centre for Research in Social Policy following the departure of Professor Donald Hirsch, who has retired after a decade in the role.

The centre was founded in 1983 to tackle a wide range of social policy issues, and has become one of the UK's leading social research areas. Since 2012, it has focused on income and poverty, and from 2006 introduced the highly influential Minimum Income Standard, which establishes the goods, services and opportunities the public agrees people should have in order to reach an acceptable standard of living.

Ms Davis and Mr Padley have pioneered the use of the standard around the world, training teams in other countries to adopt it.

University of Edinburgh: Dr Rebecca Hewer has launched a new research initiative, the Feminist Policy Project, in which contributors rewrite a range of UK social policies.

The project seeks to create a network of academic and non-academic collaborators to use theory and scholarship to rewrite government policies using a feminist perspective.

The project will focus on policies in areas such as sexual violence and parental leave, as well as more general policies such as those on travel and infrastructure.

The project is inspired by the Scottish Feminist Judgements Project, which researches whether the outcome of important legal cases would have been decided differently if judges had applied a feminist perspective.

University of Oxford: Professor Melinda Mills has been appointed as one of three Special Advisors to Paolo Gentiloni, the European Commissioner for Economy.

Professor Mills, Director of the Leverhulme Centre for Demographic Science, will advise the Commissioner on socio-economic matters.

The appointment is an extension of her work on the European Commission's High-Level Group on post-Covid economic and social challenges.

As part of this, she wrote a chapter in its report 'A new era for Europe: how the European Union can make the most of its pandemic recovery, pursue sustainable growth and promote global stability'. The chapter dealt with the future of employment in a post-Covid Europe.

University of Sheffield: Professor Helen Kennedy was among 40 social scientists made Fellows of the Academy of Social Sciences.

The award is given in recognition of excellence in their fields of research and their wider contribution to the social sciences.

For more than 20 years, Professor Kennedy has researched how developments in digital technology are experienced in everyday life, studying digital inequity, class, gender, race, disability, labour, identity and representation.

Professor Kennedy is currently directing the Living With Data programme of research which investigates how people experience the 'datafication' of their lives.

University of Hertfordshire: Rebecca O'Connell has joined the Centre for Research in Public Health and Community Care in the School of Health and Social Work.

She joins as Professor of Food, Families and Society, moving from UCL Institute of Education.

She is co-author of *Food, Families, and Work* (2016) and of *Living Hand to Mouth: Children and Food in Low-income Families* (2019).

She also has an interest in research methodology, particularly mixed and multi-methods approaches. She has been a convenor of the BSA Food study group.

Group event studies the role of emotions in political activism

Emotions study group: The group ran a two-day online symposium in June on the connections between emotions and social change, reflecting on the emotional quality and consequences of socio-political crises.

Researchers based in various countries spoke on issues such as the significance of emotions in social movement politics, including a presentation on Italy and Turkey by Cansu Sonmez, of Gran Sasso Science Institute, Italy. Dr Merve Betül Üçer, of Istanbul University, spoke on why the meaning of shame has changed in contemporary Turkey.

The emergence of new everyday practices, such as those promoting wellbeing, were examined by Taoyi Yang, of the Free University, Berlin. Popular narratives of emotional life in Britain were scrutinised, using historic material gathered by Mass Observation, by Professor Mary Holmes, of the University of Edinburgh.

Dr Merve Betül Üçer

The theme of the gendered quality of emotions was examined by Dr Gabriela Loureiro, of the University of Edinburgh, who spoke on efforts to mobilise solidarity for combating gender-based violence in Brazil. Alice Menzel, of the University of Birmingham, presented on the shifting dynamics of masculinities in Britain in the context of expectant fatherhood during Covid-19, and Dr Kitty Nichols, of the University of Sheffield, on the significance of banter amongst rugby club members.

Papers also addressed political activism and affiliation, with Dr Camilo Tamayo Gomez, of the University of Huddersfield, speaking on efforts to democratise post-conflict Columbia, and Johan Gordillo-García, of the University of Edinburgh, on political movements led by victims of extreme violence in Mexico.

Alice Menzel and Dr Nichols replace Dr Fiona McQueen and Lisa Kalayji as convenors of the group.

From information submitted by Alice Menzel, Kitty Nichols and Lisa Smyth

Work, youth and biography: study group round-up

Work, Employment and Economic Life study group: The group held an online seminar featuring Dr Alex Culvin, a senior lecturer in sports business at Leeds Beckett University and a former professional footballer.

Dr Culvin presented her work on employment policy and workplace conditions in women's professional football in England at the event, in May.

In June, the group held an online panel discussion on whether the International Labour Organization could or should take in the complex field of regulating employment and protecting workers' rights in the crisis-ridden global labour market.

The panel members included Professor Tonia Novitz, Professor Nicola Piper and Dr Huw Thomas, with Professor Jean Jenkins responding to the panel's comments.

In August, the group held its first online annual meeting following the pandemic.

Members discussed possible activities for the research group, ways of supporting PhDs and early careers researchers in the group's research areas, and how to develop shared resources and potential collaborations with other research groups.

More information on the group can be seen at: https://tinyurl.com/4nexaask

From information supplied by the convenors, Jonathan Preminger, Jill Timms and Rachel Cohen

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Auto/Biography Review journal has relaunched as an online, open access journal.

Professor Nicola Piper

This is an international, peer-reviewed, twice-yearly publication that addresses theoretical and empirical issues relating to autobiographical and biographical research.

Auto/Biography Review is the journal of the BSA Auto/Biography study group. Group members pay an annual subscription that entitles them to a reduction in conference costs and publications, including free publishing in the journal. Non-group members will pay £30 per article submission.

The aim of the journal is to develop academic interest in life studies and narrative analysis of historical and contemporary lives.

The journal is sociologically orientated but welcomes contributions from a range of disciplines including history, geography, law, politics, psychology, health, youth and social work, education, work and employment, business and management, literary criticism, and the arts, as well as sociology.

The Editor-in-chief is Dr Carly Stewart, of Bournemouth University, and more details are at: https://tinyurl.com/3p7pe6a5

Youth study group: the group has collated responses from members offering tips for youth researchers at different career stages.

The group had 27 responses from youth researchers and practitioners from a wide range of career stages and areas.

Tips shared included taking at least one day off a week from university work and joining a union. The tips can be seen at: https://tinyurl.com/nhdpkus8

A website devoted to civil sphere theory, as formulated by the US sociologist Jeffrey Alexander in his book *The Civil Sphere,* has been launched.

The website is run by the Civil Sphere Working Group – theorists and empirical social scientists who share the goal of developing and revising the theory.

The working group holds conferences every second year and uses the website to post papers, comments and other news.

For more information, see: www.cstnetwork.org

Sociologists take part in BBC tribute to the science of society

The story of sociology was explored in a BBC radio programme by the author and journalist Lynsey Hanley.

She looked at its rise in the post-war era as a 'science of society', with early studies of class, race and gender in Britain pioneering the use of field research, data gathering and new techniques such as ethnography and participant observation. For the first time all aspects of society and culture were considered worthy of study, from the ground up, the programme heard.

She emphasised that the discipline was wide-ranging, studying football terraces, housing estates, youth groups and popular culture, as well as new patterns of labour and the powerful new medium of television. Books published by Pelican, including *The Uses of Literacy by Richard Hoggart* (1957), explored everyday lives and brought sociological thought into the mainstream culture, offering radical new visions of British society.

Professor Gary Younge

The programme looked at how sociology began to change the course of broadcast media itself, with programmes such as the BBC's Panorama and Man Alive, and ITV's pioneering World in Action operating between current affairs and considered sociological analysis. Sociologists and documentary makers went inside prisons, youth cultures, the police, inner cities and new political groups.

The rise of a more aggressive ideology of individualism during the Thatcher era put sociology on the back foot, with free-market economics challenging it as the new intellectual paradigm of the age, and dismissing it as either irrelevant or pernicious.

Contributors included: sociologist Les Back; the journalist and academic Gary Younge; the writer and sociologist Ann Oakley; broadcaster Laurie Taylor; writer and critic D J Taylor; co-founder of the podcast Surviving Society, Chantelle Lewis; urban sociologist Paul Jones; sociologist and British reggae pioneer William Lesley 'Lyrics' Henry; economist Shaun Hargreaves Heap; author Marcus Gilroy-Ware; and John Scott, a vice-president of the BSA.

The programme, entitled The Art of Habit, can be heard at: https://tinyurl.com/ycked8px

Meet the PhD: Jingrui Hu

'I find my PhD process full of ups and downs – I sometimes wait for inspiration before moving on'

My research explores how costume jewellery from the West is purchased and used in China. During 2021, I conducted fieldwork and interviews in the US (New York City, Florida) and China (Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Tianjin, Ningbo), allowing me to follow the commodity chain of a piece of costume jewellery on its journey from the US to China.

I am a jewellery enthusiast and also a vintage jewellery trader in China, so the phenomenon of Chinese consumers purchasing jewellery from the West is appealing to me. Manufacturers were established in the last century, and some of them have more than a hundred years of history. I wanted to interview them and record their current situation and their interaction with the Chinese market.

I carried out semi-structured interviews with 24 consumers, nine traders in China and eight staff members from four manufacturers in the US.

My interview with the manufacturers took place in their factories. I saw the production process, such as casting, polishing, setting stones, and enamelling and I saw how the artisans did all these processes with their hands. I was impressed by the strong smell of rubber (the moulds are made of rubber) in their storage room, where I saw thousands of moulds that they use to produce the jewellery. I saw the manufacturer's media department take pictures of the products and post them on Instagram and the official website, before contacting distributors for retail sales.

In my analysis I look at how jewellery manufacturers provide information about their craftsmanship, history and heritage, and how Chinese traders then craft narratives to reinforce the connection between costume jewellery and authentic old pieces from the past. Following the physical journey of the object allows me to establish a material and symbolic connection between costume jewellery and consumers in China.

In exploring the reasons for Chinese consumers' preference for costume jewellery, whether vintage or more recent, I find that the formation of their tastes is closely related to China's development over the past 40 years, when a generation of middle-class consumers emerged in China.

I find my PhD process full of ups and downs. My understanding of costume jewellery consumption is like water in a well, and the process of completing a PhD project is making tools to bring water up from the well. Sometimes I rejoice at the progress of tool making. But sometimes, when I lie down by the well, I see water, but I don't have the tools to bring it up. The insider experience has been the biggest challenge for me, especially when analysing data, which traps me in perceptions based on my experience rather than looking outside my existing perceptions to analyse data. But it was also the most fun part of the research: challenging existing perceptions and assumptions and reshaping understanding.

'The consumption of vintage costume jewellery in China and the cultural narrative of its producers' 2020-2023, Loughborough University

BSA members-only events tackle war, impact and the cost of living

The BSA has launched a series of members-only events as part of its commitment to recruit and retain members.

The first event, in June, was 'Sociological perspectives on war and peace', which heard leading scholars tackle topics such as Ukraine, Afghanistan and gendered violence.

The event was chaired by John Brewer, Professor of Post Conflict Studies at Queen's University Belfast.

The speakers were: Professor Jeffrey Alexander, Yale University, on 'A global civil sphere does not exist'; Dr Raluca Bejan, Dalhousie University, on 'Ukraine and how citizenship and race play out in refugee movements in Europe'; Professor Sinisa Malesevic, University College Dublin, on 'The sociology of war'; Professor Neil McLaughlin, McMasters University, on 'Responding to the Ukraine war from a sociology of intellectuals perspective'; Professor Larry Ray, University of Kent, on 'The sociology of violence'; Professor Louise Ryan, London Metropolitan University, on 'The Afghan evacuation of 2021'; Professor Sylvia Walby, City, University London, on 'The sociology of violence: alternative gendered futures'; and Professor Iain Wilkinson, University of Kent, on 'The sociology of suffering'.

Clockwise from top left: Raluca Bejan, Sinisa Malesevic, Iain Wilkinson, Hannah Smithson, Jane Monckton Smith, Sylvia Walby

The videos can be seen at: https://tinyurl.com/2aaaevh5

In November, the event 'How to craft an impact case study: REF2021 researchers share their stories' was held at the NCVO offices in London, as well as online.

The event was chaired by Professor Ryan, the BSA Chair, and featured a panel of speakers drawn from the pool of REF2021 impact case studies.

They included: Professor Michaela Benson, of Lancaster University, Professor Jane Monckton Smith, University of Gloucestershire, Professor Kate Reed, University of Sheffield, and Professor Hannah Smithson, Manchester Metropolitan University.

In December, the BSA ran 'Sociological perspectives on the cost of living crisis in Britain', chaired by Dr Jen Remnant, University of Strathclyde.

Association makes progress on key aims

The BSA has made progress on its four key commitments: supporting its members, working with schools, achieving equity in its work with members and others, and responding to the climate emergency.

In the spring issue of *Network* last year, the BSA published an article telling members about the steps it was taking to be greener.

It said that its trustees were now mainly meeting online, that *Network* was published on the web only rather than in print, and that its journals were no longer sent out to members in print form.

This work to reduce its carbon footprint continues. The BSA is in the process of switching its utilities to 100% renewables, once its existing contract have expired in 2025.

Over the past 18 months, it has considered whether to move some of its conferences online. A poll of attendees at its (virtual) annual conference this year found that three-quarters were happy for the 2024 event to be virtual, given that it will be in-person in 2023.

Another option is to make all conferences a mix of online and in-person events, although this doubles the cost of running them, and they were already loss-making. The BSA will debate this further before reaching a decision.

The BSA is a member of E3G, a coalition of professional organisations working together on climate care, which wrote to Conservative MPs to press the new Prime Minister to commit to net zero.

Other steps will need to be taken as the association seeks to play its part in keeping carbon emissions as low as practically possible, and it will keep members informed of progress.

The BSA has brought in a 'mentoring month', in which more experienced members can give others support and useful tips on navigating areas of the academic world. The month first began in January 2021, and its success encouraged the BSA to run it again in February this year, with 70 members participating. So far a record number of members (81) have registered as mentees.

Judith Mudd, BSA Chief Executive

This is now a regular annual event and will next take place in February. It replaces the three days of mentoring that the association ran during its annual conferences.

The BSA's work with schools has included adding new video resources to its teachers' website, www.discoversociology.co.uk Changes to the homepage are being made to improve access and usability for school teachers.

