



Australian
National
University



TASA The Australian
Sociological Association

Sociology Goes Public

**29 November 2021
12pm – 5.15pm**

This event is centred on contributions and discussion from ANU Sociology's community of postgraduate scholars. Topics include the value of sociology education in the workplace, digital media policy and populism.

The afternoon will be organized around three sessions: two panels addressing the main symposium theme followed by a book launch discussion.

12 noon - 1pm

PANEL 1 - Sociology goes to work: exploring the value of sociology education in the workplace

The public value and importance of sociological research and thinking has long been recognised, most famously by Michael Burawoy in his address to the American Sociology Association in 2004. Sub-fields such as public sociology and applied sociology both aim to intervene in public discourse and issues of concern using sociological knowledge. Relatively less attention has been paid to sociology trained professionals working in roles that may not involve 'doing sociology' in a strict sense but whose approaches to their work are nevertheless informed by sociology. This panel discussion will explore the value of sociological training through a conversation about experiences and work undertaken in professional roles across community services, politics and the public service, in areas that address issues related to sex, gender and sexuality. At a time where sociology departments across Australia face significant funding cuts, and the worth of sociology education is being eroded, this panel considers the applicability of sociological skills and knowledge outside of the academic sphere.

Tate McAllister (Chair)

Tate McAllister is Assistant Director in the ACT Government Office of LGBTIQ+ Affairs. Alongside his work he is completing a PhD in Sociology at ANU where he researches trans masculinity and embodiment.

Dr Gemma Killen

Gemma is a writer, researcher and social advocate. She recently completed a PhD in Sociology at ANU, specialising in gender, sexuality and community making. She is currently working as a Senior Policy Officer at the ACT Council of Social Service, where her policy portfolios include issues relating to justice, alcohol and other drugs, gender and sexuality, families, young people and education.

Isabel Mudford

Isabel Mudford is a political advisor to the ACT Greens and PhD Candidate in the School of Sociology at the ANU where she researches emergence of the category of LGBTIQ+ Health in Australia. She specialises in gender and sexuality policy.

1.00 – 2.00pm LUNCH BREAK

2.00 – 3.30pm

PANEL 2 - Applying sociology to digital media policy

Simon Copland (Chair)

This paper studies the efficacy of the Reddit's quarantine, increasingly implemented in the platform as a means of restricting and reducing misogynistic and other hateful material. Using the case studies of r/TheRedPill and r/Braincels, the paper argues the quarantine successfully cordoned off affected subreddits and associated hateful material from the rest of the platform. It did not, however, reduce the levels of hateful material within the affected

spaces. Instead many users reacted by leaving Reddit for less regulated spaces, with Reddit making this hateful material someone else's problem. The paper argues therefore that the success of the quarantine as a policy response is mixed.

Dr. Jenny Davis

The “bias to action” that defines Silicon Valley culture has had spectacular fallout in the form of products that extract, surveil, divide, and misinform, made by companies that exploit, monopolize, control, and devour. This is both supported and driven by market realities that demand growth within a legislative context that poses few barriers. Australia *could* be different. It turns out, they are not. Despite substantial distance between the two markets in geography, size, and risk orientation, Silicon Valley culture permeates the Australian tech ecosystem. This manifests most profoundly in a *failure-speed dyad* by which “failing fast” is the accepted path towards growth and innovation. Drawing on data from interviews and observations with Australian tech startups, I demonstrate the global reach of Silicon Valley norms and thus the need for external regulations, focusing in particular on creating friction between product development and distribution.

Jessie Liu

Infant formula parallel importation, also known as ‘daigou’ between China and Australia has received extensive media coverage over the past 6 years. This talk explores the labour involved in the trade, particularly the digital labours of daigou shoppers on Wechat, one of the most widely used social media apps within China and within the Chinese diaspora. Building on previous literature and my own interviews and fieldwork, I examine the ways in which different actors within the trade negotiate the platform affordances of the app, and the kinds of labour relations that Wechat has facilitated. In particular, I aim to highlight how the continued non-recognition of digital labour as labour has given way to exploitative relationships between companies and individual daigou shoppers, whereby daigou shoppers perform advertorials, sales, and customer service without compensation, while the profit margin and the share prices of these companies greatly increase.

Sean Ward

Digital platforms offer new avenues for outrage and harassment and new challenges for regulators. Recent research into harassment highlights the inability for policy to move beyond a dyadic model of harassment, to encompass emerging models of networked harassment. These models particularly highlight the role of *amplifiers* (highly followed accounts or communities) in the spread of networked harassment. My research, which focuses on moral outrage and encompasses online harassment, seeks to use digital methods to explore and visualise this process of networked moral outrage. Preliminary findings highlight the interplay between processes of amplification and platform affordances, showing how viral instances of outrage may allow for new types of ‘amplifiers’. This encourages a more nuanced understanding of networked harassment and adds further complexity in disentangling accountability in online spaces.

3.45-5.15PM BOOK LAUNCH

Melinda Cooper in conversation with Paul Jones about his recent book,

Critical Theory and Demagogic Populism (Manchester University Press, 2020)

<https://manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/9781526123435/>

Book Description

Critical Theory and Demagogic Populism provides a detailed analysis of the relevance of the Frankfurt School’s sociological work to understanding contemporary populism. It draws on the research that the Institute for Social Research conducted concerning domestic demagogues during its period of ‘exile’ in the USA. The book argues that the figure of the demagogue has been neglected in both orthodox ‘populism studies’ and in existing critical approaches to populism such as that of Ernesto Laclau. Demagogic ‘capture’ of populist movements and their legacies is thus a contingent prospect for ‘left’ and ‘right’ populist movements. An account of ‘modern demagogy’ is thus detailed, from the Institute’s own dedicated demagogy studies through to their dialogue with Weber’s work on charismatic leadership, the US liberal critique of demagogy and Freud’s group psychology. The Institute’s linkage of ‘modern demagogy’ to the culture industry speaks to the

underestimation in ‘populism studies’ of the significance of two other ‘modern phenomena. The first is ‘cultural populism’ – the appeal to a folkloric understanding of ‘the people’ and/or ‘their culture’. The second is the pivotal role of modern means of communication, not only in the recent prominence of social media but demagogic exploitation of all media since the rise of literacy and the widening of the suffrage in the nineteenth century. The dialectical dimensions of these processes are also highlighted in reconstructing the Institute’s work and in extending these analyses through to the present. The book so concludes by weighing up potential counter-demagogic forces within and beyond the culture industry.

Paul K Jones

Paul K Jones is Reader in Sociology in the ANU Research School of Social Sciences. His work sits at the intersection of sociology, critical theory and political communication and maintains a critical dialogue with the legacies of the Birmingham cultural studies project, in which he was formally trained. He is the author of *Raymond Williams’s Sociology of Culture: a critical reconstruction* (Palgrave) and lead-author of *Key Concepts in Media and Communications* (Sage). Most recently he published “Demagogic Populism and Media System: a preliminary articulation”, in *The European Journal of Communication* in 2021.

Melinda Cooper

Melinda Cooper is Professor of Sociology in the ANU Research School of Social Sciences. Her monograph *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism*, was published in Zone Book’s Near Futures series in 2017 and is currently completing a manuscript entitled *Capital Gains and Public Liabilities* on the limits of contemporary public finance and the possibility of revolutionary alternatives. Her most recent publications include “Infinite Regress: Virginia School Neoliberalism and the Tax Revolt” published in *Capitalism: A Journal of History and Economics* in 2021 and “The Alt-Right: Neoliberalism, Libertarianism and the Fascist Temptation,” published in *Theory Culture and Society* in 2021.