

# SO303 SPECIAL TOPIC CHOICES

SO303 group sign-up will **commence** on the SO303 Moodle site on **THURSDAY 21<sup>st</sup> September at 10am and run until 12 noon on TUESDAY 26<sup>th</sup> September 2017**

## Place Exploration

**Dr Mary Benson**

**Tuesday 2pm, Seminar Room Auxilia Bld.**

Everything that we study is emplaced. Place is not merely a stage on which we produce our lives, place itself has detectable effects on social life. Place is, at once, the buildings, streets, monuments, and open spaces assembled at a certain geographic spot and actors' interpretations, representations, and identifications (Gyeryn, 2000). Place also exists in different layers of time and meanings. This special topic group is an exploration of place/space; place identity and identification. Students will be encouraged to carry out explorations of different places with a view to developing a sociological awareness of place as a theoretical concept and as lived experience. The aim is to develop an understanding of the complex interplay of identity and place. This type of research lends itself to fieldwork methods and visual representations and students are encouraged to take SO205A Fieldwork Methods alongside this special topic group. However, place can also be explored through a variety of methods and students are allowed to choose this Special Topic group while taking any of the methods modules.

Places of interest for this special topic group include the following:

- Public space
- Buildings
- Streetscapes
- Communities
- Cafes
- Markets
- Abandoned buildings
- Tourist sites
- Urban and rural townscapes
- Etc.

There are a multitude of potential sites which will be discussed in class in more detail in order to help students identify specific places that they can research and which fit in with their own areas of interest.

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### **Secondary Data Analysis of Quantitative Data: Using the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) study to understand inequalities in children's lives**

**Dr. Delma Byrne**

**Wednesday 1pm Long Corridor Computer Room, South Campus**

This special topic group will use nationally representative quantitative data from the *Growing up in Ireland* study to understand the mechanisms through which inequalities in children's educational experiences, out-of-school experiences and civic participation come about and are maintained. *Growing Up in Ireland* is a national, longitudinal study of children, funded by the [Department of Children and Youth Affairs](#), in association with the [Department of Social Protection](#) and the [Central Statistics Office](#).

In this special topic class, students will have the opportunity to formulate and theoretically frame a research question that has arisen from sociological readings or interests relating to children's educational experiences, out-of-school experiences, or civic participation. Issues are likely to cross-cut issues of social class, household income, gender, disability/SEN or ethnicity or migration status, as well as changes in the macro-economic climate. Students will then have the opportunity to develop their quantitative, secondary data analysis skills using a cohort of this large-scale dataset. Please note that students taking this module must use the Growing up In Ireland data. Data and questionnaires will be provided by the lecturer.

The study follows two groups/cohorts of children first visited in 2007/2008. The first wave of the project collected data from 11,000 children aged nine months and their parents (the Infant Cohort), as well as 8,500 children aged nine years (the Child Cohort), their parents, teachers and carers. In all, three waves of data collection have been conducted with the Infant Cohort (at 9 months, 3 years and 5 years) and two waves with the Child Cohort (at 9 years and 13 years). See [www.growingup.ie](http://www.growingup.ie) for more information about the study.

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## Religion & Society

**Dr. Brian Conway**

**Wednesday 9am, Seminar Room Auxilia Bld.**

Are we more or less religious now than before? Why do women tend to be more religious than men? Why are strict churches strong? These are some of the core questions taken up sociologists concerned with the relationship between religion and society. In the first semester students learn about the major theoretical, methodological and empirical debates and issues in the sociology of religion literature. Special attention is given to placing the Irish case in comparative perspective. This provides a foundation for the second semester, in which the focus turns to carrying out a research project about a research question(s) derived from the literature examined in the first semester as well as becoming acquainted with some writings about writing.

Topics:

Religion and generational change

Religion and young people

Religious professionals

## The sociology of the public realm

**Professor Mary P. Corcoran**

**Monday 10am, Seminar Room Auxilia Bld.**

What do such varied social processes as allotment gardening, swimming at the Forty Foot in Dublin, playing Gaelic games, volunteering, public libraries, car boot sales, Culture Night, hill-walking clubs have in common? They all to one degree or another are located in the public realm. According to Lofland (1989) the public realm is defined as those non-private sectors or areas of urban settlements in which individuals in co-presence tend to be personally unknown or only categorically known to one another. Lofland, Sennett (2011) and others have argued cogently about the sociological significance of the public realm- spaces that are relatively open to all, with no (or low) cost of entry where people can congregate, communicate, encounter each other only in fleeting exchanges but which are founded on a sense of mutual confidence and trust. Such spaces can help to generate a sense of subjective competence and a sense of collective belonging both crucial to the well-being of the citizen. In this special topic group we will identify and investigate sociologically events, activities and practices that embody publicness and public spiritedness and that help to constitute a public realm, even as we contend with the

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forces of as privatization, monetization, and marketization. Can the public realm-based on co-presence- survive in a digital age? If so, where do we find it?