As featured in the summer issue of *Network*, an online repository with material on best practice in the teaching of race and ethnicity within sociology will be launched. A team from the University of Kent is creating the repository, called acKnowledge, which will be hosted on the BSA's site. It is expected to be live by spring next year.

More information about the project is at: https://tinyurl.com/2ft9h9kx

The BSA has also begun trialling events that are offered first to members. *See above*

It has also carried out surveys of its members, to enable it to track changes n membership over time.

BSA offers support to members taking part in UCU strikes

Sociologists played their part in the recent strike action across British universities.

They were among more than 70,000 staff at 150 universities who took part in three days of strike action over pay, working conditions and pensions.

Sociologists issued a series of tweets about thr strikes. Dr Kirsty Finn tweeted: "Tomorrow I'll be withdrawing my labour in solidarity with colleagues who haven't had my luck/timing & who face brutal competition & casual precarious contracts."

Dr Ali Meghji wrote: "Striking tomorrow for many reasons, including the fact that the system is failing our ECRs into lives of insecurity… sad that even 'critical' academics can be happy to actively participate in this."

Professor Jenny Pickerill tweeted: "I am striking in solidarity with all my colleagues nationally to demand a fair pay deal, the end of pay inequality, end of casualisation + action on workloads. We are overworked + underpaid, + I see the harsh impacts that has on colleagues daily."

Dr Yasmin Gunaratnam wrote: "UK HE has been making huge profits & yet continues to rely on casualised lab (fixed term teaching contracts that don't cover the acad year)."

Professor Les Back tweeted: "Amazing support from Glasgow students at the Adam Smith Building for the UCU action today – inspiring." *See image above*

Glasgow students supporting the strike

The BSA has released a statement about the strikes, saying it "supports our members and all sociologists who are affected by UCU strike action".

The statement says: "The BSA continues to support strike action by UCU members which begins next week. We're proud to be part of a community where our members feel empowered to stand up for what they believe in.

"In a gesture of solidarity with all those who are taking part in the action, we will keep all communication to a minimum whilst continuing to support our members. The office staff will be working regular hours as we are not university employees and so are not directly involved in the disputes. We are happy to help anyone getting in touch with us during this period. It's important to note that not all BSA members work in higher education or live in the UK.

"Communication from the BSA office will continue during the strike period because, as the national subject association for sociology in Britain, it is essential that we continue our charitable work promoting sociology and our administrative work supporting our journals, events and award programmes.

"On social media, we will join you on the digital picket line and refrain from retweeting any institutional content on strike days. However, we will continue tweeting news from the BSA and our journals so that you can stay informed.

"Those members not involved in the strike action may wish to support it via sharing their views on social media etc, and contributing to funds that help those members who are participating. If you wish to contribute you can do so here: www.ucu.org.uk/fightingfund

"The BSA office supports our members and all sociologists who are affected by the UCU strike action. We are thinking of all those who will be on the picket lines and affected by the strike."

BSA is relevant for sociology, members say

The BSA is relevant for representing UK sociology today, its members have said.

A survey of more than 300 members – about one-sixth of the total – found that 80% thought that it was either 'highly' or 'somewhat' relevant, with 6% saying it was 'somewhat' or 'very' irrelevant.

When asked what difference the loss of the BSA would make, comments from members included "Then the heart of sociology as a discipline would not exist", and "I would be an isolated lost individual rather than a nourished member of a vital community".

One wrote: "As a PhD student the BSA provided me with a community and the ability to meet many other sociologists. It helped me develop my networks and to meet others who do the work I do, and to then be able to write and publish with them. It also gave me the opportunity to make friends and feel a part of something bigger than my own subject area. Academia can be a lonely place, especially for those from the margins, so this community, for me anyway, was vital in my sociological journey." Another wrote that its loss would mean "Not a lot, but then I am retired".

A quarter of the respondents had been members for over 20 years, with 60% members for 2-20 years.

The most important membership benefit for a third of those surveyed was 'being an active member of the sociological community' and for a quarter it was 'reduced fees to conferences and events'. Free journals, taking part in study groups, and access to the members' area of the website were also important.

The most important BSA activities were "representing the sociology community to government and other important public bodies" (31%), "bringing sociologists together" (27%), and the annual conference (13%).

Members thought the BSA was either excellent (19%) or good (58%) at communicating with its member, with only 2% saying it was not good.

Many commentators said they did not use social media, though several wanted a greater BSA presence on Twitter. Several commentators thought the website was not user-friendly. Views on Network ranged from noting it was "absolutely important to the BSA" to calls for it to be printed again rather than being online, and also a question about whether anyone read it.

One third thought the BSA was either excellent or good at communicating with external organisations, with 60% saying they were neutral in their assessment of this and 7% saying it was not good.

The BSA also surveyed 160 non-members, asking them why they had not joined, with some saying the membership fee was too high for them, and others unsure about the benefits of joining. It surveyed 90 former members, asking them why they left, with some saying it was the cost of membership, though most agreed that the BSA was relevant for sociology.

Action needed to cut ‘astounding’ food waste in supply chains

As part of its coverage of the challenges of cutting climate emissions, Network looks at a recent event on tackling food waste

Dr Christian Reynolds

Lorna Slater

One third of all food is wasted in the supply chain, including over half of chicken and fruit, Dr Christian Reynolds said.

Dr Reynolds, senior lecturer in food policy at City, University London, was speaking at a Public Policy Exchange conference on cutting food waste.

“My work is looking at healthy, sustainable diets and food loss and waste. From a greenhouse gas and climate change perspective, food loss and waste accounts globally for around six per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

“If we gathered all global food loss and waste together into a specific country, it would be the third largest greenhouse gas emitter as a country.

“There are different amounts wasted on farms in transport, in processing wholesale and at the consumer level.

“Over half of chicken and half of fruit are wasted across the supply chain. That’s an astounding amount. One third of food never reaches a human stomach.”

He said that a range of actions were needed to cut food waste and so reduce carbon emissions.

“Consumer behaviour change is a huge part of a food loss and waste solution, but it’s not the only part of it. And we need to prevent and reduce waste.

“We’re not just saying there’s one silver bullet – there’s many different things that need to happen across the system. And that means that there are many different government departments that need to create solutions linked to food loss and waste.

“That could be date-labelling longer shelf lives. It could be more efficient operations. Lots of different solutions are there to actually help reduce food loss and waste.

“One of my pieces of research has been simulation modelling for the removal of ‘best before dates’ from fresh fruits and vegetables. We’ve shown through our modelling and through empirical research carried out on the field that if we take those best before dates off – and now the big five supermarkets have done that – we could be saving 100,000 tons of food waste, 10,000 tonnes of plastic and the equivalent of 130,000 tonnes of CO_2.”

He said there had been a dip in self-reported food waste during the pandemic, but “we are now back to where we were in 2018 in terms of reductions in our food loss and waste. We’ve not doubled down, we’ve not improved. People have gone back to their pre-Covid waste routines and patterns, which means changing consumer level food waste is very, very difficult.”

Lorna Slater, Biodiversity Minister in the Scottish government, said that her government’s food waste reduction plan had set an “ambitious” target of a 33 per cent reduction in food waste by 2025.

“We started this work earlier in the year, raising awareness of food waste impact on climate change through a nationwide media campaign for consumers and households.

“The campaign highlighted the importance of preventing food waste in the first place, but also encouraged people to recycle food waste.

“If everyone lived as we do in Scotland, we would need three planets to sustain ourselves. We must begin the process of rapid change right across our economy. We need to move to a circular economy where we reduce the demand for raw materials in products and recycle waste and energy to maximize the value of any waste that is generated.

“Work is already underway to realise this vision for a circular economy for Scotland, including a £17 million investment in the recycling infrastructure, introducing new deposit return scheme, legislation to ban some of the most problematic single use plastic products, bringing forward a new circular economy Bill, and the publication of a waste target which draws together what we must do to achieve our waste and recycling targets for 2025.”

Amy Fry, Chief Adviser for Food Business at the National Farmers’ Union, said that “global distribution and supply chains have been in disarray for a long time now. Labour shortages, gas, inflation, energy inflation and the cost of living crisis – not helped of course by the war in Ukraine – are all now having huge impacts on food production and ultimately food waste. And then with changes brought up by Brexit, food production in the UK is vulnerable.”

A survey had found that £22 million pounds worth of waste was generated as a result of not having the labour to pick the crops.

“We are really trying to work with members and the supply chain to get flexibility on specifications going forward, so that produce can go into the supply chain and continue to go into the supply chain in light of some of the impacts of climate change.”

• Other speakers at the event were: Harry Morgan, Campaign Coordinator at Plenty to Share; Emma Beal, Managing Director at West London Waste Authority; Daniel Zeichner MP, Shadow Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries; and Andy Mitchell, Senior Technical Manager at Worldwide Fruit.

All around the world...

Links to online articles about these topics can be found at www.britsoc.co.uk/members-area/network

Network takes a look at sociology beyond our shores

Cultural tastes 'partly genetic'

Bourdieu would not be pleased with the latest findings from sociologists at the University of Copenhagen, who say that our genes are up to 50% responsible for our cultural tastes.

A study of 1,200 Danish twin pairs, 466 monozygotic and 734 dizygotic, mapped their taste for and participation in 12 cultural activities, such as music, drama, art and cinema.

Studies of twins claim to uncover the relative influence of genes by comparing monozygotic twins, who are genetically identical, and dizygotic twins, who share 50% of their genes. If traits among the former are shared more often than among the latter, despite both sets having the same family background, that's taken as a clue to how far genetics determine cultural taste.

The study, published in *Sociological Science*, found that 54% of the variation in the twins' taste for highbrow culture such as classical music, plays, ballet and art could be attributed to genetic disposition. Only 16% was due to social influences from within the family, and the remaining 30% to external social factors, such as friends and society.

The figures for more popular cultural activities put the genetic component at around 30%, roughly the same as for family, with the biggest contributor being external social factors.

Assistant Professor Stine Møllegaard from the Department of Sociology, said: "It has been the common understanding in sociology that parents exclusively transfer their cultural preferences to their children through socialisation and social interaction.

"Our study paints a different picture. We show that there is a significant genetic component to the overall cultural consumption."

Dr Møllegaard said she was looking forward to seeing how her ideas would be received in the field of sociology, where Bourdieu and other leading theorists have emphasised social and cultural factors.

"When I ask my students if genes are important for our behaviour, many respond 'not at all' and become very quiet when I state the opposite. But in sociology, there is a growing acceptance that genes matter."

Max's face enchants Baghdad

Max Weber may not be the first person to leap to mind when considering the topic of beauty, but his face is depicted in one of a number of new murals created to brighten the war-ravaged streets of Baghdad.

The Iraqi artist Wijdan al-Majed is transforming Baghdad's battered concrete into a city filled with colourful murals depicting well-known figures.

Weber is among 16 subjects, including the Iraqi poet Muzzafar al-Nawab, Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid, and Mother Teresa.

Wijdan began the scheme a year ago in an attempt to "bring beauty to the city and move art to the streets to get rid of the grey and dusty colours". At first she had helpers, but later turned to working alone, undaunted by the disparaging comments she received at first. "People have become used to seeing a woman paint, Iraqi society has accepted me," she said. Why she chose Weber as a subject has gone unreported, unfortunately.

Same-sex parents' kids do well

Children who have same-sex parents are just as well adjusted as those who have a father and mother, according to a study by University of Cologne sociologists.

In the study, 62 children aged six to 16 with same-sex parents were compared with 72 peers with different-sex parents to study their social behaviour, hyperactivity, peer problems, emotional adjustment and any general behavioural problems.

Previous studies have shown that same-sex parents face significant stress factors related to their sexual orientation, such as the experience of prejudice and unsupportive legal contexts, which in turn could lead to adjustment problems in their children.

But the new study, conducted by Dr Mirjam Fischer and published in the journal *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, showed that this was not the case, as the children were equally well adjusted.

"Parents create an environment in which their children receive appreciation and recognition from others and where other same-sex families provide positive role models," said Dr Fischer.

Iran professor arrested

Authorities in Iran have arrested a sociology professor on security charges and "suspicious foreign links", Iranian media have reported.

The semi-official Mehr news agency said Saeed Madani, based at Allameh University, was an activist who had allegedly met with "suspicious" foreign citizens and carried messages from them to local activists.

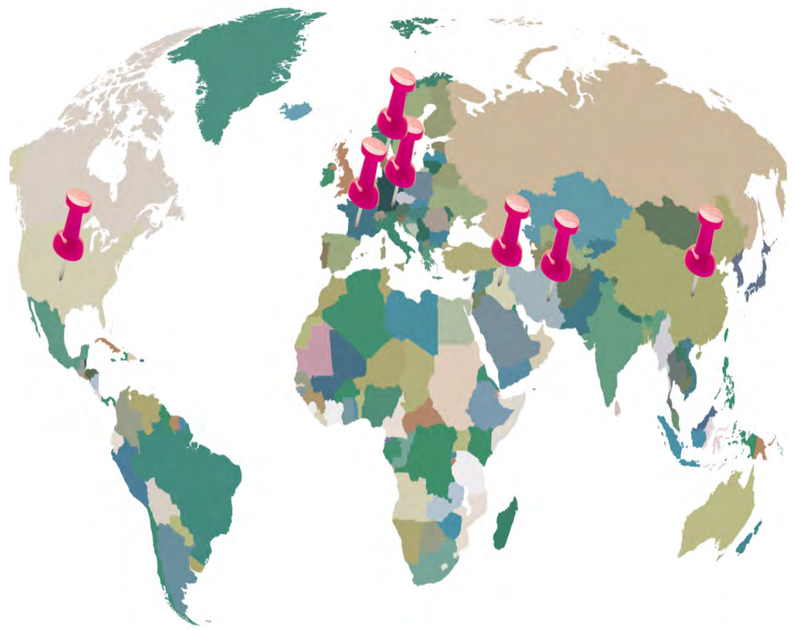
Professor Madani has been summoned by the courts several times in the past, and was banned from travelling abroad in 2019.

Iran has in recent weeks intensified its crackdown on dissent, including carrying out raids on activists on trumped-up charges. Several sociologists have been arrested in the past.

• The Turkish Supreme Court has sentenced Pinar Selek to life in prison, in absentia.

Dr Selek, a sociologist and human rights defender now based in France, was arrested in Turkey in 1998 for her research on peace processes and demilitarisation.

