



Network

Recording the working lives of sociologists for 50 years

Issue 151
Winter 2025



What planet are we on? Global sociology under attack

Also in this issue:

- The inside story on the MedSoc and WES conferences
- 60 years of sociology at York
- New forum for mid-careers researchers launched
- One in 12 workers suffers threats or physical attacks, says study

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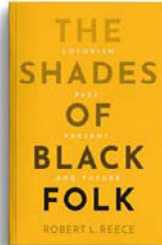
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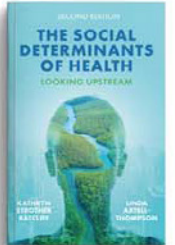
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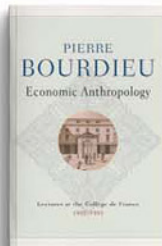
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Translated by Peter Collier

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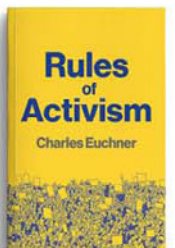
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Organizing, Protest, and the Fight for Democracy

Charles Euchner

Since its founding, activists have demanded that the United States lives up to its democratic promise. Now, Euchner offers a "field guide" to the critical place of political and social movements in American politics.

ISBN: 978-1-5095-6956-4 | October 2025 | PB: £17.99

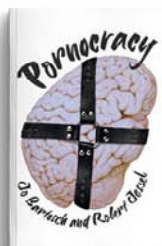


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Jo Bartosch & Robert Jessel

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ISBN: 978-1-5095-6513-9 | October 2025 | HB: £20.00



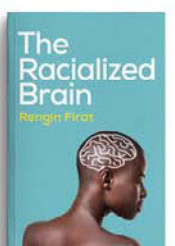
The Racialized Brain

The Neurosociology of Race and Racism

Rengin Firat

Are humans wired for racism from birth? Is racial bias inevitable? This sharp-sighted book offers nuanced answers to such impactful questions by unfolding the ways the human brain learns and enables the racial patterning of our societies.

ISBN: 978-1-5095-5795-0 | October 2025 | PB: £15.99



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Issue 151, Winter 2025

Main feature:

Sociology is under attack in countries around the world: Network takes a look

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www.britsoc.co.uk

Longer versions of some *Network*

articles may be seen at:

<https://www.britsoc.co.uk/members-area/network>
(login needed)

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ONE IN 12 WORKERS SUFFERS THREATS, INSULTS OR PHYSICAL ATTACKS, SAYS STUDY

One in 12 workers experienced threats, insults or physical attacks in the workplace over a period of a year, according to a new study.

Researchers analysed data from the United Kingdom Household Panel Study, a nationally representative survey of 40,000 households, and found that workplace violence took place in all industries examined.

Workers in public service, such as civil servants, firemen, police officers, legal assistants and immigration officers, had the highest risks of workplace threats and violence.

This was followed by people working in health, residential care and social work,

such as nurses, midwives, doctors and radiographers. Workers with the third-highest risk of experiencing workplace violence were employees in the wholesale and retail sector, such as shop attendants.

Some workers reported that their managers dismissed their claims or became annoyed or upset.

The research was carried out by Dr Vanessa Gash, of City St George's, and Dr Niels Blom, University of Manchester.

Dr Gash said: "Violence in the workplace is more prevalent than we realised. The idea that you'd have to go into work and be scared at work is very problematic.

"Most of us can avoid what we are scared of, we can avoid walking alone at night, but we can't avoid going to work. Most of us need a job to pay our rent and our other expenses.

"Not only is workplace violence extremely unjust, but it is also extremely inefficient for the economy because we risk losing really good workers."

The survey asked interviewees about their experiences at work during the previous year. The research findings are published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* https://www.sjweh.fi/show_abstract.php?abstract_id=4230

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

SCOTS 'LESS LIKELY TO BLAME RAPE VICTIMS'

A new paper shows that people in Scotland are less likely to blame victims of rape for the assault than they were in the past.

DPhil student Zoe Abrams used data from the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, a cross-sectional survey of public opinion in Scotland.

Respondents were asked how much a woman is to blame for being raped if she 'wears very revealing clothing on a night out', and 'is very drunk'. They were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statements, 'women often lie about being raped' and 'rape results from men being unable to control their need for sex'.

Over the period from 2014 to 2019, the study found that levels of victim blaming declined by 3.4% and perceptions of perpetrator culpability increased by 9%.

The study, published in the journal *Sex Roles*, asked whether the #MeToo movement – which gained global prominence in 2017 and brought widespread attention to experiences of sexual assault – coincided with measurable changes in public attitudes.

Ms Abrams said: "Over time, people became less likely to blame victims and more likely to hold perpetrators responsible. These attitude-

changes stemmed from both the liberalisation of social values and individual engagement with new public discourses on sexual violence, such as those shaped by the #MeToo movement."

Certain groups' attitudes changed more than others. Women, left-wingers and people who were very interested in politics changed more than men, people on the hard right, and those who were less politically engaged.

LONDON METROPOLITAN
UNIVERSITY

SCALE OF IRISH NURSES' CONTRIBUTION TO NHS SET OUT ON RADIO 4



Bronwen Walter, Laurie Taylor and Louise Ryan

Professor Louise Ryan appeared on *Thinking Allowed* on Radio 4 to talk about her popular book, *Irish Nurses in the NHS: An Oral History*, written with Gráinne McPolin and Neha Doshi.

The book, based on 45 oral history interviews with retired Irish nurses, tracks the scale and contribution of Irish-born nurses to Britain's NHS, from its inception in 1948 to the present day. It arose from a four-year research project led by Professor Ryan, which includes a podcast series, a touring photographic exhibition and a documentary film.

Professor Ryan told the programme that the NHS had relied on migrant nurses from its beginning. From 1948, NHS recruiters travelled throughout Ireland to attract young women to migrate to Britain to train and work as nurses, with advertisements placed in Irish newspapers and on radio offering paid travel.

By the early 1970s more than 30,000 Irish born nurses were working in British hospitals, comprising 12% of all nursing staff.

Professor Ryan talked about the nurses' experiences, which included anti-Irish

hostility, especially during the Northern Ireland Troubles and the IRA bombing campaign in Britain.

Professor Bronwen Walter, who also featured in the programme, provided additional details about Irish migration to Britain.

Link to the podcast: <https://shows.acast.com/irish-nurses-in-the-nhs>

Link to the book: <https://www.fourcourtspress.ie/books/2025/irish-nurses-in-the-nhs>

UNIVERSITY OF KENT

FIRST BOOK TO BLEND THEORIES OF ANIMAL RIGHTS AND WITCHCRAFT PUBLISHED

The first book to blend theories of animal rights, feminism and modern witchcraft has been published.

Vegan Witchcraft, by Dr Corey Lee Wrenn, examines the role of animals in modern witchcraft from a vegan feminist perspective, including the way they are objectified and exploited.

The book calls for the redirection of the modern witch's path away from the symbolic and material exploitation of animals that permeates witchcraft today. <https://tinyurl.com/s3zs4k4>

Dr Wrenn has been interviewed on the BBC Sideways podcast on the stigmatised relationship between

women and cats in American politics: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m002hksl>

Her keynote speech on her book, *Vegan Feminism*, given at an event at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, is available to view: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUHNlp-zVSE&t=146s>

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

'FEEL-GOOD MYSTERY' BOOK IS EPIPHANY FOR SCOTLAND WRITER

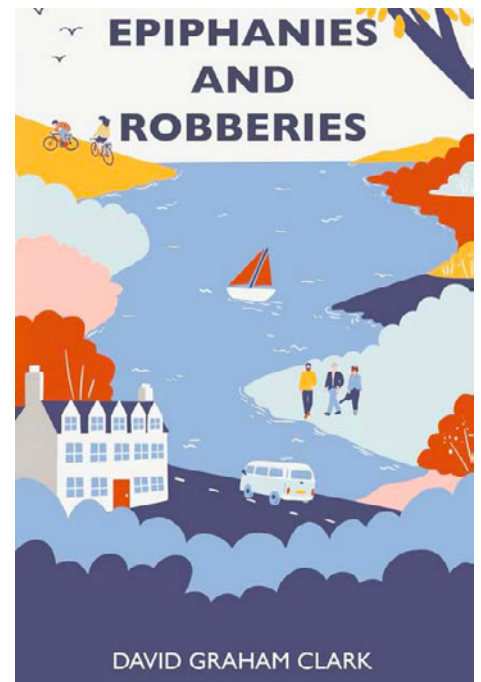
Professor David Clark has published his first novel, *Epiphanies and Robberies* (Beaten Track Publishing), which follows the story of three people drawn together as a series of art thefts sweeps across Dumfries and Galloway.

"I THINK OF EPIPHANIES AND ROBBERIES AS A FEEL-GOOD MYSTERY STORY, WITH SUBSTANCE"

Professor Clark said: "I think of *Epiphanies and Robberies* as a feel-good mystery story, with substance. The novel is set here in the beautiful landscape and changing seasons of south-west Scotland. But I have mixed up and blurred chronologies, geographies and biographies.

"The first drafts of my debut novel were written in real time and serialised on my website, month by month, throughout 2023. It's all interwoven with bigger questions about sustainability, rural communities, working life and personal relationships."

He is Professor of Medical Sociology at Glasgow's School of Interdisciplinary



Studies in Dumfries and has wide-ranging interests in end of life issues. He founded and led the Glasgow End of Life Studies Group.

In 2015 he served in the Scottish Government as consulting editor to its Strategic Framework for Action in Palliative and End of Life Care. He was awarded an OBE in 2017 for services to end of life care research.

LONDON METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

BOOK ANALYSES TENSIONS THAT SHAPE PRIDE EVENTS

A new book that analyses the tensions that shape the organisation of Pride events across the globe has been published.

The Politics of Pride Events - Global and Local Challenges, by Dr Francesca Romana Ammaturo, draws on decolonial theories to examine

the relationship between Pride and modernity while addressing pressing issues such as accessibility, grassroots activism and environmental sustainability in a post-pandemic era.

<https://bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/the-politics-of-pride-events>



UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX

STUDIES ON INEQUALITY, IMMIGRATION AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE FUNDED

Researchers in the Department of Sociology and Criminology have received funding for various projects recently.

Dr Zsófia Boda has received a €1.5million European Research Council Starter Grant to study how stereotypes can reinforce social inequalities in the education system. By collecting and analysing panel data in English secondary schools, she will examine how students apply stereotypes to their peers, and how stereotypes conserve social inequalities.

Professor Renee Luthra has received funding from the Nuffield Foundation to examine how the immigration process can affect marriage, divorce and family life. Working with Dr Edit Frenyo, of the University of Stirling, Professor Luthra will study how the recency of arrival, legal circumstance, socioeconomic status and national origins intersect to shape child contact

and maintenance negotiations during and after separation or divorce.

Professor Sandya Hewamanne is working on a Leverhulme-funded study exploring grassroots economic justice and transformative politics in Sri Lanka.

In other Essex news, Dr Samuel Singler's book, *Outsourcing Crimmigration Control Digital Borders, the IOM, and Biometric Statehood* (OUP), has been published and is available open access through Essex University funding.

Emeritus Professor Mike Roper was awarded the 2025 Social History Society's Book Prize for his monograph, *Afterlives of War: A Descendants' History* (Manchester University Press, 2023).

Head of Department Professor Linsey McGoey has joined the Scientific Advisory Board of the Vienna Doctoral School of Social Sciences for a new term from 2025-2029.

Two staff members have been appointed to the REF 2029 process: Professor Eamonn Carrabine on the Sociology sub-panel and Dr Laurie James-Hawkins, on the Public Health, Health Services and Primary Care sub-panel.

In student news, the department launched a new programme in 2025 to support undergraduate students' research by running a competitive scheme that offers stipends to offset the costs of attending summer schools across the world.

This enabled its second and third year students to attend the Summer School System of Human Rights Protection at European-University Viadrina Frankfurt, the LiU Summer Academy in Linköping, Sweden, and the 2025 Winter Intensive Seminar on Contemporary Issues at the Universidade La Salle in Brazil.



UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

PATIENTS LIVING WITH LONG COVID ‘FACE ‘DISMISSAL’ FROM DOCTORS

Patients living with long Covid face “dismissal” from medical professionals, research says.

A study found participants had to rely on data on their symptoms gathered from their smart watches and phones as backing for getting treatment.

A total of 30 participants, aged between 25 and 62, were recruited from three online long-Covid support groups and interviewed about their experiences using self-monitoring practices to track their symptoms.

Twelve participants had straightforward experiences of obtaining a diagnosis of long-Covid, but others had faced “gatekeeping from the medical practitioners they consulted”.

One participant, Sonja, told researchers that when she initially approached her doctor about recurring low-grade fevers, he suggested they were a psychological symptom of her “fear of work”.

Her doctor was only willing to investigate further and prescribe treatment after Sonja presented him with months of data from her digital thermometer.

The lead researcher, Dr Sazana Jayadeva, said a shift was needed in medical culture.

“We found that people with long-Covid are often led to fend for themselves in a system that isn’t adequately informed about their condition and doesn’t offer them appropriate medical support.”

She said patients’ own data was not fully appreciated. “We urge practitioners to treat patient-generated data as a valuable resource. Without this shift, patients with contested illnesses like long-Covid risk remaining stuck in a system where they have to be their own doctors.”

The research was conducted in collaboration with Professor Deborah Lupton from the University of New South Wales in Sydney. The study, ‘Most people with long Covid are their own doctors: self-tracking and online patient groups as pathways to challenging epistemic injustice’, was published in the BSA journal, *Sociology*.

NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY

‘SUPER INTERESTING’ EVENT RECLAIMS THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Alex Lee has written a blog piece about a regional postgraduate conference, ‘Reclaiming the sociological imagination’, held in July at Northumbria. The event, funded by a £1,000 BSA regional event grant, heard around 20 presentations.

Mr Lee, of the University of Brighton, wrote; “I was really happy that, not only did every presentation talk about issues of power, most also brought in the idea of the social imagination too.

“The presentations ranged from late diagnoses of ADHD, SpaceX’s destruction of indigenous sacred lands, rural tourism in China, and people’s relationship with horses. And every presentation was genuinely super interesting. People made connections and hopefully these will be useful networks that PGRs will use for research, their careers, and to make friends too.”

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WEST OF ENGLAND

EVENTS TACKLE METHODS, GREEN SPACES AND PANDEMIC



Finn Mackay

Sociologists at the university have been involved in a series of events recently. The university hosted a one-day conference, organised by the Families and Relationships BSA study group, entitled 'Doing research differently: methodological creativity and innovation in the sociology of families and relationships'.

At the conference, Professor Debbie Watson, of the University of Bristol, gave a keynote talk about her creative research with children and young people, and the event featured presentations on methodological approaches such as participatory methods, drawing, zine-making, family dinners, fiction, walking and collages.

Also, Dr Jon Mulholland organised, with students, a public seminar on 'Public urban green spaces: ecological solidarities and social inclusions' in Bristol. This brought together academics, practitioners, organisations, policy makers and the public to explore the opportunities and challenges of

urban green spaces. Dr Mulholland has co-authored an article, 'De-bordering solidarities: using eco-craftivism as an eco-social pedagogy in primary education' in the *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, <https://tinyurl.com/bddc4dhj>

Dr Sean Creaven gave a presentation examining the public response to non-pharmaceutical interventions during the Covid-19 pandemic, at the 16th Asian Conference on the Social Sciences in Tokyo. An extended version of paper has been published: <https://tinyurl.com/3xzs7pdz>

Dr Martin Crook gave a presentation on his book, *Capitalism, Colonisation and the Ecocide-Genocide Nexus*, at the 53rd annual conference of the European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control, in Malmo. He took part in a roundtable discussion on ecocide as a concept and as a potential crime against humanity at the British International Studies Association's 50th anniversary conference in Belfast.

Dr Finn Mackay was the keynote speaker at the Gender and Education annual conference at Manchester Metropolitan University. Dr Mackay has appeared on two podcasts: 'Pride and prejudice', discussing radical feminism, masculinity, trans inclusion, and the power of bridging activism with academia; and on 'Now and men', arguing that we should aspire to be positive and equal human beings without needing to have our identities as men reinforced.

<https://tinyurl.com/y28p2cxe>

<https://tinyurl.com/3ce5w7z9>

Dr Mackay has also written an article, 'Positive humanity, when? Is masculinity worth saving?' in the *Journal of Gender Studies* <https://tinyurl.com/wkcjvz5z>

Dr Julia Carter has been awarded an 18-month Leverhulme Research Fellowship on 'Post-intimate spaces: understanding co-residency after relationship dissolution', which began in October.



UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

RACHEL BROOKS APPOINTED TO REF PANEL

Professor Rachel Brooks has been appointed to the Education sub-panel of the Research Excellence Framework 2029. Professor Brooks, the current President of the BSA, had a similar role in the REF 2021.

She is currently leading an ESRC-funded project entitled 'Does higher education politicise today's students?', which tracks undergraduates at four UK universities over the course of their studies to examine the impact of higher education on their political knowledge, views and behaviour.

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

RUTH PENFOLD-MOUNCE GIVEN AWARD FOR HER OUTSTANDING TEACHING

Professor Ruth Penfold-Mounce has been awarded a National Teaching Fellowship for her outstanding contribution to teaching excellence in higher education.

Professor Penfold-Mounce focuses on innovation and creativity in teaching practice and improvements to student learning experiences, including 'learning on the move' which she uses to teach crime and deviance, death studies, popular culture, and celebrity. She was one of 61 National Teaching Fellows recognised in 2025.

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

KAREN BROADHURST RECEIVES AN OBE FOR WORK ON WOMEN AND CARE

Professor Karen Broadhurst has received an OBE in the King's Birthday Honours.

Professor Broadhurst has championed compassionate and effective services for women whose children are at risk of entering the care system.

Her team produced the first national estimate of women's vulnerability to repeat involvement in care proceedings, leading to major reforms in preventative services.

Professor Broadhurst went on to design and lead the high-profile Born into Care research series, which raised awareness of breaches of women's legal rights

in the immediate postnatal period and improved the help that women with complex needs receive during pregnancy and following birth.

She is a regular media commentator, and her work has been covered by the BBC Radio 4 Today Programme, BBC News, *The Guardian* and *The Times*.



SATNAM VIRDEE ELECTED TO BRITISH ACADEMY FELLOWSHIP

Professor Satnam Virdee was one of 92 scholars elected to the British Academy's Fellowship.

The new Fellows join a community of more than 1,800 scholars who share a commitment to advancing the humanities and social sciences.

Professor Virdee is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and of the

Academy of Social Sciences. Since 2017, he has been co-editor of the Racism, Resistance and Social Change book series, published by Manchester University Press.

From 2013 to 2018, he was Deputy Director of the ESRC Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity, and from 2005 to 2020 he was Director of the Centre

for Research on Racism, Ethnicity and Nationalism at the University of Glasgow.

