



2025 Annual Conference
Wednesday 23 - Friday 25 April
University of Manchester



STREAM PLENARIES

WEDNESDAY 23 APRIL 2025, 17:15 - 18:15

BSA Presidential Event - Room 4.204

The Future of Higher Education

Jana Bacevic, Janja Komljenovic, Aline Courtois,

(Durham University, University of Edinburgh, University of Bath)

The past academic year has been marked by crises in higher education. Within the UK, numerous universities have faced challenging financial circumstances, with sociologists often bearing the brunt of voluntary and, in some cases, compulsory redundancies, and students are graduating with increasing levels of debt. While the incoming Labour government has expressed some sympathy with the plight of universities, and has been more welcoming of international students than its predecessor, no action has yet been taken to address the deep-seated problems the sector faces.

Informed by this context, this session explores what the future holds for higher education – from three different, yet intertwined, standpoints. First, drawing on a political economy perspective, Jana Bacevic (Durham University) questions whether higher education is sustainable in light of the climate crisis and widespread extractivist practices. Second, Janja Komljenovic (University of Edinburgh) explores the likely impact of digital infrastructures and technologies on higher education, including the increasing dominance of BigTech and value capture by private sector companies. Third, Aline Courtois (University of Bath) considers changing migration infrastructures, the changing landscape of international higher education, and diversification in the profiles of internationally-mobile students — and the implications of these for the future of higher education. All three speakers will examine how we might envision a more ethical and equitable future.

Chair: Rachel Brooks, University of Oxford, BSA President

Race, Ethnicity & Migration - Room 1.219

The New Racial Regime: Recalibrations of White Supremacy

Alana Lentin

(Western Sydney University)

As Robin D.G. Kelley puts it, 'anti-wokeness is the perfect example of the functioning of the racial regime.' Taking the reader beyond the distracting framings of culture wars and moral panics, Alana Lentin shows how the attacks on Black, Indigenous and anticolonial thought and praxis reveal the processes through which racial colonial rule is ideologically resecured.

Throughout the book, the often chaotic and contradictory restitching of the racial regime is traced through the attacks on Critical Race Theory; the 'whitelash' against the teaching of histories of slavery and colonialism; the counterinsurgent capture and institutionalisation of antiracism, Indigeneity and decoloniality in the interests of Zionism, settler colonialism, and imperialism; and how the state mandated 'war on antisemitism' reforms white supremacism at an acute time of genocide.

While the racial regime undergoes constant recalibration, its inherent instability is the consequence of continual resistance from below. Maintaining and deepening that resistance is vital at a time of rapidly mounting fascism.

Chair: Narzanin Massoumi, University of Exeter

Science, Technology & Digital Studies - Room 2.220

Tracking AI Transformations: What Generative AI Means for Social Research Now

Karen Gregory, Addie McGowan, Meenakshi Mani

(University of Edinburgh)

In October 2024 we held a symposium 'Generative AI and the Future of Social Research: Opportunities, Challenges, and Implications'. At that time, we were responding to how 'The rapid advancement of Generative AI presents both exciting opportunities and profound challenges for social research in the digital age.' In this way the symposium set out 'to explore the methodological implications of generative AI tools for social inquiry.'

In the subsequent months Trump was re-elected to power, his inauguration front row comprised four technology company leaders all involved to some degree in the development of AI. Elon Musk has been given an extraordinary leadership role within the Trump Government as the Head of the Department of Government Efficiency and in February of this year announced his intention to acquire one of his main competitors, OpenAI. In January, Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced that 'Artificial intelligence will deliver a decade of national renewal' and in common with the United States the UK has not signed the Paris 'Statement on Inclusive and Sustainable Artificial Intelligence for People and the Planet'.

Tracking AI transformation then in digital sociological terms is not just a matter for research methodology but also asks profound questions about the nature of our relationship to the companies supplying the products we may use in digital enquiry and those companies' role in global politics and democracy. The global political arrangements are shifting as immense power through accumulated wealth pours into these companies. At this time, we hope to discuss what this means for the planning of future research agendas moving forward and to ask how, if at all, we can continue to engage with these companies. Bringing together academics across career stages in the field we will discuss what lies ahead for our ways of working and how we might protect our disciplines during the disruptions of the emergence of this new technological political order.