She was accused of supporting the Kurdistan Workers' Party and of setting off a bomb in Istanbul's Egyptian bazaar, which she denies. Accusations by a young Kurdish activist obtained under torture led to Dr Selek's arrest, though the activist later recanted.



Tributes paid to Bruno Latour

The death of the French philosopher, anthropologist and sociologist Bruno Latour, 75, was widely reported in the press internationally.

His main idea, a *Guardian* obituary said, was: "We should realise we are not the selfish individuals predicted by neo-liberal economic theory, but social beings living interdependently with other organic life."

For the *New York Times*, "a single thread ran through all of his work: the notion that facts do not exist outside of society, but rather are generated and advanced within dense networks of people, ideas and objects."

For *Le Monde*, "Latour was, indeed, for a time misunderstood in France, as his research subjects seemed so disparate, which could hide a great coherence. It must be said that he touched on almost all areas of knowledge: ecology, law, modernity, religion and, of course, science and technology, with his inaugural and explosive studies on laboratory life."

Other tributes in the media, in Germany, Cuba, Denmark, the Czech Republic and elsewhere, were paid to Professor Latour, best known for his work in the field of STS and actor-network theory.

Google: darker shade of palette

Google introduced a new palette of 10 skin tones after research recognised the existing system was failing people of colour.

The Monk Skin Tone Scale will help Google and the tech industry to build more representative datasets so that it can train AI models and evaluate them for fairness, improving the way they detect faces in images.

The new scale replaces one used widely in the tech industry which has a range of just six colours.

Google collaborated with Ellis Monk, a sociologist at Harvard University, for the replacement. Dr Monk said he felt dehumanised by the camera on his smartphone, which was unable to detect his face and reflect his own complexion.

By the means of Photoshop and other digital art methods, Dr Monk curated 10 skin tones, a figure manageable enough for people who assess and contribute to training of artificial intelligence systems to use successfully.

Google surveyed 3,000 people in the US, revealing that many found a 10-point scale matched their skin just as accurately as a 40-shade palette.

Wealthy = unhealthy in China

Education and wealth are not necessarily tied to better health among Chinese people, a study has found, in contradiction to research on many Western countries.

In some cases, higher socio-economic status in China is associated with similar or worse health outcomes.

Rui Huang, a graduate student at the University at Buffalo, and Dr Hanna Grol-Prokopczyk, an associate professor of sociology, used data from the 2015 China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study, a representative sample of 14,000 participants aged 45 and over living in China.

The researchers found that education and wealth were associated with a lower risk of arthritis, but they found no significant socio-economic disparities in rates of diabetes or hypertension. Moreover, they found greater prevalence of high cholesterol, obesity, smoking and heavy drinking among the highly educated and wealthy in China.

"What stands out in this research is that risky behaviours are damaging population health in China even among people at the top of the social hierarchy, a finding we don't see in studies in the West, where higher socio-economic status leads to better health outcomes," said Huang.

"There are specific cultural meanings embedded in high-risk behaviours like smoking and alcohol consumption in China, particularly among middle-aged and older adults.

"Cigarettes and alcoholic beverages are at the centre of social courtesy in Chinese society, and gifting luxurious cigarettes and liquor is a prevailing way to facilitate interpersonal relationships, display social position, build social networks and benefit business affairs.

"These types of behaviours and risk factors are not only socially accepted, but encouraged. This may outweigh the otherwise protective effects of high socio-economic status, which provides resources that can help avoid risks, adopt preventative strategies, minimize disease and promote good health."

Dr Grol-Prokopczyk said: "Even if you're only interested in the US population, it's important to realise that cultural practices can impede as well as improve health."

The findings, published in the journal *SSM-Population Health*, are reported by the University of Buffalo's news service: www.buffalo.edu/news/releases/2022/05/006.html

Medsoc 2022 brings sociologists together for ‘brilliant, lovely, funny and scary’ conference

This year’s hybrid MedSoc conference saw addresses on chronic illness and culture wars, and a host of special events. Network takes a look...

This year’s MedSoc conference, at Lancaster University in September, attracted 269 delegates from 18 countries, including China, India, Ireland, Nigeria, Turkey and the US.

The conference, the 54th held, was notable for being the first to stage hybrid events that allowed delegates joining online and in-person to present their research.

The hybrid events included six streams of papers and a ‘sandpit’, sponsored by the Wellcome Trust, where people could discuss their shared interests across important themes such as gender and disability.

Professor Janice McLaughlin, of Newcastle University, gave the opening plenary, on ‘The politics of the boundaries between chronic illness and disability and the need to situate both in the making and disvaluing of varied embodiments’.

Dr Ruth Pearce, of the University of Glasgow, gave the closing plenary, entitled ‘From birth parents to backlash: doing sociology of health amidst culture wars’.

The plenaries will be available on the Medsoc website soon and full details of the programme and speakers are on the online event archive, https://tinyurl.com/277f9kcd

The MedSoc group ran a well-attended event for early career researchers, which included sessions from guest speakers on publishing, networking, funding and working outside academia.

The programme also included two special events, a panel on ‘Celebrating 10 years of the Cost of Living blog, and looking to the future of medical sociology’ and a symposium, ‘Race to recruit’, which explored initiatives to recruit people from minority ethnic groups into clinical research.

Running a hybrid event involved hiring an external events company, which was achieved at the cost of a large deficit, covered by the group’s surplus. The group will therefore explore alternatives for future years that are financially sustainable.

All 24 of the free places were taken up, and the group were pleased to welcome many new researchers to the conference.

Outside of the conference, the Medsoc Mentoring Network matched people with mentors based on their support needs and their mentor’s expertise. The group will be looking for new mentees and mentors soon, contacting previous MedSoc conference delegates and sending invitations through Twitter at @BSAMedSoc and on the Medsocnews jiscmail, https://tinyurl.com/2mvsvvvd.

Shadreck Mwale and Katie Coveney have stepped down as co-convenors, with Jo Hope and Gareth Thomas now leading the committee. María Jesús Vega-Salas will move from the ECR representative to be a full committee member, with Julia Swallow returning to the committee from maternity leave. Sarah Hoare has left the committee, and Sonali Shah, Victoria Cluley and Amelia Talbot have joined as new committee members. The group thanks Shadreck and Sarah for their work.

The Foundation of the Sociology of Health and Illness book prize was won by

Dr LaTonya Trotter

Siyi Wang

LaTonya Trotter, Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Vanderbilt University.

She wins for her book, *More Than Medicine: Nurse Practitioners and the Problems They Solve for Patients, Health Care Organizations, and the State*, published by Cornell University Press.

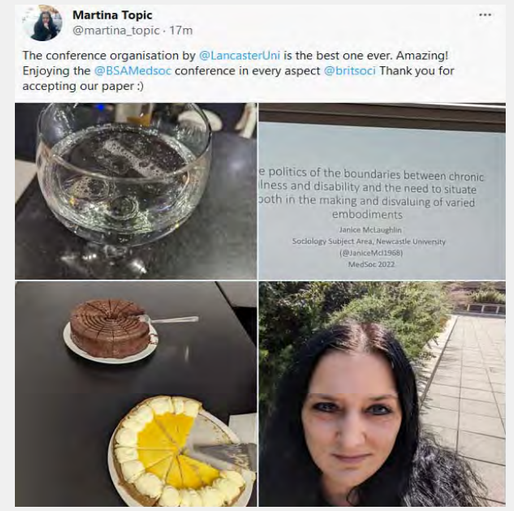
The book chronicles the everyday work of a group of nurse practitioners caring for African-American older adults living with poor health and on limited means.

Dr Trotter describes how they practised an inclusive form of care work that addressed medical, social and organisational problems that often accompany poverty.

The book shows that the patients’ problems are as much a product of lack of investment in social problems as of scarcity of doctors or rising costs.

The Phil Strong book prize was given to Siyi Wang, of the University of Sheffield, who researches the social networks of UK migrant Chinese women online during their perinatal period, looking at how they build peer relationships by using digital technology to promote their postnatal mental health.

The £1,200 prize is given for outstanding postgraduate research and was established in memory of Phil Strong (1945-1995), one of the post-war generation of sociologists who influenced the development of medical sociology in the UK.



Next year’s MedSoc conference will be held from 13-15 September at the University of Sussex.

From information supplied by Dr Jo Hope

• As well as the main MedSoc group, there are eight BSA regional medical sociology groups and four special interest groups: Deconstructing Donations, Environment and Health, Early Careers, and Mental Health.

More details of the group can be found at: www.britsoc.co.uk/groups/medical-sociology-groups/medical-sociology-medsoc-study-group

Four sociologists spoke at a recent event which looked at whether the social sciences must explain the world in order to have value, or if simply describing it is enough

‘If we’re not explaining, then it becomes more difficult to expose lies and so harder for us to speak truth to power’

Sociology needs to offer explanations of the social world and not just descriptions, an online event was told.

An example of this was the need to systematically investigate the link between imperialism and the British economy, rather than simply assuming that exploiting colonies helped the country’s economic growth, Professor Julian Go said.

Speaking at the LSE event ‘Social science is explanation or it is nothing’, Professor Go, of the University of Chicago, said that “sociologists have the resources to systematically, carefully, thoughtfully collect and analyse data to systematically observe and analyse the world.

“[But] I’m not saying that social scientists always provide good explanations – sometimes they fall short.

“Let me give you an example for my own more qualitative oriented area of work, post-colonial sociology. One of the implicit, if not stated, claims of post-colonial sociology is that imperialism had and continues to have an important impact upon colonised societies and upon metropolitan societies.

“One common claim is that colonialism has detrimentally impacted the economic, political and social conditions of former colonies, while conversely enabling the economic growth and wealth of metropolitan societies like Britain.

“According to some, therefore, the goal of post-colonial sociology should be to trace these colonial connections to produce what is sometimes called connected histories or connected sociology.

“The problem is that post-colonial sociology too often leaves these causal claims as assumptions. They assume, for instance, that just because there is a connection with colonialism, that this connection is automatically a cause.

“This leaves the post-colonial project open to critique. The great sociologist Michael Mann, for instance, argues against any notion that England’s economic growth was dependent upon overseas imperialism, by pointing out that only five to 10 per cent of England’s economy was connected to overseas colonialism.

“The post-colonial assumption that connections made a difference for England’s development is thus upended. And in a sense, the entire post- colonial project that rests upon the assumption that connections equal cause is overthrown.

“Now, we can – and I would – dispute Mann’s reasoning here about England’s development, but that’s not the point.

“The point is this: if we assume that connections are a cause rather than thoroughly and systematically investigating causes and causal processes, our analyses will be weak. We need to do more than just recognise and describe connections, which is unfortunately where some post-colonial sociologists end their task.

“We have to explain – it is one thing to say that we need to go beyond methodological nationalism and recognise that England has been connected to India or Jamaica through colonialism or whatever. It’s quite another to show that those connections and relations caused English economic growth or had a real impact on things going on in England. And for the latter, we need to do the careful work of collecting empirical data and enlisting methods of causal inference, such as ruling out alternative hypotheses, process tracing or comparative pattern matching, among many other qualitative methods, to create causal narratives that explain why and how such connections matter.

“This task of explanation, I would argue, is one of the most important tasks of sociology. It may even be *the* task of sociology.”

Professor Go spoke about the book, *The Philadelphia Negro,* written by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1897 and published two years later, as an example of sociological explanation.

“This was a deep examination of Philadelphia’s swelling African-American community. It was lauded as the originator of empirical sociology in the United States. It was Du Bois’ first major scholarly achievement.

“More than a founding influential work of early sociology, *The Philadelphia Negro* also did something equally, if not more important, by the same token. That is, it exposed and dispelled lies. These were lies about causes, about why things are the way they are. The lies were being perpetuated all around Du Bois by the white press, the white public and even white sociologists – they were lines of scientific racism.

“They claimed that African Americans were mired in poverty, illness and deprivation because of their biological character, because they were racially inferior, their biology, blood or stock making them unable to be anything else but lazy, ignorant, incapable of intelligent labour and sometimes criminal.

“He exposed the barriers of discrimination in class that Black Philadelphians faced. He showed how the history of American racism best explains their lowly status. In other words, what Du Bois did was mobilise sociological research and theory to show that the cause of Black Americans’ inferior position in society was not biological but social and historical, thereby offering one of the first empirically backed sociological causal explanations of racial hierarchy.

“And in this way Du Bois dispelled lies and spoke truth to power. And I think that this is what sociology is uniquely positioned to do and must do at all costs. That is, it must provide causal explanations of social outcomes and events and processes so that we can dispel lies and speak truth to power.”

Professor Mike Savage, of the LSE, said that while explanatory work could be “really powerful”, it was not essential for research to be influential.

He gave as an example *Capital in 21st Century,* by the French economist Thomas Piketty. “Many of you will know this thousand-page mammoth book, where he goes into taxation data and unravels the income distribution and to some extent the wealth distribution across several nations, showing the trend over the last few decades for the very wealthy to take a higher share of national income.

“Does he explain it? Not obviously. So one argument, if you take this explanatory perspective, is to say this thousand-page book is a failure because it hasn’t got a theory of what’s going on. On the other hand, it has sold a million and a half copies and has inspired the Occupy Wall Street social movement.

“So just to say, ‘we should put Piketty in the bin because the theory doesn’t stack up’ would be a big loss, it seems to me, in terms of how social science can be influential in the world.”

Another example was *The Spirit Level*, by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, which looks at the correlations between wellbeing and inequality in 22 rich countries.

“They famously discover that more unequal countries score worse around a basket of wellbeing measures – health, lifestyles, political wellbeing and such like.”

But, said Professor Savage, correlation was not causation and the book’s data did not lead to a solid hypothesis for why inequality was so damaging.

“I don’t think they demonstrated that from the data. So again, if we were to just say ‘how does that book stack up as an explanatory work of social science?’ – not very well, I think.

“But how does it stack up as a work which has been very inspiring to many people and has made us think about inequality in really powerful ways? – it’s been very important.

“Explanation in theory is a fantastic goal to have. But if we ask ourselves the question, ‘how do we communicate to wide audiences and get people to listen to us and make our work have traction?’, my contention is it’s the more descriptive vein of work which is doing that in contemporary times, and we would be losing a lot of ground if we said that’s not very good work.”

Professor Noortje Marres, of the University of Warwick, said that reflexivity, in which the act of researching can effect a change in the people being studied, meant that explaining social phenomena was difficult.