His books include *Britain in Fragments: Why Things are Falling Apart* (co-author, 2023) and *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider* (2014).

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

MANALI DESAI APPOINTED HEAD OF SOCIAL SCIENCES SCHOOL

Professor Manali Desai has been appointed the new Head of the School of the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Professor Desai, who was Head of the Department of Sociology at Cambridge between 2020 and 2024, succeeds Professor Tim Harper.

She received her PhD in Sociology from the University of California, Los Angeles, where she specialised in comparative and historical sociology.

Her work focuses on social movements, ethnic and gendered violence, theories of crisis, state formation and post-colonial transformations. Her current research examines the persistence and transformation of caste in India.

"I am committed to raising the global profile of the humanities and social sciences at Cambridge, supporting cutting-edge cross-departmental initiatives that build on our vast and diverse expertise," she said.



MANALI DESAI

LSE

EVENTS LOOK AT HUMAN RIGHTS, POWER, CITIZENSHIP AND DATA FUTURES



The Sociology Department has hosted a series of recent events as part of its commitment to sociological inquiry and public engagement.

It celebrated the 25th anniversary of LSE Human Rights, a transdisciplinary hub based within the department for research, teaching and scholarship on human rights, by holding a conference, 'Subverting human rights: left, right and centre'.

This examined human rights discourse in the context of colonial violence, climate breakdown and rising authoritarianism. Speakers included Lina Attalah, the Chief Editor of Mada Masr, an independent online Egyptian newspaper, Mohammed el-Kurd, a Palestinian writer, and poet, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Professor of Geography in Earth and Environmental Sciences at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

The department hosted a public lecture entitled 'Critique is the critique of power', chaired by Dr Carrie Friese,

which used a debate format to explore whether critique is inherently tied to the analysis of power.

In a lecture entitled 'Suspect citizenship: rethinking belonging and non-belonging in plural societies', Dr Jean Beaman, of the City University of New York, shared her ethnographic research from France to examine how ethno-racial minorities are excluded from full societal inclusion, introducing her concept of 'suspect citizenship'.

In a talk entitled 'A new data infrastructure for the social sciences?', Professor David Grusky, of Stanford University, sketched out a vision of data futures in the social sciences, questioning the viability of legacy systems and exploring new technological possibilities.

An international conference, 'Politics, inequality and social change', marked Professor Mike Savage's retirement from the department and stimulated discussions on the future directions for academic debate and critical investigation. This was followed by a

keynote panel on 'Inequality in the 21st century', which examined how the sociological imagination can illuminate contemporary fractures.

The department will run further events using different formats to engage with sociological questions, including screening a film, 'From where we stand', which explores race and disaffection in post-Brexit northern England. This will be followed by a question and answer session with its director, Lucy Kaye. Also, Dr Nisrin Elamin, of the University of Toronto, will give a talk on 'The politics of hunger in Sudan', for its Annual Human Rights Day Lecture.

In other news, Dr Friese's book, *A Mouse in a Cage: Rethinking Humanitarianism and the Rights of Lab Animals* (NYU Press), has been published. This proposes a new approach to the treatment of laboratory animals that recognises the interconnectedness of all species and how human actions impact their welfare and the planet as a whole.

FORUM FOR MID-CAREER RESEARCHERS SET UP

A forum specifically for sociologists navigating their mid-career has been set up.

The BSA Mid-Career Forum was established because some sociologists find themselves without a clear support structure once they move beyond the postgraduate and early-career stage, typically 10 years after their PhD.

Its organisers say that the mid-career period can involve new and heightened expectations, from

increased research publication pressures and grant income targets to substantial leadership and teaching responsibilities.

Activities planned by the Forum include: online writing groups and career reflection workshops; events focused on networking and practical reflections on teaching, research and leadership; panel discussions at BSA annual conferences; and a dedicated blog series sharing insights from diverse mid-career paths.

The forum is convened by Dr Saorfhlaith Burton, of Robert Gordon University, and Dr Kathryn McEwan, of Northumbria University, who were both convenors of the BSA Early Career Forum and the BSA Postgraduate Forum.

Those wanting more details should join its Jiscmail list: bsa-mid-career-forum@jiscmail.ac.uk and go to its website: www.britsoc.co.uk/groups/special-interest-groups/mid-career-forum

EARLY CAREER FORUM

EXPERTS ON FATHERHOOD AND EMOTIONAL LABOUR JOIN ECR FORUM

Two researchers have joined as co-convenors of the group.

Dr Fei Huang is a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellow at the UCL Social Research Institute and was previously a lecturer in Chinese studies at the University of St Andrews. Her research interests include fatherhood, masculinities and gender relations, and her current project explores stay-at-home fathers and their wives in China.

Dr James Green is a lecturer in organisational behaviour at the University of Worcester. His research focuses on the sociology of work, particularly emotional labour and labour exploitation, and he currently leads a project investigating 'feeling

AI' services, such as AI companions, and how users engage with them to manage their emotions.

The ECF team also hosted webinars on Administrative Data Research England in October. The initiative was created by the UK government to facilitate knowledge production and exchange between the public and higher education sectors. Approved researchers can access administrative datasets that are not publicly available and produce timely research on social problems.

The Forum will run a webinar on funding for ECRs, led by Dr Huang and Professor Katherine Twamley, of UCL, on 30 January 2026.

SOCREL'S GOLDEN JUBILEE CHARTS THE FUTURE OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

SocRel hosted their 50th anniversary annual conference at Durham University in July, on the theme of 'Charting challenges and change: the past, present and future of the sociology of religion'.

The keynote speakers included Professor Monique Moultrie, who explored 'Religion, reproductive justice, and ensuring black women's reproductive futures', while Professor Linda Woodhead and Professor Gordon Lynch discussed the 'Past, present and futures of the sociology of religion: methods and substance'.

A panel discussion, led by Dr Sarah Harvey and supported by Professor Grace Davie, Professor Peter Gee and Professor Mathew Guest, reflected on the past, present and promising future of the study group.

The conference also had a selection of papers from PhD students through to senior professors exploring a wide array of topics. Bloomsbury Publishing showcased books exploring theology and the sociology of religion.

The conference ran events for PGRs and ECRs, including breakfasts, discussion sessions and dedicated training. These included 'Publishing your thesis: three easy steps', led by Professor Emeritus Abby Day, which offered a practical and compassionate take on academic writing, and also an interactive workshop led by Dr Lucy Potter. This featured a session on public engagement given by Dr Jennie Riley, one on framing for reach and

accessibility by Dr Renasha Khan, and one on the press and the public sphere, by Dr Rob Barward-Symmons.

EDI officers, Dr Krysia Waldock and Dr Khan, led a session on 'Religion, disability and neurodivergence – reflecting on the SocRel response day 2025', alongside Dr Naomi Lawson Jacobs.

Dr Waldock and Dr Khan have recently published a paper in the journal *Religions* entitled 'Working as "rebellious disruptors": neuroqueering and crippling academic spaces within the sociology of religion', which reflects on their experiences of organising the SocRel Response Day in March, at which they fostered a safe, accessible and inclusive academic space.

Other conference highlights included the SocRel quiz, and the 50th anniversary gala dinner, where Professor Emeritus Eileen Barker received a lifetime achievement award for her longstanding commitment to the sociology of religion.



ABBY DAY

SYMPOSIUM STUDIES INEQUALITY, TRAUMA AND POLICY

The group held a symposium, 'Advances in the sociology of mental health' at the University of York, its first in-person meeting in several years.

The event, convened by Dr Baptiste Brossard, of the University York, and Professor Ewen Speed, University of Essex, brought together 20 researchers from UK universities and featured five themes – lived experience, inequality, trauma, policy, and emerging directions, with roundtables designed to enable open discussion. It was supported by the Foundation for the Sociology of Health and Illness and York's Department of Sociology.

The opening session on lived experience featured reflections from Professor Speed, Jason Grant-Rowles, of King's College London, and Dr Heather Sutherland, York St John. They examined the role that experiential knowledge could have in shaping mental health research and policy, considering the position of 'convergent scholars' who combine academic expertise with lived experience.

The second session, on inequalities, featured Dr Jerome Wright, University of York, who offered a critical view of global mental health discourses, while Dr Yuting Wen, of the University of East Anglia, explored the transcultural mental health challenges faced by Chinese students in the UK. Dr Shardia Briscoe-Palmer, of the University of Nottingham, focused on wellbeing practices within Black communities, highlighting how local and cultural specifics intersect with global structures.

The day concluded with a publishing roundtable, co-chaired by Dr Brossard and Professor Speed, which raised practical and strategic questions about disseminating research in and around the sociology of mental health.

Day two began with a session on trauma, where Dr Hilary Stewart, Lancaster University, critically

discussed trauma-informed frameworks, followed by a theoretical examination of trauma as a sociological category by Dr Brossard. In the subsequent policy session, Dr Annie Irvine, University of York, reflected on how mental health is conceptualised within policy debates. The afternoon featured a session on new developments, with Dr Nathan Keates, University of Sunderland in London, addressing epistemic injustices in the context of neurodivergence.

The symposium closed with a roundtable chaired by Dr Ruth Graham, Newcastle University, on the question: 'What is the sociology of mental health?'

Discussions across sessions converged on several challenges: defining a sociological approach within an interdisciplinary field; integrating lived realities with structural analysis; ensuring that sociological insights inform both policy and practice; developing the role of theoretical critique; acknowledging inequalities and cultural particularities; and examining current difficulties caused by austerity policies.

Participants concluded that the study group should blend online seminars and face-to-face meetings to sustain its momentum. The group is growing, and is planning its next in-person event.



EWEN SPEED

SPORTS GROUP EXPLORES HOW AI IS CHANGING TEACHING

DR JON DART AND DR JIM LUSTED WRITE ABOUT
A RECENT STUDY GROUP EVENT

In June, academic staff from across the UK attended a group workshop to explore how generative AI is transforming the teaching of the sociology of sport. The session addressed a fundamental question: if AI can instantly generate essays, conduct research and provide feedback, what is the purpose of our assessments?

The informal online seminar, organised by Dr Jon Dart, of Leeds Beckett University, Dr Jim Lusted, Open University, and Dr Mark Doidge, Loughborough University, sought to move beyond the traditional assessment approaches that are focused on recall to explore how academic staff and students use generative AI in their teaching, learning and assessments.

“IT CANNOT REPLACE THE FUNDAMENTAL TASK AND SKILL OF CRITICAL READING”

Dr Michael Hobson, St. Mary's University, London, began by sharing his experiences of using generative AI. Among other things, he explained how he works with students to develop prompts that provide meaningful feedback on their work. He noted that while AI can help with reading academic articles, such as simplifying

texts, translating and extracting key points, it cannot replace the fundamental task and skill of critical reading. A key concern raised was the potential inequality between students using premium – paid for – AI tools versus free versions, alongside the risk that students might lose essential soft/durable skills when AI handles much of the analytical work.

Dr Conor Heffernan, Ulster University, presented his innovative role-play activity where students develop interview questions for AI personas (for example, governing body officials, recently retired players or referees). Students then analysed AI's often superficial responses against published research, with the activity encouraging reflectivity and critical thinking while highlighting AI's tendency toward 'hallucinations' requiring fact-checking.

Participants raised serious concerns about generative AI's broader impacts and ethical issues. Beyond built-in biases affecting women, girls and other minoritised groups, participants highlighted the often-overlooked issue of data 'appropriation', where generative AI tools 'steal' information without consent. The significant environmental costs of using large language models, which consume enormous amounts of energy and water, were also highlighted. It was noted that this critical understanding of AI should be an important component of future teaching to contextualise its use.

Participants also expressed their concern that while AI tools might have the potential to reduce staff workloads, its use could conversely lead to significant increases in this. In addition, some raised fears that AI adoption in higher education may lead to further staff cuts and redundancies. It was also noted that large language models often perpetuate existing knowledge hierarchies that marginalise already disadvantaged communities.

Although by the end participants had more questions than they started the session with, AI presents both opportunities and challenges that require thoughtful, critical engagement rather than wholesale adoption. This workshop highlighted the importance of ongoing collective discussions and sharing of practice around AI, which was particularly beneficial among colleagues who regularly teach the same discipline.



MARK DOIDGE

FAMILIES AND RELATIONSHIPS STUDY GROUP

BOOKS ON MIGRANT MOTHERS AND CARING FATHERS PUBLISHED

Three books on families and relationships have been published recently.

Bordering Social Reproduction: Migrant Mothers and Children Making Lives in the Shadows, by Professor Rachel Rosen and Dr Eve Dickson, UCL, examines the lives of destitute mothers and children who are denied mainstream welfare support in the UK due to their immigration status. This book shows how enforced destitution and debt work alongside detention and deportation as exclusionary tactics of the state. <https://tinyurl.com/3svdezk9>

Caring Fathers in the Global Context, an open access book, explores how men become caring fathers, and connects fatherhood studies with care scholarship. It is edited by Dr Petteri

Eerola, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Professor Katherine Twamley, UCL, Dr Henna Pirskanen, University of Lapland, Finland, and Dr Pedro Romero-Balsas, Autonomous University of Madrid. <https://tinyurl.com/4wj6kf5e>

Marriage Matters: Imagining Love and Belonging in Uganda, is edited by Professor Lotte Meinert and Dr Nanna Schneidermann, of Aarhus University, Denmark, and Dr Julaina Obika, of Gulu University, Uganda. It examines how partnership, kinship and child friendship are changing in Uganda, as are ideas about love and commitment. <https://uclpress.co.uk/book/marriage-matters>

Members of the **BSA Families and Relationships study group** are among the authors and editors of the books.



KATHERINE TWAMLEY

NEW MATERIALISMS STUDY GROUP

CONFERENCE TACKLES COMMUNICATIVE CONTROL

The group held a one-day conference in June, attended by 50 delegates, on the theme of 'Materiality, society and the more-than-human'.

The keynote speaker at the event, held at Goldsmiths, was Professor Lisa Blackman, who spoke on 'Meanings that matter: semiotic combat and communicative control'.

Paper sessions were held on the themes of 'Humans and other animals', 'Embodiment assemblages', and 'Intra-actions and entanglements'.

The conference included an exhibition, with artworks by new humanist scholars, Julian Burton and Mark Drane.



SYMPOSIUM HELPS UNDERSTAND SCOTLAND TODAY

The group held a symposium on the theme of ‘Understanding the Scottish present through the sociological lens’ at Abertay University, with speakers from across Scotland’s universities.

The opening paper was from Dr Gareth Mulvey, of the University of Glasgow, on the topic of ‘Radical municipalism: two Scottish case-studies’. This was followed by a presentation from Dr Eurig Scandrett and Jeni MacKay, Queen Margaret University, looking at empirical research from two case studies of environmental justice-struggles in Scotland.

This was followed by presentations from Dr Paul Gilfillan, Queen Margaret University, exploring the question ‘Does Scottish society exist?’ and from Professor Ian Greener, University of Glasgow, on qualitative comparative analysis of the social determinants of health in Dundee and Aberdeen. The final paper before lunch was from Dr Carlton Brick, University of the West of Scotland, exploring the legacy of the Irish peace process on post-devolution Scotland.

After lunch the keynote speaker, David McCrone, Emeritus Professor at the University Edinburgh, spoke on the main arguments of his forthcoming book, *Changing Scotland: Society, Politics and Identity*. He said that the resurrection of the Scots Parliament in 1999 was a political expression of demographic, material, socio-economic changes in the country since the 1970s. So a sociological

understanding of these changes was vital in order to comprehend the nation and where it might be going.

The keynote was followed by four papers and a panel discussion on the contemporary university, which was relevant given the recent financial crisis at Dundee University.

Professor Jane Fenton, of Dundee University, presented on the topic ‘The ‘feminisation’ of the university – are we self-harming?’. This was followed by Seb Monteux, Abertay University, speaking on ‘Trauma and neuro-babble: the pathologisation of students in higher education’.

Next to present was Professor Mark Smith on the work of the late Alasdair MacIntyre as it related to the state of universities today. Finally, Dr Penny Lewis, Dundee University, presented her paper on the governance and management of Scottish universities. A panel discussion followed.

Study group convenor Dr Gilfillan said: “It was great to gather together in person for the first time in a few years. And it was great to gather sociologists from across Scotland. The quality of the speakers and range of topics covered was excellent. The job of selecting from a large number of abstract submissions is never easy but we had a high quality, ranging from theoretical issues to empirical research. I hope there was something for everyone.”

He thanked Professor Alex Law and Vivien Collie at Abertay University for their help in arranging the event.



PAUL GILFILLAN

EMOTIONS STUDY GROUP

EVENT UNPACKS EMOTIONAL CONCEPTS



The study group continued its ‘Unpacking concepts within the sociology of emotion’ seminar series with a roundtable in November that explored methodological concerns in emotions research.

The online event, entitled ‘Doing emotions research: ethics, empathy and engagement’, examined research into the sociology of emotions in terms of the people engaged with, the data generated, and the researchers’ own emotions.

The seminar series was launched in autumn 2024 to create a space for researchers, activists and practitioners to present their work on concepts relating to the sociology of emotion, and to enable them to explore and deepen their thinking as a collective.

The first seminar in the series was led by PhD researcher Pancho Lewis, who spoke on the topic, ‘Fluid hope in a climate emergency’, which offered an opportunity to think through debates about the climate emergency in the public, activist and academic spheres,

examining the emergence of different forms of hope for the future.

A second seminar, by PhD researcher Miriam Dillon, engaged with the concept of distress and its individualisation and pathologisation in physiotherapy’s treatment of chronic pain as set out in their paper, ‘Beyond pathology: (re) conceptualising distress in physiotherapy chronic pain care’. This proposed a new conceptual framework for distress in chronic pain care, offering a multidisciplinary approach to the topic.

The group will share more details on the seminar series on the BSA Emotions JiscMail and via its social media platforms, bsa-emotions.bsky, social and, shortly, on LinkedIn.

The study group stimulates sociological research on emotions and affect across all domains of social life, including work and employment, culture, the economy, politics, social movements and family, and engages with all forms of intersecting inequalities.





MORE A-LEVEL SOCIOLOGY STUDENTS GETTING TOP MARKS

Students taking Sociology A-level are getting more A-grades and A-starred grades, the latest figures show.

The results show that the proportion of students getting the two top grades rose from 17.9% in 2024 to 18.8% in 2025, a rise of 0.9 percentage points, or 5%.

This rise was the third highest among the top 15 A-level subjects, with only

Media, Film and TV Studies, and Art and Design, seeing higher rises.

The level of Sociology A-grades and A-starred grades is still low, however: only Media, Film and TV Studies and Business Studies were lower, with the highest being Mathematics, at 41.3%.

