

Class and...? Explorations at the intersections of class and inequity in higher education

Introduction

Research interest into the experiences and lives of working-class people in higher education has increased in volume and significance over the past thirty years. Alongside a growth in university participation, scholarship has begun to understand the ways in which working-class people are admitted to, move through, and exit the academy. Within this nexus of research, much focus was originally oriented towards developing knowledge of working-class students, pioneered by scholars such as Diane Reay, and taken forth by others (Reay et al., 2009a; 2009b, Reay, 2017, Attridge, 2021). More recently, an alternative focus has also been placed on academics who have working-class heritage and continue to work within higher education institutions (Crew 2020; 2024, Burnell Reilly 2022; 2024).

Despite the growth of research in the field of working-class studies in higher education, there still exists significant omissions when it comes to understanding the experiences and circumstances that working-class people who also hold other social and demographic identities simultaneously (for example, Black working-class people, disabled working-class people and working-class people from other international contexts of origin outside of the UK). Whilst limited scholarship exists in this space (see, for example Wilde's 2025 work on working-class disabled academics, or Bhopal's 2024 work on Black and ethnic minority working-class academics and her 2023 work on race and class), it remains piecemeal and exists in disciplinary silos. Simultaneously, the field of social class studies in higher education has largely omitted the experiences of working-class people in administrative, professional or ancillary roles and their influence and impact on the academy (Moreau and Wheeler, 2024; 2025, Pilgrim-Brown et al., 2025a; Pilgrim-Brown, 2023).

This special issue attempts to address this gap in the literature by extending a call for abstracts to scholars working on empirical data which relates to the study of social class as it intersects with one, or several, other demographic categorisations, marginalised experiences, or perspectives. By developing this space we hope to add nuance and complexity to the field, illuminating specific forms of knowledge of working-class life in higher education and complementing the rich work that already exists in this space.

Core Themes and Questions

This Special Issue explores the following key questions and concerns:

- **Foregrounding marginalised voices and experiences.** We invite contributors to consider: Who is missing from the field of social class studies in relation to higher education? What intersections has the field of research failed to consider thus far? What does that tell us about knowledge production and who is able to contribute? How can research metamorphosise to better include and understand different marginalised identities in future? What is currently missing? What are the personal challenges to conducting research with marginalised communities?
- **Adding value to the academy.** Working-class people are often viewed through the lens of deficit in higher education (see Pilgrim-Brown et al., 2025b). What benefits do working-class people from different backgrounds bring to the academy? Contributors

are asked to consider the particular strengths working-class people from different backgrounds bring to the academy, in knowledge production, student-facing roles, pedagogies, dissemination, impact and culture. Often, the field has rightly focused on documenting inequalities and structural harm, this special issue invites contributors to 'flip the deficit narrative' (Pilgrim-Brown et al., 2025) by foregrounding the distinctive strengths, knowledges and contributions that working-class people from diverse backgrounds bring to the academy.

- **Innovative methodologies in the field of social class studies.** How can novel methodological approaches be adapted for the field of intersectional social class studies? How can different methodological approaches begin to address inequities in representation?
- **Critiquing hegemonic theoretical application.** Can we apply alternative social theories to the study of social class? What do we miss by typically applying a Bourdieusian lens to studies of social class? Are there alternative theoretical frameworks which may open up different or new avenues of inquiry in the field of social class studies? Contributors are encouraged to think outside the Bourdieusian lens which is often applied to studies of social class. Whilst this is a useful way to frame and observe how structures reproduce cycles of inequality we ask contributors to consider whether other theoretical lenses may be applied to understand the field of social class and social class studies in different ways. Contributors are encouraged to think about what a Bourdieusian framing may miss, particularly in relation to intersectional identities in working-class studies.

Call for submissions

We invite submissions that address the themes outlined above, including:

- Empirical studies that focus on the intersections between social class and other marginalised and minoritised demographic characteristics within higher education. These may include (but are not limited to) studies of social class and disability, social class and race, social class and religion, social class and care/caring responsibilities.
- We particularly encourage empirical research that focuses on understudied stakeholders in the academy (e.g., Ancillary workers).
- We encourage submission from knowledge holders outside of mainstream academic pathways, trajectories or traditional scholarship (e.g., professional services researchers)
- We encourage papers that are methodologically innovative and those that may utilise creative methods

- Research articles exploring theoretical and methodological innovation in intersectional social class studies, particularly articles that critique a Bourdieusian application of social theory to social class studies .
- Theoretical reflections on social class knowledge production and the role of social class studies in challenging standardised norms and values in higher education.

Submissions should adhere to the journal’s guidelines, including formatting and word count requirements (approx. 250 words for abstracts). We particularly encourage contributions from underrepresented voices, including scholars and practitioners from marginalised communities, early career scholars and PhD/Masters students. By bringing together diverse perspectives, this Special Issue aims to advance the collective understanding of how social class interacts with other marginalised identities within the academy, bridging the research gap around intersectional perspectives.

The editorial team welcomes you to contact us to discuss potential contributions, including alternative, creative or ‘non-traditional’ forms of research output and publication.

The deadline for abstract submissions is 12 March 2026. For detailed submission guidelines, please visit <https://novaajs.newcastle.edu.au/ceehe/index.php/iswp/about>. We look forward to your contributions and to developing a new nexus of research for intersectional class-based studies.

Timeline

Abstracts due	March 12 th 2026
Decisions to authors	By March 23 rd 2026
Submission of full papers	June 30 th 2026
Publication (online)	November 2026
Publication (in print)	January 2027

Editorial team

Eireann Attridge (she/her) is a PhD Researcher at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA). Her research focuses on understandings of social class and social mobility in relation to higher education and is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. In addition to this, she holds an MSc in Education (Higher Education) from the University of Oxford where she conducted research into the experiences of working-class undergraduate students at the University. Prior to returning to study, Eireann worked in the field of widening participation and access to higher education. Her work is informed by her professional and personal lived experiences.

Jess Pilgrim-Brown is a Research Fellow at the University of Oxford. She previously worked in professional services, in elite sports coaching and as a Consultant Researcher. She focuses predominantly on the relationships between working-class professional services staff and administrative staff in UK higher education although her interests also include equalities agendas, cultures and behaviours in higher education and expanding access to higher education for people from traditionally marginalised backgrounds. She fervently advocates for collaborative, supportive research cultures in higher education and university spaces.

Teresa Crew is a Senior Lecturer in Social Policy at Bangor University and a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Drawing from her experiences as a working-class academic, her research examines social class in higher education, focusing on academic experiences, social inequalities among marginalised groups and regional disparities. Her teaching philosophy centres on empowering students through critical engagement and active learning, encouraging them to develop practical solutions to contemporary social problems while understanding how lived experience shapes social policy outcomes (and should influence policymaking).

Cherie Duffy is a PhD Researcher in the School of History, Law and Social Sciences, University of Bangor. Her current research, funded by the ESRC, has a sociological focus on the gaps in paid and unpaid labour of women and the relationship between this and social class. Cherie also holds an MA in Human Resource Management and an MA in Sociology from Liverpool John Moores University and Bangor University, respectively. Her previous research has examined the notion of the Gendered Organisation within a Public Sector organisation, and other research interests lie in the domains of equality, diversity, and inclusion, as well as social class. Cherie is also a Lecturer in Adult Community Learning provision and a former HR Learning and Development professional.

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