“For more than a century, social scientists have developed pretty compelling arguments to highlight what is the problem and what are the limitations of explanation as a way of understanding society.

“Many of these sociological arguments foreground reflexivity – the insight that the relation between society and knowledge about society is a particularly complex one, and the relation between social science and society is best understood as an interactive relation. And I think this rightly causes some problems for explanation.”

Professor Melinda Mills, of the University of Oxford, said that the best form of research to take depended on the subject matter.

“It just really depends on the question – from rich, deep ethnographic work to correlational work, doing machine learning, we put everything together and then we understand things, and that’s why we’re here.”

The event, which was introduced by Professor Monika Krause, can be seen here: https://tinyurl.com/ypa8xzvt

Clockwise from top left: Julian Go, Melinda Mills, Noortje Marres, Mike Savage

> ‘One common claim is that colonialism has detrimentally impacted former colonies – the problem is that post-colonial sociology too often leaves these causal claims as assumptions’

> ‘If we ask ourselves the question, how do we get people to listen to us and make our work have traction, my contention is it’s the more descriptive vein of work which is doing that’

REF and RAE 'have made sociology less diverse'

British sociology has become "startlingly" more homogeneous over the past 40 years because of the research evaluation exercises, while scholars have more than doubled their article outputs, a new book finds

The research evaluation exercises of the past 35 years have made the social sciences in British universities "startlingly" more homogeneous, a new book has claimed.

Sociology today is as homogeneous as economics was in the 1980s, the book says, in the sense that researchers in one department tend to tackle the same range of topics as those in other departments.

In *The Quantified Scholar: How Research Evaluations Transformed the British Social Sciences*, Juan Pablo Pardo-Guerra (pictured), a sociologist at the University of California, San Diego, takes a quantitative look at the how sociology, economics, anthropology and politics have changed over time under the influence of the various RAEs and REFs.

With the help of research assistants, he used the Social Science Citation Index and Web of Science to look at the abstracts of 13,000 sociology papers and data on the career progressions of 3,600 sociologists.

By noting the topics outlined in the abstracts, he could see how similar the subjects tackled by sociologists within their departments were, and how similar the topics tackled overall in departments when compared to each other. By studying this over time, he could note trends. *See the method section on page 23 for more detail*

He concluded that, over time, departments tended to display an increasingly similar range of research topics when compared to each other. Departments that had specialised in one research area, such as work and employment, for example, gradually moved away from this to tackle a wider range of subject areas similar to those found in other sociology departments. While this meant that a varied set of topics was being tackled widely within departments, it was the same range from one department to another.

Thus, research evaluation exercises created a paradoxical effect – individual departments became more diversified in their research profile, but in a similar way, leading to a lack of overall diversity in British sociology as departments stopped specialising in one area, which they could tackle in-depth.

This happened because researchers in departments which specialised in their research areas were more likely to leave for those that did not. A hypothetical scholar who closely mirrored all of her or his colleagues' topics, for example, would be eight times more likely than a colleague who did not do this to change institutions between research evaluation periods.

Scholars who were one standard deviation more similar, in the sense of tackling the same research themes as their colleagues, were 12 to 40 per cent more likely to change jobs than their average peers.

As Dr Pardo-Guerra says in his book, "Scholars with similar interests will not tend to cluster in specialist departments over extended periods but will sort themselves, through labor markets, more evenly across the institutional field.

"As a result, institutions will tend to converge on a 'diversified portfolio', to borrow a financial term, or generalist departments containing specialist elements from across the academic market. This is a rather unexpected finding.

"Research evaluations do not explicitly require departments to pursue strategies of disciplinary breadth, yet this seems to be how scholars are sorted across the institutional space."

This sorting might well be because departments themselves felt under pressure not to specialise, he said. This was because of the fear of getting low rankings in RAEs or REFs if scholars in the same department competed to get papers in journals or get funding grants, with some losing out.

"A specialization strategy would be counterproductive, if not risky. Populating a department with many exceptional scholars working on similar topics might be difficult, particularly in relatively small subfields, and likely counterproductive as colleagues would compete for similar publication venues, awards, and other sources of prestige. It is also risky in the long term: sub-fields fall out of fashion, but employment contracts are long-lasting arrangements.

"Putting all the epistemic eggs in one basket could lead institutions to make costly over-investments and fall behind in disciplinary excellence should that subfield go dormant. So, the relatively low similarities we see among institutional colleagues suggests that there is a certain pressure on the British social sciences to conform to a diversified or broad department type."

Examples of departments that were specialised before research evaluation exercises began, and which had been subsequently lost, were "some institutions, such as Birmingham, [which] originally emphasized industrial sociology and social work, while others – such as Leicester, which was home to Ilya Neustadt and Norbert Elias – had a distinct international, theoretical orientation.

"Individual scholars' inclinations created niches within institutions where research then flourished. The impressive strength of Birmingham's contributions to culture studies, for instance, resulted as much from the efforts and prowess of scholars such as Stuart Hall as from the serendipitous founding of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964 under Richard Hoggart.

"By the late 1980s, the interconnected archipelago of British sociology possessed clearly identifiable ecologies of specialization. The University Grants Committee's 1989 Report of the Review Committee on Sociology, for example, noted five self-declared areas of scholarly emphasis by sociology departments that reflected both long-standing histories of institutional build-up and path dependence and the emergence of new subfields of study (most notably, so-called science and technology studies).

"These specializations, however, clashed with the research assessments' pressures to conform 'with the increasingly hierarchical organization of departments' within their institutional hierarchies. Rather than being associated with niches for exploration or spaces for the refinement of intellectual subfields, the thematic concentrations that defined the discipline's archipelago became sources of critique and potential depreciation when placed before sub panels of 'peers'."

Using a method for calculating how different departments were from one another, he estimated that the difference between departments had fallen by a third from 1990-2015 for sociology, with similar falls for anthropology, politics and economics, although sociology departments were still less similar to the other disciplines in 2015.

Those departments that wanted to move away from specialising called it right, his analysis shows.

"We see a notable, positive relation between the degree of a department's typicality (that is, how well work by its affiliated scholars represented the overall literature in the discipline) and its standardized ratings [in the research evaluations].

"The assessment exercises operate as yardsticks through which disciplinary norms are rewarded and impressed upon the field. Instead of showing how innovation, originality, influence, and robustness are teased out of a multiplicity of complex outputs, our analysis of typicality provides evidence that the evaluations affect disciplines by rewarding departments that decline to stray far from their discipline's established traditions, both financially and with higher epistemic credentials.

> "Our analysis provides evidence that the evaluations affect disciplines by rewarding departments that decline to stray far from their discipline's established traditions"

"The results of this [analysis] are startling. Over the years in which the research evaluations have been imposed, the British social sciences have become more homogeneous. The process is noisy, yet the fact remains: the average department today is far less specialized than it was a few decades ago. Comparisons provide a sense of the scope of these changes.

"Compare, for example, economics (a discipline often thought of as lacking in pluralism and epistemic diversity) and sociology (renowned for its fragmented, almost fractal organization).

"In our analysis, sociology in Britain today has the same degree of structural homogeneity as economics did in the mid-1980s.

"Put differently, when it comes to organizational forms, sociology today is not very different from what economics was a generation ago.

"Some of this convergence has to do with staff expansions: as departments grew in size and accommodated new scholars, their potential topical coverage expanded, ostensibly leading to more similar, "closer" institutions.

"Yet because our distance measure considers forty possible topics, staff expansion is unlikely to wholly explain the convergence. Because proximity is only attained when departments invest in the same topics, our data provide strong evidence of thematic convergence and overlap in the British social sciences."

Dr Pardo-Guerra said that while researchers may not always have moved universities simply because they consciously wanted to work in a less specialised department, the pressure of being in an institution where they do well in research evaluations may have been a strong factor.

"Scholars faced with the possibility of moving institutions do so voluntarily, with complex and often personal motivations, and not always to gain a promotion in pay or prestige.

"Few academics would uproot just because someone else in their institution is doing similar work. But as slight nudges and modest pressures that haphazardly shape the course of our institutional lives, the opportunity structures created by research evaluations – the ways these standardizing exercises count and discount, include and exclude, compare and contrast – shape the distribution of knowledge in the long run, slowly contributing to the sorting of the bodies and minds that labor in scholarly work."

Feature continued overleaf

More papers written, more job changes for women

Feature continues ▸

As well as his conclusions on research diversity, Dr Pardo-Guerra also analysed productivity and job turnover:

Dr Pardo-Guerra's analysis also found that researchers have published more articles since the introduction of research evaluation exercises in 1986.

"This relatively simple data set provides additional insights about large-scale transformations in academic practices. The most important, perhaps, refers to a notable change in the productivity of British social scientists (or at least in the rate of publication of articles contained in the SSCI): from an average of fewer than two peer-reviewed articles published by each scholar in the earliest evaluation period, productivity rose to about five peer-reviewed publications per scholar in the most recent period of assessment.

"This growth was gendered (women publish an average of 4.6 peer-reviewed articles, in comparison to men, who publish an estimated 5.8), and it is associated with an increase in the number of multi-authored articles. Publications are patterned across disciplines: economics and political studies have the highest publication rates, followed closely by sociology, but there is a steep drop-off when it comes to anthropology.

"The evidence from this data set, however, is strongly suggestive of transformations in the incentive structures and practices of British social scientists."

> ‘From an average of fewer than two peer-reviewed articles published by each scholar in the earliest evaluation period, productivity rose to about five’

However, he said, "It is striking that the data confirm several unequal structural features of scholarly work. For one, it supports long-standing evidence of gender gaps within and between academic fields.

"Not only are there publication gaps between genders, but the data also reveal (controlling for both number of publications and journal prestige), that women are cited 20 per cent less often than are their male counterparts. If women are, on average, published less often than men and cited with lower frequencies, they are doubly disadvantaged in seeking jobs, promotions, and higher pay."

His analysis also showed "a steep decline in British social scientists' annual rate of job changes, from close to 13 per cent in the early 1990s to four per cent in recent years."

"More established scholars tend to change jobs less often than early-career scholars; women change jobs more but gain less from each transition in terms of earnings and rank (in fact, women's employment changes are more frequently associated with exits from academic employment); and scholars in well-resourced, elite institutions – the most prestigious ones – experience better mobility outcomes than their peers working at lower-prestige universities.

"Gender differences in mobility rates are conclusive in our data, too: women scholars are about 1.28 times more likely to change jobs than are men, a trend that is patterned by discipline so that, at the extremes, women sociologists are 41 per cent more likely to change jobs than are men. In politics and international relations women tend to move within the same rank (that is, their mobility is less likely to be associated with promotions), and men tend to move and experience promotions.

"Women experience higher rates of mobility with comparably worse outcomes. Highly visible scholars (who tend to be men) are more able to transform their visibility into upward mobility.

"We counted their years of activity in the field (the time elapsed since the first recorded publication in our data set) to approximate a "professional age" and found that every additional year of activity reduced the chance of mobility by about four per cent.

"Over the typical career, this means that about 24 per cent of scholars will remain with the same institution where they began their professional lives."

Dr Pardo-Guerra related the effect of evaluation on the Sociology Department at the LSE:

‘At the time [2014], I was a lecturer in the Department of Sociology of the London School of Economics and Political Science. Although central to the structures of prestige and disciplinary development of the field in Britain (LSE's Department of Sociology was the country's first), sociology at LSE often came up unexpectedly short in the research assessment rankings, particularly when compared with other, consistently top-tier units in the school, notably, economics and anthropology.

Having survived a historically poor result in the 2008 RAE – LSE sociology was the lowest-ranked unit across the entire school – we were prepared to approach the 2014 REF in the most serious, professional, and proactive way possible.

Being at an elite institution saves a department from managerial interventions if – and only if – that department happens to be at the top of the pack within the university. Relative precarity with respect to other units could counterbalance external visibility, leading to more aggressive interventions by higher management. This was certainly our experience at LSE: despite our institution's visibility within the higher education sector, our past under-performance in the RAE implied more scrutiny, intervention, and oversight from the administration.

Like too many stories of auditing run amok, mine started with a seemingly harmless email from a management consultant in late 2011. The rules of the next assessment had been announced scarcely two months prior when all of the research-active staff at the LSE were invited to complete a short survey about the REF 2014.

What did we understand by impact? Did we think research management structures were effective? Did we know how the REF worked? And, more ominously, did we understand our role and responsibilities with respect to REF?

LSE was investing substantive organizational and financial efforts toward the REF, and the ultimate outcome for each department was explicitly the responsibility of its many scholars. The survey was far from the only expansion of the campus's organizational structures aimed at the REF 2014. Two years ahead of the census date (set for November 2013), LSE's senior administrators created a dedicated, school-wide REF Strategy Committee to coordinate the eventual submission to the panels.

Each department created internal REF committees that, in collaboration with their own long-standing research committees, would collate, analyze, and give shape to their scholars' multiple submissions.

Department meetings and away days dedicated increasing amounts of time and energy to discussions of 'REF strategies' – what they meant and how they would work. Research officers were hired to email staff, collect scholarly outputs, document evidence of impact, and support the departmental REF coordinators. In hallways, meeting rooms, staff assemblies, pubs, and coffee shops, intense discussions about the collective approach to the impending evaluations unfolded with palpable anxiety. The laborers, we research-active staff, understood that we had limited agency in terms of our 'roles and responsibilities'.

The strategy was simple: since only three- and four-star research counted toward quality-related funding, LSE decided to 'aim for an average quality profile within the 3* band across all units of assessment (internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigor)'.

Those whose work fell short of this standard would be left out of the school's submission – and that meant mobilizing a self-policing apparatus full of hand-wringing comparison and paranoia. The problem with this strategy (bolded and underlined in the original memorandum) was that it required departments to internally estimate the quality of their staff's potential submissions.

Over the following eighteen months, the research officer collected our work. As both the producers of this knowledge and employees of the institution, we staff members had only partial access to the process, though we were given the opportunity to see external assessors' grades and comments regarding our outputs.

At no point, however, did we partake in discussions about which scholars and which works would be submitted to the REF. Those strategies were the purview of the higher-ups. This process of grading and evaluating colleagues' work would seem a familiar one, given its closeness to the accepted practice of peer review.

Soon, however, it became an object of contention. The internal evaluation forms and their outcomes were not just about REF; increasingly, they became instruments of personnel management, a point that the school's upper administration was making explicit. In the future, the LSE was far less likely to decouple the outcomes of these internal, assessment oriented mock exercises from very real discussions about staff retention, review, promotion, and reward.