<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/a-level-results-2025-which-subjects-had-more-top-grades/>

A-LEVEL LESSON PLANS LINKED TO PODCAST SERIES

The Sociological Review Foundation has launched a series of lesson plans linked to its podcast series, *Uncommon Sense*.

Each podcast in the first three series of *Uncommon Sense* now has a lesson plan for teachers that relates to its subject matter.

The plans feature activities presented in downloadable worksheets that support A-level teaching on topics matching AQA and Cambridge OCR syllabuses. Plans for season four are in progress.

Doctoral researcher Isabel Sykes, who created the lesson plans, said

the worksheets “make seemingly complicated sociological ideas accessible to students, and help them understand how sociology can be a tool for them to interpret the world”.

<https://thesociologicalreview.org/announcements/news/uncommon-sense-podcast-launches-lesson-plans-for-use-in-the-classroom/>



UKRI GIVES £8 MILLION FOR FOOD PROJECTS

UKRI has announced it will give funding of more than £8 million for six projects across the UK, set up to make nutritious food more easily available to people and to tackle food waste.

The projects include running a mapping tool which can direct a mobile greengrocer to visit areas of Liverpool where social housing residents have poor access to food.

They also include funding for two state-subsidised restaurants in Dundee and Nottingham that provide access to nutritious and sustainably produced foods as an affordable alternative to unhealthy convenience food.

More details of the projects are at: <https://tinyurl.com/u82adyww>

SOCIOLOGISTS WHO WANT TO CHANGE POLICIES CAN MAKE DIRECT CONTACT WITH GOVERNMENT

Sociologists who want their research to have an effect on government policies can make direct contact through a new website.

The Areas of Research Interest website, ari.org.uk, has a searchable database that lists current topics that the government is seeking expertise on, including societal issues such as poverty and diversity.

Interested academics should then send an email outlining how their research may be relevant, and governments departments will then respond.

For more details:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/areas-of-research-interest>

EVENTS SERIES FOR SOCIOLOGY TEACHERS LAUNCHED BY BSA

The BSA is launching a series of online events for sociology teachers, following a survey which found that most wanted more support in their role.



SUNNY GUNESSEE

The survey, completed by 80 sociology teachers in schools and FE colleges, found that almost 80% wanted to join a new BSA forum or network for sociology teachers. Around 70% wanted online training courses and most wanted regular webinars and an annual conference.

Around 80% wanted to incorporate new research into their teaching and 55% wanted to understand new sociological theories.

In the light of the survey, the BSA has decided to run termly online events in 2026 to support sociology teachers, especially for those with a non-sociology background. The aim of the events is to build confidence, knowledge, skills and support networks.

A sub-group of academics and teachers has been set up to design online content and to work with exam boards. It is led by Sunny Gunessee, who teaches GCSE and A-level sociology at the Jewish Community Secondary School in north London.

The survey also found that 38% of respondents taught sociology alone, 16% taught it as their main subject along with other subjects, and the remainder mainly taught other subjects, with some sociology.

As reported in the summer issue of *Network*, the BSA is to set up a new teaching award, with categories for schools, FE colleges and universities.

CONFERENCE MOVED AFTER BSA RECEIVES HIGHEST NUMBER OF ABSTRACTS

The BSA has moved its annual conference this year – its 75th anniversary – from the University of Edinburgh to the University of Manchester because of an unexpectedly large number of abstract submissions. The BSA received 2,005 submissions, surpassing 2024's record-breaking 1,435.

“This is the highest number in our history and reflects the incredible strength and breadth of the community’s work as we approach the 75th anniversary of the BSA,” the association said in a statement.

“Manchester is available to host us again and can offer the space and facilities needed to support an event of this scale. We know that many delegates were looking forward to gathering in Edinburgh, and this decision was made carefully so that our anniversary year can be celebrated fully and inclusively. Our priority is to ensure the best possible experience for all delegates.”

The conference is entitled 75 Years of Sociology and has as speakers Professor Jason Arday and Professor Les Back and a panel of experts.



ALL AROUND THE WORLD

NETWORK TAKES A LOOK AT SOCIOLOGY BEYOND OUR SHORES

AUSTRALIA

UNIVERSITY ANNOUNCES PLANS TO AXE ITS SOCIOLOGY MAJOR

Macquarie University has announced plans to axe its Sociology major degree as part of broader cuts to its humanities and social sciences.

Eleven of the 14 sociologists there face redundancy, with the remainder redeployed to general interdisciplinary teaching.

The university cited “declining demand” as the reason for the plans, part of wider cuts and job losses in Politics, Ancient History, Education and Modern Languages.

The campaigning organisation Academics for Public Universities opposes the cuts. It said: “Academics within the discipline cite figures to the contrary that indicate Sociology enrolments are strong and rising.

They also contend that discipline enrolments match or exceed other disciplines in the Arts faculty that have been spared from cuts.

“Academics for Public Universities stand with our colleagues at Macquarie University to oppose these cuts. In doing so we also wish to draw public attention to the fact that similar cuts to humanities, social science and critical disciplines in general are being made at universities across the country.

“We submit that this is an attack not just on Sociology and Politics, but on the very idea of a public university. Sociology and Politics teach students to understand power, inequality and the ways that our institutions function and respond to social change.”



Elon Musk

UNITED STATES

FLORIDA SOCIOLOGISTS PROP UP TESLA SALES

Sociologists in Florida are buying so many Tesla cars that they are effectively controlling the profits the company makes.

That’s the unlikely conclusion of a study by the statistical website, tylervigen.com, which notes a close correlation between the two figures.

It found that as Tesla’s share value rose dramatically from 2020 onwards (from \$30 to \$240), so did the number of Florida’s sociologists (from 60 to 170).

The findings suggests that Elon Musk, a man noted more for his war on woke

than his attention to sociological insights, could be making an error in offending a major customer sector.

Or perhaps not: the website is devoted to finding spurious but amusing links between disparate data, demonstrating that correlation doesn’t necessarily mean causation. A few years back tylervigen.com ‘discovered’ another strong statistical association with Musk – the rate of sociology doctorates awarded correlates with the number of space launches.

ISRAEL

ISA SUSPENDS ISRAELI SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY OVER GAZA

The International Sociological Association has suspended the Israeli Sociological Society for its failure to condemn the Gaza attacks.

In a statement, the ISA said: “We regret that the Israeli Sociological Society has not taken a clear position condemning the dramatic situation in Gaza.

“In a decision that reflects the extraordinary gravity of the current situation, the Executive Committee has decided to suspend the collective membership of the Israeli Sociological Society.”

It said that as part of its public stance “against the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza”, it maintained “no institutional relationships with Israeli public institutions”.

‘THEIR PARTICIPATION AMOUNTED TO TACIT APPROVAL OF ISRAEL’S ATTACKS IN GAZA’

The move follows pressure from Moroccan academics and global organisations who were opposed to Israeli participation in an ISA Forum in Rabat.

Ahead of the opening, Moroccan and international sociologists and humanities researchers signed a petition demanding the removal of Israeli speakers, arguing their participation amounted to tacit approval of Israel’s attacks in Gaza, which have killed more than 57,000 people.

NEW ZEALAND

FOUR-DAY WEEK LEAVES STAFF HAPPIER

Moving to a four-day working week without losing pay leaves employees happier and healthier, according to a study in six countries, the largest carried out on the subject.

Researchers studied 2,896 people in 141 companies in New Zealand, Canada, Australia, the US, Ireland and the UK.

At the start of the trial each employee answered a series of questions to evaluate their wellbeing, including “Does your work frustrate you?” and “How would you rate your mental health?”

After six months of a shortened working week, they revisited the same questions and, overall, said that they felt more satisfied with their job performance and had better mental health.

The study did not analyse company-wide productivity, but more than 90% of companies decided to keep the four-day work week after the trial, suggesting that they were not worried about a drop in profits or productivity.

The authors also looked at whether the positive impact of shorter working weeks would wane once the system lost its novelty. They collected data after workers had spent 12 months on the trial and found that morale had stayed high.

The study was published in *Nature Human Behaviour*. The lead author is Dr Wen Fan, a sociologist at Boston College in Massachusetts.

INDIA

DALIT-CASTE ADVOCATE DIES

Professor Nandu Ram, a pioneering sociologist hailed for helping bring Dalit perspectives to the heart of Indian academia, has died, aged 78.

He was among the first to rigorously explore the social, political and economic dynamics of caste in modern India.

Professor Ram was born in 1946, in a village in Uttar Pradesh, in a family of Dalit labourers.

He excelled at school and earned his MA from Banaras Hindu University and a PhD in Sociology from IIT Kanpur. He worked at Jawaharlal Nehru University for more than three decades, serving as the first Dalit Dean of the School of Social Sciences.

His 1988 book, *The Mobile Scheduled Castes: Rise of a New Middle Class*, gave scholars a new lens to examine social mobility. The five-volume *Encyclopaedia of Scheduled Castes* (2007-2011) remains a landmark in the field.

“HE WAS A LONE VOICE BACK THEN — AND IT WAS NOT EASY”

Professor Maithrayee Chaudhuri, who was among his first students and later a colleague at Jawaharlal Nehru University, said: “Over the decades, he built a generation of scholars who

created a distinct body of knowledge on marginalised communities. He was a lone voice back then — and it was not easy.”

In 2017, the Indian Sociological Society honoured him with a Lifetime Achievement Award. The JNU Teachers’ Association described him as “quiet but firm”, “gentle in manner”, and “a person who shall be remembered fondly by colleagues, students and the academic community worldwide.”

Despite holding senior academic positions, Professor Ram lived modestly. “He never bought a car. He always walked”, his son Siddharth said. “Even if his own pockets were empty, he would help others.”

CANADA

NATION SHALL NOW SPEAK UNTO NATION

McGill sociologist Skyler Wang is part of an international team developing a universal translator that allows almost anyone in the world to get near-simultaneous translation of dozens of foreign languages.

Existing machine translation models and devices – earbuds, handheld translators and smart glasses – currently support only widely-spoken languages such as English, Spanish, French and Mandarin.

The team, working with researchers from Meta, says that within five years they hope to bring in a model that supports speech-to-speech translation in 100 languages.

The researchers used publicly available data sources to build the models on which the systems rely and have partnered with local communities and linguistics experts to try to ensure that the process is ethical and inclusive.

Professor Wang, a sociologist with an interest in human-machine interactions

and social-centred AI, emphasises that human involvement remained crucial.

“THE ETHICAL SIDE OF THIS WORK IS INCREDIBLY COMPLEX”

“The ethical side of this work is incredibly complex,” he said. “It’s not just about the speed and quality of this technology. It’s about respecting the people and cultures behind the languages and not engaging in a new form of digital colonialism.”

“Translation isn’t just about access. It’s about preserving cultural heritage and enabling global knowledge exchange.”

UNITED STATES

MORE WOMEN UNSURE IF THEY WILL HAVE CHILDREN



Half of women who want children are unsure if they will have a family, a new study says.

Researchers used data from the National Survey of Family Growth from 2002 to 2019, including surveys of a nationally representative group of 41,492 women aged 15 to 44.

Findings showed that there was little change during that time in the proportion of women who said they intended to have children, with 62% of women saying they wanted to have a child and 35% that they would not.

‘AROUND 25% OF WOMEN WHO INTENDED TO HAVE CHILDREN SAID THEY WOULD NOT BE UNHAPPY IF THEY ENDED UP CHILDLESS’

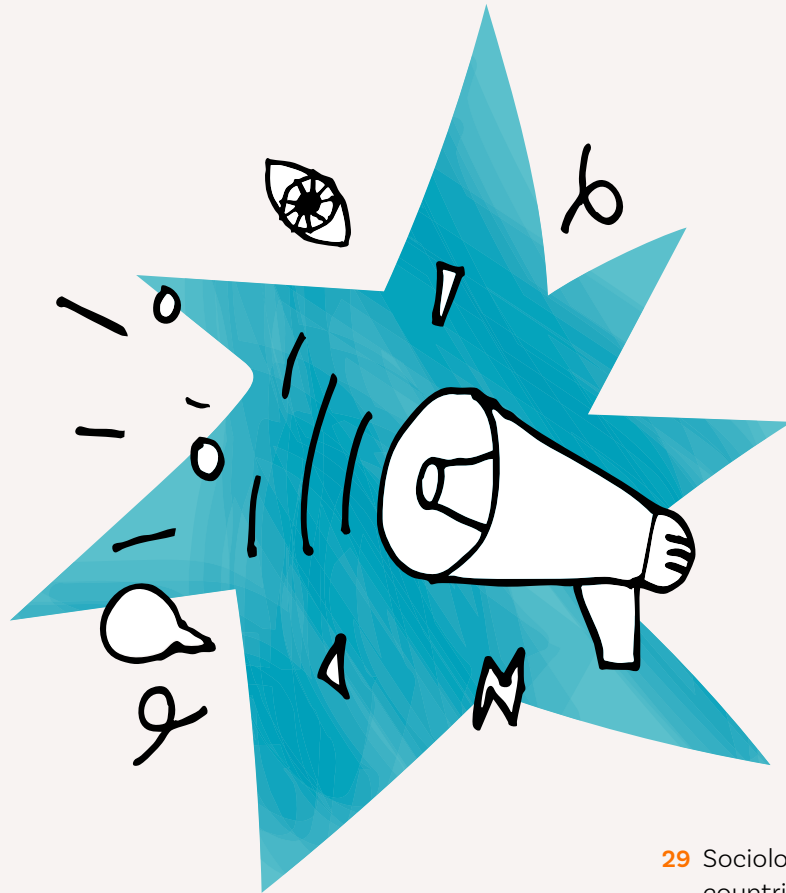
But around 50% of the women who intended to have children said they were only “somewhat sure” or “not at all sure” that they would actually realise their intention. Around 25% of women who intended to have children said they would not be unhappy if they ended up childless.

Women who had higher levels of income and education were slightly more likely to say they were ‘very sure’ that they would have a child than others.

The US fertility rate was stable at about 2.0 children per woman in the 1990s and early 2000s, reaching a peak of 2.12 in 2007, statistics show. But the fertility rate has steadily declined since then, falling to 1.62 in 2023.

The study, published in the journal *Genus*, was led by Luca Badolato, an Ohio State PhD student in sociology.

Features



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'GLOBAL SOCIOLOGY MAY BE UNDER ATTACK, YET IT STILL BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER'

AS WE ALL KNOW, THESE ARE HARD TIMES FOR SOCIOLOGY IN THE UK, WITH JOBS CUTS IN DEPARTMENTS AND ATTACKS ON CRITICAL RACE THEORY. BUT HOW IS THE DISCIPLINE FARING IN THE REST OF THE WORLD? RECENT PAPERS IN THE BSA'S JOURNAL SOCIOLOGY HAVE TAKEN A LOOK...

Sociology is publishing a special issue on 'How and why sociology is under attack'. The journal editors say that they started to think about this special issue "when the jobs of colleagues in sociology departments were under attack and the reinvigoration of the networks of the global Right (energised by Trump's first term) informed a renewed ideological battle about the role of universities and of the social sciences in particular."

"THESE ATTACKS ARE SHAPING THE POLITICAL LIFE IN THESE COUNTRIES"

"In Central and Eastern Europe, Sociology, higher education, and universities in general came under attack from authoritarian forces. Whether motivated by the traditional beliefs in gender roles, ethnic and racial injustices, or religious beliefs, these attacks are shaping the political life in these countries."

"In parts of Latin America, such as in post-Bolsonaro Brazil but also elsewhere, ultraconservatives own a big part of the media that allows them to shape the public discourse and infiltrate some of the centres of power. It is no surprise that there too similar arguments are deployed

against LGBTQI+ activists, followers of liberation theologian Paulo Freire, the organised left and even liberal educators and activists.

"Together these campaigns seem designed to call into question the role and purpose and value of higher education, narrow the ideas available to the population and whip up social opposition to particular strands of research and learning such as Critical Race Studies, Queer Theory and Romani Studies. In times of hardship and uncertainty, the concoction of new folk demons linked to scholarly practices feels very dangerous indeed."

"In authoritarian regimes, the government and its leaders often seek to maintain tight control over the population, including control over the ideas and beliefs that people hold. As a result, Sociology and other social sciences that aim to critically analyse and understand society and its structures can come under attack in various ways. Sociology can be seen as a threat to authoritarian regimes because it seeks to understand and critique social structures and power dynamics."

The special issue had attracted attention from sociologists round the world. "When we issued the call, we received an overwhelming response to it. However, some authors subsequently withdrew their interest and, in a few cases, [their] fully-developed and well argued papers. Some authors cited workload pressure others, fear of persecution."

"We knew when we started work on this project that academics in many locations were working in impossible circumstances. In the intervening period, these threats seem greater still and authoritarian states have been emboldened further by the apparently successful attempts to curtail, remake and repurpose universities as political instruments of the state. Yet people carry on reading and teaching and writing, working hard to carry the lessons of sociological inquiry into new spaces and generations. We hope this collection conveys something of the energy of a global sociology which may be under attack, yet still brings people together to think about who and what we are to each other." <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00380385251372714>

The edition editors are: Dr Spyros Themelis, University of East Anglia; Professor Gargi Bhattacharyya, UCL; and Dr Iulius Rostas, University of Stuttgart and the National School for Political Studies and Administration in Bucharest, Romania.

As well as three papers from the special issue on Hungary and Brazil, this feature includes another recent article from *Sociology*, on the state of sociology in Australia and New Zealand, and also non-journal features on censorship in the US, an ISA declaration of the importance of sociology, and harassment in the UK.

HUNGARY

'A SMALL NUMBER HAVE OFFERED DISSENT'



Sociology is “far from the role some aspire to see it play, acting as a bulwark against authoritarianism and a catalyst for a politics of happiness”, researchers conclude in their article.

“ONLY A FEW PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL SOCIOLOGISTS IN HUNGARY SPEAK OUT IN A WAY AND MANNER THAT MIGHT GENUINELY DISCONCERT AUTHORITARIANISM”

The illiberal government of Viktor Orbán meant that critical sociologists can “find themselves in a precarious situation. Only a few public intellectual sociologists in Hungary speak out in a way and manner that might genuinely disconcert authoritarianism.”

Professor Andrew Ryder and Dr Béla Soltész relate a history of sociology in the country, noting that since 2010, Orbán’s government had brought in “a series of measures that have been denounced for undermining academic freedom such as the refusal of the state to validate postgraduate gender studies courses and a campaign to force out the Central European University from Hungary.

“Universities saw a further attack against academic freedom as a consequence of a series of reforms in 2019. Twenty-one universities have been transformed from public entities into foundations. These foundations are controlled by close supporters of the government, who dominate the boards of trustees.

“Universities seem to have been corporatized, driven and directed by formulae, incentives and targets guided by the principles of ‘new managerialism’ and audit culture. It is a fallacy to view the modern university as some form of a platonic academy, instead it can be said to resemble more a commercial enterprise.”

