

Preface

Sociology sets out to develop the sociological imagination of those who study it, allowing us to think critically and reflexively about the social world around us and make sense of the relationship between our personal experiences and wider society. This approach to interrogating the world is embodied in this collection of critical reflections written by final year students on the Sociology degree programmes here at Leeds Beckett University. The reflections in this volume underline both the breadth of the subject and its power to shed light on the familiar and the taken for granted. They tackle a wide range of contemporary issues such as mental health apps, online sex work, femvertising, sharenting, commodification of women and of crime. To do this, they apply theory as an interrogative and explanatory tool, tackling these subjects through the lens of, for example, neoliberalism, surveillance, risk society, commodification, and cultural production, underlining its central role in Sociology.

This collection is a testament to both the students and staff of the Sociology degrees. For the students, each of the reflections emphasises the knowledge and skills they have developed individually – in applying the tools of the social sciences to analyse and interpret current trends and developments and, just as importantly, communicating incisive, critical commentary; the end product is also a collective editorial effort. Each essay also underlines the strong commitment the course team have to developing students as active producers of knowledge and the support that they provide as part of this to enable them to develop their intellectual skills and abilities.

I hope that readers of these reflections enjoy the perspectives offered, and are themselves further challenged, encouraged or inspired to reflect on the contemporary social world.

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For more information on our sociology courses at Leeds Beckett University see:
<https://courses.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/sociology/>

Images:

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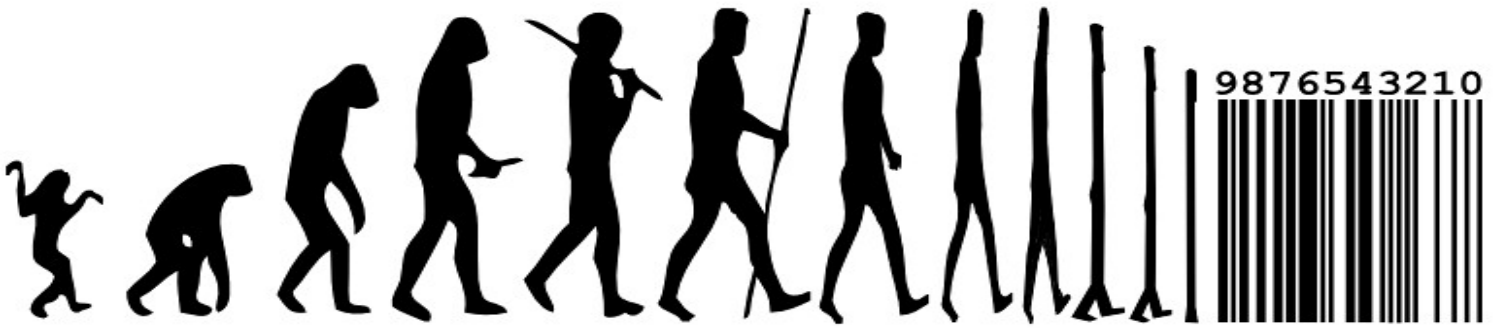
[Banksy.newtfire.org](#)

[How To Choose the Right Vlogging Camera | Techno FAQ](#)

[ONLYFANS如何提现 | 小刀吧 \(xiaodao8.com\)](#)

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/>

[Building a globalised research system – Social Sciences \(lse.ac.uk\)](#) [Heart of a Poet: Swarm \(poemsbyraslater.blogspot.com\)](#)



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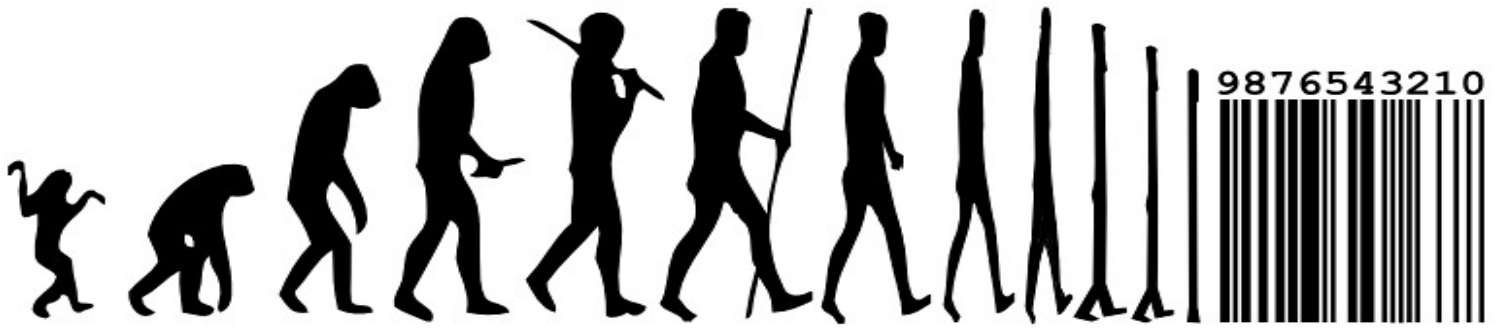
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Editorial

Whilst the COVID crisis has abated the academic year has been marked by other national and global events, such as the continued *cost of living crisis* and high inflation as well as global conflicts. Despite constraining external structures our students continue to produce thoughtful work in their 3rd year module *Contemporary Society and Social Futures* and we proudly mark the 12th anniversary of our student journal. These students' university experience still bear the hallmarks of disruption from the COVID crisis and lockdown during their educational journeys. It is therefore to the credit of these students that they have persisted and developed their critical thinking skills and embarked upon using the sociological tools from the module to apply these to a social phenomenon they deemed to be worthy of closer investigation and analysis.