We were to understand the discretionary choices about inclusion as terrifying indicators of underperformance and, ultimately, dismissal. Later, in my interviews, I would learn that these types of awkward conversations at LSE were proliferating across Britain's institutions of higher education. As the 'mock' exercises got underway, scholars began to feel nudges, if not shoves, toward a very specific type of productivity – or toward the door.

All of this translates into real money. At the London School of Economics, for example, our submission to the 2014 REF resulted in an allocation of £314,000 per year. Crunching the numbers, this implies that each four-star publication submitted by my colleagues was associated with about £8,000 of funding per year, three-star publications brought in £2,000, and otherwise classified research brought no monetary gain.’

• LSE sociology was ranked eighth in the 2014 REF, and seventh in the 2021 REF.

Research methods used in the book:

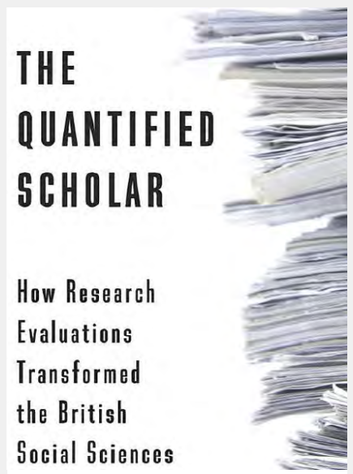
With the help of research assistants, Dr Pardo-Guerra compiled a partial census of the British social sciences that detailed the movement of academics across institutions between the late 1980s and 2018. In almost all cases, a change of job resulted in the same or an improved job ranking, or status of institution.

He used the Social Science Citation Index and its embedding Web of Science, which contains details of nearly 150,000 articles in more than 3,000 academic, peer-reviewed journals across more than 50 disciplines since 1988.

Each entry contains the corresponding address for at least one of its authors. Using this field, he could match authors, addresses and institutions, building a relatively comprehensive data set of where scholars were employed across evaluations.

With this he reconstructed the careers of 2,208 anthropologists, 6,384 economists, 4,271 political scientists and 3,668 sociologists over nearly four decades.

The SSCI data from the mid-1990s onwards also provided an abstract or short summary of the paper, which allowed his research team to see what authors in individual institutions and disciplines were writing about, who they were citing, and how these patterns changed over time, and also to quantify the keywords used.

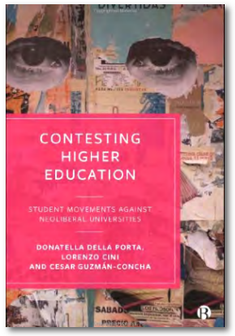


They were able to see how close colleagues in each department were to one another in their research topics, and how close each department was to other departments, over time.

They were also able to see which scholars were entered by their departments into the RAEs and REFs up to the one in 2014 (it was not until the 2021 REF that all research scholars were assessed) and how highly the departments were rated in these exercises.

In addition to these, the statistical model contains most of the variables that are commonly used in other studies of academic careers. These include: the length of a scholar's career; their productivity (measured cumulatively and by publications per evaluation period); their visibility (proxied by cumulative and periodic citations); and the prestige of their publication venues (approximated by journal impact factors).

• The Quantified Scholar: How Research Evaluations Transformed the British Social Sciences (Columbia University Press, November 2022)



Contesting Higher Education

Donatella della Porta, Lorenzo Cini and César Guzmán-Concha

Bristol University Press
2020
230 pages
£79.99 pbk
ISBN: 9781529208627

Focusing on higher education, this book provides an informative comparative study on key episodes of student protests against neo-liberal policies in contemporary universities in the UK, Canada, Chile and Italy. Examining both the origins and the outcomes of higher education reforms, Della Porta, Cini and Guzman-Concha set the waves of student demonstrations in the wider contexts of student movements and political activism.

The waves of unrest being investigated in the book cover different HE systems, from those where the role of the state remains prominent (Italy, Quebec), to others in which the market has acquired greater relevance in recent decades (England, Chile). The authors suggest that in order to explain the evolutions and effects of social movement campaigns, one has to consider the relations between the state and the market in the policy field of higher education, and how these relations shape the processes that either promote or hinder relevant alliances and oppositions in the policy field.

At the beginning it is acknowledged that several reforms, started in the 2000s, have introduced market mechanisms in the higher education sector, including policies of tuition fees and competition between universities. Triggered by the announcement and implementation of such reforms, a global wave of student protests has arisen since 2008 to oppose them. To quote the authors, "in the last few decades, neoliberal policies have brought about a major shift in the paradigm that informed education policies during the so-called embedded liberalism period …" Drawing on the assumption that the private sector approach is superior to the public sector's, the new HE paradigm promoted the "discipline of the market place, the power of the consumer and the engine of the competition as defining principles for the sector" (p. 9-10).

One of the most insightful cases being investigated in the book is that of Italy – a country that has historically exhibited a strong tradition of student activism, displayed both in the university and in the more general mobilisations throughout the 1960s and 1970s (including youth and urban movements, peace movements, etc.). More recently, a number of protests occurred in Italy in 2008 and 2010. In both campaigns, it is argued, the student activists and their organisations deployed a very diversified array of tactics, ranging from the most conventional to the most disruptive, to halt the process of marketisation of Italian HE.

The Italian students undertook two protest campaigns against two national laws: Law 133/2008, introducing significant cuts to the public system of funding for HE; and Law 240/2010, aiming at the restructuring of the university governance towards a managerial pattern. Student-protesters not only contested the extant system and the reforms, but they have also been able to "put forward radical and alternative conceptions and practices of HE to show that a more equal and democratic model of HE was possible, even in times of economic and political crisis" (p. 61). According to the authors, they were particularly successful in putting values of democracy and self-government at the core of alternative conceptions of HE.

In summary, while focusing on recent student movements around the globe, the book fills a number of gaps in social movement studies. In the above-mentioned case of Italy, it showed the complexity of social relations which was at the basis of student protests between 2008 and 2011 aimed at stopping the processes of dismantling of public HE and of manager-ialisation of university governance. The authors embed these movements within a broader concept of student politics, looking at movements but also non-movement dynamics, especially within student unions and associations. The content of the book is therefore appealing to anyone with a thorough interest in social and political studies focusing on universities and developments in higher education systems across the world.

■ **Mitja Stefancic**
Independent researcher

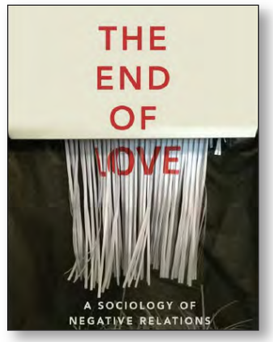
Bookends

Reviews of recent books in social science and sociology

The End of Love:
A Sociology of Negative Relations

Eva Illouz

Polity Press
2021
316 pages
£17 pbk
ISBN: 9781509550258



For Eva Illouz, uncertainty is the predominant feature of contemporary love, sex and romance. In *The End of Love,* the Moroccan-born French sociologist examines how individuals choose to exit or not enter into a heterosexual romantic relationship – in short, how one chooses to 'unlove'. Drawing on interviews, novels, letters, blog entries, films, TV shows and other textual material, the author shows that the social malaise some of us encounter in our romantic and sexual lives cannot be explained only by the strength or weakness of our psyche.

Instead, as in her previous books, Illouz focuses on the impact of capitalism on how and why we love and have sex, suggesting that "a sociological critique of sexuality and emotions is crucial to a critique of capitalism itself" (p.5). Illouz develops a sociology of relations where various (heterosexual) actors compete against each other in what she calls 'situationship', where sexual(ised) actors describe sex that is "not serious" – casual sex, hookups, friends-with-benefits, the 'zipless fuck', etc. (chapter three), or, a more institutionalised form of non-relationship, divorce (chapter six).

This variety in sexual and romantic settings and practices is explained by how capitalism has been transforming sexuality and love since the 19th century through various discourses, practices and technologies. Drawing on Bourdieu, Debord, Foucault, Giddens, Goffman and feminist thinkers such as Bernstein, McRobbie, Pateman, and others, Illouz argues that the sexualisation of the body by a consumer and capitalist culture is the direct result of a male-dominated and patriarchal "media-market-technology nexus" (p.103). Because women and men occupy different positions in the sexual field, this new socioeconomic structure affects them differently.

Although women made modest progress in the political and economic realms, they have ended up being devalued in the sexual market (p.117), and while most (white) Western women have gained better control of their body and sexuality through contraceptive pills and various institutional changes, this freedom-through-sexuality was hijacked by capitalism to commodify women's bodies and sexuality in the sexual market.

By lowering the legal, economic and social barriers to heterosexual women's bodies for sexual purposes, this increases the abundance of sexual partners, legitimising men's control of women.

Illouz's sole focus on heterosexual women and men from Western countries such as the US, Israel, France, Germany and England has led some to rightly point out that the book overlooks romantic and sexual relationships that are not from dominant groups and Global North countries.

Illouz does not reject the fact that some of us are happily in love with one, two or more partners, or alone. The aim of the book is therefore not to call for a return to old ways to love, or to say that pre-modern European lovers were better at it, but to free love from its capitalist chains (p.13).

In my view, this line of defence falls short in at least one substantial aspect: it runs against current trends made in sociology that try to 'provincialise Europe' and distance the discipline from able-bodied heteronormativity by including perspectives from marginalised groups. This investigation on contemporary love needs to explore if these findings apply outside of the white Western/Eurocentric heterosexual matrix.

The End of Love ultimately provides us with a rich, yet partial, sociological explanation of how and why men and women in Western and capitalist countries still, to borrow Bourdieu's sociology, invest in the game of love.

■ **Rémy-Paulin Twahirwa**
PhD candidate, LSE

Imagining Society: the Case for Sociology

Daniel Nehring and Dylan Kerrigan

Bristol University Press
2020
256 pages
£21.99 pbk
ISBN: 9781529204902

Many would agree that our world has changed remarkably in the past few years. We have been living through a global pandemic that has already taken so many lives worldwide. We witnessed the killing of George Floyd and its aftermath across cultures. We continue to hear about new wars and threats to humankind. We saw technology becoming pervasive in our daily lives, making it difficult to even think about people without it. These and many other changes compel us to rethink the role of sociology, as a discipline and practice, in understanding the everydayness of individuals and the public more broadly. This book explores this question by focusing on what sociology is and what it is for.

The first four chapters in the book respond to the question 'what is sociology?' in different ways. The first chapter, for example, highlights specific ways in which sociology can be understood – as a field of knowledge, an outlook, or even a way of working. Many of these points are further illustrated in a discussion on sociological imagination in chapter two. Drawing on C. Wright Mills's work, this chapter discusses what characterises sociological imagination – or how to think like a sociologist.

Unlike many sociological books, the authors of *Imagining Society* acknowledge the impact of institutional arrangements in shaping the idea and the practices of sociological imagination. Following up on this, the third chapter delves into the core topic of concern for all sociologists, the social. In this chapter, the authors adeptly outline core aspects of sociological thinking developed over time in the discipline of sociology.

In comparison, chapter four shows the trajectory of sociology as a discipline in the western world, culminating this discussion in acknowledging the changing nature of the social itself and the power underlying sociological imagination to accommodate the ever-evolving social practices. The core theme that runs through all of these chapters is the changing nature of sociology as a discipline.

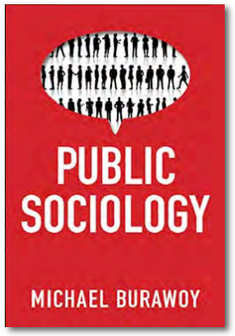
The following four chapters in the book tackle the question 'what is sociology for?' by delving much deeper into imagining society with all its complexity, produced through the changing nature of the society that we live in and the evolving field of sociology as a discipline. Various issues, such as sociology in diverse cultural contexts, the move towards decolonising sociology amidst the shifting nature of structure, agency, power and conflict, and new forms of understanding difference, stratification and social inequalities, have been usefully introduced both independently and in relation to each other.

Chapter nine redirects the focus from the other to the self, offering a legitimate place to identity and emotions in making sense of the politics of self.

The final chapter in the book brings to the fore some of the contemporary issues shaping the present and the future of sociology as a discipline.

Beyond answering these two questions, this book also shows sociology's changing nature and position vis-à-vis society and other fields of inquiry. A great thing about this book is that while the authors offer a strong case for sociology by really illustrating how sociology enables imagining society with, rather than simplifying, all its messiness, they do not shy away from problematising it as a discipline, thus offering a great possibility of reconsidering the (ever-changing) social.

■ **Dr Achala Gupta**
University of Southampton



Public Sociology:
Between Utopia and Anti-utopia

Michael Burawoy

Polity Press
2021
232 pages
£50 hbk, £14.99 pbk
ISBN: 9781509519149 hbk

Bookends

Reviews of recent books in social science and sociology

In his preface, Michael Burawoy describes *Public Sociology* as a critical memoir. This is good to know before embarking on reading it. The book is an unusual mix of personal and professional reflections, combined with the history of the discipline and shot through with his call to action for public sociology. This is not the book to read if you need a textbook or a cutting-edge monograph, yet it has much to offer.

In 2004, Burawoy was President of the American Sociological Association and offered to the association an overview of the characteristics of four types of sociology as he saw them: policy, public, critical and professional.

This book is structured around a core of his descriptions of these types of sociology and reflections of his personal and professional journey through them at different times in his career. In addition, an introduction sets the scene with an elaboration of his views on the founders of the discipline (ensuring W.E.B. Du Bois is included in that canon), and the final part draws upon the work of his friend and colleague, the late Erik Olin Wright, to discuss public sociology in light of how we can contribute to creating 'real utopias' (hence the sub-title of the book).

The central argument of the book is the contention that it has been important for Burawoy (and by extension is therefore important for us in the discipline) to forsake certain stages of development in our sociological consciousness to reach a point which can adequately address the current crises facing our world.

He moves from the naivety of believing that sociological proposals for reform will easily bring about change, to finding out that offering robust critique is not enough either. He moves on to recognise the trap of professionalism on limiting critical thinking and action, to the point of attempting public sociology in order to create "communicative knowledge defined by its relevance to publics" (p.37). He suggests all four types of sociology have their place and are interdependent, but we are encouraged to recognise and resist the structural conditions in our discipline that channel us towards the professional or critical only, over the public.

