

ETHNOGRAPHIES OF WORK

Edited by Rick Delbridge, Markus Helfen,
Andreas Pekarek and Gretchen Purser

RESEARCH IN
THE SOCIOLOGY OF WORK

VOLUME 35

ETHNOGRAPHIES OF WORK

RESEARCH IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF WORK

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Andreas (Andi) Pekarek is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Management and Marketing at the University of Melbourne, Australia. He is fascinated by how people work, and his research has focused on how collective action by workers and their allies can steer the world of work in a more sustainable direction, towards fairness and social justice. His recent projects have centred on gig work in the platform economy, unions and industrial relations institutions, the HRM occupation, and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of work. He has published in leading journals, such as *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, *Human Resource Management Journal*, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, and *New Technology, Work and Employment*. In addition to his role as Associate Editor for *Research in the Sociology of Work*, he serves on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Industrial Relations* (Sage).

Gretchen Purser is Associate Professor of Sociology at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University. She earned her PhD in Sociology from the University of California at Berkeley and has held postdocs at the University of California at Davis and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Her research predominantly focuses on the intersection of low-wage precarious work and urban poverty and, more specifically, the growing role and significance of labour market intermediaries in the United States. She is a committed ethnographer and has published in leading sociology and anthropology journals, such as *Ethnography*, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *Critical Sociology*, and *Anthropology of Work Review*. She is the recipient of numerous publication awards from both the American Sociological Association and the Working Class Studies Association. In addition to her role as Associate Editor for *Research in the Sociology of Work*, she serves as the Editor-in-Chief of the Marxist Sociology Blog and as commissioning editor for Work In Progress.

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Monica Bhatia is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. Her dissertation focuses on sustainability and inequality in ecological intentional communities. Her research and teaching interests include gender and sexuality, organizations, work, inequality, and environmental sociology. Her work has previously appeared in *Environmental Sociology*.

Michael Dunn is Faculty at Skidmore College's Department of Management and Business, Skidmore College, USA. His education began with an MBA, shifting to the study of work and employment, including studies of contingent work and platform work, during his doctorate (in sociology) at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. His work is focused on issues at the confluence of technology and labour market outcomes with a specific emphasis on precarious and non-standard work arrangements. His work is theoretically informed by the sociology of work, and organizations and labour studies. In the previous decade, he has worked on five NIH-funded efforts focused on precarious and underserved worker populations (i.e. tribal workers, day labourers, and ex-offenders). From 2015 to 2017, he was a Visiting Researcher at the Bureau of Labour Statistics. His methodological orientation is primarily qualitative and has field-based research experience with rideshare/transportation, delivery/task, crowdwork, and online freelance platforms.

Hanna Goldberg is a doctoral student in the CUNY Graduate Center Program in Sociology and holds a master's in Food Studies from Syracuse University's Falk College. She studies work and labor across the many realms that constitute the 'American Century,' from shopping mall service work to missile production.

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Krzysztof Z. Jankowski attained an M.Phil. in Sociology from The University of Hong Kong where he examined global-mobile society and identity. He is currently a PhD student at The University of Glasgow, Scotland, where he is researching at the intersection of precarious work, adulthood, and urban sociology.

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Sideeq Mohammed is the Associate Dean of Education and Undergraduate Student Experience at Kent Business School. His work draws on the writings of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in order to critically reflect on the social, political, and ethical problems of ‘organisation’ in the contemporary milieu. He is the Author of ‘Stories and Organization in the Anthropocene: A Critical Look at the Impossibility of Sustainability’.

Isabel Munoz is a PhD candidate at Syracuse University’s School of Information Studies (iSchool), Syracuse University, USA. She received her Master’s degree in Communication from the University of Wyoming. She is focused on human–computer interaction, namely, information systems design and technology-supported resilience research. Her specific interests are centred on supporting underrepresented populations and women in pursuing and succeeding in digital work.

Clea O’Neil is an Undergraduate Research Fellow with the Digital Work Group and a Sophomore at Skidmore College, USA, majoring in Business-Political Science and minoring in Anthropology. Broadly, Clea is interested in understanding career strategies and how they relate to non-standard work arrangements.

