

## PhD Studentships 2024/25

Centre name: **Centre for Organisations and Society**

The Centre takes a critical approach to studying organisational and societal challenges, engaging in collaborative and interdisciplinary work. Our research expertise and interests include organisational ethics; international HRM; employment relations; critical management studies; equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace; precarious work and its future; platform/gig work and its impact; interactive service work (emotional and aesthetic labour); post-pandemic forms of working; and discursive approaches to understanding work.

We currently propose two research topics for scholarship applications. Please get in touch with the potential supervisors named below before submitting your application.

### **Proposed research topic 1**

Title of proposed research topic: Developing a Rhetorical Account of Moral Disengagement.

Potential supervisors:

Professor Peter Hamilton ([Peter Hamilton](#))

Professor Onno Bouwmeester ([Onno Bouwmeester](#))

### **Developing a Rhetorical Account of Moral Disengagement.**

There are numerous global challenges that are addressed in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). Reaching these goals will potentially affect business models that were successful in the past, but which may not be considered sustainable for the future. Industries affected include the fossil fuel industry, Agri business, the food process industry, the tobacco industry, the tourism industry and many more. Prior behaviours and actions will need to be changed to contribute to SDG goals. These industries are however powerful lobbyists that seek to maintain the status quo or to moderate change in ways that ensure their business models stay profitable. The debates centre around long term versus short term benefits, or inclusion of narrow versus broad stakeholder groups, and societal effects that are minimized or maximized. One approach through which we can examine businesses response to SDG is through the concept of moral disengagement (Eriksson & Svensson, 2016). Concerned with how people transgress and absolve themselves of immoral conduct, as initially developed by Bandura (1990) we can extend the notion that ethical standards can be obviated from the individual level to the organisational level (Newman et al., 2020; White et al., 2009).

While Bandura (2018) has written on the 'rhetoric and reality' of moral disengagement, and although the development of the concept has been labelled as linguistic devices (Schaefer and Bouwmeester 2021) there is a paucity of studies that have examined moral

disengagement through the prism of rhetoric. This is surprising since a rhetorical lens on moral disengagement tactics fits with arguments to minimize consequences or moral justification arguments that could reframe unsustainable business behaviour as still being necessary to keep the economic system running (Perelman 2020). Exceptions include rhetorical studies that have identified various moral disengagement strategies and mechanisms in Presidential speeches (Cartledge et al., 2015) and online racist acts (Faulkner and Bliuc, 2016). In organisation studies the rhetoric of moral disengagement is largely unexamined though urged implicitly by Schaefer and Bouwmeester (2021).

The proposed research here aims to study the moral engagement rhetoric of environmental organizations that challenge firms to make their business models more sustainable, and the moral disengagement rhetoric in the responses as to why this is not necessary. While moral disengagement needs to be studied at the organizational and social level, there is a paucity of moral engagement studies, whereas many environmental organizations are quite successful at countering moral disengagement tactics. We want to find out how they do this through competing rhetorical forms.

The study will focus on a selection of public debates in which environmental organisations have been successful in getting leading multinationals to become more sustainable over time, less involved in moral disengagement, and more eager to show their moral engagement beyond greenwashing. Analysis of public discourse will be accompanied by interviews and document analysis of selected cases, with a focus on the best and worst in class multinationals within selected industries.

The research project will aim to establish:

- How environmental organizations have practiced a moral engagement rhetoric and what responses and actions they have triggered from most/least sustainable multinationals.
- Whether and how the more sustainable multinationals have changed their moral disengagement rhetoric into moral engagement rhetoric and action since the SDG's adoption in 2015.

The research is relevant for further developing moral disengagement theory at the organizational level, and for its focus on the counter rhetoric of moral engagement. The study can help environmental organizations to strengthen their rhetoric and presence in public debate. The found strategies may also apply to other organisations that aim to challenge forms of moral disengagement. For the study of rhetoric, it is a new field of application, and a way to become more relevant as a method in the social sciences. We welcome applicants excited to work on a topic of global significance through the prism of rhetoric and discourse to help further our understanding of a key public policy issue.