Tonally, the book is slightly odd, given the number of different aims it is trying to integrate into one narrative: memoir, critical reflection, overview of the history of sociology and the incorporation of 'real utopias'. As a reader, if you choose to accept and appreciate these tonal shifts there is much to enjoy.

The personal reflections are written with engaging storytelling and give an insight into a changing world – both of workplaces and of academia. The professional reflections are fascinating, especially as to how a Marxist ended up as President of the American Sociological Association.

The elements intended to educate and summarise are contextualised and given richness by understanding why Burawoy feels so strongly that he wishes to share them. There is occasional disjunction or repetition that could have been edited out to improve the flow in places. However, overall, this chance to peer at the discipline through the eyes of one of the big names of 20th century sociology does not disappoint.

■ **Dr Helen Fitzhugh**
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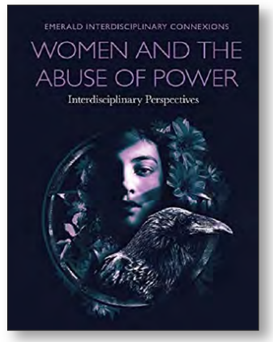
Women and the Abuse of Power

edited by Helen Gavin

Emerald Publishing
2022
201 pages
£36.60 hbk
ISBN: 9781800433359



Women and the Abuse of Power is not about women as victims. On the contrary, this edited volume explores how women can abuse power as much as men, though they are often framed as monstrous and unfeminine when they enact violence in anger, for revenge, or from a position of political authority. In this interdisciplinary collection, the authors offer a range of perspectives, analysing film, theatre and literature and exploring real life violence in personal and political contexts.

Revealing the dark side of women's relationship with power, the book is an uncomfortable read. Following Helen Gavin's introduction, the first section begins with Cynthia Jones' treatment of cultural representations of sinister religious motifs. She analyses the folkloric stories of women who are willingly seduced by the devil to escape a life of powerlessness and patriarchal control. Continuing with the folklore journey, in chapter two Kristin Bone draws us into the history of the fae world of changeling myths, used to excuse abuse and murder. Such attraction to the paranormal remains culturally alive and Bone segues into an analysis of vampiric women in more modern stories where power is accessed and misused by female characters.

The second section reveals the fascination with the dangerous embodied female. In chapter three, Almudena Nido explores the murderous, but alluring, mother of Grendel the dragon in re-tellings of Beowulf. Such representations teach us about the male gaze on female rage and revenge – the sexualised film portrayal of the monstrous mother by Angelina Jolie is an apt example. In more modern literary iterations of the female embodied paranormal, the fictional teen witch trope is a phenomenon examined by Miranda Corcoran in chapter four, drawing out how such narratives are ultimately about female choice, agency, and bodily autonomy in the context of a feminist approach to corporeality. Chapter five, by Gina Gwenffrewi, interrogates the theatre of trans performers who seek to disrupt sexual politics, introducing us to an apocalyptic vision of gender that revolves around the trans body, accompanied by descriptions of transphobic violence, their justification fertilised by the gender critical commentariat.

Moving on to still more disturbing contexts, chapter six by Morag Claire Kennedy introduces the final section, 'Women who kill', with a case study of the abuse and death of a male victim at the hands of a female partner. She examines how we are sometimes blind to these cases because we are used to seeing intimate partner violence as a gendered crime mostly perpetrated against women. And darker still, Therese Porter and Helen Gavin's chapter looks at how women in high authority are directly implicated in state-sanctioned torture and genocide – a timely reminder that women with political power are as capable of its abuse as men, troubling the notion of an essentialised feminine morality. The final chapter, by Laura Button, underlines how women who violently abuse power are framed as doubly deviant because they transgress the boundaries of naturalised femininity. Women who kill their children are perceived as monstrously aberrant, the extreme 'bad mother', judged differently to a filicidal father.

An important contribution to the project of deconstructing gender, *Women and the Abuse of Power* contains the narrative arc of how, when rigid boundaries of femininity are violently overstepped, women are framed not simply as perpetrators but as monsters.

■ **Dr Sharon Jagger**
York St. John University

Refugees in Higher Education: Debate, Discourse and Practice

Jacqueline Stevenson and Sally Baker

Emerald
2018/2020
168 pages
£67.99 hbk, £26.99 pbk
ISBN: 9781787542167 hbk

Refugees in Higher Education: Debate, Discourse and Practice offers a critical exploration of the importance of higher education for individuals from refugee backgrounds. Not only this, it outlines what meaningful participation within HE may look like, as the authors illustrate the presence of a "policy silence" (p.46) surrounding access to HE for refugee students. Crucial context in the first four chapters alludes to the local and global discourse around forced migration, and how the prominence of the alt-right grounds the realities of forced displacement. The complexities between seeking asylum and having received refugee status are also underlined, as this is a fundamental factor when it comes to accessing higher education and the resources arguably required to flourish. These experiences are brought to life by the stories of Aaliyah, Andy and Sadiya, whose individual cases within the UK and Australian context are represented in this book.

Each individual's account makes up a chapter, conveying the "unfamiliar structures" (p.93) refugee students are expected to navigate during their attempt at participation in HE, "the enclave for the elite" (p.35). Aaliyah's story offers insight to the difficulties behind various policies within the application process which may be overlooked by the average applicant, such as confusion over the personal statement writing process and the bureaucratic procedures associated with the service, Student Finance England (SFE). For example, Aaliyah left her home town in Guinea in 2003, aged 17, seeking asylum amidst the sudden death of her parents and siblings. Yet SFE required her to supply her parents' death certificates, which she has never had access to.

Sadiya's story conveys the bureaucratic struggles of needing evidence of qualifications that demonstrate abilities like English language proficiency. She describes the feelings of self-doubt she endured, despite being a journalist in her home country, Iraq, before coming to the UK, being met with continuous feedback on her writing as being "wrong wrong wrong" (p.87). Andy, originally from Afghanistan, a country with one of the world's most under-resourced educational systems (p.75), held special humanitarian refugee status in Australia due to his previous work in the coalition forces. Despite his status in Australia the chapter reckons with Andy's continuous overwhelming concerns for his family's safety and financial hardships, coupled with his own academic workload and need to navigate a completely alien system.

Stevenson and Baker argue that narrative research and the use of narratives within this book (p.111) offer an opening into not just an outline of events but how individuals make sense of such happenings, which is crucial when working with (not on) refugees. In the introduction Jacqueline notes her relationship to the topic, alluding to the various access programmes for refugees she has initiated, including the refugee mentoring scheme at Sheffield Hallam University that she recently set up. Sally highlights her teaching experience in the Australian and UK government-funded migration programmes (p.22) as well as her being the co-chair of the Refugee Education Special interest group.

This book reflects the need to transition away from assumptions typically made by the Western academy (p.45), such as the expectation that certain languages will be spoken or certain previous educational attainments will exist. The authors raise concerns surrounding many of the current HE support interventions which locate the responsibility for failure within HE with the individual and their supposed lack of resilience. However, their text highlights the "social and material exigencies and structural barriers" which must be recognised as key factors affecting the possibilities for refugee students like Aaliyah, Andy and Sajida.

■ **Shivani Daxini**
PhD candidate, Durham University

Transcription of interviews can often be more emotionally challenging than fieldwork

From: 'Almost confessional: managing emotions when research breaks your heart'

Kate Reed, Laura Towers

Sociological Research Online, September 2021

https://tinyurl.com/3kwfutmv

Transcribing and analysing interviews with bereaved people can often be more emotionally challenging for researchers than carrying out the original fieldwork, two sociologists say.

Professor Kate Reed (pictured top) and Dr Laura Towers (below Kate), of the University of Sheffield, discussed the intense effect that their research projects had upon them.

In an article in the BSA's journal, *Sociological Research Online,* they also say that while "articulating and managing emotions in research is undoubtedly hard work, it can also be a productive and life-affirming experience for researchers".

The article is based on the authors' experiences of conducting two sensitive sociological research projects. One, by Professor Reed, looked at parents' and other family members' experiences of the death of a child, including miscarriage, stillbirth, neonatal death and sudden infant death. The other, by Dr Towers, focused on investigating people's experiences of the death of a sibling.

The authors write: "Both Kate and Laura knew their research would be emotionally challenging from the outset. However, they both assumed that face-to-face interviews with bereaved parents and siblings would be the most emotionally intense aspect of the research, something which is reinforced by the wider literature on researcher emotions.

"While the fieldwork was undoubtedly intense, what was often more challenging was the process of transcription and analysis which took place afterwards.

"While researchers often get emotional during interviews and observations, the presence of other factors in the field can provide some distraction. For example, when listening to participants during interviews, the researcher is often simultaneously concerned with making a good impression and acting in a way deemed appropriate for a sensitive researcher.

"However, the process of listening back to participants' experiences through the solitary process of transcription can be an emotionally intense experience.

"Laura kept a diary throughout the research process. She found this process valuable but emotionally draining: 'I feel exhausted. I know I'm supposed to make notes but it's really hard when you feel so emotionally drained and actually all you want to do is sit and cry. I don't want to reflect on my feelings right now, I just want to let them all go and sit here, enjoying the silence'.

"Laura felt that the individual grief of her participants was amplified through the process of listening, thereby increasing the emotional distress felt during transcription, as articulated in the fieldwork diary extract: 'I feel so emotionally drained after hearing that interview played back. There is so much pain and hurt in her voice. It keeps echoing round my head like it's trapped in there'.

"Some of the transcripts in Kate's study, for example, offered detailed and graphic accounts of individual experiences of baby loss. Reading through and annotating the transcripts as part of the analytical process, the researcher could physically feel and sense what the parents had been through. This process, although necessary, was also very sad. This is illustrated in the fieldnotes: 'Sometimes, after spending the day in the data, I find it really hard to pick myself up off the floor and function normally, the data make me so sad'.

"Transcription and data analysis can be just as emotionally challenging as data collection. More attention must be given, therefore, to this issue in discussions on emotional labour in research. Reflexive self-care techniques such as sharing experiences with peers and keeping a diary can both provide useful tools in dealing with researcher emotions.

"Certain caveats, however, must be noted. For example, diary keeping, while therapeutic, can be tiring and the usefulness of sharing experiences is often contingent on the availability of appropriate collaborators and networks."

Presenting papers at academic conferences was often challenging for Professor Reed.

"Baby loss is a common experience and she was mindful that members of the audience may have experienced this form of loss. Presentations using data from this project, therefore, were always prefaced with a trigger warning about content.

"There was one incident, however, where Kate presented a paper at a university some distance from home. The paper focused on exploring the issue of emotional labour in post-mortem work using film clips and images from the project.

"Once the paper had been given, the conference organiser invited questions from the audience, a request that was met with stony silence.

"The diary extract details Kate's feelings: 'I was mortified, there was only stunned silence. I was worried that maybe the audience thought the paper was academically poor, or worse that I had upset people due to the paper's content. As I waited for my taxi to the train station two participants (former nurses) came outside and told me what a great paper it had been. I still worried all the way home on the train and didn't feel better until I started to receive emails a few days later from attendees who had been deeply moved by my paper. That is when I knew the value of what we were doing...'.

"Disseminating the findings [of both projects] to participants turned out, however, to be an extremely rewarding experience for two reasons. First, it felt restorative to give something back to participants; to show them that they had been listened to and something had been created from their time and words. Second, it provided a timely reminder that the research was valuable and meaningful for those who took part, something that other researchers studying bereavement have often sought to stress.

"Knowing that her respondents had gained something from research participation provided Laura with further reassurance that this was the case in her research on sibling bereavement."

Paperclips

In the latest in our feature series, Network carries excerpts from papers about sociology in the BSA's journals

Leading sociologists deliberately signal their credibility to politicians

From: 'Performing trustworthiness: the credibility work of prominent sociologists'

Ben Baumberg Geiger

Sociology, January 2021

https://tinyurl.com/58ysrcse

Leading sociologists signal their credibility to politicians and media through a variety of means, a study by Dr Ben Baumberg Geiger said.

Dr Baumberg Geiger, of the University of Kent, interviewed 15 sociologists, including well-known and influential researchers. All but two were professors, and 12 were involved in REF 2014 impact case studies.

He found that in order to seem credible when summarising their research and ideas for non-academic audiences, the sociologists were often keen to present themselves as non-partisan politically.

They also flagged up the prestige of their position or their institution, ensured they were transparent about how they reached their conclusions, and even turned their qualitative data into quantitative conclusions.

"I find that some sociologists deliberately pursue credibility, a phenomenon largely ignored in previous research," Dr Baumberg Geiger (pictured above) wrote in the journal *Sociology.*

"There was clear evidence that some high-profile sociologists consciously tried to present themselves as 'non-partisan' – that is, they suppressed signalling their personal value positions to avoid being seen as a vested interest.

"This could take various forms, whether avoiding advocacy (e.g. not making direct recommendations in research reports; avoiding round-robin letters to newspapers), not joining a political party or not identifying closely with social movements. It could also be performed within social interactions."

One sociologist told him: "When I was interviewed for [an official role], I made a conscious effort to present myself as quite a 'small c' conservative person, because I knew they probably wouldn't select me if they thought of me as being too radical. So I went in the soberest [outfit] I've got, I presented myself in the most scientifically respectable way possible ... It wasn't about the credibility of my science, it's about who you are and what sort of person people perceive you to be. And you can deliberately create that impression."

Dr Bauman Geiger said: "At times, such credibility work could be consciously insincere, with avowed radicals adopting a neutral's clothing to avoid being dismissed – 'almost pretending you're not an old leftie', as one put it. But for most, conscious displays of non-partisanship were a way of demonstrating independence of thought rather than pure neutrality.

"Nearly every respondent emphasised that [their views] were based on the evidence, often contrasting this with the 'rent-a-quote': 'anyone can gob off and then you go on Newsnight and say something provocative and you're a star, but that's not what I do'.

"Several visible partisans felt that engaging with political opponents in a respectful matter – particularly genuine listening and engagement – was a powerful way of signalling trustworthiness.

"Most tried to manage their emotional tone, particularly anger. Anger was described as 'going off on one', 'ranting' or 'losing it'; 'it would make great telly but it won't get the message across, they'll just think "look at that fool"'.

"Avoiding anger was sometimes felt to be a particular challenge on Twitter, which several respondents had therefore stopped using after potentially credibility-damaging failures to manage their emotional tone.

