

## Bio-Social Methods for a Vitalist Social Science

Locations	Muirhead Tower, Room 427
Date(s)	Tuesday 16th July 2013 (09:15-17:00)
Contact	Workshop Leader: <a href="/staff/profiles/gees/pykett-jessica.aspx">Dr Jessica Pykett (/staff/profiles/gees/pykett-jessica.aspx)</a>
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Societies face several contemporary governmental challenges ranging from climate change to obesity, which are said to require 'bio-social' solutions. That is, solutions which take into account the biological, ecological, psychological and sociological underpinnings of human behaviour. Insights from behavioural science, emotion science and neuroscience are now used to develop more effective and sophisticated mechanisms for governing the self and societies. This trend has perhaps been most notable with the incarnation of the 'behaviour change agenda' which spans policy areas as diverse as public health communication, household energy consumption, parenting classes, personal pensions policies and tax compliance. Neuroscientific, behavioural economic and psychological research *knowledges*, and biomedical research *methods* are part and parcel of these explicit attempts to govern through affective means. Traditional social scientific approaches have been taken to task for failing to adequately recognise the inherent biological vitalism, materiality and complexity of human behaviour in light of advances in the biological and behavioural sciences.

From a critical perspective, it has been widely argued that new affective forms of governance open up new questions about the democratic legitimacy and public permissiveness of mobilising psychological prompts and primers to 'improve' public policy and implementation. Existing social scientific research has sought to demonstrate how particular forms of disciplinary knowledge have come to be valued by policy strategists, how certain kinds of evaluative methods such as Randomized Controlled Trials have become more wide-spread outside of the medical field, and how policy and research expertise has been reframed. The sociologist, Nikolas Rose (2012) has arguably pioneered critical approaches which have sought a rapprochement between social theoretic perspectives and developments in the biological and life sciences, in parallel with scholars from the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) who have radically interrogated the application and translation of laboratory science into various forms of social intervention. Several key issues remain to be fleshed out concerning what the methods, conceptual apparatus and objects of enquiry for this new bio-social science might look like.

This workshop brings together researchers from the biological, behavioural and social sciences across the University of Birmingham with external speakers to consider the potential for integrating critical and applied approaches contemporary 'bio-social' challenges. We aim to examine what kinds of languages, principals, methods and theoretical frameworks might be required for a genuinely transformative approach to 'vitalist' social science. At the same time, we aim to consider how to hold on to crucial political and ethical questions concerning the potential impact of biologically-infused accounts of the human condition on our conceptions of governance and citizenship.

### Confirmed speakers include:

Dr John Cromby (Psychology, Loughborough University)

Professor Steve Hinchliffe (Human Geography, Exeter)

Professor Martyn Hammersley (Educational & Social Research, The Open University)

Professor Kathryn Ecclestone (Education, University of Sheffield)

Dr Felicity Callard (Social Science for Medical Humanities, Durham University)

Dr Des Fitzgerald (Interacting Minds Centre, Aarhus University)

To register your interest in attending this workshop, please email [Sarah Myring \(mailto:s.myring@bham.ac.uk\)](mailto:s.myring@bham.ac.uk), stating any special dietary requirements you have.