Chair: Phillip Brooker, University of Liverpool

Theory - Room 2.218

Theorising Sociodigital Futures: Spatial, Temporal and Analytical Scales

Susan Halford, Dale Southerton

(University of Bristol)

Digital technologies are increasingly implicated in ongoing social transformations across all fields of sociological research, from those that focus on major societal challenges such as climate change and inequality through to substantive questions about everyday practices of consumption, care, mobility, learning and organizing (for example). This talk will sketch out a theoretical framework to explore this broadening and deepening of intra-actions between the social and the digital, and what these might mean for future transformations.

To do so we draw on a range of cognate perspectives, including actor network theory, social practice theory and theories of time & temporality. Building on their shared commitment to a practice-based ontology, the talk sketches a novel theoretical approach to researching, analysing and acting on sociodigital futures in the making. In doing so, we confront some fundamental questions about spatial, temporal and analytical scale, illustrating our argument with empirical examples to demonstrate the theoretical purchase of our approach. Ultimately, the talk places sociological theory at the heart of an effort to extend capabilities and capacities for thinking about digital technologies, social transformation and the interventions we might make in this as Sociologists.

Chair: Debbie Watson, University of Bristol

Work, Employment & Economic Life - Room 3.204

Occupational Inequality and Social Transformation: “We need to talk [more] about work”

Marek Korczynski, Viviane Galata, Caroline Barrett, Karen Tatham

(University of Nottingham, Hellenic Open University, University of York, University of Leeds)

In the 2020s, occupational inequality has intensified and taken on new dimensions in response to the challenges posed by multiple economic and social crises since 2008. Some scholars argue that crises are catalysts for social change and new opportunities, while others emphasise the potential for increased inequality and social unrest. This plenary is led by Marek Korczynski, author of *The Sociology of Contemporary Work: What It Is and Why We Need It* and Editor-in-chief of *Work, Employment and Society* (WES). We illuminate the socio-economic, cultural, geographic and political factors that shape workers' employment, and how their experiences influence broader societal structures of agency, life choices and inequality.

Marek Korczynski

We need the sociology of work in these times of crisis. I will draw on my recent book, [*The Sociology of Contemporary Work: What It Is and Why We Need It*](#), to make this argument, highlighting particularly the key strengths of the sociology of work in relationship to corresponding weaknesses in related disciplines and fields.

Viviane Galata

Occupational groups in low-skilled jobs have been among the most affected by crises. Using Relative Deprivation as a key concept and Work Histories of migrant workers, my research emphasises the relative condition of inequality, shaped by social relations and comparisons. In analysing the causes of dissatisfaction, and interpreting shifts in people's attitudes, the paths through which inequality is experienced are illuminated during periods of rapid change.

Karen Tatham

Progression prospects, and the reproduction of inequality in the mid-skills space is under-recognised. My research explores vocational routes to higher skilled work, in which I argue that sector traditions and norms of 'who progresses and how' reinforce stratified education and occupational processes for early adults in new and continuing forms of opportunity and constraint.

Caroline Barrett

Alternative pathways to elite occupations have the potential for social transformation. My research explores inequalities in access to the legal profession, as an elite space, in England. Rational action theories and social practice theories help in understanding how individuals' educational and career decision-making varies by social background, and how social class influences their strategising for their future employability and well-being.

The 2025 Conference is a chance for us as sociologists to reassess what we do as Sociologists of Work, and what our relationship is, or could be to these changes:

- In this time of social and occupational upheaval, how do sociologists understand what emerges?
- Existing occupational and workplace inequalities abound. Are new inequalities emerging?
- What new social narratives and ways of being are developing?
- How can we respond positively and critically to these challenges?

Chair: Helen Norman, University of Leeds

STREAM PLENARIES

FRIDAY 25 APRIL 2025, 17:00 - 18:00

Culture, Media, Sport & Food - Room 4.206

Sociology of Consumption – Full title to be confirmed

Vicki Harman, Dan Welsh, Jo Littler

(University of Reading, University of Manchester, Goldsmith's, University of London)

This session will consider the changing status of Sociology of Consumption within context of publishing and the discipline more generally. It will consider the value of the Sociology of Consumption in understanding social transformations in everyday life and wider social and political structures. Furthermore, as editors and authors in the Sociology of Consumption, the speakers will reflect on where the debates in the Sociology of Consumption are best located and how academics may seek to navigate publishing in this field given the often interdisciplinary nature of their work, which speaks to issues inequality, identity, economics and immigration, as well as consumption.

Families & Relationships - Room 4.205

Are We More Emotionally Reflexive about Intimate Life and Why?