"The social scientists I spoke to often 'tried to be as fair as possible', to show that 'you will change your mind when the evidence changes' and to 'head off' any damaging criticisms that were likely to be raised; others visibly considered uncertainties and alternative interpretations.

"These were partly presented as good academic practice, but also as deliberate signals of credibility. Hence for one academic who was 'seen as biased' from previous critical work, it was important that they 'bent over the other way' in trying to consider whether their new qualitative research could possibly support the Government's claims."

One told him: "The primary route for gaining trust is to be trustworthy. And so you don't bullshit, you don't fiddle your figures, you don't jump over challenging bits in your argument, you don't overstate your conclusions, and then you make it more likely that people will trust you, cause you earn it."

Dr Baumberg Geiger said: "Credibility could also be assumed based on personal attributes. Foremost among these were markers of academic prestige such as the title 'professor' or being attached to a prestigious university.

"I found clear evidence that credibility work exists: some sociologists do consciously pursue credibility with non-academic audiences.

"Many also pursued 'dispassionate advocacy': they recommended particular courses of action but nevertheless tried to avoid being labelled as a pure advocate. They did this by stressing the connection between evidence and their recommendations, emphasising their non-partisan status, engaging with those with different values, demonstrating their willingness to consider alternative accounts or managing their emotional tone."

Occasionally, seeming partisan could help establish credibility: "Some sociologists deliberately signalled non-partisanship, but other sociologists spoke of situations in which partisanship helped their credibility. This was particularly the case when being drawn into the inner circle of powerful politicians (in all cases here, Labour politicians), who were concerned with 'political credibility' – whether the sociologist was 'on their side' or 'ideologically trustworthy'."

One sociologist told him: "Particularly within the Labour Party, it is 'are they one of us?' syndrome, and at some point what they want from you is to know that you're going to come out with a range of ideas that are within their blanket brackets of the acceptable, or the politically sympathetic."

Anna Bull

Dr Anna Bull, of the University of York, researches class and gender inequalities in classical music education. Her book, *Class, Control, and Classical Music* (2019) was joint winner of the BSA's Philip Abrams Award. Her previous career was as a pianist and cellist in New Zealand and Scotland. She also researches sexual harassment in higher education, and is a co-founder and director of the 1752 Group, which campaigns against sexual harassment in universities

Your first choice is *Class, Self, Culture, by Beverley Skeggs* – why did you choose that?

Bev was one of my PhD supervisors and her influence was hugely formative of my work. Her 2003 book *Class, Self, Culture* is perhaps overlooked in comparison to her *Formations of Class and Gender* but to my mind it's a more complex, detailed account of the shaping of classed forms of selfhood than *Formations*. I'm sure I read chapter eight of *Class, Self, Culture,* on the middle classes at least four times while writing my PhD and book (which was an ethnography examining classed and gendered practices and reproduction among young classical musicians in the south of England). As a deeply middle class person myself, it took me some time to 'see' class in my research sites – but my re-reading of *Class, Self, Culture* uncovered layer after layer of new ways of seeing what was, to me, a deeply familiar world.

Class, Self, Culture is fundamentally about value. Bev argues that the (classed) value of different forms of personhood is both moral and economic. She outlines how this value is produced, and through this, how class is produced. This theorisation was incredibly generative for understanding how classed value is produced through investment in learning classical music. Indeed, bringing together my ethnographic data with Bev's book – and supervisions with her and Les Back, my other supervisor – was an incredible theoretical experience. The ways in which classed value had been institutionalised within classical music institutions became a cornerstone of my argument.

Bev's argument that "class is always connected to systems of moral evaluation" (p.27) could also have been written explicitly about classical music in England, so apt is it. But perhaps it was the theorisation of classed subjectivity that was most generative. Bev argues that the formation of valued forms of selfhood is part of class formation. What better site to explore this than institutionalised education sites where moral value is central – i.e. classical music? Indeed, the most instructive voices among my participants were those from lower middle-class backgrounds, who described – often extremely astutely – the ways in which they had adapted and re-socialised themselves to fit in within classical music spaces. But this was not just about how they behaved and acted – it was also about stepping into new forms of selfhood and marvelling at how valuable they had become simply by moving into this space. And, of course, the gendered embodiment of the middle classes – in particular the authority of male conductors – becomes visible through this analysis.

Perhaps the statement in the book that I pored over most was the following: "investment … must be about a projection into the future of a self/space/body with value. We only make investments in order to accrue value when we can conceive of a future in which that value can have a use" (p. 146). Classical music, in the way that children and young people in my study were learning it, was all about investing in the future self. When I'd produce ethnographic chapters about very disciplined, authoritarian youth orchestra or youth choir rehearsals, Bev found it fascinating and always asked, 'but why do they do it?' The answer was already there in *Class, Self, Culture.*

What made you choose your next book – *Middlemarch*, by George Eliot?

I first read *Middlemarch* when I was about 18. I realise now that it's a very sociological novel, presenting a case study of fractions of the bourgeoisie and upper classes in a provincial town in England during the 1830s. At that age, its appeal for me lay in large part in the main character, Dorothea, an upper class young woman who yearns to do something more ambitious than her gender allows – but falls into all the classed and gendered tropes of wanting to marry someone erudite who will teach her all about the world. (Hint: it turned out to be a bad idea). In a sense, in my book/PhD, I was trying to do a 'provincial sociology' along the lines of *Middlemarch* – paying attention not to the centre but to the periphery or the provincial, which is usually dismissed for its mundanity.

Reading *Middlemarch* alongside *Class, Self, Culture* – which my regular re-readings of *Middlemarch* eventually led to – allowed a critical lens on George Eliot's classed perspective. Skeggs argues that interiority, or 'inner depth', as a classed resource is 'only available to the privileged few and is premised on the exclusion of others' (p. 56). Once you start looking for this specific form of classism in 19th century literature, it's impossible to stop seeing it – in *Middlemarch*, only middle and upper class characters are afforded any degree of inner depth, even the unsympathetic ones, while working class characters don't really exist as people. Eliot isn't as bad as some other 19th century authors (looking at you, Trollope), but this perspective was a helpful critical exercise for a middle class woman who grew up on white middle class literature, as I did. All the same, I'm sure *Middlemarch* fuelled my interest in studying the sociology of the everyday, teaching me to pay close attention to what is happening when it seems like nothing is happening.

Why did you select for your third work, *The Bone People*, by Keri Hulme?

Novels have always been as, if not more, formative of my sociological imagination than sociological texts so I make no apology for choosing two of them here. As a Pakeha (European-heritage) New Zealander, I didn't have many cultural resources at my disposal to help me make sense of growing up in a colonised country, as a descendent of colonisers. Indeed, in my living room growing up we had some antique chairs that had been passed down through the family after being brought over from England by a relative who was in the British Army. These everyday palimpsests of colonialism were ever-present but never discussed. *The Bone People* was a revelation to me in the way it explored the dual identity of being Pakeha and Maori as a rich cultural heritage and set of resources, through the identity of the main character in the book, Kerewin.

As with *Middlemarch*, I've re-read it periodically over the years. I've also recommended it to many friends over the years, with varying results – most memorably when I made my book group read it and had some upset and angry responses, due to its depiction of child abuse and the loving relationship between the abusive father and his child. It's also an imperfect book – the language is experimental and sometimes brilliant, while at other times doesn't quite work – so it taught me that you can take risks in writing. It also teaches ambition in trying to make sense of things that don't make sense to yourself, that you have no language to describe, and that people may be offended or upset that you have written about.

Your fourth choice is *Music, Society, Education* by Christopher Small – why this book?

When I started studying sociology aged 26 I was trying to escape from being a classical musician, having trained and worked as a pianist until that point. I had no intention of writing about music and instead wanted to explore gender, feminism and class inequality – themes that have also dominated my work. My supervisor Georgina Born recommended this book to me, among other formative sociological texts on music, including her own work. Georgie's influence, and Christopher Small's book, helped me to realise that there was interesting sociological work to be done on classical music, and that in fact classical music was a rich site for exploring the development of the subjectivities and institutions of modernity.

Indeed, the responses to my book from musicians and music academics have confirmed that there is a great thirst for sociological approaches in this area due to sociology's capacity to offer complex, multi-dimensional explanations of the world.

Music, Society, Education is unapologetically grand theory à la 1970s, examining how classical music and music education has been shaped by industrial modernity. Some of Small's arguments are pretty preposterous, in an enjoyable way – and in general I'm susceptible to a grand but ridiculous argument – but other parts are spot on. I still remember my shock when reading his discussion of the "rhythmic impoverishment" of classical music, giving Beethoven as an example, so blasphemous was this idea in the context of my own classical music training. In this way Small's work provided some of the tools that helped to make visible to me my own, deep-seated ideological assumptions about music. Small's book was also formative in reflecting my own education and ideological influences back to myself. The further I get into my career, the more convinced I am of the importance of sociological writing that does this work of making sense of our own experience and providing those 'oh my god!' moments that reveal ourselves to ourselves. Small sadly passed away before I could meet him, but I remain grateful to him for many of those moments.

Your last book is *Men's Intrusion, Women's Embodiment*, by Fiona Vera-Gray – what led you to this?

This is a book that I know is going to shape my career, rather than one that already has. Strangely, I met Fiona before either of us were academics, through Rape Crisis, but our academic work has taken us in overlapping directions. My current research involves trying to make sense of how sexual harassment within academia shapes people's lives and work, how gendered power structures enable this to occur, and how institutional responses could – but currently generally don't – ameliorate these impacts. I haven't yet written in any detail on the harms of sexual harassment, but this is something that comes up constantly in my interview data with students and staff who have attempted to report sexual harassment or violence to their universities: the impacts are extremely wide-ranging, and yet trying to make both these experiences and the impacts visible to institutions is very difficult as the systems and policies in place can't account for them.

Fiona's book examines women's experiences of street harassment and theorises how their embodiment – and through this their subjectivity – is shaped through these experiences. She describes the subtle pervasiveness of the ways in which 'men's intrusions' – and the threat of these intrusions, whether or not they actually occur – shapes women's ability to act in the world. In these explanations, she draws on Simone de Beauvoir's phenomenological work, in particular her theorisation of 'situation' as a way of reconciling freedom and structure. As well as being an important contribution to theorising sexual harassment, then, this book also showcases an overlooked but hugely important social theorist. I was educated in the triumvirate of Durkheim, Marx, Weber, and I wonder if my intellectual trajectory would have been different if I had encountered women and/or feminist theorists such as de Beauvoir earlier on. I'm therefore looking forward to using this book to theorise sexual harassment in academia.

And for your luxury?

If I ever did an Oscars-style speech, the first thanks I give would be to coffee. It's the reason I get up every day. But a close second after coffee would be garlic. I spend a lot of time making and thinking about food, and without garlic these thoughts would be very flavourless. Is garlic a luxury, though? I think perhaps it's a necessity.

Dr Bull's choices:

1. ***Class, Self, Culture,* by Beverley Skeggs (2003) Routledge**
2. ***Middlemarch,* by George Eliot (1871) William Blackwood and Sons**
3. ***The Bone People,* by Keri Hulme (1984) Spiral**
4. ***Music, Society, Education,* by Christopher Small (1977) Calder**
5. ***Men's Intrusion, Women's Embodiment* , by Fiona Vera-Gray (2016) Routledge**

Professor Ken Plummer, 1946-2022

Professor Stevi Jackson, of the University of York, writes about Professor Ken Plummer

Ken Plummer, who died on 4 November 2022, was emeritus professor at the University of Essex, where he had taught from 1975 to 2005. He was one of the most distinguished sociologists in the UK. He was truly a pioneer in the sociology of sexuality, the work for which he is perhaps best known, and he remained a leading figure in the field. His expertise, however, was much broader than this. He wrote on narrative analysis, symbolic interactionism, critical humanism and the need for a global sociology.

Sexual Stigma (1975) was one of the first works by a British scholar (and the first British-authored full-length book) to approach sexuality from a distinctively sociological perspective. It was written at a time when many considered sexuality to be beyond the scope of sociology, best left to psychologists, and was important in establishing the sociality of sexuality. Ken went on to play a central role in the development of the field, both theoretically and methodologically, enhancing its credibility and relevance to sociology.

While Ken may be best known for his work on homosexuality/queer sexualities, this was never an exclusive focus. In works such as *Telling Sexual Stories* (1995) and *Cosmopolitan Sexualities* (2015), for example, he paid attention to wider sexual issues including gender inequality and sexual violence. He made a major and lasting contribution to the field as the founding editor of the journal *Sexualities*, the first issue of which was published in 1998. It was established with the aim of becoming the foremost journal addressing the social and cultural character of human sexuality. This aim has certainly been achieved. While the journal is interdisciplinary, it has always foregrounded the social context of sexual life, has been a vital outlet for sociologists of sexuality and has had considerable impact on the development and diversification of sociological research and theorising.

Another major area of Ken's intellectual endeavours was life history research and narrative analysis, where he developed a methodological approach to narrative as socially situated and applicable to many areas of sociological enquiry. Sexuality and narrative were brought together in *Telling Sexual Stories*, demonstrating the importance of social context to the stories that can and cannot be told. He was thus able to locate well known sexual stories such as narratives of 'coming out' and 'rape survival' in their time and place and elucidate the social conditions of their existence; the gay liberation movement provided a narrative of 'coming out' and feminism provided new means of making sense of rape. In both cases individual experiences were made social and political.

Ken's work, from *Telling Sexual Stories* (and *Documents of Life 2* (2001) to *Narrative Power* (2019), demonstrated that the analysis of narrative is crucial to a sociological imagination. Telling stories is, after all, a pervasive feature of everyday interaction and social life; through stories, personal experiences and world events are made meaningful. Moreover, how such meanings are woven into stories can have social and political effects. Ken was always alert to the ethical and political consequences of both individual and collective narratives, as well as to the contexts in which stories can and cannot be told, and who tells them. There are, as he noted in *Narrative Power*, 'narrative voids', subjects about which stories are not told or not heard. These include, most obviously, those from the perspective of the poor, powerless and dispossessed, but also stories of the powerful that are rarely recounted in the public realm. In the latter case the lack of public narratives protects the privileged from scrutiny.

