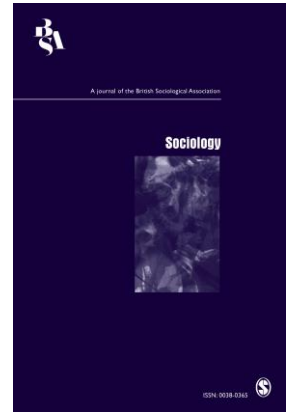


Call for Papers: *Sociology* Special Issue The Normative Turn in Sociology. Opening the Black Box



Guest Editors: Elisabeth Becker-Topkara (Heidelberg University), Daniel Chernilo (Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez), Sebastian Raza (University of Cambridge) and Galen Watts (University of Waterloo)

Deadline for submission of full papers: 22 January 2026

Social life in the twenty-first century is rife with normative controversy. From clashes over immigration, religious and ethnic diversity, and nationalism, to battles over abortion, gender norms, climate change and AI, we are living through an era of tremendous moral and political upheaval. What some today term “Culture Wars” are global phenomena, roiling countries in both the Global North as well as the Global South.

Of course, moral contestation has been an endemic feature of human history. Yet what stands out about the late modern era is the sheer diversity of normative disagreement. Through a combination of technology, geographic self-selection, and online curation, individuals today increasingly inhabit their own moral worlds. As a result, despite widespread awareness of the fact of moral pluralism at the macro level, micro- and meso-level social dynamics regularly entail the segregation of groups with different, and often divergent, normative perspectives. It is for this reason, among others, that polarization—moral, political, and affective—has become a constitutive feature of the global order.

Somewhat surprisingly, as the normative conflicts animating wider society have multiplied in number and increased in intensity, sociologists have, in the main, given less explicit attention to questions of normativity than scholars in neighboring disciplines. It is as though we made a collective decision to avoid the issue of normativity altogether, in the hopes that it would simply go away. Of course, normative questions and concerns have been integral features of sociological thought and practice since the discipline’s founding. To read Marx, Durkheim, Simmel, Du Bois, or Stetson Perkins is not merely to encounter different attempts at explaining the social world, but equally to confront different evaluations of it. However, as the discipline has pursued both increased professionalization and scientificity, sociologists have increasingly downplayed, if not denied, the role of moral assumptions in the construction of sociological knowledge. In recent times, sociologists such as Andrew Abbott, Hartmut Rosa, and Andrew Sayer have taken up this task and encouraged fellow sociologists to take a more reflexive stance toward their own normative assumptions. Together, these disparate calls for an explicit sociological engagement with issues of normativity portend something like the existence of an incipient “normative turn” within the discipline.

Still, normativity largely remains a kind of “black box,” which we sociologists have left shut and locked. Accordingly, the purpose of this special issue is to open up and explore the “black box” that is normativity within sociology. Rather than a call for a new and improved normative sociology, we view this special issue as laying the groundwork for a *sociology of normativity*; that is, a form of sociology (be it “critical” or otherwise) which is expressly normative. This sociology of normativity entails the theoretical and

empirical exploration of normativity as a constitutive dimension of both social life and sociological research. While there are many kinds of normative sociologies, each of which is guided by distinct normative presuppositions and commitments (e.g., critical theory, feminist theory, queer theory, critical race theory, etc.), the goal of a sociology of normativity is to make these normative presuppositions and commitments the object of analysis. A sociology of normativity, then, seeks to bring much-needed clarity and organization to a dimension of sociology which, despite being essential, is poorly understood.

In this special issue on the *normative turn in sociology*, we are looking for contributions, theoretical and/or empirical, that engage with the question of normativity in sociology. More specifically, we seek papers that address one or more of the following questions, themes, or problems:

- How do sociologists *do* normativity?
- What normative traditions inform sociological research? How do these traditions relate to another?
- How should we distinguish between the components or elements of normativity in sociology research? E.g., political ideology, values, conceptions of the good, conceptions of justice, conceptions of human nature, etc.
- If social science is oriented toward the “common good” how do we, as a discipline, determine what this consists of?
- What is the relationship between evaluation and explanation in sociology?
- How should sociologists cope with normative dilemmas in their research?
- What are the roles of normative theories (e.g., ethics or political philosophy) in empirical sociology?
- What is the relationship between normativity and interdisciplinarity in sociology?
- What has led to the siloing of normative questions and issues in sociology?
- How should the discipline organize the study of sociological normativity? Should a subfield akin to political theory exist? Should all grant applications require a “statement of normativity”?
- Where has progress been made in the sociological understanding of normativity? Are there particular subfields that stand out?
- What does normative reflexivity look like?
- How do national contexts relate to normative traditions?

Format

We welcome articles of 6000-8000 words in the usual house style that can both illuminate particular areas of normative inquiry and speak to the general theme of the special issue. [Submission guidelines](#) are available on the journal website.

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