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Steve Sawyer is the Faculty of Syracuse University's School of Information Studies, Syracuse University, USA. His research focuses on the changing forms of work and organizing enabled through uses of information and communication technologies. This is done through detailed field-based studies of scientific collaborators, software developers, real estate agents, police officers, organizational technologists, freelance and nomadic workers, and other information-intensive work settings. He has also been active in advancing sociotechnical approaches to studying computing collectively known as social informatics and emphasizing the sociotechnical basis of digital technologies. Sawyer's work is published in a range of venues and supported by funds from the National Science Foundation, IBM, Corning, and a number of other public and private sponsors. Prior to returning to Syracuse, Steve was a Founding Faculty Member of the Pennsylvania State University's College of Information Sciences and Technology. He earned his Doctorate from Boston University in 1995.

Laurianne Terlinden holds a PhD in Economics and Management Sciences from Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium. Her research focuses on new ways of working and identity construction in organizations. To study these issues, she uses qualitative and, more recently, ethnographic research methods.

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PREFACE

A Welcome from the New Editorial Team

We are very pleased to welcome you to Volume 35 in the Emerald Series *Research in the Sociology of Work*. This is the first volume edited by the new editorial team of Rick Delbridge, Markus Helfen, Andreas (Andi) Pekarek, and Gretchen Purser.

First, we would like to place on record our gratitude to Steve Vallas who has edited the series for a number of years. It was Steve's suggestion that we might like to take over the series and we are grateful to him for that and also to Katy Mathers of Emerald for the opportunity. Our primary reason for agreeing to take on the editorship of *RSW* was to ensure the continuation of a home for research which explores the realities of work, the dynamics of workplace relations and labour markets, as well as the wider societal contexts that shape the worlds of work. It would appear that researching work and workers has been given less priority in the last few decades. Or at least, such studies seem to appear less often in some of our most prominent journal outlets. There are notable exceptions, of course, and we are pleased to take our place alongside the colleagues who edit, for example, *Work, Employment & Society*, *Work & Occupations*, and *Work in the Global Economy*.

The study of work, workplaces, and labour markets is more important than ever. There are a series of developments, one might say a confluence of circumstances, which are threatening to make the day to day experiences of workers ever more challenging. To note just a few, there is the increasing prevalence of precarious and insecure work arrangements, developments in new technologies that are heralding major changes across occupations in many – new as well as mature – segments of the labour market, and the ongoing economic and social upheaval wrought by climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. These developments are all shaping the contemporary workplace and the wider landscape for workers in various ways across the globe. Naturally, each of these individual elements has echoes of previous periods and it would be mistaken to assume that all of the current conditions facing workers are novel. Nonetheless, the current combination of challenges represents a particularly problematic context. It is one which we hope will be closely recorded and evaluated by researchers of work and labour markets.

It is our intention that forthcoming editions of *RSW* will provide a home for critical, rigorous, and interesting research, and we intend to offer a variety of ways in which researchers can communicate their findings to our readership. You will see in this first volume that we have contributions documenting a variety of different ethnographic studies of work and that these adopt a range of styles and formats from shorter reflective pieces through to extended presentations of

empirical findings and analysis. With this series, we have some greater flexibility than is often found in more conventional journal outlets and we are keen to draw upon this greater breadth of form. This enables us to both respond to how authors feel is the most effective way of them communicating with their audiences and to make our volumes accessible and interesting for our readers.

We are also particularly pleased that this first volume of our editorship is based on ethnographic research as we are keen advocates of this method. Across our editorial team, we have had diverse and rewarding experiences conducting our own ethnographic research immersed as participant observers in diverse settings ranging from factories and union offices to the practice of day labour in a variety of dangerous, dirty, and degrading jobs. We remain keen to promote and support ethnographic research since it can offer the type of fine-grained and exploratory data that provide insights beyond other methods. What is particularly gratifying is that we have a number of doctoral studies represented in this volume. It is great to see the continuation of strong traditions of ethnographic research within the sociology of work. We anticipate that we will run further calls for ethnographic-based contributions in the future, and we hope that this will become one of the features of *RSW* during this editorial team's period of office.

There are further volumes in the pipeline, and we encourage readers to continue to monitor the series webpage for future calls for papers. We are currently working with calls for submissions to thematic volumes rather than having an open call for contributions but we welcome ideas both for volumes and individual papers and would be happy to discuss these with potential contributors. Finally, we want to thank all of the reviewers who read and constructively commented on the submitted manuscripts.

We hope you enjoy Volume 35.

Rick, Andi, Gretchen and Markus
Editors
Research in the Sociology of Work