

Figures of Fatigue

Edited by Heidi Bickis (University of Lancashire) and Tracey Collett (University of Plymouth)

Figures of Fatigue will bring together a collection of original essays presented in a variety of formats (including the written word), that examine the multifaceted ways tiredness, exhaustion, and fatigue are figured in the contemporary moment. The book is currently in the proposal stage and here we invite abstracts for essays that engage with this theme. The collection is intended for an interdisciplinary audience with a particular focus on academics working in the social sciences and humanities.

Playing on the multiple meanings of 'figure' – a geometrical, bodily, or object form; a numerical symbol; a graphic representation; a person – the collection will explore how tiredness, exhaustion, and fatigue are lived, measured, imagined, and politicised, and how they both shape and are shaped by social processes and relations, from everyday interactions through to social structures. Indeed, much more than the result of physiological processes, these embodied experiences are deeply social. The aim of the collection, then, is to foreground this social aspect by attending to the many figures and figurings of fatigue.

The figuring of fatigue is evident across a range of spheres. In medical, physiological, and psychological research, various instruments are used to attempt objective representations of a fatigued or tired body. In medical practice, standardised questionnaires seek to objectively measure the intensity and severity of the experience of fatigue. Certain social roles or points in the lifecourse are strongly associated with fatigue and thus come to embody the fatigued figure (e.g., the mother, the menopausal woman, the burned-out teacher; the chronically ill). Artists imagine and represent fatigue through various media. In health, industry, and political discourses, fatigue is typically framed as a barrier or even a threat to wellbeing, safety, and productivity with measures to combat it put in place. And individuals narrate and imagine their own lived experiences of tiredness and fatigue in ways particular to their own lived practices and interactions with others. These multiple figures of fatigue not only foreground the social aspect but also highlight the limitations of viewing fatigue narrowly as either a normal (and therefore neutral) part of human bodies or as a malfunction, the body gone wrong. While tiredness, fatigue, and exhaustion are all embodied, these embodied modes or experiences are also taken up, analysed, understood, lived, and conceptualised in a multitude of ways that have political and ideological implications. While some of these figurings reproduce and reinforce dominant narratives, others offer alternative imaginings that subvert and refigure the former. By asking after how fatigue is figured, this collection seeks to make plain that tiredness, fatigue, and exhaustion should not be dismissed as mere 'natural' processes but attended to as embodied modes or experiences that are deeply enmeshed in the making and remaking of the social.

Topics should engage with fatigue, tiredness, and exhaustion as embodied experiences and foreground the social, relational, and structural aspects. Areas of focus might include but are not limited to the ways fatigue is figured in and/or through:

- Medical and scientific research

- Work and industry
- Political discourses
- Leisure and sport
- Health and medicine
- Poetry and literature
- Visual art
- Popular culture including TV, film, comics, graphic novels, etc.
- Theatre and performance
- Persons or specific social groups
- Lived experience, social interactions, and the everyday

We welcome all varieties of essay including creative (arts based / illustrative), theoretical, research-based, discussions and more. This includes pieces based on research in progress/completed research and on discussion of impact within, beyond and beside the academy.

Please send us a 250–300 word chapter proposal/idea no later than 16 January to hbickis@lancashire.ac.uk and tracey.collett@plymouth.ac.uk.

Working timeline:

- Confirm contributors February 2026
- Complete and submit proposal April 2026

If you have any enquiries please do not hesitate to contact us.