In their article they depict a range of responses that fictionalised academics made to their authoritarian government. These include a head of department who “sees sociology doing a better job to partner up with business interests and market research, creating a viable and functional sociology”, and an associate professor who resigns because she has “a moral duty, as the free university is at the essence of a free democracy”.

One fictionalised emeritus professor – ‘Zoltán’ – has written “critical articles of Orbán in leading academic journals and no-one yet is knocking on my door in the middle of the night. I have suffered no sanction”, but another notes that Zoltán’s papers are “locked into elite English language journals. His message never reaches the wider public and he is no threat to the authority of Orbán. That is why they don’t touch him, he’s not worth the effort. They let him publish his papers that only a small gaggle of professors will read. He speaks at these elite international conferences, play acting the dissident thinker.”

Article continues >

Another fictionalised academic notes that “I am a single mother, and I need this job. The best trajectory for my career is to stay here in this university. It’s clear to me though that I need to boost my citations as the last evaluation at work highlighted this weakness.”

In their summary, the authors note that “Many staff have opted for individualized survival or careerist strategies and there seems little evidence of solidarity and/or civility. Sociologists, though, have aligned themselves with these hierarchical and hegemonic forces or simply kept quiet. A small number have offered dissent.

“Sometimes the role of ‘expert’ has led to social scientists, including sociologists, being hierarchical or seeking to be neutral.”

‘The role of sociology in an illiberal political setting: the case of Hungary’, Professor Andrew Ryder and Dr Béla Soltész, of Eötvös Loránd University

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00380385251359740>

Another paper sets out the background to the changes in Hungary’s universities. In ‘Teaching sociology in contemporary Hungary’, four authors say that: “Over the past 15 years, Hungary has undergone a series of political transformations that have had a profound impact on higher education.

“The government has begun to strengthen its loyal right-wing conservative academic regime, which helps to propagate its neo-conservative agenda; it has meanwhile restructured and steadily narrowed the scope of higher education and especially of the social sciences, converting most state universities into public interest trusts and tightening the budget of the few remaining state universities.

“Some university programmes, such as gender studies, have been banned, and recently there have been serious cuts in publicly funded university

places, particularly in the humanities and social sciences. As a result, most sociology lecturers are underpaid and feel the pressure of the government’s hostility to critical social sciences.

“An important first milestone in restricting institutional autonomy and increasing the financial control over universities was the appointment of government-aligned chancellors in 2014, which expressed the centralized institutional control over the universities. The chancellor, a manager appointed by the prime minister, is responsible for the budget and administration of the HEI, having veto power in these issues against elected bodies of the HEI, such as the Rector or the University Council.

“THE SYSTEM OF CHECKS AND BALANCES HAS BEEN COMPLETELY REMOVED FROM THE OPERATION OF UNIVERSITIES”

“The academic faculty at universities governed by public interest trusts lost their public servant status, placing them in unpredictable, precarious employment conditions. The system of checks and balances has been completely removed from the operation of universities. Real decision-making power has been displaced from the Senate to the Board of Trustees and the university’s top management.”

‘Teaching sociology in contemporary Hungary’, Dr Eszter Berényi, Elte University; Professor Beáta Nagy, Corvinus University of Budapest; Dr Gergely Rosta, Pázmány Péter Catholic University; and Dr Ágnes Rényi, Elte University.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00380385251359757> ■

'SOCIOLOGY TEACHERS ARE VIEWED AS PUBLIC ENEMIES'

Sociology teaching in schools is under attack from right-wing politicians, Dr Amurabi Oliveira says in his article.

A new School Without Party movement attacks sociology teachers as public enemies who are indoctrinating students into Marxist and 'gender ideology'.

The movement has been so successful that some private schools in Brazil have stated in their job postings that they seek a "sociology teacher not oriented by communist or socialist ideology".

In his article, Dr Oliveira notes how the position of sociology changed according to the nature of the political party in power, first becoming a mandatory discipline for courses preparing students for higher education in the 1920s. This mandatory scheme was abandoned in the 1940s as right-wing and military governments took over, sociology was removed from the secondary education curriculum.

It was not until 2008 that sociology teaching became mandatory again in all years in high schools, and from 2008 to 2017 there was a significant expansion of the discipline in the school curriculum and higher education. But in 2017, the mandatory teaching requirement was again removed as the government swung back to the right.

"While in the United States, the debate centres around critical race theory, in Brazil, issues related to Marxism and debates about gender and sexuality gain more prominence," said Dr Oliveira, of the Federal University of Santa Catarina.

"More emphatically, in Brazil, the discussion revolves mainly around the so-called 'cultural Marxism' and 'gender ideology', although both concepts are never clearly defined by those who use them, becoming empty signifiers that can assume various meanings.

"The fear of a 'communist coup' with the ideological arm of Marxist indoctrination in schools continues to be present in the imagination of Brazilian conservative movements.

"The School Without Party has become highly articulate, with different right-wing politicians in Brazil seeking to replicate its ideas through legislative projects. These projects are often presented at various levels of government, including federal, state and municipal, and are frequently advocated as a means of combating 'ideological indoctrination in schools'. During the 2018 presidential campaign, the movement openly supported Jair Bolsonaro's candidacy for the presidency.

"In schools, sociology, philosophy, and history teachers are the most frequently reported by the School Without Party movement. Accusations against teachers labelled as 'indoctrinators' for addressing topics such as gender, racism and social inequalities under capitalism are made through blogs and other digital media platforms, and in some cases even reach public authorities.

"For instance, in 2018, sociology teacher Vanessa Gil was filmed and reported by her students while discussing gender-based violence in the context of that year's presidential election, during which then-candidate Jair Bolsonaro advocated for expanded access to firearms. This recording was sent to the

School Without Party movement and went viral, leading to a wave of online attacks against her and ultimately forcing her to stop teaching that class.

"AN IMPRESSION HAS FORMED THAT THERE IS AN ONGOING SURVEILLANCE OVER TEACHERS"

"An impression has formed that there is an ongoing surveillance over [teachers]. This surveillance is believed to be carried out by students, parents or even fellow teachers.

"Currently, there are over 60 bills inspired by the School Without Party movement under discussion in Brazil, encompassing both municipalities and states. This not only indicates that the discussion is far from over but also suggests that the mere existence of these bills is consistently used as a threat, either implicitly or explicitly, against teachers.

"We have moved from a moment in which secondary education was seen as the main arena for developing a public sociology in Brazil, to a scenario in which sociology has become the target of attacks and sociology teachers are viewed as public enemies."

'The rise and fall of sociology in Brazilian schools: from public sociology to public attacks', Dr Amurabi Oliveira, Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00380385251370978>

SOCIOLOGY FADING ‘LIKE THE CHESHIRE CAT’S GRIN’

The picture is mixed in Australia and New Zealand. In their article, Adam Rajčan and Professor Edgar Burns found that sociology departments had disappeared as they merged into larger academic units, which could either be seen either as a contraction of the discipline or a dissemination of its approach.

The researchers found that the number of departments or units with ‘sociology’ in their title fell from 11 (out of 39 universities in total) to two in Australia from 2000 to 2023, and from five (out of eight universities in total) to one in New Zealand.

The public face of sociology was “fading like Lewis Carroll’s Cheshire cat’s steady disappearance until little more than the grin is left,” the authors said.

“Sociology has been steadily changed from having departmental naming [as] previously found on institutional websites, administrative listings and promotional material.

“SOCIOLOGY HAS BEEN SHIFTED TO BEING A SUBUNIT OF LARGER ORGANISATIONAL UNITS WITH GENERIC TITLES”

“Instead, sociology has been shifted to being a subunit of larger organisational units with generic titles (e.g. School of Social Sciences; School of Humanities, Arts, Education and Law). It is absorbed or submerged as ‘a programme’ or ‘a discipline’ rather than being an autonomous organisational unit with ‘sociology’ in its title. This has implications for the visibility of sociology (and sociologists).”

However, the authors note that “though most sociology teaching units are being submerged, this does not mean that some of them are not ... adding sociologists to the staff or increasing student numbers.”

For instance, the number of PhD completions in sociology departments,

programmes or units increased by almost 50% in Australia from 2010-2019 and stayed constant in New Zealand.

The authors identified 718 sociology PhD students who completed their degrees between 2010 and 2019 in sociology departments or within the new larger structures at Australian and New Zealand universities. They produced 924 journal articles in 579 journals.

Of these, 64% were published in non-sociology journals, 26% were published in sociology journals and 10% in journals whose subject matter was not listed.

The preponderance of publishing outside of sociology journals could be viewed in two ways. “As an intellectual space, this spread of sociological thinking is a positive outcome. As a discipline contesting for its position in the academy, it might be more simply interpreted as sociological contributions sitting with or even disappearing into the success of other fields. We find a tension between sociology’s ability to contribute broadly to academic research and its reduced ability to maintain its visibility.”

The shift to larger academic schools and departments had hit other subjects too, amid the rise of corporate-style management that reduced the authority of academics to make decisions about their university.

‘Australia–New Zealand sociology: less visible or more spread? A contribution to debates around interdisciplinarity and institutional change’, Adam Rajčan, Macquarie University, Australia; Professor Edgar Burns, University of Waikato, New Zealand. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00380385251351261>

UNITED STATES

PROFESSORS TOLD TO REMOVE THE WORD 'DIVERSITY' FROM BOOK



Two sociology professors have been told by their publisher to remove the words 'diversity', 'equity', and 'inclusion' from the next edition of their book, *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies*.

Professor Emeritus Jay Coakley, of the University of Colorado, and Professor Jeffrey Montez de Oca, Chair of the Department of Sociology at Colorado, were asked by McGraw Hill to replace the words with alternatives such as, 'cultural considerations', 'social factors' or 'individual differences'.

The move comes as federal investigations lead to crackdowns on schools' diversity, equity and inclusion policies and the content of syllabi and textbooks.

Professor Coakley and Professor Montez de Oca said they had no intention of implementing anti-DEI changes. They are working with the chief lawyer at the Textbook and Academic Authors Association in the US, and considering legal action. The association has said that the action by the publisher is the first they have encountered.

Professor Coakley said: "Academic book publishers have, in recent years,

included explicit commitments to DEI on their websites. One of the inferences of their commitment to DEI was that their publications would, where relevant, recognise the essential relevance of DEI issues in their content.

"AS PUBLISHERS FEAR RETRIBUTION, THEY ARE BEGINNING TO ASK AUTHORS TO COMPLY WITH REQUESTS TO CHANGE VOCABULARY"

"This now makes them a target for the Trump administration. As publishers fear retribution, they are beginning to ask authors to comply with requests to change the vocabulary as DEI issues are discussed, even in connection with reported data and findings in the research they cite.

"Books that will be challenged include discussions of gender, race, ethnicity, social class and other topics that discuss or cite research dealing with

DEI by using the terms 'diversity', 'equity', 'inclusion' and 'discrimination'. This is the case for *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies* and the new policies of McGraw-Hill Education.

"When will this fascist anti-DEI approach be mandated for course syllabi and the vocabulary used in classroom lectures and discussions? Will we also be asked to delete the 28 'Sports in Society' podcasts we've done that cover issues and controversies?"

- An article in the Wall Street Journal has said that scientists are removing words like 'diverse' and 'disparities' from hundreds of federal grant renewals to avoid getting flagged in the Trump administration's focus on eliminating DEI programmes.

At least 600 research projects funded by the National Institutes of Health were altered over the past few months to remove terms associated with diversity, equity and inclusion, its investigation found. The most frequently deleted term was 'diverse', followed by 'underrepresented'.

www.wsj.com/health/scientists-are-removing-dei-language-to-keep-federal-grants-d092833b

‘AN EVIL EYE STARED UP AT ME’

PAULINE LEONARD, OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON, WRITES ABOUT A CAMPAIGN OF ABUSE AGAINST SOCIOLOGISTS

A few years ago, I picked up a strange and unsettling postcard from my pigeonhole. Against a deep purple background, a single, orange ‘evil eye’ stared up at me. A communication from a PhD student on holiday was an initial thought, until I turned it over and read a malevolent message informing me that I was being ‘watched’. I returned to my office initially perplexed and then became more concerned – who was ‘watching’ me and why? I soon found that another colleague had received a similar communication, and on contacting my dean, the matter was reported to the police. It transpired that a selection of sociologists across the country had been similarly targeted, all with research interests in racial and ethnic inequalities. The perpetrators were never traced.

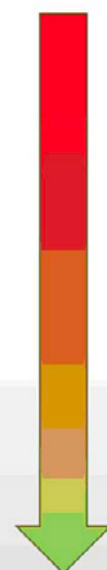
Other colleagues in my Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology were also starting to report hostile, abusive and aggressive reactions to their research. Posts on social media about

new research findings and publications were attracting streams of hatred-filled attacks. This is particularly experienced by women, often intersecting with ethnicity, religion and sexuality. It can be in response to any topic of research, but reactions turn especially virulent on any issues relating to far-right activism and inequalities in race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Posters are often explicitly racist and sexist, threatening physical harm and even rape and murder. Trollers may act as individuals or as members of a network, sometimes encouraging others to join in the hostility through doxxing: publishing private contact details and personal information to expose researchers to further harassment and fear.

My colleague here at the University of Southampton, Larisa Yarovaya, who takes a critical approach to cryptocurrency, has created a barometer of social media abuse, demonstrating how different forums trigger different levels of abuse.

See image

- Twitter (X) – **very high level of abuse**, need constant monitoring.
- Facebook/Instagram – **high level**, unless kept private, hence personal use
- The Conversation – **moderate level**, but quick spillover effect to other platforms above.
- LinkedIn – **golden medium** for engagement with academic and professional network.
- Research Gate – **low abuse**, but purely for academics
- Personal website/webpage/blog – **low abuse, high control**, but too static, easy to neglect.



*Social media abuse barometer, created by Larisa Yarovaya, University of Southampton**

Article continues >

Online abuse can potentially spill over into actual physical, face to face contact. Another colleague has experienced unwanted visits to her office, and hecklers turning up at speaking events to create a climate of hostility and fear. Such experiences are truly frightening, and few of us have the knowledge and skills to cope with these as individuals. And nor should we. This is clearly an important issue for both institutions and professional associations, who have a duty of care to ensure the health and wellbeing of their communities. In response to such threats, researchers may feel forced to be silent about their research on public platforms, not only diminishing the potential of their research findings to positively impact social challenges, but

also negatively affecting their research careers. Social media is increasingly important for developing networks and reaching stakeholders and funders (Head et al 2023) and non-participation may entrench inequalities between researchers.

At the University of Southampton, we have created a working group to investigate the extent of the risk of harm for researchers, not only in the social sciences but across the institution. We aim to develop effective reporting and support structures at the institutional level, clearly signposted and quick to respond. We have found that the risk of abuse is exacerbated for sociologists and criminologists, and as such this is also a critically important issue for

the British Sociological Association. A sector-wide, connected network could provide an important resource for us all, enabling us to share experiences and support each other.

The BSA is keen to help facilitate this development.

If you have experienced similar issues, please do get in touch with the BSA's Chief Executive, Judith Mudd at judith.mudd@britsoc.org.uk

* Michael Head, Larisa Yarovaya, Ashton Kingdon and Millie Downer, University of Southampton (2023) 'Dealing with abuse after public commentary' Tips for public scientists on dealing with abuse | THE Campus Learn, Share, Connect ■

ISA'S DECLARATION OF SOCIOLOGY'S IMPORTANCE SIGNED BY HUNDREDS

A declaration, A Time for Sociology, which was presented to a forum of the International Sociological Association in July, has been endorsed by more than a thousand sociologists worldwide, including many BSA members.

The declaration says that, at a time of hate speech, fake news and global crises, "we believe that critical interventions by social scientists are more essential than ever, and we reaffirm the values and commitments at the core of our work as researchers, educators and public intellectuals".

"SOCIOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES ARE INTRINSIC TO DEMOCRACY AND MUST BE PROTECTED AND PROMOTED"

The declaration, presented by ISA President Geoffrey Pleyers at the Fifth ISA Forum of Sociology in Rabat, Morocco, calls for a "rigorous sociology based on facts and analysis,

that rejects simplistic narratives and embraces the world's complexity ... sociology and the social sciences are intrinsic to democracy and must be protected and promoted.

"We believe that informed, historically grounded and sociologically relevant public debate is vital to understanding and navigating the crises of our times.

"We are convinced that sociology not only helps us understand the world, but also to build a more just, liveable, peaceful and sustainable future. At a time of climate change, war, rising inequality and hatred, sociology has become an indispensable tool for living together on a finite planet."

The declaration is available in English, Armenian, Arabic, Catalan, French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Turkish, and is being published in academic journals. Sociologists can endorse it here: <https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/about-isa/executive-committee/presidential-corner-23/lfp-a-time-for-sociology>

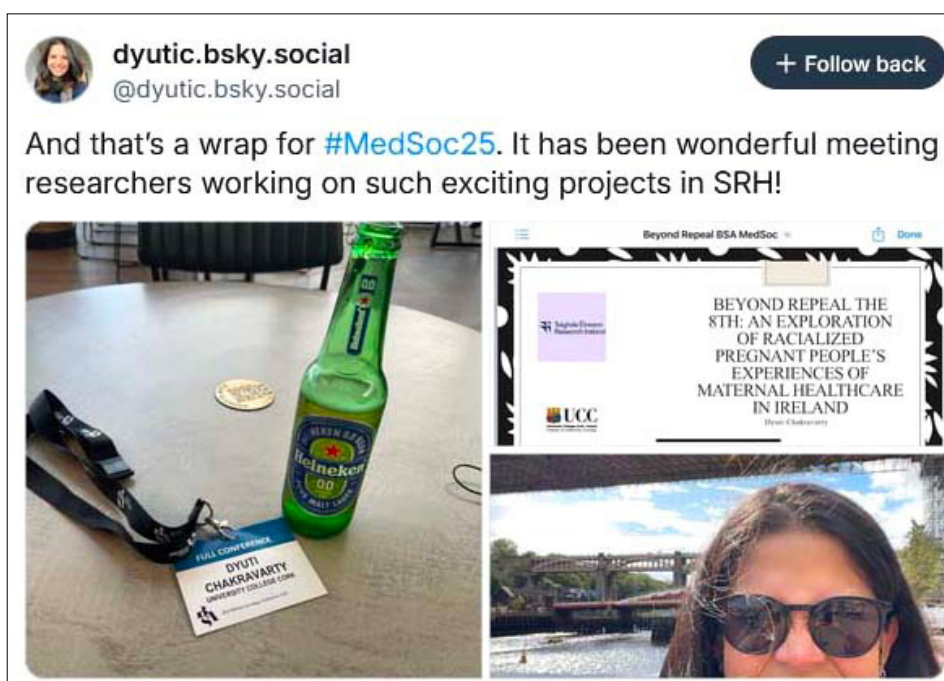
GREAT DAYS AT MEDSOC DRAW IN AUDIENCE FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Last year's MedSoc conference, at Northumbria University in September, attracted 242 delegates from 28 countries, including Brazil, Ethiopia, India, Japan, Nigeria, the US and South Korea, as well as the UK and other European countries.