## References

Bandura, A. (1990). Mechanisms of moral disengagement in terrorism. In W. Reich (Ed.), *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, States of Mind*. Washington, Woodrow Wilson Center Press: 161-191.

- Bandura, A. (2018b). A commentary on moral disengagement: The rhetoric and the reality. *American Journal of Psychology*, 131(2): 246–251.
- Cartledge, S.M., Bowman-Grieve, L. & Palasinski, M. (2015). The mechanisms of moral disengagement in George Bush's 'war on terror' rhetoric. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(11): 1905-1921.
- Eriksson, D., & Svensson, G. (2016). The process of responsibility, decoupling point, and disengagement of moral and social responsibility in supply chains: Empirical findings and prescriptive thoughts. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 134: 281-298.
- Faulkner, N. & Bliuc, A-M. (2016). 'It's okay to be racist': moral disengagement in online discussions of racist incidents in Australia. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 39(14): 2545-2563.
- Newman, A., Le, H., North-Samardzic, A. & Cohen, M. (2020). Moral disengagement at work: a review and research agenda. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 167: 535-570.
- Schaefer, U., & Bouwmeester, O. (2021). Reconceptualizing moral disengagement as a process: Transcending overly liberal and overly conservative practice in the field. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 172: 525-543.
- White, J., Bandura, A., & Bero, L. A. (2009). Moral disengagement in the corporate world. *Accountability in research*, 16(1): 41-74.

## **Proposed research topic 2**

Title of proposed research topic: Gendering hospitality work through engaged and engaging research

Potential supervisors:

[Owain Smolović Jones](#)

[Cat Spellman](#)

The hospitality industry is the UK's third largest employer and one of the fastest growing job markets (UK Hospitality, 2024). Hospitality can constitute the very identity of a place, with some towns and areas of cities becoming synonymous with a type of hospitality - e.g. theatre districts like London's West End, fine dining hubs like Padstow in Cornwall, specialist food neighbourhoods like Chinatown in Newcastle or the 'Curry Mile' in Manchester, etc. Whilst the UK Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy recognises the importance of the sector not just for the economy but also for its social value, the pandemic triggered a number of challenges in terms of business contingency and resilience (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2023). A contradiction is evident in the fact that hospitality - despite adding so much value socially and economically - is also systematically under-valued. It offers low pay, with a Resolution Foundation report (2020) finding that it offered the lowest hourly median pay in the UK. Furthermore, a report showed that during and post-pandemic hospitality workers found themselves increasingly subjected to unfair working conditions such as abuse from both customers and managers, whilst feeling unable to report abuse or challenging behaviours and environments due to the cultural conditions of the sector (Hadjisolomou et al. 2022).

Although women represent the majority of the hospitality industry, studies show that their experience continues to be characterised by male dominated values and norms (Dashper, 2020; Silva & Couto, 2023). Women working in hospitality face ongoing challenges such as a persisting gender pay gap (PWC, 2019) and occupational segregation in which women are often assigned to service and more domestically oriented tasks (Silva & Couto, 2023). Whilst gendered perspectives on hospitality work are emergent, the literature is scarce on the gendered lived experience of workers: for example, on assault and harassment in the workplace (Morgan & Pritchard, 2019) and the role of gendered stereotypes in women's experiences in hospitality settings (Mooney, 2020). For example, Pills et al. (2021) highlight the significance of experiential factors of inviting, care, and comfort in shaping experiences in service-oriented environments such as theatres, which are undeniably interlinked with service oriented tasks commonly associated with female workers. Insight into the embodied experiences of women workers in these settings, particularly considering the complex challenges faced by the sector, is however lacking. In short, more studies that engage with the lived experiences of hospitality workers from a gendered perspective are sorely needed. Furthermore, study in this area has the potential to be engaging for policy and practice - informing UK hospitality working practices, helping to develop an agenda for greater gender equality and more inclusive workplaces in one of the UK's most valuable and meaningful industries.