The six contributions this year can be found here:

<https://ojs.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/index.php/SOC/index> and we are proud that students develop a range of different themes and below the reader will find an overview of the contributions as compiled by the student authors who were also involved in the editorial process. Continuing our efforts to give voice to our students we hereby hand over to the student editors to describe the contributions.

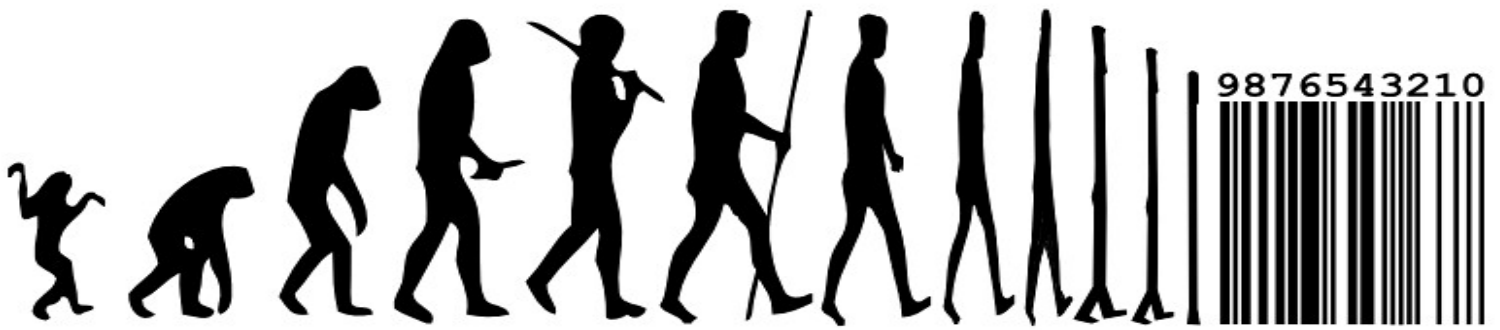
Dr Darren Nixon & Dr Natalia Gerodetti

This critical reflection issue is opened by Hope-Collins' evaluation of the usefulness of mental health apps within a neoliberal society. Collins examines the regulatory effects of these apps against the backdrop of the rise of information

society and surveillance society. These forms of apps can have a positive effect as they can be a tool for regulating people's emotions and behaviour in the pursuit of becoming better selves. However, despite some positive features Collins goes on to discuss how the neoliberal ideology of individualism responsabilises individuals to monitor and manage mental health symptoms. Furthermore, neoliberal policies and funding cuts of NHS mental health services restrict people's ability to access professional medical advice, which, as a result limits the usefulness of information obtained through mental health apps.

In the next contribution Moses examines online sex work in an online, contemporary framework through the online subscription site '*OnlyFans*'. Here Moses explores the shifting perspectives regarding sex work in a surveillance society; one that allows sex workers to be consistently perceived by and analysed by a larger group. She also explores the concept of online sex work as 'gig-economy' work. The transfer of sex-work into an online sphere influenced by digital platforms has reshaped both the experience of sex workers, and the social/economic sphere in which it operates.

Turning her attention towards a different area, Hamilton analyses Beyoncé's journey to becoming a worldwide superstar and her branding in terms of femvertising. The commodification of Beyoncé's life experience has created an image of female empowerment, where even her struggles and challenges are sold to her audience via her music. Hamilton examines Beyoncé's social



media presence - where she secures her superstar status – also as a form of surveillance through the idea of the synopticon. For here her fans have a global forum of feeling closer through information publicised online but where also her fans then quantify themselves, as they share a mass identity of their love for her.

Also occupied with aspects of the digital sphere, DGLISH examines the potentially harmful impact of 'Sharenting'. Through 'Sharenting' parents turn childhood events - previously private family affairs such as births and birthdays - into money-making opportunities. DGLISH examines how everything is up for commodification in neoliberal capitalism, with childhood being no exception. Yet significantly, the brand deals and adverts attached to family vlog YouTube videos feature children who are often too young to consent. Questioning the ethics of this lack of consent, DGLISH discusses surveillance capitalism's use of human experiences and relationships as a source of financial gain and highlights the stereotypical family values essential to a capitalist system that are most often promoted through family vlogs.

The effects of capitalist condition are also at the basis of FOYSAI's critical reflection how the complex interplay of being a woman in a capitalist society ultimately results in the exploitation of women's insecurities. This inherent exploitation persists in spite of the narrative of empowerment and choice promoted by contemporary liberal feminism. FOYSAI pays particular attention to how gender-based inequalities are not only reproduced but are intensified by the male gaze under the conditions of neoliberalism and

consumerism. as well as the idea that women's insecurities are increasingly being commodified. Self-entrepreneurship as a means of female empowerment is contested throughout as it highlights the patriarchal undertones inherent to the capitalist system.

In the final piece of this issue Curtis examines crime as entertainment. Crime dramas have been dominating the TV charts demonstrating their popularity within contemporary society. Curtis endeavours to understand why crime dramas have been sensationalised for the production of profit, perpetuated damaging stereotypes and resulted in the fabrication of fear in society. She urges us to develop more reflexivity in relation to our consumption of TV shows and how that might contribute to a distortion of crime representation in postmodern society.

Editors: Shannon Curtis, Ruby DGLISH, Kareema FOYSAI, Tijauna Hamilton, Hannah Hope-Collins, Sophie Moses