

Professor Tracey Warren



Biography

Tracey is Professor of Sociology and Director of Research in the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Nottingham. Her research interests lie in the sociologies of work and employment, and of social divisions. More specifically, these include work time in Europe; social inequalities in income, wealth and financial security; the transmission of economic dis/advantage; gender, class and ethnicity; work-life balance/reconciliation in Europe; and gendered and classed time poverty. The bulk of her research is based on the analysis of large scale secondary data-sets (including Understanding Society; the British Household Panel Survey; The Family Resources Survey and the European Community Household Panel Survey). Tracey is currently publishing from her project funded by a British Academy Research Development Award (2011-13) 'Changing gender and class inequalities in economic wellbeing in Britain?'.

Talk summary

The 2008-9 recession and subsequent on-going economic crisis have seen a fall in the proportion of workers in the UK reporting very long working hours. Countless work life debates and policy initiatives to combat work life imbalance focus upon long working weeks and on those who report working 'too long'. One of the most influential of work life approaches is one that has revealed, analysed and proposed policy solutions to combat the negative work life consequences that can arise when workers work long hours and feel that they spend too much time in the labour market. Middle class workers dominate these debates: the main concern in work life debates and policies has been their 'overstretched chronometric temporal' experiences. This paper argues that working 'too few' hours is a fundamental and growing problem that has been over-looked as a work life issue. Yet studies show that an economic-based fear of 'too few' hours features in accounts from working class employees and actually experiencing work-time underemployment can have serious ramifications for economic in/security. Yet the economic domain has been disregarded in many work life studies and in policies that have been developed under the work life umbrella. Drawing upon large-scale survey data, the paper shows the extent to which economic hardship within the UK is classed, and expanding. It calls for the routine inclusion of the economic within work life studies and work life policy debates, and argues that financial security should be fundamental to any understanding of what a 'balanced work life' might look like.