We welcome applications from prospective students who can enliven knowledge of the gendered nature of hospitality work, through engaged and engaging research. Proposals could include - but are not restricted to one or more of the following:

- Ethnographic explorations of occupations that are under-researched, offering insight from sustained and embedded engagement in a workplace.
- Proposals that foreground embodied, lived experience, drawing in theory and empirical analysis to help us understand how bodies are disciplined, but also asserted and made to matter.
- Perspectives that apply theory from critical geography to meaningfully engage with gendered hospitality work. Such proposals could offer relational views of space (Massey, 2005), exploring how gendered norms are enforced through the spaces of work, but also how workers re-craft space in ways that enhance dignity, solidarity and liberation (Smolovic Jones et al, 2022). Proposals in this area could also draw in perspectives from economic geography, providing rich analyses of the spatial networks that maintain and challenge the gendered economic inequalities inherent in hospitality (Johns et al, 2024).
- Proposals drawing on queer theory could illuminate the experiences of LGBTQ+ people, or people who defy heteronormativity within hospitality work (Rumens et al, 2019). Such studies could engage with the emotions of hospitality work, exploring how norms of happiness/unhappiness, or other forms of feeling offer a queering of gendered norms (Ahmed, 2010 and 2014).
- Accounts of hospitality work where class is prominent, such as workplaces where low-paid and precarious women workers serve prosperous customers.
- Intersectional approaches that explore and challenge normative constructions of hospitality workers along vectors of disability, race, age, class and sexuality.

- First-hand accounts of attempts to unionise and/or lead hospitality workers to resist from a gendered perspective.

#### References:

- Ahmed S (2010). *The promise of happiness*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed S (2014). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Dasher K (2020). *Mentoring for gender equality: Supporting female leaders in the hospitality industry*.
- Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2023). *Hospitality strategy: reopening, recovery, resilience*. GOV.UK.
- Hadjisolomou A, Booyens I, Nickson D, Cunningham T & Baum T (2022). *Fair work for all? A review of employment practices in the Scottish hospitality industry*. University of Strathclyde Business School.
- Johns A & Hall S (2024). *Contemporary economic geographies: Inspiring, critical and plural perspectives*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.
- Massey D (2005). *For space*. London: Sage.
- Mooney SK (2020). Gender research in hospitality and tourism management: time to change the guard. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 32(5): 1861-1879.
- Morgan N & Pritchard A (2019). Gender Matters in Hospitality (invited paper for 'luminaries special issue of *International Journal of Hospitality Management*). 76(Part B): 38-44.
- Pills R, Galetzka M, Groen BH & Pruyn A T H (2021). Hospitality in a theatre: The role of physical warmth. *Research in Hospitality Management*, 11(3): 225-233.
- PWC (2019). *Let's make it years not decades. Closing the gender pay gap in hospitality, travel and leisure*. PWC [online] Available at: <https://www.pwc.co.uk/human-resource-services/assets/pdfs/gender-pay-in-hospitality-travel-leisure-report.pdf> [Accessed 5 Feb 2024].
- Resolution Foundation (2020). *Ethnic minorities in the hospitality sector: Comparing the experiences of hospitality workers from different ethnic backgrounds*. Available at: <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2020/12/Ethnic-minorities-in-the-hospitality-sector.pdf> [Accessed 5 Feb 2024].
- Rumens N, de Souza, E & Brewis J (2019). Queering Queer Theory in Management and Organization Studies: Notes toward queering heterosexuality. *Organization Studies*, 40(4), 593-612.
- Silva S & Couto M J (2023). Gender bias in the Hospitality Sector: Female and Male Jobs. *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Tourism Research*, 61(1).
- Smolović Jones O, Briley G & Woodcock J (2022). Exposing and re-placing leadership through workers inquiry. *Leadership*, 18(1), 61-80.
- UK Hospitality (2024). *Economic contribution of hospitality*. UK Hospitality [online] Available at: <https://www.ukhospitality.org.uk/insight/economic-contribution-of-hospitality/> [Accessed 5 Feb 2024].