Mary Holmes

(University of Edinburgh)

Emotional reflexivity is the relational use of emotions to consider and form ourselves and our relationships in light of our social context (Holmes, 2014: 20). In this talk, I consider to what extent emotional reflexivity is new, or whether and why it has become increasingly important in navigating the complexity of life in late modernity? Arguably, emotional reflexivity is required as people become disembedded from the past and face complex, diverse and changing emotional and social norms. I will focus in particular on how novel social circumstances and departures from conventional ways of doing intimacy prompt emotional reflexivity. I discuss a range of empirical examples of emotional reflexivity, including amongst young refugee friends in Beirut, working class Scottish households navigating COVID lockdown and internet daters. This leaves questions about differences in doing emotional reflexivity and the implications for understanding inequalities in intimate life.

Chair: Leah Gilman, Manchester Metropolitan University

Environment & Society - Room 3.205

How Young People Imagine Their Climate Futures

Kathryn Wheeler

(University of Essex)

This paper explores how young people envision the future through the lens of a fictional child, 'Alex', who is their age now but living in the year 2050. Drawing on responses from 1655 young people who completed the SEEd Youth Listening Survey between 2021-2023, the study examines the expectations, concerns, and hopes that young people project onto future generations, offering insight into how they understand social, economic, and environmental change over time.

The findings reveal a dual narrative. On one hand, young people imagined Alex enjoying familiar aspects of childhood—playing with friends, engaging with technology, and experiencing nature. On the other, they expressed deep concerns about climate change, economic instability, and technological overreach. Many feared that Alex would inherit a world defined by environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and political inaction, with some respondents anticipating social unrest and extreme weather as defining features of daily life. Others, however, envisioned Alex as part of a more sustainable world, shaped by technological progress, climate-conscious governance, and shifts in social behaviour.

These contrasting visions highlight the ways young people interpret intergenerational responsibility and the perceived failures or successes of current society. The study underscores the importance of developing constructive narratives about climate action and climate justice to shape a more hopeful outlook for the future.

Chair: Samya Ambreen (Independent Researcher)

Lifecourse - Room 3.204

Identifying New Spaces for Social transformation Across the Life Course

Melanie Hall, Katherine A. Smith, Kingsley Purdam

(Manchester Metropolitan University, University of York, University of Manchester)

The plenary will consider new spaces and possibilities for social transformation across the life course, concerned with changes in meanings, methods and ethics of researching with and across different generations, capturing the consequences of social transformation and how this might transform knowledge and practice. The Life Course stream plenary comprises four study groups (Childhood, Youth Studies, Ageing, and Death, Dying and Bereavement). Plenary speakers have provided a 5-minute provocation based on their research, intended to foster dialogue across the Life course stream as follows:

Melanie Hall

The plenary invites participants to reflect on their own research and identify if and how they might be complicit in the construction of the good research child. How might we balance the inclusion of children's voices in research in a way that avoids this construction? Is there potential to reorient research to avoid perpetuating the 'good' research child?

Katherine A. Smith

Why and how to study the mental health 'crisis'? This provocation explores the mental health 'crisis', and how and why to study what is a heavily contested social phenomenon. Addressing challenges to its ontological and epistemological basis, how increasing rates of mental health difficulties vary across generations, and various proposed underlying factors, I attempt to disentangle multiple strands of academic narratives of the 'crisis'. Through this I make the case for further research, especially that which privileges lived experiences and intergenerational dialogue.

Kingsley Purdam

Not even 'astride of a grave'! How a life on low income can haunt you - from low birth weight to not having enough money for your own funeral. What next for researching and tackling poverty and its consequences?

After all the plenary speakers have presented their provocations, we will break into small groups with attendees to discuss the provocation. The plenary will provide a supportive environment to advance debates across the boundaries of the study groups, which themselves span the life course, to create new allegiances and possibilities for sociological research.

Chairs: Harriet Rowley, Manchester Metropolitan University & James Fletcher, University of Bath

Co-Facilitators: Thalia Assan, Hebrew University of Jerusalem & Liam Wrigley, Leeds Metropolitan University

Methodological Innovations - Room 3.213

Area-Deprivation Government Spending and the Rates of Children in Care in England: Challenges of Capturing and Modelling Using Available Data

Stefanie Doebler, Karen Broadhurst, Bachar Alrouh

(Lancaster University)

This paper presents some recent population-level analysis of the rates of children in out-of-home care in local authorities in England and the relationships with area deprivation and local authority social care expenditure.