### **Migration: Identities on the Move**

**Dr. Áine Corrigan O'Neill**

**Tuesday 11am, Seminar Room Auxilia Bld.**

Contemporary migration has become a topic of intense public and political discourse. New flows of migrants into Ireland have deeply impacted the social, cultural and demographic fabric of Irish society. Successive waves of Irish emigration have led to the emergence of a global Irish diaspora with complex and enduring ties to the homeland. In this special topic group, we will explore how migration and mobility impact on the culture and identity of those who migrate, the communities they leave behind and the web of transnational ties that migrants weave as they move between homeland and host society. Students will develop their own original research on migration by analyzing the impact that mobility has on the experiences of migrants in their careers and work practices, in their relationships and connections with friends and family and in the formation of ethnic ties and immigrant communities. Each week we will explore a key aspect of migration from a sociological perspective. Students are required to read, reflect on and discuss the themes presented in class from which they will develop their individual research topics.

Potential research topics include:

Migrant identity; home and belonging, transnational identities, diaspora and citizenship.

Immigrant communities in Ireland; ethnic culture, language, education, work, religion, gender, networks, discrimination and the integration of immigrants into Irish society.

Migration and work; barriers to employment, high skilled migrants, immigrant entrepreneurship, migrant networks and social capital.

Migration and technology; the impact of technology on migrants emotional, social, cultural and economic lives, the role of technology in facilitating transnational migrant relationships.

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### Ireland Since the Crash

**Dr. Colin Coulter**

**Thursday 10am, Seminar Room Auxilia Bld.**

As the century turned, the Irish Republic was lauded widely as an exemplar of how small, previously underdeveloped states might reach the promised land of national prosperity. Within a few years, however, a country that was once a ‘poster child’ for capitalist globalization would come to be seen as a cautionary tale for those tempted to tread the same neoliberal path. The global economic crash heralded most dramatically by the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008 had rather more severe consequences for Ireland than most other western societies. The scale of the country’s fall from grace was indexed in spiraling levels of unemployment, emigration and national debt not seen since the sour times of the 1980s. In this seminar programme, we will take a critical look at how Irish society has changed since the onset of the global economic recession. We will examine some of the debates that attended the Celtic Tiger era before turning to consider the ways in which the austerity measures introduced since boom turned to bust have been represented, experienced and contested. The series concludes by analysing whether the current claims that Ireland has ‘turned a corner’ into a period of ‘recovery’ provide grounds for optimism or signal that the tragedies of recent times are about to be played out once again as farce. It is hoped that the programme will offer a critical and engaging perspective on the nature of social change in a country that has, more than almost any other, reflected the promise and peril at the heart of late capitalism.

### How can we change the world?

**Dr. Laurence Cox**

**Wednesday 12 noon, Seminar Room Auxilia Bld.**

Social movements and revolutions, NGOs and charities, religion and alternative lifestyles, education and art, governments and corporations all offer modernity’s classic promise of a different and better world in one form or another. In a time of evident crisis, the claim to be a force capable of changing the world for the better is obviously an important one, and can help to recruit supporters and participants for different social actors’ projects. But how seriously can we take these claims? Some such claims are clearly PR covering a much more mundane reality; some may be well-intentioned but hopeless. However much of modernity – from postcolonial independence to neoliberalism and from education systems to many cultural changes – *can* be traced back to conscious projects on the part of

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more or less clearly defined social actors. So how can sociologists assess which is which?

In this course we will think about the extent to which different actors are already involved in the co-production and reproduction of contemporary society (their deeds as opposed to their words) and how we can analyse the different directions in which they seek to push social change. We will look both at the historical record and at the question of potential – how sociologists can think about what particular organisations and forces *may* be able to do in the future.

Students will select one social actor, in Ireland or abroad, which presents itself as being in the business of changing the world. They will critically analyse its own account of how it can do this, comparing it both with its actual actions and organisation in the present day and with its potential for developing. Research will draw on the actor's own public statements, its structure, history and activities, the views of its own participants (through interviews, social media or other appropriate sources), external commentary both supportive and hostile and examination of the wider social context within which it operates.

