

BSA London Medical Sociology Group Annual Report

Group membership

We continue to attract between 20 to 50 attendees at our monthly seminars. These seminars are open to all, and no record is kept as to whether attendees are BSA members or not. Attendees change from one seminar to the next, though the group is mainly comprised of academics and students at London universities, with a few people coming from the surrounding counties.

Income, expenditure and balance

Income – £0

Expenditure – £0

Balance - £105.35

Aims of the group

The aim of the BSA London Medical Sociology Group group are to reinvigorate medical sociology through overlaps with other disciplines and social theory.

Activities undertaken during the past year (October 2015 and September 2016)

Following our first highly successful series of seminars and debates running from January 2015 to June 2015, we convened a second series spanning the first half of 2016. This included monthly seminars along with a well-attended – and considerably lively – workshop, held jointly with the BSA Climate Change and Environment & Health study groups, at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. The details of these events are as follows:

25 January 2016

Title: Shifting Configurations of Science, Practice & Selfhood in US Psychiatry

Speakers: Dr Martyn Pickersgill, University of Edinburgh & Dr Simon Cohn, LSHTM (discussant)

Abstract: The US National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) today urges researchers to go beyond existing categorizations listed within the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (the DSM). Studies instead should seek to contribute to new understandings of psychopathology based largely - but not exclusively - on biology, and which could enhance therapeutic innovation (at least, this is how the NIMH plans are often understood). This talk draws on initial research conducted as part of a Wellcome Trust project seeking to understand the rationales underlying the shifting research strategies of the NIMH (and other funders), their impact on laboratory research, and their effects on how psychiatrists understand and treat patients. Specifically, the presentation will draw on semi-structured interviews with 13 scientists with roles in shaping the contexts of US and UK psychiatry (e.g., NIMH officials, senior members of the American Psychiatric Association, and the editors of major psychiatric journals). The talk will set out what is (perceived to be) distinctive about the work of the NIMH in the context of other ventures to go 'beyond diagnosis' in psychiatry, and discuss the interviewee's responses to such developments. Through their direct actions and through the contestation they created, the NIMH (and other funders) are directing increased attention to the place and roles of psychiatric symptoms in research, and hence, ultimately, clinical practice and the nature of the selves that are produced through therapeutic interventions. In so doing, the NIMH is seeking to produce a new form of epistemic infrastructure with ontological effects that are beginning to extend beyond the US - generating reflexivity and reigniting scientific passions of diverse kinds.

19 February 2016

Title: Environment & Health Workshop

Keynote Speaker: Professor Hilary Graham, University of York

Workshop Abstract: The workshop will explore perspectives on current research and theory into the environment and human health. The interactions between the natural environment and human health have become increasingly the focus of social analyses and scrutiny. Social research has shown how human health may be threatened by environmental factors, such as air or water pollution and by climate change impacts, such as flooding and heat waves. Meanwhile, improvements in health threaten the environment through population growth, greater longevity of life, and health technology developments. Research further indicates how improving the environment can enhance human health, for instance through clean water and food security, while initiatives can also reduce the environmental impact of health care, such as preventing run-off from pharmaceutical production. This wide-ranging research area thus presents an important agenda for social analysis across the multi-disciplinary areas of environment and human health.

The full programme can be found here: <http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/uploads/events/Programme%20v2.pdf>

9 March 2016

Title: Unsettling technoscience: The biopolitics of ageing and (trans)human imperatives

Speaker: Professor Joanna Latimer, Cardiff University

Abstract: In this paper I offer some reflections on my study of ageing and biology. Drawing on an ESRC funded study of the socio-cultural significance of the biology of ageing, or 'biogerontology', the analysis scrutinises the various ways in which ageing has been made a critical site for altering the experience of ageing and extending the limits to life. Specifically I examine how discoveries in bioscience, advances in medical practice, developments in public health policy and hype in the media come together in co-constructing a 'new dynamics of ageing'. I show how all too easily, the versions of ageing that dominate the narratives and practices of biomedicine, public health and the media reproduce and reinforce negative attitudes to growing old, with ageing poorly as the anti-thesis of the valued body-person in late modernity - the monster that can undermine the progress of neoliberal capitalism - as at the same time a transhuman future in which ageing is defeated is imagined. I show that the transhuman future of ageing successfully is enacted as where the body embodies wealth in a glow of a particular kind of health. The objective is to contribute to debates on new cultures of ageing and biosociality by opening up some of the complexity that lies at the heart of the so-called challenge of ageing.

27 April 2016

Title: Broken Narratives: Listening with & through another's voice, another's voices

Speaker: Professor Lisa Blackman, Goldsmiths

Abstract: This talk will reflect upon a question that has arisen from over two decades of working with people who hear voices, primarily as part of the Hearing Voices Movement. The question of how to listen with and through another's voice, another's voices has been a key orientation of various practices and technologies of listening developed within peer support groups within the movement. These groups have enabled people to enter into the arduous process of experiencing themselves as "voice hearers", leading to profound transformations in the phenomenology of the voices and the stories and narratives they are able to tell. The process of telling a story about one's voices that is located within life events, life histories and, often traumatic disavowed histories emerges from a collective, shared process, which I have described as a form of mediated, distributed attention. The processes of change and transformation do not originate with an individual voice hearer, who becomes an intermediary, but not necessarily the agent of change and transformation. The lecture will reflect upon the question of what kinds of technologies of listening and attention can we develop to extend these processes of recovery, which do not necessarily end in the eradication of voices. The talk will provide examples, which draw from Lisa's ethnography of peer support groups, work on "diasporic vision", as well as drawing on personal examples and materials from growing up with a Mother who hears voices.

29 June 2016

Title: Understanding the evolving diversity of self-rated health

Speaker: Dr Tiago Moreira, Durham University

Abstract: Health measurement and monitoring has been a central concern for researchers, governments, insurance companies and employers for over 7 decades. Social science engagement with this process has mainly

taken two forms: studying the attitudes, beliefs or behaviours related to health, or critically relating health measurement to specific modes of social organisation in late modernity. In this paper, I draw broadly on the latter to explore the genesis and development of 'self-rated health' measurement from the 1950s to the present. In this, I identify three overlapping, sedimenting repertoires: one concerned with the regulation of help seeking behaviour, the second aiming to monitor 'patient experience' and the third focusing on the 'embodied mind'. I argue that this evolving diversity is best understood as resulting from fluid – rather than network – relations: a process whereby the deployment of a standardising measurement is seen as partially generating or accelerating the proliferation of 'local' – yet to be 'socialised' - singularities.

Activities planned for the coming year (October 2016 to September 2017)

Currently, there are five London Medical Sociology Group seminars planned for 2017. All of these will take place 6-7pm at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (15-17 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9SH):

29 March: Professor Nik Brown, University of York

26 April: Professor Anne Kerr, University of Leeds

29 June: Dr Beth Greenhough, University of Oxford

25 October: Dr Tim Rapley, Newcastle University

27 November: Dr Amy Chandler, University of Edinburgh

Details of these seminars, including abstracts, will appear on our BSA page. We will also advertise them via medsocnews and anthropology matters. If you would like to be put on our direct mailing list, please email us.

Names and contact emails of the convenors

Joint-convenors: Dr Oliver Bonnington (oliver.bonnington@lshtm.ac.uk) and Dr Lorelei Jones (lorelei.jones@ucl.ac.uk)