The analysis used linked administrative population data from government sources, i.e. the DfE, birth and maternity records, multiple area-deprivation indicators from the English Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and government social care expenditure data reported by local authorities. The paper discusses some findings and challenges pertaining to measurement and modelling the rates of children in care, using administrative linked data to reliably capture their numbers, evaluating associations with area deprivation and government spending under austerity. The paper also reflects on how population level descriptive findings can be framed by and inform the sociology of child and family welfare and the sociology of care.

Theorising and Empirically Analysing Forced Labour, Child Labour, and Power (A Socio-Economic Approach)

*Wendy Olsen
(University of Manchester)*

In this presentation, I explain social systems in which some children are coerced into detrimental work relationships. Particular social and cultural norms, which are variegated by class, ethnic group, migrant status, gender, and life-stage, underpin the reasons why people do this self-detrimental work. The theoretical framings are considered at an abstract level. First, I offer and then critique the common framing in terms of individual choice which sees child labour mainly as a labour demand and labour supply issue (Webbink, et al., 2015). The parents are seen as suppliers of child labour. Second, I explore more collective and collaborative agency theories. These differ in terms of the degree of individualism, the analysis of social structures, the types of agents, and the varied social norms we consider. We can see these as the institutionalist approaches. The coerciveness in child labour is not just because of the parents' wishes, or the choices of individuals, but fundamentally result from social phenomena at the community and polity levels.

In the empirical section, I show trends and social-group variations in the percentage of children doing damaging forms of child labour in six South Asian countries. I conclude by examining the UNICEF, ILO and United Nations approaches to child labour, responding to the empirical findings.

References:

Lukes, Steven (1974), *Power: A Radical View*, London: Macmillan.
Kim, Jihye, Olsen, W.K. and Arkadiusz Wisniowski (2022) Predicting Child-Labour Risks by Norms in India. *Work, Employment and Society*. doi:10.1177/09500170221091886

Social Divisions / Social Identities - Room 3.210

Families and Wealth

*Céline Bessière, Ye Liu
(Paris Dauphine University, King's College London)*

Family wealth increasingly determines one's life chances: whether the ability to obtain secure housing, acquire an education, start a business or retire with dignity. For all social classes, family wealth contributes more and more to defining one's social position over the life course. The middle classes are increasingly dependent on inter vivo gifts and inheritances inside families, while a lack of savings and assets has become a reliable measure of poverty and a key dynamic in the decline of social mobility. The upper classes benefit from the so-called 'great wealth transfer' that will see fortunes of historic proportions passed on to new generations of heirs. In recent years, the role of family in sustaining, reproducing and even accelerating wealth inequalities has received growing attention. In a context described for example as 'patrimonial capitalism' (Piketty, 2014) and 'the asset economy' (Adkins et al. 2020), scholars from various disciplines have investigated the intertwined relationships between kinship and private wealth accumulation and the wider ecosystem of state, educational and legal actors that frame and regulate the decisions and actions of families with regard to property, shaping their more or less egalitarian nature.

The stream plenary will unpack the role of the family as a unit of economic accumulation and (re)distribution through presentations from Professor Céline Bessière (University-Paris Dauphine-PSL) and Dr Ye Liu (King's College London) followed by audience discussion.

Chair: Katie Higgins, Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Sheffield

Sociology of Education - Room 4.204

Pedagogies of Hope in Higher Education: Transformative and Liberatory Possibilities

Manny Madriaga, Syra Shakir

(University of Nottingham, Leeds Trinity University)

In an era where higher education is increasingly shaped by neoliberal imperatives, the call to cultivate pedagogies of hope becomes ever more urgent. This panel discussion brings together academics from diverse disciplines to explore how hope, as an active and transformative force, can create liberatory and meaningful opportunities for students and educators alike. We interrogate the colonial structures embedded within universities, advocating for the decolonisation of the curriculum as an essential step toward societal transformation. This journey to humanise our teaching and assessment practices can be painful and arduous, requiring boldness in the face of despairing processes of white supremacy and antiblackness hidden behind metrics of performativity and notions of academic quality.

We consider how alternative ways of learning and teaching, particularly through creative expression such as poetry, film, and music can offer critical interventions in dismantling oppressive educational paradigms. Hip-hop, as an art form deeply rooted in resistance and liberation, serves as a powerful pedagogical tool, speaking to histories of struggle while imagining new possibilities of hope for racial repair and healing. Inspired by bell hooks' vision of a 'classroom of all possibilities', we reflect on our own experiences as educators seeking to cultivate spaces where all students, irrespective of background, feel a deep sense of belonging, agency, and empowerment.

Chair: Tamsin Bowers-Brown, Leeds Trinity University