The aim is neither to celebrate nor to condemn but rather to assess seriously how far this actor is actually capable of changing the world.

### **Women's Interests, Activism and Agency in Ireland**

**Dr. Pauline Cullen**

**Wednesday 10am, Seminar Room Auxilia Bld.**

How can we understand what are women's interests and are they similar or different to men's interests? How and why are relations between women and men changing and what are the economic, social and political consequences? How are women's organisations and feminist movements engaging with the reality of women's lives in all their diversities? What contribution can feminist scholarship provide to understanding contemporary forms of women's subordination? This special topics course is interested in these questions in the context of Irish society. Drawing from sociological research on gender inequality, women and public policy, women's representation in decision making and women's and feminist movements this seminar will explore the gendered structures, social practices and ideologies that shape the experiences, perspectives and life-chances of women in Ireland. Issues to be examined include: younger women and older women, intersectionality and solidarity between women in the context of race and class dynamics; women's movements and feminist activism. A specific focus will be on

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the kinds of political agency available to women in Ireland and the specific forms that gender asymmetry and feminist struggle assume in societies where capitalism is financialized, globalizing and neoliberal. Potential topics for research projects include: women lives as workers; women in higher education; women and decision making/political office; women's movements; feminist organising. Projects should include a focus on the forms of agency and activism that women exercise in these domains.

### **Gender, Violence and Security**

**Professor Honor Fagan**

**Thursday 11am, Seminar Room Auxilia Bld.**

This module examines violence, conflict, and security from a gendered perspective. It will provide students with the opportunity to learn how to *research* gender with a particular emphasis on violence, conflict, and security in international contexts. It will focus on research design and methods. It involves epistemological, methodological, and ethical considerations in conducting research on how gender is reflected in the substantive areas of nation state development, peace-building, warring, and global security. This research workshop is closely complementary to Module SO324A Threats, Risks, Conflicts and Human Security, which takes place in Semester 2, so it is highly recommended that you enrol for both.

#### Topics

Investigating Gender, Gendering Violence, Militarisation and Masculinity, Nation and Citizenship, War and Terrorism, Violence and Sexuality, Peace-making and Security, Gender Justice Movements, The Sex Trade, Trading Sex in Refugee Camps, Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War, Understanding and Experiencing Insecurity, Gendered Processes of Securitisation

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## **Digital Society**

**Madhu Kambamettu**

**Monday 4pm, Seminar Room Auxilia Bld.**

Information and communication technology (ICT) has dramatically affected the ways in which we learn, communicate and socialise, and the growth of the internet has generated an exponential increase in the amount of information and range of products available to us as consumers. However, many social and economic analysts highlight the increasing capacity of various automated systems (such as robots, 3D printers and web-based apps) to carry out tasks previously done by humans as a serious threat to employment and prosperity. Others disagree, arguing that similar fears were prevalent at the time of the industrial revolution, and that new technologies lead to new jobs that are simply different to those that existed before. In addition, the implications of “big data” and the rapidly expanding Internet of Things (IoT) are not yet widely understood, even as data-transmitting sensors have become standard components in many of the electronic devices in our pockets, homes, workplaces and environment. In this reading and research group, we will examine questions concerning how we can understand these developments as sociologists. Does the proliferation of digital technology herald a completely new epoch in social relations and structure? And is classical sociology still relevant, or do we need an entirely new set of social theories?

## **Networked Media and the Quantified Self**

**Dr. Aphra Kerr**

**Wednesday 11am, Seminar Room Auxilia Bld.**

Irish people are increasingly experiencing many aspects of their lives in, and on, networked media, especially on the internet. We form ‘networked publics’ (boyd, 2010) and we create data trails of ourselves. From these traces commercial and non-commercial online services create ‘calculated publics’ (Livingstone, 2014) that target and personalise services to us. But these services offer partial and incomplete understandings of the self. They presuppose certain skills, resources and levels of access to the internet. What might be the social, political and cultural implications of these calculated publics? Why is our data important to them and how do they commodify it? How much agency do we retain over our data? What are the implications for our individual and group privacy? Drawing upon themes from Media and Society, and Technology and Culture, this special topic group will

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explore the role of networked media and data for individuals and society. Possible topics include:

- Digital Inequalities and digital divides
- Online Risks, harms and vulnerabilities
- Dataveillance, surveillance and souveillance
- New forms of online work (e.g., the gig economy, vlogging, elancing)
- The quantified self – self-tracking, power and knowledge
- Civic hacking, resistance and data activism
- Digital literacy and inclusion programmes

### Beauty and Popular Culture

**Dr. Rebecca King-O’Riain**

**Thursday 12 noon, Seminar Room Auxilia Bld.**

What does it mean to be beautiful today? How is that linked to popular culture? This module will explore beauty and popular culture through a critical lens to unveil and think about beauty practices in contemporary society. The beautiful body requires constant attention and surveillance. To be beautiful, one must constantly pay attention to being beautiful and one must work at it and purchase goods and services (make up, cosmetic surgery, fake tan, etc.) to strive for beauty. In doing so, bodies (particularly of women, but also of men) become commodified and need constant modification, fixing, and fussing to be produced. All of this contributes to an increasing awareness of the visual body in modern society particularly on social media where the beautiful (presentation of) self appears on Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook.

Research topics available in this module are:

Beauty in the Fashion Industry, Beauty and Emotions/Affect, Beauty in non-Western cultures, A#LAG (Always like a girl) and confidence culture, Beauty and Women’s magazines, Beauty and online dating, Beauty and mail order brides, Beauty and bodies during pregnancy and post-partum, Beauty and the global cosmetics industry, ‘Living Dolls’ on YouTube (or connections to Anime and Manga), Beauty and Celebrity, Make up tutorials on YouTube, Beauty and appearance on Instagram, Snapchat or Facebook, Skin altering practices including skin lightening and ‘fake tan’, Cosmetic surgery (from eyelid surgery to designer vaginas), Race and beauty, Beauty ‘games’ for girls which mimic beauty practices, Beauty workers (nail salons, hairdressers, etc.), The role of beauty at work (looking professional/middle class), Beauty work on the body as ‘fun’ or ‘taking good care of yourself’, Beauty and ‘Critical Fat’ studies, Beauty and the ‘Wellness Industry’,

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Postfeminist Beauty, Beauty Online, Beauty and Empowerment, Self-help literature and beauty, and Sex and Beauty (on and off line).

### **Pathways to Adulthood: Which Adulthood? What Path?**

**Professor Seán Ó Riain**

**Tuesday 12 noon, Seminar Room Auxilia Bld.**

The “transition to adulthood” has been analysed by sociologists as the time between the end of formal education and the establishment of long-term employment and an independent family and household (typically between 18 and 35). It can be a crucial period in shaping peoples’ lives and in challenging or reinforcing inequalities. In this special topic group we will examine many aspects of this part of peoples’ lives, partly by questioning the idea of a ‘normal’ path to a ‘normal’ form of adulthood.

We will investigate patterns of early employment, careers, access to housing, relationships and family formation – and how they vary across countries. We will ask whether these patterns are changing to become more flexible and uncertain, and how people are navigating these changes. Our research will investigate inequalities in how these life changes are experienced - by gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, citizenship and other social categories and divisions. Perhaps most fundamentally of all, we will ask what is the form of adulthood that is constructed as ‘normal’, how that is constructed and whether there is now a more diverse set of types of adulthood available in Ireland.

### **Consuming Celebrity – everyday practices and identities**

**Dr. Paul Ryan**

**Thursday 3pm, Seminar Room Auxilia Bld.**

Celebrity culture is not new. However, in late modern society as self-identity becomes a reflexive project (Giddens 1991), celebrity has become a key resource drawn upon by individuals as they continuously reflect and work on the self. How people exercise, cook, read, vacation, dress, worship, vote, decorate their homes and even how they give to charitable causes is increasingly influenced by celebrity endorsement in an accelerated consumer world. In this group, we examine how

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celebrity has become a resource that helps construct cultural identities and explore the functions it performs. We locate these processes in a media and digital world where the boundaries of news and entertainment have blurred, where there is an increasing democratisation of the public sphere that, in theory, should allow for wider participation. We examine the wider political economy of celebrity that facilitates this transnational market for photos, brands and products and explore how they intersect with gender, class and ethnicity.

There are many research topics available to students including –

- Online ethnography of celebrity websites or social media like Instagram or Twitter.
- Documentary or comparative analysis of historical and contemporary celebrity production and consumption
- Interview based research with users of celebrities fora – like magazines or digital resources or live concerts or performances
- Analysis of fan forums or message boards
- Exploring aspects of gender, sexuality, ethnicity or class in the production or consumption of celebrity.