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Research interests

I'm interested in the relationship between the most intimate and the most structural, between who we think we are and global capitalism and the processes by which we become (the doing of being). I question the division between private and public and explore how new forms of intimacy and ethics are shaped by historical legacies that are repeated over time and habituated, so barely recognised for what they are, and the most powerful economic forces, which in turn are repeated and habituated so that their power and influence are almost naturalised. My latest book 'Class, Self, Culture' (London: Routledge 2004) explores these interests by examining how class is produced across a range of sites: through historical classification systems that are repeated in sociological analysis as if they are value-free; through economic discourse that produces a particular subject of value, in which the responsibility for exploitation becomes transferred to the individual in the production of themselves, i.e., people have to learn the right behaviour and dispositions in order to make themselves employable, hence open to exploitation. This shift from transferring responsibility from capitalism to the intimate production of the self illustrates how far capitalist social relations have pervaded our lives. To show how these forms of encroachment work I also explore how both political rhetoric and popular culture generate judgements about who is a worthy and good person. In most of these assessments and judgements (often played out through the ethical scenarios of everyday life) the working-class are found wanting because they do not make the 'right' choices about how to become certain forms of people. But what is significant is that they never have access to the 'right' cultural resources to make themselves as the political and public judgements require. This process repeats a long historical legacy in which the working-class were forced to 'tell' themselves in a particular way in order to receive poor relief. These issues are highly pertinent to the Identities Programme and will be explored in our Reality TV project.

In another book, produced as part of the ESRC funded Violence Programme, on Violence, Sexuality and Space (which took place over two years with five researchers in Manchester and Lancaster see <http://les1.man.ac.uk/sociology/vssrp>), called 'Sexuality and the Politics of Violence', co-written with Les Moran, Paul Tyrer and Karen Corteen, (London: Routledge 2004) we also show how judgements about culture has become similarly pertinent to how people are assessed through law and how they can make justice claims. We show how making the 'right' and responsible choices about where to be and what to be becomes crucial to how the state offers protection against violence. But we also show how violence can be deployed as a



resource in political claims making by gay and lesbian campaigning groups. This is an in-depth analysis of how violence exists in the most cramped and intimate spaces of people's psyche and sense of self (their ontological security) to how the state deploys violence to sustain and contain categories of sexuality.

Both these books emerged as a result of interests generated in an ethnographic research project, published as *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage 1997). This book questions the assumptions of post-structural theories on gender and class by applying them to the lives of 83 white working-class women. Again, it explores how subjectivity is produced through the inhabitation of the categorical positions of class, gender and sexuality. It explores how on a daily basis the women question the values that are given to the position of 'working-class woman' that they are expected to occupy, showing how they dis-identify from the categories on offer to them. They do this in order to claim some value for themselves – in terms of how they see themselves and how other people view and assess them. This is an exploration of the construction of subjectivity against identity, arguing that identities are a particularly limited resource that cannot be accessed by all groups. This has important implications for the current contemporary political scene, based upon recognition, in which identity politics proliferate in the making of political-claims.

Throughout all these books is a central concern with power, with who has value, with who is seen to be worthy and unworthy and with how groups are positioned and position themselves in relation to the social categories available to them. These themes appear in a diverse range of journal articles and chapters, ranging from an analysis of Black female rappers, pornography, masculinity, sexuality and space, television and education. All my work is informed by a concern with representations (media, political, academic), hence books on *The Media* (London: Nelson 1992) and *Feminist Cultural Theory* (Manchester University Press: Manchester 1995). And with the advances made by feminist theory, which has been startlingly cutting edge over the past few years. If you don't believe me check out *Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism* (with Sara Ahmed, Jane Kilby, Celia Lury, Maureen McNeil, London: Routledge) and the books in the Routledge Transformations series. Also for those interested in Pierre Bourdieu, a book by Blackwells on 'Feminists Evaluate Bourdieu' (2005 is edited by myself and Lisa Adkins, following a very successful conference).

Another major influence that runs through all my work is methodology. I've written lots on feminist ethnography and following the ESRC Violence research project on multi-method research, such as quantitative and focus group research. More recently I've returned to my interest more specifically in the media and am currently conducting research into the amazing Radio Regen (Community Radio station in Manchester).

My future research involves how new political formations are being shaped through contemporary ethics, specifically about how identities based on class (with gender, race and sexuality) are being produced by the new ethical scenarios presented on television. It is an investigation in textually mediated subjectivity which shows how class is being re-made as ethical choice, telling and display in contemporary representations.

I've supervised PhD students across a wider range of areas: Cultural Citizenship and Advertising by Anne Cronin (1994-1998), see Anne's book published by Routledge in the Transformations series ([link](#)) ; Breda Gray (1994-1998) on Irish Women's experience of Irishness and migration, also published in the Transformations series ([link](#)). Diane Railton (1995-1999) on young women's responses to popular music taste; Jocey Quinn (1996-1999) on women's experiences of higher education; see Josie's book published by Trentham books; John Galilee (1996-1999) on Men's magazines and changing masculinities; Ming Phang Sun (1989-1993) on the changing experience of education in Taiwan; Fang Long Sook (1996-1999) on ghosts and women's experience in Taiwan; Sahar Khamis (1997-2000) on rural Egyptians women's mediated experience of birth control policies via television; Myung Sook Sun (1998-2002) on the impact of feminism on women's position in South Korean society; Tara Few (1998-2003) on taste and women's responses to popular music; Annie Meyer (2001- 2004) on the representation and responses to paedophilia as a neo-liberal crisis in governance; Jenny Birchall (2001- 2005) on the historical and contemporary use and representation of space in central Manchester;

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