The number of delegates – 19 attending on free places – was a rise on the 211 who attended 2024's event at Warwick. A total of 174 oral presentations were given at Northumbria, with 16 posters.

The conference proved popular, with people posting favourable comments such as “lovely few days”, “wonderful” and “great day”.

See images



The programme featured six special events on: care in contexts of crisis; embedded research; recalibrating stigma; public discourses of health and illness; eating disorder treatment and recovery; and collaborative group working.

Professor Ruth Holliday, of the University of Leeds, gave the opening plenary, on ‘Enacting and resisting gendered and colonial constructions of the surgically enhanced breast’. see page 39 Dr Jen Remnant, University

of Strathclyde, gave the closing plenary on ‘Sick at work, sick of work – managing long-term ill-health in the contemporary UK workplace’. see page 41

Simon Carter and Hillary Collins stepped down as co-convenors of the MedSoc committee, with Jaime Garcia Iglesias and Julia Swallow taking their place alongside the current co-convenor, Victoria Cluley. Raquel Bosó

Article continues >

Pérez and George Burrows joined the committee as ordinary members and Marie Larsson as an ECR representative. The Foundation of the Sociology of Health and Illness book prize was won

by Dr Elizabeth Chiarello, of St Louis University, US, for her book, *Policing Patients: Treatment and Surveillance on the Frontlines of the Opioid Crisis*.



The book draws on interviews with physicians, pharmacists and enforcement agents across the US on the frontlines of the opioid crisis, where medical providers must make difficult choices between treating and punishing the people in their care. More details: <https://tinyurl.com/naxm6fcp>

The prize, of £1,000, is awarded each September to the author or editor of the book making the most significant contribution to medical sociology or the sociology of health and illness published during the preceding three years.

The Phil Strong prize was given to Victoria Nunn, a PhD student at Northumbria University, to help with her research on how voluntary organisations shape mental health research.

The prize was established in memory of Phil Strong (1945-1995), who influenced the development of medical sociology in the UK. It is worth £1,200 and is given to support postgraduate research.

The conference organising committee was: Simon Carter, Victoria Cluley, Hillary Collins, Emma Craddock, Priya Davda, Christopher Elsey, Jaime Garcia Iglesias, Hazel Marzetti, Raquel Bosó Pérez, Chloe Phillips, María Jesús Vega Salas, Julia Swallow, Amelia Talbot and Rose Watson.

- The group is planning to restart its popular poster prize this year. It also operates a mentoring scheme and 34 matches have been made.

‘NHS HAS EFFECTIVELY ENDED PUBLICLY-FUNDED TRANS CARE BY EXTENDING WAIT TIMES’



Ruth Holliday

The contrast between the difficulty in obtaining surgery to remove male genitalia and the ease of getting breast augmentation operations for women was highlighted in Ruth Holliday’s plenary address.

Professor Holliday, of the University of Leeds, said that breast enlargement and orchiectomy – the removal of testicles – were both simple operations, yet the latter was much more difficult to obtain.

This meant that trans men found it much harder to get the surgery they wanted, compared with women who wanted cosmetic treatments.

“Breast augmentation and orchiectomy are both simple and quick,” said Professor Holliday, who is researching this area with colleagues. “Orchiectomy has, if anything, a lower risk because there is no foreign body implanted. It has been tried and tested over thousands of years and it is routinely used on animals.

“Yet, in western biomedicine, removing the testicles is considered high risk, risking functional damage to the body, so that it must be tightly restricted.

“Patients have to meet a definition of psychological distress called gender dysphoria, be diagnosed by a psychiatrist within a strict binary model as feeling trapped in the wrong body, be easily able to pass as their identified gender, be heterosexual after transition, and not feel aroused by the thought of surgical changes to the body. This creates extremely narrow diagnostic criteria, which means doctors have been able to reject the vast majority of trans patients.

“Some states in the US have criminalised doctors treating young trans people, and in the UK the NHS has effectively ended publicly-funded trans care by extending waiting times so far as to make it untenable. Such restrictions then force trans people into circumvention tourism, in which they must pay out of pocket for medical procedures in another country. Raising money for this is one factor pushing trans people into sex work or into DIY [surgical] practices.”

She contrasted this with the easy availability of breast augmentation for

Article continues >



women, despite its history of causing medical problems. Silicon implants were invented in the 1970s, but “early implants ruptured, distributing silicon around the body, and more than 25% suffered capsular contracture after 10 years, where scar tissue builds up around the implants and the breasts go hard and misshapen.

“By 1992, silicon implants were banned and by 1995, half a million women were suing implant manufacturers Dow Corning, who declared bankruptcy but eventually entered into a \$3.2 billion settlement with 70,000 women.”

The FDA later approved breast implants, but “studies demonstrate a three-year complication rate of between 36% and 50%, mostly from capsular contracture. There’s a three-year re-operation rate of 15% to 29%, mostly for aesthetic reasons, and a high level of nipple numbness and problems breastfeeding.”

Some women who had breasts removed as part of cancer treatment were put under pressure to have implants, said Professor Holliday. One woman interviewee said that her surgeon told her she had to have a reconstruction or she “wouldn’t feel feminine and would become depressed.”

But, said Professor Holliday, “since the surgery, she’s had multiple problems with her back, where muscle for her reconstruction was harvested, and she suspected that her PIP [Poly Implant Prothèse] implant had ruptured, releasing non-medical grade silicon to migrate around her body.”

Professor Holliday contrasted Western attitudes to male genital removal to those in Thailand.

“Thailand is a global hub for trans medical tourism. The country’s skills in sex reassignment surgery for gender-affirming care were honed within its relaxed attitude to gender and sexual

diversity, especially in relation to kathoey – or ladyboys – a term that includes anything from gay men, to transvestites, to castrated individuals, to fully transitioned transwomen.

“Orchiectomy has a long history in Thailand and elsewhere as an androgen blocking procedure that yields a more feminine appearance, particularly when conducted before puberty.”

“THE EXTENT OF GENDER, SEXUAL AND FAMILIAL NON-CONFORMITY IS DIZZYING IN ITS VARIETY”

She noted the history of eunuchs throughout history, prized for the quality of their singing. Castrated men often had high status in Native American cultures, in Samoa and the Philippines. “The extent of gender, sexual and familial non-conformity is dizzying in its variety,” she said.

It was the advent of European colonialism that changed this. “Hetero patriarchal norms and binary hierarchical agendas were seen as signs of civilization and development by European colonizers. The colonized were seen as backward, abnormal or deviant if they did not follow Europeans’ binary gender, and non-conforming people were often the first victims of colonial genocides.”

Ruth Holliday is Professor of Gender and Culture in the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds. In 2020, her book *Beautyscapes*, (written with Meredith Jones and David Bell) won the FSHI Book Prize. ■



‘NHS STAFF WITH HEALTH PROBLEMS CAN BE SEEN BY MANAGERS AS MANIPULATIVE OR LAZY’

NHS staff with health problems who challenge the system can be perceived by their managers as manipulative or lazy, the Medsoc conference heard.

Dr Jen Remnant told her plenary audience that managers often categorised staff with health issues as ‘absentees’, ‘poor performers’, ‘health and safety risks’ or ‘difficult/disruptive employees’.

“THERE’S AN IMPLICIT ASSUMPTION THAT PEOPLE ARE LYING OR OVER-EXAGGERATING THEIR NEEDS OR SYMPTOMS AND THEY’RE DISINGENUOUS, MANIPULATIVE, LAZY OR ENTITLED”

The latter category was “the most common categorisation – the difficult, disruptive diva, the argumentative, challenging individual,” said Dr Remnant, of the University of Strathclyde, who is researching ill health and employment among NHS staff.

“There’s an implicit assumption that people are lying or over-exaggerating their needs or symptoms and they’re disingenuous, manipulative, lazy or entitled.

“I heard a lot from managers [who said] ‘I can’t provide this person this support even though they’re asking for it a lot and it’s causing me a lot of stress.’”

Dr Remnant said that “if you complain about anything, no matter how wrong it is or how right you are, you become the problem by complaining”, which could lead to “disciplinary and grievances.”

She gave as an example an NHS administrator who encountered problems with the management after asking for an ergonomic chair for her health condition and left her job. The administrator told her: “I was seen

as a bit of a lame duck. And while I could have continued to fight and fight and fight, I thought, what’s the point? Because it’s not doing any good. It’s not helping me. It’s making you feel stressed, it’s making you feel bullied. It’s making me feel surplus to requirements.”

Dr Remnant said that when staff were absent from ill health, this led to “heightened levels of scrutiny that are in themselves problematic and punitive. There’s a policy presumption of either a return to full productivity after temporary deviation, or an entire contractual change that’s usually a drop to part-time work or a demotion.”

This was despite “legal protections against discrimination based on age and disability in the Equality Act 2010,” which required employers to take reasonable steps to remove barriers to working. “But it’s a really useless piece of legislation because it all balances on the word ‘reasonable’, which is massively subjective.”

Article continues >

She spoke about a midwife with endometriosis who had pain flares once a month and who asked for time off during this. “They just couldn’t accommodate it despite the regularity of it, despite her ability to articulate what she needed. The recommendations were, ‘if you could ever feel like this at work, you shouldn’t be here’. And so she was just signed off for six months for a fluctuating long-term health condition that had a regular, periodic flare-up, and she left her job.”

Dr Remnant also spoke about categories of staff who put up with difficult working conditions without complaint: ‘martyrs’ and ‘superstars’, including one interviewee she would “always remember, as it broke my heart.”

“THAT’S WHERE HE WANTED TO BE, BUT HE WAS BROKEN IN A MILLION WAYS”

“He was this huge, wonderful guy who was the embodiment of compassion. He was an emergency department nurse and he specialised in people who are coming in in a crisis, a mental health crisis, a substance abuse crisis.



That’s where he wanted to be, but he was broken in a million ways.”

He told her that after his own health problems worsened, he had tried to commit suicide three times, yet carried on working.

“He was really unwell, really dangerously unwell. He went on to list about eight different medications that he’s on. This man rattled when he moved. And he just had this growing list of health conditions that he was just tolerating.”

Many nurses told Dr Remnant that, in effect, “I’m a nurse and this is just what nurses have to tolerate. We just have to have muscular skeletal health issues. We just have to have high levels of anxiety. We just have to have problematic gut issues.”

Dr Remnant is a Senior Lecturer in the Scottish Centre for Employment Research at Strathclyde Business School, University of Strathclyde. ■

WES CONFERENCE



‘EMPLOYERS IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES ARE CONSISTENT IN THE WAY THEY EXPLOIT THEIR STAFF’

Employers in different countries and time periods are “boringly consistent” in the way they exploit and harass their staff, Professor Jean Jenkins told her WES plenary audience.

“Sadly, in terms of the exploitation of workers and the poor conditions of work that exist around the world, there’s an awful lot of continuity, which we as scholars need to expose, and need to expose clearly,” said Professor Jenkins, a co-Director of the Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research Data at Cardiff University.

“Something that I’ve felt as I’ve done my own research is how boringly consistent employers are at finding ways to exploit workers, and they use the same methods across time and across space – it doesn’t matter whether you are in India or Phnom Penh, in Turkey or in Leicester.

“The same traditional ways of exploitation come through because

we’re all working in a system which, we have to remember, expects workers to devote themselves to producing surplus value in which they don’t share, and they are not ever intended to share in.”

She and colleagues carried out a study into the nature of workplace violations in a factory in Bangalore in India. She said there were examples of managers intimidating staff to force them to meet production targets, isolating them, preventing them from getting food or water, and sexually harassing them by using their debts against them.

“Using debt to control a worker and then getting sexual favours for forgiveness of that debt is an age old tactic. It is seen today right across Asia, where women are stereotyped as promiscuous because they work in garment factories. It’s the same trope – stigmatise the victim.

Article continues >

“But [the victims] could come from anywhere. They could come from Eastern Europe, they could come from Leicester, they could come from anywhere in the UK, so the fact that it’s India shouldn’t make us think that this is a problem which is far away.”

“THE WORKPLACE IS A MICROCOSM OF WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON IN SOCIETY”

The forms of harassment were related to the nature of wider society. “You can’t study a workshop without studying the society within which it exists and the industrial structure within which it is set. The workplace is a microcosm of what else is going on in society.”

One example of this was that sexual harassment was rife in some factories because women were discouraged by wider society from reporting this, she said.

Professor Jenkins referred to a group of ethnographers at Manchester University, including Tom Lupton and Sheila Cunnison, who described workplace relations and the interactions between society and workplace.

“They undertook their studies by means of intensive open participant observation in five [garment] factories. What these scholars gave us was a detailed description of workshop life,

down to wage rates, and how gender and ethnicity was used on the factory floor to divide workers.

“These books are of their time, these outputs are of their time. There’s a lot in there that we probably wouldn’t use as an interpretation today. But there’s an awful lot that, if you took Sheila Cunnison into a workshop in India today, she would recognise.

“We are driven as scholars to constantly find something new to say, to have some new contributions, some new theoretical insight. I’m not speaking against theory, it’s very important, otherwise we can’t understand what we are looking at, but there’s very little that’s new.”

Miguel Martinez Lucio, Professor of International Human Resource Management and Comparative Industrial Relations at the University of Manchester, also spoke at the first plenary, on ‘The widening of the employment relations agenda: trajectories, possibilities and challenges’.

The Work, Employment and Society conference took place at the University of Manchester in September, with more than 250 presentations given. The organising committee was: Chris Chan, Royal Holloway; Susan Kirk, Newcastle University; Marti Lopez-Andreu, Newcastle University; Toma Pustelnikovaite, Cardiff University; and Jenny Rodriguez, University of Manchester. ■



‘GOVERNMENT MAKING A SERIOUS SHIFT IN POLICY TO CUT NUMBERS OF WORKERS FROM ABROAD’

The Labour government is introducing a “serious shift” in policy on bringing in workers from abroad, Dr Manoj Dias-Abey told his plenary audience.

It will no longer allow the care sector to obtain skilled worker visas and all jobs will require at least undergraduate degree level training, he said.

Dr Dias-Abey, of the University of Bristol, contrasted the new approach with the previous decades, saying that “between 1997 and 2010 [the years of the New Labour government], the UK’s population increased by 2.2 million people.

“Some of this was due to the increase in unrestricted migration from the former Eastern Bloc countries, but a lot of it was due to deliberate policy choices in the area of labour migration.”

These policy choices involved the “creation of a high-skilled migration programme, which sought to attract more high-skilled workers from outside the European Union.

“The programme selected candidates on a points basis, and certain

points were awarded for certain characteristics such as educational attainment and previous income. Once successful, an applicant was given an unrestricted work visa to enter the UK.

“Labour migration, particularly of high skilled workers, was seen to promote a whole variety of economic goals: labour productivity, addressing short term shortages in growth industries, and just generally increasing the human capital stock of the country.

“This way of thinking about economic growth, the labour market and migration, was not just a UK-wide phenomenon. You see similar thinking occurring right across many of the advanced economies, which explains why a lot of countries started to reorient their migration policies towards attracting high skilled migrants around this time.”

But when the Conservative government took office in 2010, first in a coalition and later as a majority government, “completely different thinking prevailed during the post-global financial crisis period, in which austerity was the order of the day, and

migration became a lazy explanation for a whole set of dissatisfactions. The government – and I want to single out the Home Secretary, Theresa May – really amplified some of these explanations.

“It wasn’t possible for that government to control EU migration and so they introduced things like annual quotas to try and bring down non-EU migration. And, of course, the ‘hostile environment’ policy, which was introduced to get migrants to ‘self-deport.’”

Britain’s departure from the EU Single Market and Customs Union after Brexit changed the situation again.

“When the Brexit referendum result came through, there was a decision taken by the Conservative government that this meant leaving the Single Market, which need not have been the case. The UK left on the 31st of December, 2020, and free movement came to an end. So the end of free movement necessitated a new labour migration programme.”

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The government under Boris Johnson “was keen to present the new system that it introduced in the wake of Brexit as radical and revolutionary. But in actuality, it really wasn’t that. The liberalisation was quite significant in some respects. Annual quotas were abolished, salary thresholds were reduced. For those jobs for which you previously needed an undergraduate degree, the requirement was reduced to just A-levels.

“If you look at the detailed reports, policy documents and political debates surrounding the first [post-] Brexit migration scheme, you see that a lot of the thinking between the [Johnson] government and the New Labour years remained intact. They were still seeking to attract the best and brightest in pursuit of a set of economic goals. And it’s under this particular system that numbers really shot up.

“IT’S NOT PARTICULARLY SURPRISING, GIVEN THE LIBERALISATION, THAT FULLY 50% OF FULL-TIME JOBS IN THE UK WERE ELIGIBLE FOR A WORK VISA”

“It’s not particularly surprising, given the liberalisation, that fully 50% of full-time jobs in the UK were eligible for a work visa. And the ongoing challenges in recruitment and retention in the NHS and social care sectors also added further impetus. As an example, in 2023, there were close to 340,000 skilled work visas given in health and social care, and a further 280,000 visas for dependants of those primary visa holders. In the dying days of the Sunak government a variety of tweaks were introduced to bring those numbers down.

“Labour [under Starmer] has kept many of those changes. But what we are starting to see is a more serious rethinking of labour migration as well. The Labour government published in its immigration White Paper that they intend to no longer allow the care sector to access skilled worker visas. Going forward, all jobs will once again require at least undergraduate degree level training. The government wants to make access to work visas contingent on the implementation of sectoral workforce plans.

“If implemented in full this represents quite a serious shift from previous thinking about labour migration – whether we’re seeing a paradigm shift or something lesser than that is yet to be determined.

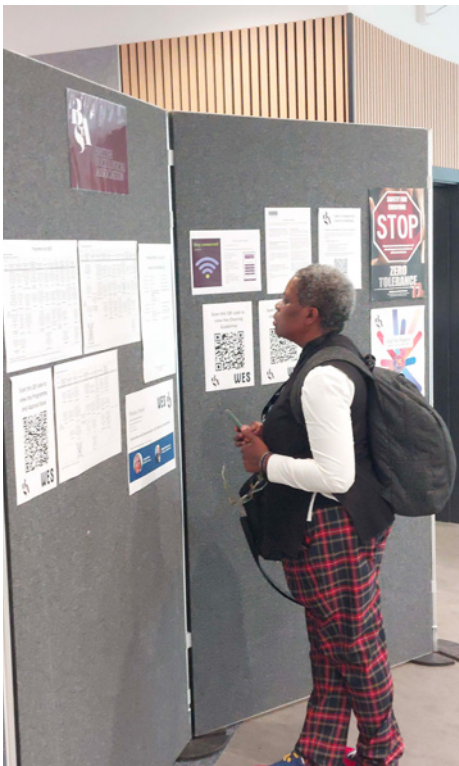
“We’re seeing a shift away from a demand-driven orthodoxy, where employers were in the driving seat to determine labour shortages and how many migrant workers to bring in, towards the state intervening much more heavily to verify employers claims and then making recruitment contingent on fulfilling a certain amount of the government’s broader economic goals.”

- Also on the plenary panel was Dr Pratima Sambajee, of the University of Strathclyde, who spoke on immigrant workers to Mauritius, who were now mostly from Bangladesh. Dr Sambajee highlighted their poor working conditions, low wages and exploitation, which she attributed to low levels of unionisation and the lack of enforcement of the historically established labour laws brought in after robust working class campaigning post-independence.

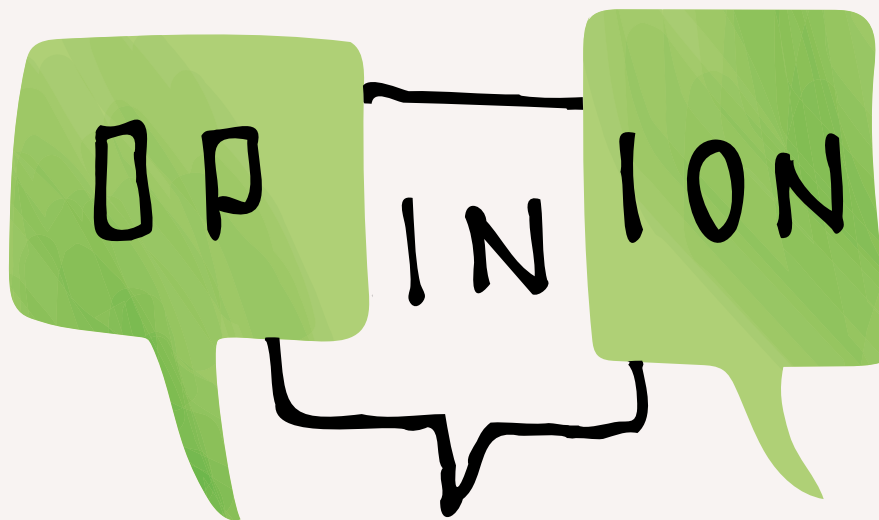
The third panel speaker, Dr Eleanor Kirk, of the University of Glasgow, spoke on how, from the beginning of capitalism, the law has been central to the preservation of wealth, entrenched class relations and property rights. Yet, over the course of history, the law had also imposed limits on rulers’ arbitrary exercise of power. ■



WES CONFERENCE PHOTO DIARY



Opinion



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'THE WEIGHT OF BOOKS COULD BRING THE CEILING DOWN': 60 YEARS OF SOCIOLOGY AT YORK

DR DANIEL ROBINS WRITES ABOUT SIX DECADES OF SOCIOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF YORK

It's 1963 and in a historically rich landscape just south of the city of York, a university is taking shape, becoming home to thousands of students within a few short years. Sociology at York was part of a broader expansion of social science, at the time forming a single department with Politics and Economics. In 1964, the first chair of sociology was appointed, Professor Ronald Fletcher, and in following year, Sociology broke into its own department entirely, initially housed in a former village stable.

Sociology at York grew surprisingly quickly in the coming years, with notable appointments that would speak to the evolving discipline of the mid-20th century. Colin Campbell, now Emeritus in the Department, was appointed assistant lecturer in 1964, going on to make a prominent contribution to the sociology of consumption, and becoming Head of Department in the 1990s. Laurie Taylor joined the Department in October 1965, having been recruited from the position of assistant English teacher at a comprehensive school. Laurie would also become Head of Department before developing a flourishing career as columnist and broadcaster.

A feature in *Sociology* from 1972 includes a section quaintly entitled 'Notes from the north', noting Roland Robertson as Head of Department, and the arrival of Andy Tudor, who did so much to develop the media studies field and to position York as a leader in cultural sociology. Andy would go on to establish the University's Department of Theatre, Film and Television. The anthropologist Anne Akeroyd had also



Social Psychology lab at York

been appointed and would contribute to the life of the Department for many years. Trevor Pinch and Mike Mulkay would also join, supervising a number of influential sociologists of science including Nigel Gilbert, Steve Woolgar and Jonathan Potter, as well as Andrew Webster and Steve Yearley, who would both return to York as heads of the Sociology Department in the years to come.

This early rapid expansion in academic staff meant that sociology had to bolt from the stables to new accommodation in the University's Wentworth College, where it would be housed for many years. Indeed, the stables had to be hastily evacuated over concerns that the weight of books

on the first floor could well bring the ceiling down. Today, the Department is located in an architecturally award-winning angular glass and wood panel-clad building on York's Campus East. But the themes that developed during those formative decades in the brutalist 1960s architecture of the Wentworth building very much set the foundations for the Department's research and teaching 60 years later. We continue to evolve our intellectual agenda with reference to four key areas: culture and values; gender and sexuality; language, interaction, and conversation analysis; and science, health, and technology.

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York sociology played a notable role in shaping a burgeoning British cultural sociology from the 1970s onwards, becoming one of the hubs for critical criminology and the National Deviancy Symposium, challenging traditional normative crime studies. Ground breaking work on sub-cultures, popular culture, and consumption by Barry Sandywell ran parallel to, and often in dialogue with, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Over the years this has developed into our culture and values cluster, with York having become a centre of research strength in digital technologies, algorithmic life and artificial intelligence. Alongside this, we have celebrated growing research funding success, exploring cultures of religion, education, cities and memory, as well as sustaining our long history of research and teaching in both critical and cultural criminology.

The appointment of Sue Lees, Mary Maynard and others as lecturers in the 1960s and into the 1970s helped to lay the foundations for new and influential research and teaching in gender and inequalities, leading to the establishment of the Centre for Women's Studies founded in 1984, and the appointment of Stevi Jackson in the 1990s.

This focus has widened into the intersectional accounting of gender, examined alongside class, ethnicity, disability and sexuality. Our research has expanded into the digital world, with work on intimacy, migration, social media, pregnancy, the reproduction of Blackness, the experiences and safety of trans sex workers, and sexuality among young disabled people. This focus on inequalities in our research is reflected in Katy Sian's development of the anti-racist toolkit that supports research practice and teaching.

Wentworth College was also home to one of the first social psychology labs. The work of York sociologists, such as Paul Drew, and later Robin Wooffitt, Celia Kitzinger and others, carved the way for a focus in the Department on language and social interaction. A particular interest developed through this cluster has been on conversation analysis in a range of contexts including healthcare practice, training and treatment.

The Department's contribution to the early sociology of scientific knowledge, and science and technology studies, was consolidated over the years with the appointments of Trevor Pinch and then later Amanda Rees and Andrew Webster, who brought with him the

Science and Technology Studies Unit (SATSU) in 1999. Under Andrew and Nik Brown SATSU flourished, securing the ESRC and MRC's flagship five-year Innovative Health Technologies Programme, and earning EU Marie Curie training site-status, hosting dozens of PhD students throughout the 2000s from across Europe and beyond. Today the science, health, and technology cluster and SATSU, co-directed by Richard Tutton and Jenn Chubb, is the launchpad for wide-ranging sociological research on the space industries, medical technologies and digital/algorithmic life, led by Dave Beer, Ben Jacobson and others.

In June 2025, we celebrated our 60th anniversary with an event in our East Campus building. As somebody who has been part of the Department for over eight years, completing my PhD here and going on to hold roles in teaching and learning and in research, it is the collegiality that I have appreciated the most. At York, I have built lasting and close ties with colleagues that have shaped my identity as an academic. It is wonderful to be part of a department where I have such fond memories, but also one which has such an exciting future. ■



Food Behind Bars © Andy Aitchison

HOW FOOD PRACTICES CONTRIBUTE TO REHABILITATION IN PRISON

**MARIA ADAMS, JULIE PARSONS AND LUCY VINCENT WRITE
ABOUT FOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN PRISONS**

Across the UK and USA, food education programmes for people in prison, or at risk of going to prison, offer powerful examples of initiatives that foster a sense of community — creating spaces where individuals can cook, learn and eat together while developing a pro-social sense of identity. These programmes not only build transferable practical skills but also enhance wellbeing and self-esteem.

This raises an important question: how can food practices contribute to a rehabilitative culture in prison and beyond, both in the UK and the USA? To explore this, we draw on the authors' observations as well as case studies of organisations such as Recipe for Change in Chicago, LandWorks, and Food Behind Bars in England.

Community organisations share a vision to improve the lives of people in the criminal justice system through food practices. The organisations use a range of carceral spaces: for example, Recipe for Change took ownership of a kitchen that was separate to the main prison population, which was designated for men on a pizza-making training programme. The space was designed to resemble a fashion-pizzeria kitchen with a specialist pizza oven. There were around 10 men in the kitchen, where each had a role for making homemade pizzas.

These spaces offer an insight to the outside world by providing an

environment and resources, such as the prison oven and tablecloths, giving people in prison the chance to experience hospitality culture as well as sentiments of home life, which helps them to reintegrate back into the outside world.

We found, across the UK and US, that there were lots of interesting spaces that were used as a hub for learning – including the gardens. Prisons like HMP Send and HMP East Sutton Park would have a site where women could grow fruit and vegetables or have opportunities to participate in farming.

Further, programmes like LandWorks includes a working market garden for its beneficiaries, who can work and train in horticulture. This provides food for the daily shared communal lunch and contributes food for sale to the local community in the onsite shop.

Community organisations across the UK and US encourage a sense of

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preparing, sharing and eating good food that contrast with other spaces in the prison that reinforced harms of criminalisation or the hostility of the prison site. Charitable organisations such as LandWorks, use food-based interventions (growing, cooking, sharing and eating together) as part of their strengths-based, holistic and trauma-informed approach, to enhance the opportunities for recently released prisoners and those with community sentences.

Similarly, Food Behind Bars provides programmes that present opportunities for prisoners and families to cook and eat together, using the prison dining hall to humanise this experience. Across the pond, Recipe for Change uses the kitchen space for men to cook and eat together, to ensure that men were able to have a space to dine and socialise with one another as well as enjoy the fruits of their labour.

Across both the UK and the USA, visible racial inequities persist, particularly in the over-representation of young Black men in prison. These disparities are often further reinforced within the prison system itself. Community organisations aim to address these issues by incorporating a mixture of pedagogical approaches that includes both formal and informal socio-cultural food related activities and an awareness of the structural inequalities that disproportionately affect minoritised communities. Recipe for Change uses art and music production as key components of the curriculum. The intent was not only to foster creativity but also to humanise the participants by recognising that music production can reaffirm social identities and provide a means of self-expression often denied within carceral settings.

How do Food Education programmes serve the broader narratives? In an edited collection on the role of food in resettlement and rehabilitation (*The Role of Food in Resettlement and Rehabilitation: Good Food and Good*

Lives, by Julie Parsons and Kevin Wong), all the contributors make a case for the ways in which food can be used as a force for good. This is especially pertinent for criminalised individuals who were socially excluded, as learning about food, cooking recipes, table manners, eating together and growing food are everyday opportunities for enhancing social skills and increasing self-confidence.

‘CHANGE FOR INDIVIDUALS CAUGHT UP IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM IS POSSIBLE’

The success of these community organisations in bringing about change for those involved in their food interventions are significant. They demonstrate that change for individuals caught up in the criminal justice system is possible; however further investment is needed in the system itself if we are serious about improving the lives of the criminalised population and reducing reoffending.

We can do this by investing in programmes that enhance learning about food, whether this is in more formal education settings, such as prison kitchens, or informally through opportunities to grow, share and cook together. These opportunities need to be provided regularly and consistently. Indeed food activities provide opportunities to be creative and are a meaningful way to enrich skills in employment and education that contribute to a rehabilitative culture and a good (food) life.

Dr Maria Adams, University of Surrey; Dr Julie Parsons, University of Plymouth; Lucy Vincent, Chief Executive, Food Behind Bars. ■

HOW DID A MOMENT OF HOPE AND EMPATHY TRANSFORM INTO FEARFUL RE-BORDERING?

DR BILLY HOLZBERG RELATES HOW HE CAME TO WRITE HIS AWARD-WINNING BOOK ON AFFECT AND MIGRATION, AFFECTIVE BORDERING

I began this book during the long summer of migration of 2015 in Germany, when the European border regime briefly gave way under the mobilisation of people fleeing Syria and other regions of war and destitution. Often misnamed the European ‘refugee crisis’, this moment was rooted in long histories of displacement in racial capitalism, to which Germany had long responded with deterrence, denial and humanitarian exceptions. Yet this time, there seemed to be a political and affective opening. Chancellor Angela Merkel promised asylum to Syrians, mobilised hope by declaring, “Wir schaffen das” (we can do this), and the international media marvelled at a new compassionate ‘welcome culture’.

At the time, I was engaged in the border struggles of the moment while also a PhD student at LSE’s Department of Gender Studies, immersed in queer feminist theories of affect and emotion. Bringing theory and practice together, I began to examine how borders operate not just economically, politically or socially, but also, crucially, through affective practices grounded in emotion and attachment. Following the innovative work of scholars like Sara Ahmed, Yasmin Gunaratnam and Miriam Ticktin, I spent the last 10 years tracing how the initial hope of 2015 turned into guilt, anger and resentment. How did a moment of, at least, cautious hope and empathy transform into fearful re-bordering and resentful nationalism?

What I found is that both negative and positive emotions often operate as shared practices of affective bordering. For instance, public appeals to empathy, usually assumed to counter states of fear and resentment, can also reproduce racialised hierarchies between those bestowing the gift of empathy and those contending to receive it. What undergirds these practices of affective bordering is what I call the ‘racial grammars of deservingness’, deeply ingrained norms and social convictions of who counts as worthy of affective concern and who does not. While a child like Alan Kurdi was framed as deserving of empathy, adult male refugees were cast as threats, sexual invaders, criminals and cheats, in need of deterrence.

More so, the racial grammars of deservingness shape who becomes positioned as the subject of affect, worthy of national concern and attention, and who as the object of affect, is relegated to spheres of abandonment, violence and destruction. Public and political discourse kept affirming that we finally ‘have to take people’s fears and worries seriously’. These ‘people’, however, were never racialised migrant workers, people anxiously waiting for papers, or those afraid of ongoing Nazi terror in the country. Instead, they were and are imagined as white citizens, often male, usually middle-class, who are supposedly overwhelmed by the spectre of migration.

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Billy Holzberg receiving his prize from BSA President, Rachel Brooks

Yet, the book also goes beyond the critique of affective bordering by exploring how migrants and solidarity actors enact alternative affective practices in marches of hope, refugee hunger strikes or initiatives against racist terror. Focusing on these alternative affective practices, the book highlights not only the critique of the current European border regime but also gestures to abolitionist horizons in which the relationality of social life is not framed through the biopolitical double bind of racialised threat and liberal recognition.

The BSA Philip Abrams Memorial Prize is for the best first and sole-authored book within the discipline of Sociology.

It was established in honour of the memory of Professor Philip Abrams

whose work contributed substantially to sociology and social policy research in Britain. He is remembered for the encouragement and assistance he provided to many young sociologists at the start of their careers.

In recognition of his commitment to sociology as a discipline, the British Sociological Association established this prize to stimulate new ideas and fresh research in sociology by encouraging new British authors.

Dr Holzberg, of King's College London, won the British Sociological Association's annual Philip Abrams Memorial Prize for *Affective Bordering: Race, Deservingness and the Emotional Politics of Migration Control*. ■

Desert Island Discourse



DIANE REAY WRITES ABOUT THE BOOKS THAT HAVE INSPIRED HER



Diane Reay is Professor of Education at Cambridge University, working in the area of education, with a strong social justice agenda that addresses social inequalities. She is author of books including *Miseducation: Inequality, Education and the Working Classes* (2025). She is the daughter of a coal miner and the eldest of eight children.

What made you choose your first book, *Germinal*, by Emile Zola?

My first choice is a book I read as a teenager. I loved English literature as a schoolgirl, and wanted to study English at university but my father said it was a whimsical subject and I had to think in more practical terms. However, despite loving literature, I never found myself in any of the texts until I read D H Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. I can remember the excitement of reading about coal mining families like my own, the thrill of recognition. However, it was a couple of years later when I was in the sixth-form that I found a book that really stirred my emotions, *Germinal*, by Emile Zola.

In both novels the brutal realities of working class lives are laid bare on the pages, and although the hero in both books is male I felt the writing was describing my history rather than that of others. There is also an honesty in both narratives that is largely missing in the eulogizing of the heroic coal miner. Rather, I believe Tony Benn summed it up really well when he argued that “the only time working class people are allowed to become heroes is when they are trapped, dying or dead [...] If there is a pit disaster [the miners are heroes], if there is a wage claim, they are militants” (Tony Benn, *Against The Tide: Diaries 1973-1976*. pp. 400, 471). In place of insincere nostalgia, both books share an empathetic understanding of the complexities of life in coal mining communities. But given the choice I would have to take *Germinal*. I think that Lawrence and his protagonist Paul were too keen to assimilate into the status quo rather than change it. Like Zola I have always been hoping for an army of ‘men’ who would establish justice.

Your second choice is *Education and the Working Class*, by Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden – what led you to this?

This book has played such an important part in my academic trajectory. I read it as an undergraduate, feeling totally alienated and out of place in an elite university. I was reassured by the sympathetic insights into the dilemmas of being socially mobile, but, more than that, I was emboldened by its clear, evidence-based class analysis of the injuries the educational system inflicts on both the vast majority of the working class that it fails but also on the few it allows into the upper reaches of society.

This was not a book that I merely read, but rather one that spoke eloquently and with insight and sensitivity to me about the travails of social mobility, recognising the damage it wreaks, as well as the privileges it confers. It is also a text that comes alive as you read it, pulsing with emotions and

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passionate concern for its protagonists. I just love this quote – ‘class’ could be “something in the blood, in the very fibre of a man or woman: a way of growing, feeling, judging taken out of the resources of generations gone before. Not something to be shuffled off with new possessions, new prospects, new surroundings; to be overlaid perhaps, or felt in new ways.” (Jackson and Marsden 1962, p.172). Fifty years after I first read it, *Education and the Working Class* became the model for my own book, *Miseducation*. Despite it being written in the 1960s, every time I have read it (at least 10 times), I find something new and powerful to ponder on.

Why did you choose *Man Made Language*, by Dale Spender, for your third book?

I was a primary school teacher from 1971 until 1991. Over that period my focus was as much on what formal schooling was doing to girls and their confidence as it was on class and race inequalities. I studied *Man Made Language* on my Human Rights masters course in the early 1980s, although I had read the book when it was published in 1980, and it inspired my work on empowering girls to speak out. I joined a group of feminist teachers, and as the ‘Anti-Sexist Working Party’ one of the first books we read and discussed was *Man Made Language*. It presents an array of examples from the English language which provide incontrovertible evidence of sexism in language. We went on to set up a programme within our schools to implement and maintain equitable relations and interactions between boys and girls. One of the very first pieces of research I carried out was on ‘who does the talking among the peer group in my own classroom?’. Sadly, and another reason for my choice, is that I think the book is as relevant today as it was in the 1980s. Currently, girls’ level of anxiety in schools is soaring at the same time as their confidence and self-esteem is falling.

Your fourth book is *Home Advantage*, by Annette Lareau. What led you to this?

Although I used a lot of Bourdieu in my PhD thesis, I referenced the work of Annette Lareau as much, if not more. *Home Advantage* is a detailed forensic ethnography of how class affects family life and parenting. She, too, works extensively with Bourdieu’s conceptual toolkit, both in this book and her later work. I really like the way she makes his concepts her own, illuminating the data and raising it to another level. What *Home Advantage* shares with *Education and the Working Class*, as well as both being outstanding works of scholarships, is a reflexive appendix, or what Lareau calls ‘a personal essay’, where she reflects honestly on the problems she faced in conducting her research. It provides the best account of the trials and tribulations of fieldwork that I have ever read. But the entire book is reflexive, each chapter has enlightening notes which further explain the empirical context or expand on the research methods. For me, the book is an exemplar of rigour in ethnographic work. There is also a refreshing honesty, where failures and missteps are explored alongside the successes. It is the sort of academic book where you know you are going to like the author even before you have met her.

Your last book is *The Melancholia of Class*, by Cynthia Cruz. Why did you choose this?

The Melancholia of Class is another book where I immediately felt a sense of connection with the author without having met her. I have recently written a lot about *The Melancholia of Class*, often in conjunction with Fran Lock’s *White/Other*, which similarly had a powerful affective impact as well as an intellectual one. Both books call out class oppression and both convey a rage of refusal to accept the world as it is. Cruz, like Lock, is a poet, polemicist and cultural commentator. In *The Melancholia of Class* she analyses the lives of working class writers, musicians, filmmakers

and artists, and conveys with clarity and passionate conviction how, in the process of becoming ‘someone’, they lose themselves. In contrast, reading the book returned me to my working class youth. I discovered myself in the text in ways that were both validating and confirmatory, and I loved the combination of poetic lyricism and righteous anger. I also felt enlightened and emboldened by Cruz’s writing on anorexia as a form of political refusal. I am still coming to terms with the legacy of my own anorexia. As Cruz asserts, for many anorexics from working class backgrounds anorexia is about becoming indigestible to the capitalist system. For me it was always about resistance to the controls and confinements on my life, but Cruz’s poetic insights added another layer of understanding.

And for your luxury?

I thought long and hard about a luxury item, but decided, apart from videos of my grandchildren variously singing, dancing and playing musical instruments, there would be little point in cultivating plants, trying to learn new skills, etc. My whole life has been about connection with others, doing rather than being, the ‘we’ rather than the ‘I’. I would try not to get too anxious and agitated by reading the books and watching the videos, which always fill me with joy wherever I am. But there is no way I would want to live in a universe centred around only me so I’d hope for a rapid, painless demise.

Professor Reay’s choices:

Germinal, by Emile Zola, 1885 (Georges Charpentier)

Education and the Working Class, by Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden, 1962 (Routledge)

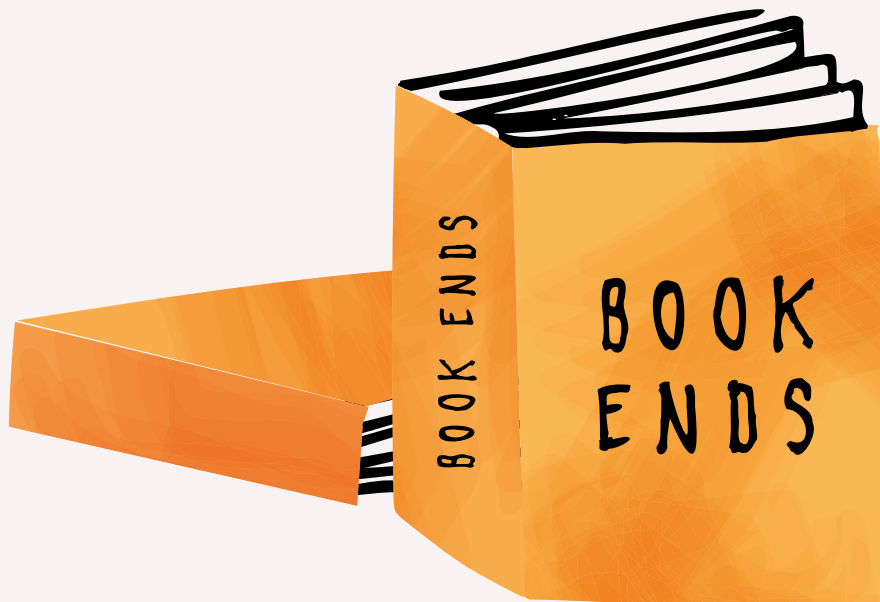
Man Made Language, by Dale Spender, 1980 (Routledge)

Home Advantage, by Annette Lareau, 1989 (Falmer Press)

The Melancholia of Class, by Cynthia Cruz, 2021 (Repeater Books) ■

Bookends

Reviews of Recent
Books in Social
Science and Sociology



FOOD IN A JUST WORLD



TRACEY HARRIS
TERRY GIBBS

FOOD IN A JUST WORLD

TRACEY HARRIS AND TERRY GIBBS

Polity Press, 2023

256 pages

£55 hbk, £17.99 pbk

ISBN: 978-1509554010 hbk

Food: an everyday necessity that underpins our very existence. But how often do we think about our food's journey before it reaches the supermarket shelves? How often do we spare a thought for how our food was made or even who our food was? The answer for most of us is probably never. Harris and Gibbs take us on a journey, highlighting the structural violence, social injustice and environmental harms deeply embedded within the global food system, before ending on a message of hope for the future.

Food in a Just World draws on the perspectives of scholars, activists, workers and community leaders to render the inner workings of the global food industry visible and reveal how each step along the way stems from exploitation. While not exclusively about animal agriculture, much of the discussion departs from the animal-industrial complex, highlighting the intense and unjust interplay between human consumers and the non-human animals consumed. Beyond this, they discuss how colonialism and capitalism have resulted in the production and consumption of food, reinforcing “many of the intersectional problems of racism, sexism, trans- and homophobia, and speciesism, allowing them to run rampant in the world”. (p.201).

In bringing together the themes of intersectionality, structural violence, capitalism, social justice and decolonization, this book asks how we can “better promote and work towards democratic and compassionate systems of decision making and food production globally”. (p.185). The answer this, the authors call for greater transparency and acknowledgment of the harms present in the global food system and their relation to other forms of oppression and marginalisation. They further advocate for “a radical democratization of our systems of production and consumption, giving people meaningful control over the decisions that affect their daily lives”. (p.46). Although global in scope, the book's North American grounding (with strong emphasis on Indigenous Mi'kmaq knowledge systems) may limit how directly its framework translates to other contexts.

The book has six chapters. The first focuses on the systemic level, highlighting both the structural violence present under the current global economic system and the

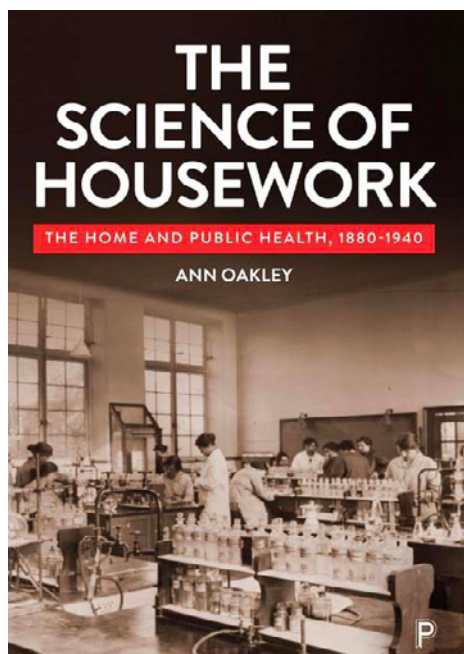
potential for indigenous and other knowledge systems to inform a more just understanding of democracy. Chapters two to five home in on various aspects of the animal-industrial complex, including its impacts on climate change and biodiversity, the negative implications for industry workers, the numerous harms of the colonial-capitalist diet for consumers, and finally the experiences of farmed animals, who suffer immeasurably at the hands of the profit-driven system. The final chapter takes a hopeful turn, exploring what a compassionate food system may look like. The solutions proposed, while encouraging, often feel more aspirational than actionable, though. In the face of such deeply interwoven injustices, the question of how one might begin to disentangle from this system remains only partially addressed.

This book offers an important and detailed insight into the failings of the global food system. Its accessibility makes it a strong teaching resource, though more advanced readers may at times wish for deeper theoretical engagement. Nevertheless, as a food studies and vegan-studies scholar, I wholeheartedly welcome this text. When it comes to food, especially meat, many seem to recoil, refusing to acknowledge the issues before them. This text lays everything bare and asks us in a forward but compassionate manner to examine food (in)justice and work towards a more just world. While oftentimes a heavy book, it ends with a celebration of joy and gratitude and the potential for genuine democracy, arguing that communities around the world are already displaying resilience, resistance and inclusivity. This book invites us to join them.

DR ELLIE ATAYEE-BENNETT

Southampton Solent University





THE SCIENCE OF HOUSEWORK: THE HOME AND PUBLIC HEALTH 1880-1940

ANN OAKLEY

Polity Press, 2024

266 pages

£80 hbk, £24.99 pbk

ISBN: 978-1447369615

At the end of the prologue to this book, Oakley says she feels she has “completed some sort of important personal circle in bringing the sociology and the science of housework together”. Oakley is, of course, best known for bringing housework into the sociological arena. She also writes fiction, which shows itself here in a very readable, but still academic, text. The book covers the history of the science of housework from 1880 to 1940, a time when technology was beginning to enter domestic spaces and women were keen to continue on to further and higher education. The bulk of the text, with three chapters devoted to it, is the history of household and social science as university disciplines. Importantly, by focussing on domesticity, these subjects also allowed women to study and to teach science at degree level for the first time. Oakley is keen to emphasise that she has tried to avoid this book being about gender and patriarchy but these themes creep in nevertheless, and the book was as interesting to me for the lives and careers of the women involved as for the scientific study of the home.

The book begins with a personal account of the role that housework has played in Oakley’s domestic life and her research. Much of this resonated with my own feelings and experience of housework, as I’m sure it will with others – I briefly reverted to Covid-era handwashing after reading this! The book is well illustrated throughout with some particularly gruesome silverfish pictured in the first chapter, which concludes by situating housework as, most definitively, work.

We are then introduced to many of the names and activities that began to bring scientific concepts of health, related to domestic hygiene, into girls’ education. These chapters are quite dense, covering a good deal of information and people, mostly new to me. There is a useful list of characters in the Appendix. Architecture, from home layout to the designs of easy-to-clean kitchens, is covered next. Some of these ideas feel futuristic even now, but the concept of keeping cooker, fridge and sink all within reach is a part of Ikea’s recommended kitchen design today. The introduction of gas and electricity examined later on also has something to teach us in terms of how new technologies become accepted by women, as we move away from gas boilers.

The social and educational movement to bring the tools of modern science into housework are discussed in Chapters six, seven and eight. The degrees in social and domestic science offered by the King’s College of Household and Social Science are the focus of two chapters, followed by those of other universities, particularly the University of Chicago. The story here is told largely through a linear history, which I felt gave a little more space for the reader to become familiar with the actors involved.

Although the book’s focus is the science of housework, it is also about the pioneering women who forged scientific careers for themselves in public health and as engineers in an era when relatively few middle class women were able to work outside the home.

This meticulously researched book has brought to light a forgotten era of education focussing on the home and on the work that (mostly) women do and have taught others to do. It is academic in its detail and facts but written with a lightness of touch that makes it accessible to a wider readership. It is important that this long list of women and their work are remembered.

DR JULIA BENNETT

University of Chester

SOCIAL POLICY: THE QUEST FOR FREEDOM, EQUALITY AND JUSTICE

VIRPI TIMONEN

Polity Press, 2014

240 pages

£59 hbk, £18.99pbk

ISBN: 978-1509566037

This book offers a valuable conceptual foundation in the study of social policy. It explores how everyday experiences and thoughts underline complex yet inescapable concepts – such as redistribution, freedom, rights, inequality, dependency and social justice – and shape social policy goals.

The book argues that the goals of redistribution and the role of state are often mapped through ideological standpoints. For instance, arguments that oppose distributional equality and justify the preference towards greater individual freedom invoke the works of Robert Nozick, while Ronald Dworkin's arguments serve as a counterpoint, advocating stronger equality of resources to mitigate entrenched deprivation.

Structured around 10 chapters, the book highlights how such contested concepts can profoundly influence people's opportunities to live, work and secure sustainable wellbeing outcomes.

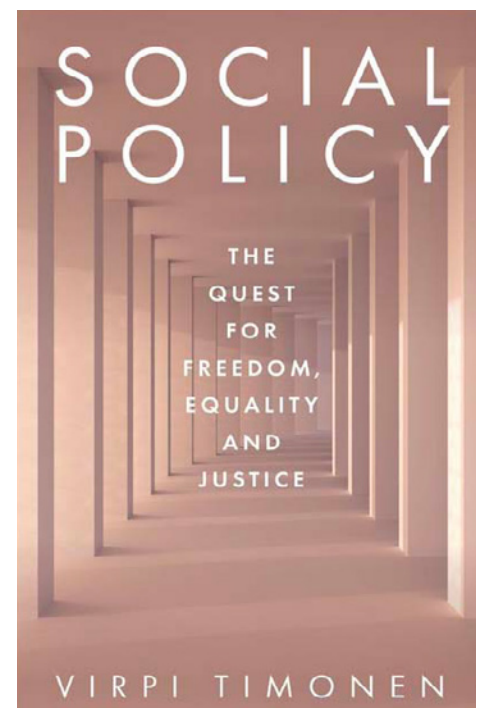
Timonen argues that, in contrast to freedom, the concept of equality is often considered too idealistic. Welfare states rarely strive to ensure equality of outcomes, being more supportive of the principle of equality of opportunity,

which is nonetheless hard to achieve due to reasons of cumulative disadvantages and intergenerational transmission of inequalities.

The underlying differences in strategies of redistribution – based on universalism, or on means-testing or on merit – helps characterise nations into distinct welfare state regimes. The book argues that the nature of ideological and political forces vastly influences social policy agendas, and this has resulted in the establishment of social-democratic, liberal or conservative welfare states. Unequal power relations are deepened by intersections in terms of class, gender and race.

The later chapters in the book argue for a social policy agenda through the framework of power, recognition and social investment. Power differentials are significant in shaping competing alternatives in the policymaking process. Similarly, redistributive policies cannot be equal in the absence of recognition of differences and injustices.

The book notes that social policies often respond to increasing new social risks. Welfare states have witnessed several crises since the



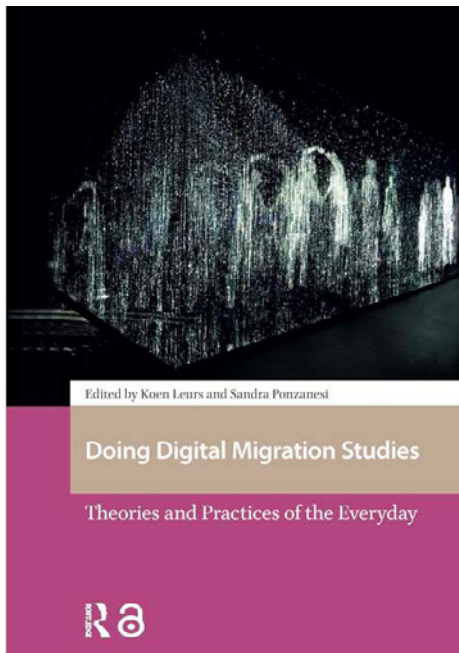
1970s including the recent coronavirus pandemic. Technological advancement and penetration, with its impact on employment, increasing urbanization, migration, ageing and environmental degradation, among others, must be addressed through globally integrated efforts.

It argues that welfare states have demonstrated endurance, reconciling different perspectives, and working to ensure consensus to promote human dignity and rights.

This concise book serves as an introductory guide for students, academics and social policy practitioners to understand how various essential concepts have shaped the world as it is today. It meticulously synthesises theory and intellectually provocative illustrations, and its accessible writing and references from both developed and emerging economies makes it an insightful book for a global readership to carefully think on the future pathways of social policy.

AKANKSHA SANIL

University of Delhi, India



DOING DIGITAL MIGRATION STUDIES: THEORIES AND PRACTICES OF THE EVERYDAY

EDITED BY KOEN LEURS AND SANDRA PONZANESI

Amsterdam University Press, 2024

388 pages

£108 hbk, £34.39 pbk

ISBN: 978-9463725774

How do we study migration when the everyday is digital? This is the question at the centre of *Doing Digital Migration Studies*, a book that refuses to separate journeys of bodies from journeys of data. As Koen Leurs and Sandra Ponzanesi declare in their introduction, “migrants and the mobile come into being through spatial, legal, procedural and symbolic moves”. The text gathers contributions from scholars and practitioners across disciplines, united by the conviction that digital technologies have transformed not just how migrants move, but how we should study those movements.

The first section, ‘Creative practices’, signals that transformation in style and method. Nadica Denić’s chapter on participatory filmmaking invites migrants to tell their own stories, experimenting with “tools to create a space of agency”. These chapters do not just analyse; they experiment, blending ethnography with creative practice to unsettle conventional hierarchies between researcher and researched.

If these artistic interventions suggest that the digital can be a site of

resistance, the next section, ‘Digital diasporas and placemaking’, illustrates its intimate, everyday uses. In Perth, Chinese grandparents maintain ‘digital kitchens’, gathering their scattered families on WeChat to share recipes, worries and joy. In Nairobi, Congolese refugees post songs on YouTube, not to chase virality, but to carve out a “place to breathe”. Such accounts remind us that digital networks are not abstract systems; they are infrastructures of care, stitched into daily rhythms of belonging.

Yet the book is not naive about the perils of the digital. In ‘Datafication, infrastructuring and securitization’, we encounter the machinery of control. Daniel Leix Palumbo’s chapter is especially unsettling, where he documents how German authorities use voice biometrics to authenticate asylum seekers, turning the vulnerability of speech itself into a “technology of exclusion”. Similarly, Luděk Stavinoha exposes how corporate consultancies craft migration dashboards that promise order while “masking deeply political

[Article continues >](#)

decisions in the neutrality of data". Here, the text's tone darkens, showing that the same tools enabling connection can also deepen precarity.

What makes this book compelling is its range, without losing focus. It moves from intimate screens to border infrastructures, from queer digital intimacies to algorithmic surveillance, always returning to the central claim that migration today cannot be disentangled from digitality. The editors' call for a multi-scalar and ethically attuned approach – by asking authors to "include reflection on how they themselves 'do' digital migration studies" – is convincing, urging us to look simultaneously at platforms, policies and personal lives. This methodological reflexivity makes the book series important not just for migration scholars, but for anyone grappling with the digital transformation of social life.

There are moments, however when the book's ambition outpaces its synthesis. The sheer diversity of cases (TikTok migrants, VR installations, asylum voiceprints) can feel disorienting, and a stronger concluding framework might have helped orient readers. But this is a small trade-off for a volume that dares to rethink the very terms of the field.

"HOW DO WE STUDY MIGRATION WHEN THE EVERYDAY IS DIGITAL?"

Doing Digital Migration Studies is a book that stays with you. It challenges readers to rethink what counts as migration in an era where movement happens as much through cables and servers as through borders and boats. For students, it offers a toolkit; for scholars, a provocation; for practitioners, a reminder that digital infrastructures are never neutral. It asks us to confront the question Leurs and Ponzanesi pose: "How do we study migration when the everyday is digital?" And it leaves us with an equally urgent one: if mobility is increasingly mediated, how do we avoid reproducing the exclusions we seek to critique? ■

DEVIKA BAHADUR

De Montfort University

REFLECTIONS ON METHODOLOGY: SOCIOLOGY, ETHNOGRAPHY AND APPLIED RESEARCH

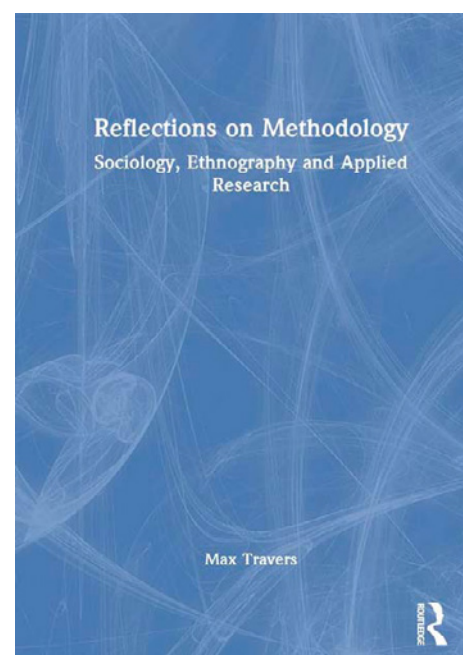
MAX TRAVERS

Routledge, 2025

162 pages

£127hbk, £34.99 pbk

ISBN: 978-1032997360 hbk



Reflections on Methodology: Sociology, Ethnography and Applied Research functions as both a methodological guide and an intellectual memoir. It offers a distinctive approach to teaching sociological research methods, by departing from traditional survey-based textbooks. Instead, Travers uses case studies and autobiographical reflections to highlight how ethnographic research can be transformative, while also critically engaging with current trends in sociological scholarship.

The book urges sociologists to transition from external observation to active engagement within institutions and social groups, by emphasising the significance of ethnography. Utilising research on immigration control, court reform, criminology and quality assurance, it demonstrates that extended immersion provides insights unattainable through other methods. It portrays ethnography as more effective than other research techniques, criticising the current emphasis on interview-based qualitative research for lacking the comprehensive context and insights characteristic of genuine ethnography.

The first section addresses key debates in the field of sociology. Travers examines the conflict between critical theory and interpretivism, two approaches with differing views on social reality and research methods. Critical theory focuses on power and change, interpretivism on understanding meaning and experiences. He supports theoretical diversity but argues that ethnography offers better access to structural and interpretative social aspects.

His chapter on 'Mixed methods projects' discusses a debated issue in sociology. Instead of accepting the mixed-methods approach blindly, Travers is sceptical, questioning if combining methods always yields better insights. This reflects his concern that methodological innovations often arise for their own sake rather than to serve research goals.

Travers critiques the reliance on interview-based studies that claim ethnographic authority without genuine fieldwork, in the chapter, 'Contesting the qualitative archive'. This

Article continues >

echoes sociology's concerns about methodological rigour and the rise of accessible but superficial research. The author's scepticism about evaluation research comes from fears of using sociological knowledge instrumentally. Travers argues that applied research, like theoretical work, requires rigorous methodology. His analysis of quality assurance and court reform illustrates how ethnographic methods can uncover gaps between policy goals and implementation.

The section 'Academic work in changing times' highlights how institutions have transformed sociology over the past 30 years. His review of teaching and research critically examines neo-liberal reforms in universities and their impact on disciplinary knowledge, positioning research practices within broader academic and political contexts.

The book's key strength is its blend of methodological guidance and real research examples. Travers demonstrates how methodological choices influence results and insights, not just in theory. His autobiographical style adds transparency, by revealing the personal and professional factors

that shape research decisions, providing useful lessons for new scholars.

Reflections on Methodology serves as both a handbook and a manifesto, offering practical guidance and bold claims about the transformative power of ethnographic methodology. It combines autobiographical reflection, methodological instruction and research examples, contributing significantly to sociological methods. While some may challenge his assertions of ethnographic superiority, few would dispute the value of sustained engagement and rigour.

The book illustrates how methodological choices have broader implications. Travers provides emerging sociologists with inspiration and practical wisdom, drawing on decades of research to aid in navigating tough institutional decisions. Even if readers disagree with his ethnographic approach, they gain insights into understanding social complexity. ■

DR PALLAVI SANIL

Central University of Punjab, India

Appreciation





DR CAROL WOLKOWITZ 1947-2025

PROFESSOR NICKIE CHARLES, OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
WARWICK, WRITES ABOUT HER FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE,
DR CAROL WOLKOWITZ

I've known Carol, as a colleague and a very dear friend, for 20 years. I first met her when I started working in the Department of Sociology, but I knew of her work many years before coming to Warwick through our shared interest in gender and work. Indeed, in 1986 we both had chapters published in a collection of articles in *Feminist Review* entitled 'Waged work: A reader'.

When I arrived at Warwick, Carol was writing her highly influential book, *Bodies at Work*, and was trying to get it finished before her study leave ended and the autumn term began. I remember her talking about the cover of the book with me and, I'm sure, other colleagues. She wanted an image that illustrated the issues she was addressing: it was a photograph of a man in overalls high above the Empire State Building in New York balancing seemingly on nothing and stretching out into thin air. Her insistence on the importance of this image relates to one of her interests, which was using visual evidence in sociology – for Carol, images not only made bodies at work visible, but they also contributed to sociological analysis.

'WORK WAS ABSOLUTELY CENTRAL TO CAROL'S LIFE, NOT ONLY AS A TOPIC SHE RESEARCHED AND TAUGHT BUT ALSO AS PART OF HER IDENTITY'

Work was absolutely central to Carol's life, not only as a topic she researched and taught but also as part of her identity; she did not separate work and life, and what she called her "eclectic approach to the sociology of work" was shaped by her own and others' experiences of work in many different environments including home, hospital and train. As a result she did not, in her words, "expect either personal life or work" to "remain in their proper boxes".

I'd like to quote from a piece she published in 2009 where she talks about working in Bradford and travelling between Bradford and London by train with her very young son, Tim.

"To begin with I travelled from Bradford to London with baby carrier in hand, usually placing it on the table British Rail Intercity trains then provided, and forcing the rush hour business travellers to allow babies and their needs (including breast-feeding) into their world. (I quickly learned to choose a table where women, rather than men, were seated, preferably middle aged). I particularly remember one occasion later on, after my son and I had moved to London, when I scribbled furiously during the whole journey from London. On arrival in Leeds the man sitting opposite on the Intercity train commented that I had already done my day's work. And I, while bemused by this everyday deployment of the concept of 'the working day', also recognised that having been up with my son at 5am, and fed and played with him before leaving home, this gentleman's idea of the working day and mine were rather different." (Wolkowitz, 2009:854-855).

This different – and gendered – view of 'the working day' and what counted as work informed her research and teaching and her interest in both

Article continues >

homeworking and body work. Both these topics challenge the boundaries between paid and unpaid work, an approach that she shared with other feminists and which informs her highly influential research on how bodies and embodiment are integral to work, however it is defined.

Her book – *Bodies at Work* – was ground-breaking, bringing ideas developed within feminist theory into conversation with the study of work. Carol was always very modest about her own contribution, but you only have to read articles and books which have been published subsequently on these topics to know just how much her ideas have shaped the field: Wolkowitz, 2006, is always cited.

“SHE WAS HUGELY GENEROUS WITH HER TIME AND IDEAS AND ALWAYS WANTED HER STUDENTS TO SHINE”

Carol’s research on body work grew out of her MA teaching. In the 1990s she was teaching a course on gender and employment, to which she added “a second term on the body/work relation” (Wolkowitz, 2009:853). This teaching, and her enriching discussions with students, eventually led to her writing *Bodies at Work* and, subsequently, generated seminar series, edited books and special issues of journals on the topic. This interest

also led to her explorations of Michel Foucault’s work and her creating an undergraduate course on sexualities in society. Needless to say this course was immensely popular.

Carol was a dedicated and inspirational teacher. She and a colleague, Phil Mizen, developed an innovative course on visual sociology, and he remembers being in awe of her and listening with rapt attention to her lectures. She was the type of academic who is increasingly rare; she didn’t blow her own trumpet as we’re all encouraged to do these days. On the contrary, and despite her brilliance and her encyclopaedic knowledge, she was always low key and never pushy. She was hugely generous with her time and ideas and always wanted her students to shine. This did not mean that she was not critical – she was, as I know from supervising PhD students with her – but at the same time she provided massive support and encouragement through her very detailed comments on whatever work students submitted. At MA level her teaching was student-led, and she encouraged independent mini-research projects and facilitated students’ development of their confidence and their sociological imaginations. I witnessed this teaching at first hand as Carol very generously invited me to teach her MA module on gender and work with her when I arrived in the department and I, as well as the students, learnt a lot from working so closely with her.

Carol was involved in the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender at Warwick from its inception in 1993,

and continued this involvement into retirement. Post-retirement she was also a founder member of the Centre for the Study of Employment and Work at Warwick and its first director, and she continued supervising PhD students for several years. In fact, in many ways she didn’t really retire, continuing to research and write and review papers submitted to academic journals. One of the things she was still working on when she died was some research she and I did on therapy dog visits to universities. Carol was particularly interested in animal touch – a form of body work – and how we could understand what the dogs were doing as work. It wasn’t only work she was involved in – she valued department social events and always came to department Christmas lunches. The only one she missed was the one that we had in 2025 – a Christmas lunch in the middle of February – something only sociologists could do! Carol died on 4 March, 2025; her quiet presence and intellectual curiosity are sorely missed by all of us who were privileged enough to work with her and to count her as a friend.

Feminist Review (eds) (1986) *Waged Work: A Reader*, London: Virago.

Wolkowitz, C (2006) *Bodies at Work*, London: Sage.

Wolkowitz, C (2009) ‘Challenging boundaries: an autobiographical perspective on the sociology of work’, *Sociology*, 43(5): 846–860. ■

PROFESSOR THEO NICHOLS 1939-2025

PETER ARMSTRONG WRITES ABOUT HIS FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE, PROFESSOR THEO NICHOLS

My friend and mentor, Theo Nichols, who has died at the age of 86, was one of the world's leading sociologists of work and industry. He produced 22 books and numerous journal articles, book chapters, official reports and working papers. All of it was lucid, jargon-free and beautifully written. That was important to Theo: throughout his career, he wrote for the general reader as well as his fellow academics. Theo's was a public sociology long before the term was coined.

I first met Theo in 1967 as a mature student at the University of Bath, where he was our tutor in sociological theory. The classes were inspirational. At the time Parsonian functionalism was crumbling under an interrogation of its categories and presuppositions and we students felt ourselves to be involved in this process of theoretical renewal.

Shortly after my course at Bath ended, Theo moved to the University of Bristol and invited me to become one of two fieldworkers in a study of class relations in continuous flow process plants, to be co-directed with Huw Beynon. Unusually, though I didn't realise it at the time, Theo did almost as much of the fieldwork as we two research assistants. For me, the experience was formative. Fieldwork with Theo was an apprenticeship such as few have been privileged to receive.

Published as *Workers Divided* (1976, with Peter Armstrong) and *Living with Capitalism* (1977, with Huw Beynon), the original intention of the 'Chemco studies', as they came to be called, was to test Robert Blauner's 'end of alienation' thesis – the idea that the disaffection and industrial conflict characteristic of mass production systems would disappear as these

were replaced by continuous-flow processes. It quickly became obvious that this starting point was hopelessly naive. Though the plants of Chemco were peaceful on the surface, all the elements of Blauner's theorization of alienation were present, albeit denied active expression by the management policy of tying up trade unionism in the machinery of productivity deals. In consequence the workers' response to their situation took place largely at the psychological level.

'THIS RESPECT FOR THE OTHER WAS FUNDAMENTAL TO THEO'S PRACTICE'

In both *Living with Capitalism* and *Workers Divided*, the accounts of these accommodations depart from the usual sociological practice of treating interviewees as subjects to be analysed. Rather, they are taken seriously as observers and interpreters of the social order, and this respect for the other was fundamental to Theo's practice. It also meant that he was extremely sensitive to the implications of seemingly casual forms of expression. During the interview phase of our fieldwork, I remember him remarking on the number of times workers would begin by expressing surprise that anyone would be interested in what they had to say. For Theo, I think this was an important aspect of the capitalist social order: that it deprived people of a sense of individuality, of self-worth, a voice. Much of Theo's sociology could be seen as a stand against that suppression.

An unexpected theme to emerge from the Chemco study was workplace health and safety. During our interviews, conversations and observations, it became apparent that there had been a surprising (to us, at least) number of industrial accidents and injuries at Chemco, and many more near-misses. We examined these in *Safety or Profit* (1973) and established that, contrary to the official view that apathy was the prime causal factor, the accidents in these cases had resulted from deliberate and repeated risk-taking under pressure to prevent hold-ups in the production process. Building on this work, Theo went on to establish – it is no exaggeration to say that – a sociology of industrial injury in a 1997 book of that same title. When he moved to Cardiff University in 2000, there followed *Worker Representation and Workplace Health and Safety* (2007), *Workplace Health and Safety: International Perspectives on Worker Representation* (2009) and *Safety or Profit? International Studies in the Governance and Change in the Work Environment* (2014), all with David Walters.

After the Chemco studies Theo's career path and my own diverged, though we remained friends, visiting one another and meeting at conferences. As a member of the audience on these occasions, Theo could be restive. He had little time for pretensions to scientific authority, especially when pressed through the use of would-be technical language, and I well remember him succumbing to an epic fit of the giggles at a particularly asinine example delivered by the eminent professor who was addressing us at the time.

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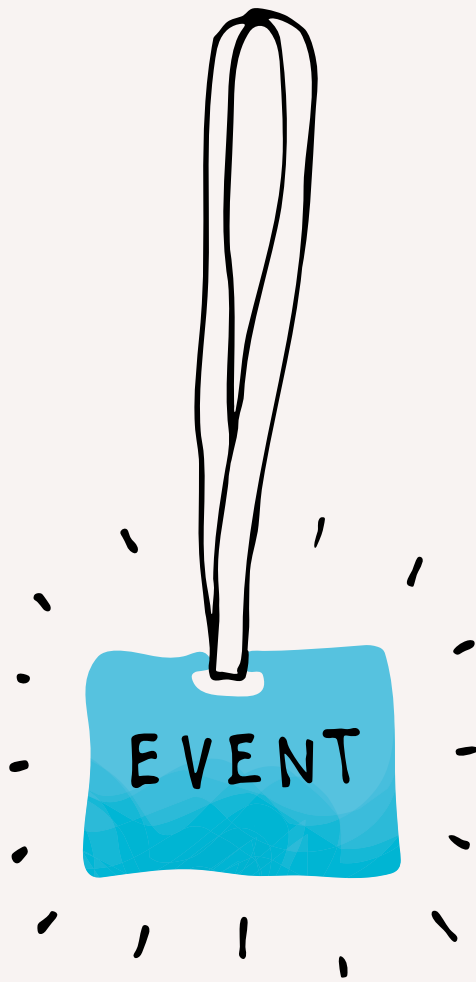
Theo was equally scornful of the exotic theoretical pathologies which were beginning to emerge from the schools of business. At one of the labour process conferences, Theo and I found ourselves on the receiving end of a lecture to the effect that we had got Chemco all wrong, having neglected the vital matter of subjectivities. It was an extraordinary accusation from someone who claimed to have read *Living with Capitalism* and it made Theo quite angry. He could see the exculpatory intention behind the convoluted argument, the sanitisation of the managerial role so as to produce a 'labour process theory' congenial to the journals of business and management.

Of Theo's later research at Cardiff I can speak only in outline since I was involved in none of it. An important strand was a series of studies of the Turkish consumer goods industries initiated in *Work and Organization in Modern Turkey* (1996, with Erol Kahveci and Nadir Sugur). The move to Cardiff also resulted in a resumption of Theo's collaboration with Huw Beynon which produced *Patterns of Work in the Post Fordist Era: Fordism and Post Fordism* and *The Fordism of Ford and Modern Management* (both 2006).

'IT IS CHARACTERISTIC OF THE MAN THAT HE IMMEDIATELY AND UNCOMPLAININGLY TOOK ON THE ROLE OF FULL-TIME CARER'

In 2009, Theo was 70, at the height of his powers, and seemingly set to continue producing important work for many years to come, when his second wife, Nancy, suffered a massive stroke. Though Nancy was not completely disabled, this meant that Theo's world was "turned upside down," as his email put it. It is characteristic of the man that he immediately and uncomplainingly took on the role of full-time carer through the long and emotionally painful years of Nancy's decline. From this, tragically, there was to be no release: Nancy's death came only a few days before his own. I admired Theo for many reasons, but perhaps most of all for that. ■

Events



EVENT LISTINGS

As of December 21 2025 – for a complete and up to date list, see: <https://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/key-bsa-events-list>

Applying for Postdoctoral Research Funding as an Early Career Scholar: An Early Career Forum Event

30 January
Online

Grace Melbury and the Experience of Liminality: An Auto/Biography Study Group Event

5 February
Online

Problematising ‘Transformation’ Photography: An Auto/Biography Study Group Event

4 March
Online

BSA Annual Conference 2026: 75 Years of Sociology

8-10 April
University of Manchester

Sociology of Religion Study Group Annual Conference 2026

29 June – 1 July
University of Nottingham

Work, Employment and Society Conference 2026

9-11 September
University of Bath



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