Given that storytelling makes us human, Ken saw narrative sociology as necessarily a humanist sociology; the subtitle of *Documents of Life 2* is 'an invitation to critical humanism'. Telling stories is part of reflexive selfhood, how we make sense of ourselves and our world. There are also collective stories of nations and communities with which we can identify or from which we can distance ourselves. "We write histories of who we are, who others are, what we value, how we change, how we connect – all the time asking just what our earth, our universe, our humanity means." (Plummer 2021: p.106). Reclaiming and arguing for a radical version of humanism was, for Ken, an abiding concern that was carried though to his later works – *Cosmopolitan Sexualities* (2015), *Narrative Power* (2019)and *Critical Humanism* (2021). He was well aware of the many critiques of humanism: that it has been damned as white, male and western, essentialist and universalising; that in many of its forms it has been divisive, exploitative or oppressive in defining who counts as fully human; that human centredness is destroying the planet. Ken recognised all these problems but argued for a form of humanism than goes beyond them, learning from them and moving on. He put forward a vision of humanity that does not essentialise the human, that avoids universalising the white, western, male, heterosexual, able-bodied subject as the standard of being fully human. His humanism is polyversal rather than universal, appreciates diversity, seeks connection across differences and is politically engaged. In keeping with this stance, and especially in his later work, Ken emphasised the need for a truly global, transnational sociology while acknowledging the difficulty, for all of us, of thinking beyond our own cultural location and avoiding the perils of imposing our own preconceptions on others

> 'While Ken may be best known for his work on homosexuality /queer sexualities, this was never an exclusive focus – his expertise was much broader'

Ken was committed to teaching, particularly introductory sociology, as well as to research, and wrote or co-authored a number of textbooks, such as *Sociology: The Basics* and *Sociology: a Global Introduction*, which have run to several editions. He also played an active role in the sociology department at Essex, serving terms as head of department and graduate chair, as well as supervising numerous doctoral students. He edited a retrospective on the department, *Imaginations: Fifty Years of Essex Sociology*, which does more than celebrate the department's achievements by offering insights into the history of British sociology, its diversity and creativity.

Throughout his career Ken was amazingly prolific, writing, co-authoring and editing over 20 volumes and continuing to write after retirement, with two major new books published in the last few years – *Narrative Power* and *Critical Humanism*. These works address major issues facing the world and sociological enquiry today and also evince the truly impressive breadth and depth of his knowledge and scholarship and his expanding and expansive field of vision. Ken has never, however, only focused on his own work. He is renowned for his generosity to other scholars, whether through support for those in early stages of their careers or his careful reading of, and constructive commentary on, the work of peers. He has contributed a huge amount to sociology and to the work of his fellow sociologists.

Ken has left a lasting legacy to sociology though his writing, the journal he founded and the many scholars he has influenced. As a fellow sociologist of sexuality and appreciator of symbolic interactionism, I have many reasons to be grateful for the inspiration he has provided. He will be remembered with respect by all those familiar with his work and with affection by those privileged to know him personally.

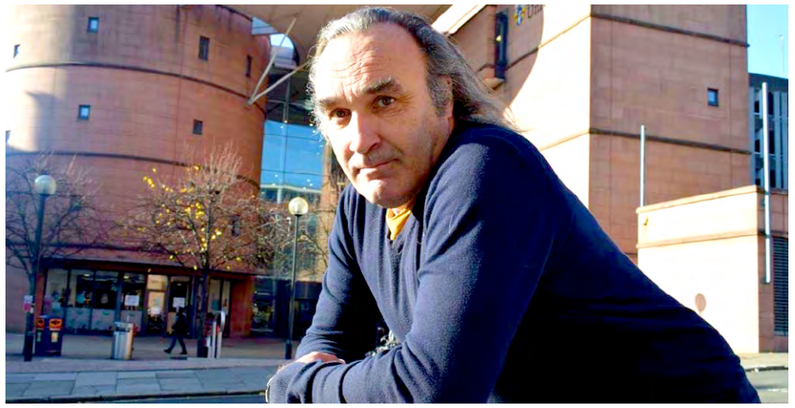
• Professor Pam Cox, Head of the Department of Sociology at Essex, writes: "I gave the first paper of my career at a BSA conference as a PhD student (1994, Preston!). One of the other sessions I attended that day was led by Ken on his ideas for what became *Telling Sexual Stories*. I'd never heard of him – coming from History – but I've never forgotten that electric presentation. A decade later, I had the privilege of co-teaching and co-writing with him at Essex. Amazing man."

A page of tributes has been set up at: https://tinyurl.com/2p8er559

> 'He is renowned for his generosity to other scholars, whether through support for early careers researchers or constructive commentary on the work of peers'

Andy Samuel, 1963-2022

Professor Alexander Law writes about his friend and colleague, Andrew Samuel



It was a great shock to all of us in the Division of Sociology at Abertay University when we learned of the tragic death of the environmental sociologist Dr Andy Samuel, a much valued and popular academic among staff and students alike. Andy was a weel-kent face on campus and made a significant but often unheralded contribution as trade union branch president, supporting colleagues experiencing difficult situations like redundancy, bullying and discrimination. He played a major public role in helping to preserve the independence of the university when in 2011 he galvanised opposition to the interference of the Scottish Minister of Education in the institutional autonomy of the university as part of the Scottish government's drive for cost-saving mergers across tertiary education.

Andy joined Abertay in 1997 when the Sociology Department was in its infancy and helped shape its subsequent development. Not long after he arrived he organised a conference at Abertay on 'Scotland's boundaries and identities in the new millennium', where Andy brought together a gathering of leading sociologists like David McCrone with younger academics who were beginning to establish Scotland as a legitimate unit for sociological analysis and not just a regional variation of what was viewed as the vastly more important metropolitan centres. Andy followed this up by co-organising a further conference later the same year with St Andrews University on island societies.

In his own research Andy developed a critical sociology of landowner power that drew on Bourdieu's historical and relational approach to symbolic capital, the sociology of scientific knowledge, and the sociology of nationalism. Andy understood the reproduction of the symbolic power of the landowner class as a remnant of quasi-feudal social relations in Scotland where landowners assume their paternal mantle as custodians of the countryside through the symbolic appropriation of 'nature' on behalf of local historical traditions regardless of how rural communities define their own history. His approach to the doxa of landowner power in Scotland was outlined in an important paper that he published in *Sociology* (2000). This built on the research that he had conducted for his 1996 doctoral dissertation, 'Science as practice: conserving Scotland's natural heritage', awarded by the University of Lancaster.

A commitment to land struggles on the isles of Rum and Eigg further informed Andy's critical environmental sociology. Deeply passionate about Scottish culture and landscape, Andy enjoyed nothing better than organising student trips to sites of cultural and natural interest, often ending up in convivial evenings in assorted pubs and bothies across the country. Andy was an outdoors sociologist who enthused his students with his passion for environmental sociology, most recently through his interdisciplinary teaching on the modules, 'Sustainable development in Scotland, environmental sustainability' and 'Citizenship and the state, environment and crime'. He was a skilled sailor who often navigated the inner Hebrides, but could also be a somewhat distracted car driver, as many students testify from their experience of being driven by Andy around Scotland on field trips, in the process being force-fed Andy's CDs of Scottish folk music on endless repeat.

Andy's academic citizenship activities included convening the BSA Scottish study group for a number of years (1998-2003). He was appointed Director and Chair of the Centre for Human Ecology, at that time attached to Edinburgh University, where Andy was inspired by the spiritual environmentalism of its Teaching Director, Alastair McIntosh, author of *Soil and Soul: People versus Corporate Power* (2001). More recently he was elected as a member of the Steering Group of Learning for Sustainability Scotland, Scotland's United Nations Regional Centre of Expertise, to promote sustainable development education, outdoor learning, global citizenship and social welfare.

Andy hailed from the working class coal-mining communities of the Lothians and made his way as a mature student at Newbattle Abbey College, and Edinburgh and Lancaster universities. Andy made a big contribution to the life of Abertay as a trade unionist and academic citizen. He served as President of the Abertay branch of UCU and was elected as the union-supported member of the University Court for two terms during some of the most turbulent periods in the recent history of the university. Union and teaching activities consumed Andy's energies for many years, but he found respite in his regular escapes by boat, bike or car to what he understood as the managed wilderness of rural Scotland.

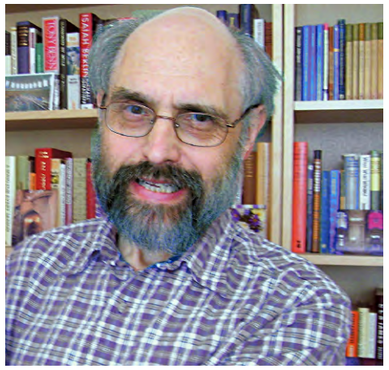
During all his travails Andy was lovingly supported by his partner Julia as they were raising their two children, Brodie and Kit. Julia showed remarkable forbearance when, ever preoccupied, Andy didn't always get around to tackling the lengthening list of DIY jobs and repairs needing done around the house. Although not in the least motivated by material status, Andy would reward himself for his various exertions with the purchase of a top of the range bike.

Andy is fondly remembered by colleagues and students for his reasonable passion, critical understanding and humanity. He was well known to the island communities of western Scotland for his love of Scottish culture and commitment to land struggles, a part of the world where he looked forward to spending the days of his retirement in an independent Scotland.

A book of condolences for Andy can be found at: www.kudoboard.com/boards/W33NdrWB/drandysamuel

We must stop 'pretending to be justice warriors'

Professor Martyn Hammersley, of the Open University, gives his views on the future of sociology



So, another BSA conference is on the horizon, the first since 2019 that will be face-to-face, if rising infection levels do not force a change in plan. The conference theme is 'Sociological voices in public discourse', but the blurb promoting the conference on the BSA website raises more questions than it answers.

It begins by listing a number of crises, not just "the Covid-19 pandemic (and its aftermath)", but also the "climate crisis, cost of living crisis, and housing crisis combined with the war in Ukraine, Syria and elsewhere, millions of displaced people, growing inequalities and pushbacks on democratic rights and equal rights". And it announces that sociology has an important role to play in dealing with these crises, through employing a "critical and justice-orientated sociological lens". It goes on to note that "speaking out on social justice is often met with resistance from a well-oiled conservative 'anti-woke' backlash in the mainstream media and on social media". The implication is that sociology's "speaking out" for social justice will assist in resolving all the crises that face us.

I know I am not alone in finding this pitch for the discipline unconvincing. In some respects, it has echoes of what Christian Smith called 'The sacred project of American sociology'. Ironically, it largely fits the stereotype of sociology held by its right-wing critics. The author(s) of the conference blurb clearly believes that the duty of the discipline is to fight in the culture war that has been fomented by the radical Right. Even aside from the question of whether this is compatible with being an academic discipline (it is not), it is a disastrous political strategy if the aim is to tackle the crises that threaten us. Shouting at one another across a deepening ideological divide is likely to worsen those crises, especially given the fact that the Left has so little access to state or international power.

While the statement mentions understanding the roots of the crises, we are not told why it is believed that sociology (on its own?) is likely to be able to provide this understanding. Even less clear is why social justice is the sole important value, or what allows sociologists to judge who is to blame for the crises and what should, or should not, be done in seeking to resolve them. For example, what are we to make of the claims made by the two sides in the Ukraine war? The BSA supports Ukraine, according to the statement about this issue on its website (and, for what it is worth, I agree). Yet Putin and many Russians insist, not without some justification, that Russia has been unjustly treated, and they go on to conclude that this warranted the invasion. Furthermore, the Ukrainians want peace and social order as well as justice; and we should note that the pursuit of one of these may make achieving the other more difficult. So, what distinctive insights about justice can sociology provide in this case? And how do these relate to what specialists in international relations, or in Russian or Ukrainian history and politics, can tell us?

The blurb for the conference concludes that the aim is to "explore the role of Sociology in engaging with the public and which give voice to those who are marginalised and suppressed during this time of multiple crises". And the hope is expressed that "meeting in-person will create the collective effervescence that builds solidarity within our discipline". Apart from being not entirely coherent, there is barely any recognition here that there may be multiple, discordant political voices within the discipline – any such differences are apparently to be overcome by "effervescence". But, even aside from this, what is the relationship between the "robust methods" of sociology and the views of marginalised groups? We are told that we are to "give voice" to these groups, but aside from the question of who falls into that category (does this include anti-vaxxers, paedophiles?), their members are likely to say conflicting things, and may say things that we do not believe to be true or find politically unacceptable. On what basis are sociologists to adjudicate among these voices? Furthermore, do not sociologists claim, implicitly if not always explicitly, to understand the causes of social problems better than lay people do? Isn't such expertise a requirement for their being listened to in the public sphere? Raising these as questions to be addressed at the conference might be productive, but the blurb glosses over them – in effect, it represses them.

Furthermore, the role claimed for sociology here is largely unwarranted: we do not have the 'robust methods' that can provide even all of the factual knowledge that would be required to think sensibly about the multiple crises mentioned. We have built up reliable bodies of knowledge about some social problems, but even in these areas there has been a tendency for each generation to reject what was done previously in favour of yet another 'new approach'. In part this reflects the fact that the task we face is very difficult, and that we don't have the resources to do it. But pretending to be justice warriors on the public stage is hardly likely to improve the situation.

Even allowing that the purpose of the conference blurb is presumably to enthuse members of the BSA into attending the conference, what is presented is a bloated sense of the capabilities and role of the discipline. The best that sociologists, like other scientific experts, can offer is to provide factual information relevant to the crises, to check and correct factual statements made by others, and to point to the complexities and qualifications that participants in public debates about them should take into account. Engaging in culture wars prevents us from doing this and from having the influence on public opinion and policymaking that we can legitimately claim.

Is it worth my attending the conference to make these points? I doubt it. Perhaps I'll just donate the conference fee to my local food bank.

NETWORK

Autumn 2022

“Sociology must provide causal explanations of social outcomes and events and processes so that we can dispel lies and speak truth to power – this is what we must do at all costs”

“I know I’m supposed to make notes but it’s really hard when you feel so emotionally drained – I don’t want to reflect on my feelings right now, I just want to let them all go and sit here, enjoying the silence”

“Over the years in which the research evaluations have been imposed, British social sciences have become more homogeneous – sociology today has the same degree of structural homogeneity as economics did in the mid-1980s”

Magazine of the British Sociological Association
Registered Charity (no. 1080235)
Company Limited by Guarantee (no. 3890729)

Network is published three times a year:
Spring
Summer
Autumn

ISSN: 2634-9213

Available online to members:
www.britsoc.co.uk

BRITISH SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION