Department of Sociology – Reading Recommendations

Whether you have already decided on what you want to study at university or are still exploring different options, it’s a great idea to dip into a few books to get a sense of some of the issues and debates in a particular subject area. Here are some recommendations from staff in our department working across each of our three degree programmes: Sociology, Media and Cultural Studies, and Social Work. Some have also offered some advice about starting university.

1. Recommendations for Sociology students

Stigma: The Machinery of Inequality
Imogen Tyler

Recommended by Professor Bev Skeggs

“This book sets the scene for how a hidden history shapes our present inequality.”

Bev recommends this book because “it is eye opening and reveals many aspects of our current lives.”

Bev’s advice to students thinking about studying sociology at university is “to be curious: read things you may not immediately be drawn to ... and keep asking questions.”

The Sociological Imagination
C. Wright Mills

Recommended by Dr Stanley Blue

“This book is important for situating sociology as a discipline (i.e. in relation to other disciplines, like psychology or geography) and explains what it is to ‘think sociologically.’”

Stan recommends this book because “The first year course takes inspiration from this book and has the same title! We read the first chapter in week 1 and come back to it at the end of the first year to consider how the course has helped or not to develop a sociological imagination for our students.”

Stan’s advice for students thinking about studying sociology at university is quite simple: “read the first chapter of this book!”
Ain’t I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism
bell hooks

Recommended by Dr Stefanie Doebler

“First published in 1981, this is a now classic account of the social experiences of black women in the US from the seventeenth century until (and including) the second wave of feminism of the 1970s and early 80s. It is a stunning sociological and historical analysis of racism and feminism.”

Stefanie recommends this book because “I find this book to be a must read for anybody interested in gender studies, feminism, critical racial studies, anti-racism and critical study of colonialism and post-colonialism.”

Gwyneth’s advice for students thinking about studying sociology at university is “Be open-minded, let yourself be inspired and follow your passion when choosing your program. Studying what I feel passionate about made my time at University the most rewarding experience!”

Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire
Akala

Recommended by Professor Andrew Sayer

“This book examines how the lived experience of racism in the UK relates to its history and politics”

Andrew recommends this book because “it relates the author’s personal experience to wider social forces in an accessible, engaging way.”

Andrew’s advice to students thinking about studying sociology at university: “Question what’s taken-for-granted in our society, don’t worry about whether your interests fit neatly into a particular discipline, and follow connections wherever they lead. (This is what Akala has done in this book!)”
**Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza**  
Gloria Anzaldúa

*Recommended by Dr Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia*

“This is a book that speaks across fields, across genres, and across cultures.”

Melissa recommends this book because “By bridging poetry, autobiography, theory, lyrics, sayings and languages (English, Spanish and Chicano terms), it takes the serious topic of borders/borderlands (social, cultural and physical) into surprising directions. It is a thoroughly engaging, experimental read that through its very form, teaches us readers about the lived, everyday struggles and resistances of Chicana women living in conditions of racial, gender and class inequality. This book reminds us of the power of language, and is an essential read for those interested in the pressing questions migration, racisms, feminism and cultural belonging.”

Melissa’s advice for students thinking about studying sociology at university is: “You will be learning (and un-learning) about the world in new and exciting ways in the years to come. As you do so, it will help to read as widely across genres as you can, drawing on fiction and popular media as well to inform your views. Daring to cross-pollinate between different types of knowledges and disciplines will help you to read, think and write with greater creativity and with attention to the multiple dimensions and complexities of the world.”

**Consumer Culture**  
Celia Lury

*Recommended by Professor Anne Cronin*

“This book gives a fascinating insight into how our world is obsessed with commodities and consumption and prompts us to think about what this means for our future.”

Anne recommends this book because “it’s a really engaging read that makes you think about your own habits and preconceived ideas.”

Anne’s advice for students thinking about studying sociology at university is that “there has never been a better time to think about how our world is changing and what we can do about it.”
Hostile Environment: How Immigrants Became Scapegoats
Maya Goodfellow

Recommended by Dr Gwyneth Lonergan

“This book provides a good overview of the origins and consequences and the UK’s hostile environment policy”

Gwyneth recommends this book because “because it shows how historical policies and ideas continue to shape present political debates and their underlying assumptions.”

Gwyneth’s advice for students thinking about studying sociology at university is “to try to identify and question what is taken for granted as ‘common sense.’”

The History Thieves: Secrets, Lies and the Shaping of a Modern Nation
Ian Cobain

Recommended by Dr Michael Lambert

“This book shows how and why governments have sought to reshape the very substance of what we know about the world and society.”

Michael recommends this book because: “it shows how our knowledge about the world and society is shaped by mountains of data, but also how absences of knowledge are just as important as presences.”

Michael’s advice for students thinking of studying sociology: “The future is unwritten. The future is uncertain. But the future is open. Learning about society can equip you with the tools to understand and reshape it, and Lancaster’s Sociology Department has a strong tradition of linking theories with practice, whichever direction you choose. As a graduate and product of Lancaster myself, I’m glad to be able to continue that tradition for another generation.”
Hannah Arendt
The Human Condition

Recommended by Professor Theodore Schatzki

“This book offers an striking vision of human life that coordinates three forms of human activity – labour, work, and action – with three key dimensions of human existence – life, the built environment, and the common space in which people appear to one another – immortalizing the latter dimension as the public realm that stands over and against the shadowy realm of the private.”

Ted recommends this book “for its breath-taking sweep of key dimensions of human life, including the idea of public space and its contrast, the private realm; its stunning analysis of human labour on the basis of Marx's ideas on this; and its intriguing account of the world humans build for themselves and their attempts to immortalize themselves in it.”

Ted’s advice for students thinking about studying sociology at university is “be receptive to and to explore accounts of social life that challenge your preconceptions about it.”
2. Recommendations for Media and Cultural Studies students

The Qualified Self: Social Media and the Accounting of Everyday Life
Lee Humphries

Recommended by Dr Joe Deville

“This book teaches us to see our everyday practices on social media in a new light, by exploring their longer, often unrecognised history.”

Joe recommends this book because: “I really like how Lee Humphries challenges our preconceptions about social media. She shows that societies have long found ways to record their reflections on the everyday life. She also shows how these everyday expressions do important social and cultural work: they allow us to represent or ‘qualify’ versions of ourselves for different audiences and for different purposes.”

Joe’s advice to students thinking about studying Media and Cultural Studies at university: “For many, studying Media and Cultural Studies means beginning a journey that will completely change how they understand themselves and their relationship to the world around them. So, prepare to expand your horizons, to be challenged, and (hopefully) to be inspired!”

Amusing Ourselves to Death
Neil Postman

Recommended by Dr Allison Hui

Allison recommends this book because “although television is hardly the only, or most dominant, form of media today, Postman's provocative call to examine how practices around certain media technologies reproduce distinctive understandings of truth is important. He argues that, by making entertainment a key aim of all television communication, we end up in a position where even 'serious' topics are fragmented and juxtaposed with trivial concerns. These kinds of insights are incredibly relevant in an era when presidents get information from Twitter and platforms like Instagram and Tik Tok have been a key source of knowledge about the global health pandemic.”
“Structure, Audience, and Soft Power in East Asian Pop Culture
Beng Huat Chua

Recommended by Dr Eva Li

“East Asian pop culture can be seen as an integrated cultural economy emerging from the rise of Japanese and Korean pop culture. In an era where the exercise of military power is increasingly restrained, pop culture has become an important component of soft power diplomacy and transcultural collaborations in a region that is still haunted by colonisation and violence.”

Eva recommends this book because “it provides an introduction to the emergence of Japanese and Korean pop culture in East and Southeast Asia and the fragmented process of transcultural audience reception. Chua’s style of writing is straightforward and concise; I particularly like how he grounded his analysis from Singapore, a locus of pan-Asian media consumption, to study the intersection of consumer power, national politics, and cultural diplomacy.”

Eva’s advice for students thinking about studying Media and Cultural Studies at university: “It is indeed an exciting time to do media and cultural studies in a hyper-mediated world! Try to enjoy as much popular culture as possible and look for the intersections of power dynamics and inequalities in its production process, textual meaning, and audience reception. Critically analysing media and culture equips us with better media literacy and ultimately prepares us to work towards a world that embraces diversity and equality.”

Exploiting Fandom: How the Media Industry Seeks to Manipulate Fans
Mel Stanhill

Recommended by Dr Maarten Michielse

“This book provides an up-to-date and critical look into the way in which today’s media industries, fans and audiences relate to – and depend on – each other.”

Maarten recommends this book because “it provides great insights into the hidden power struggles that are part of the contemporary media industries. We often think of fans and audiences as people who carelessly enjoy the products that the media industries produce (such as films, tv-series and music albums). This book, however, shows what kind of tensions and struggles take place between big and powerful
media companies and large groups of audiences and fans. It’s a very interesting read for anyone interested in media and popular culture.”

Maarten’s advice for students thinking about studying Media and Cultural Studies at university: “Consume as much media as possible. Be critical but enjoy it at the same time! Any news article you read, any tv programme you watch, any film you see in the cinema, any music album you listen to on Spotify helps you to get a better idea of what the media industries are all about and how they not just represent but actively change and influence our culture and society.”
3. Recommendations for Social Work students

**Justice for Laughing Boy**
Sarah Ryan

Recommended by *Dr Lisa Morris*

“Connor Sparrowhawk was known as Laughing Boy. In this book Connor’s mother, Sara Ryan, writes about her son’s life and his preventable death in a specialist NHS unit.”

Lisa recommends this book because “This powerful story is all about love. It is an account of the determination of Connor’s family to seek justice and accountability for his death. It is heart-breaking and yet full of beauty and hope. It is a must read for social workers.”

Lisa’s advice for students thinking about studying Social Work at university is “to be curious about the world we are living in. Read and listen to stories and campaigns that seek change. Bring your passion for social justice to your social work degree.”

**Developing Skills and Knowledge for Social Work Practice**
Michaela Rogers, Dawn Whittaker, David Edmondson, Donna Peach

Recommended by *Jane Pye*

“A perfect introduction to what you need to know and be able to do as a social worker!”

Lisa recommends this book because “it is really clearly written and covers all the basics of what you need in your first year studying social work.”

Jane’s advice for students thinking about studying Social Work at university is “to think about how amazing it is to be joining the social work community. Prepare to work hard and be open to thinking differently. It is a wonderful journey in which you will learn lots – both about social work but also about yourself!”
Crippled: Austerity and the Demonization of Disabled People
Frances Ryan

Recommended by Dr Hannah Morgan

“This is a powerful, and distressing, indictment of the devastating impact of austerity on disabled people in the UK.”

Hannah recommends this book because “disabled people, especially those who use health and social care services, have been hardest hit by the government’s programme of austerity. In 2017 the United Nations published a report that said welfare reforms led to ‘grave and systematic violations’ of disabled people’s rights. In Crippled, Frances Ryan, a disabled journalist who writes a weekly column in The Guardian, has compiled a moving and anger provoking snapshot of this devastation. By talking directly to disabled people and sharing their experiences, she brings a human face to the impact of austerity.”

Hannah’s advice for students thinking about studying Social Work at university is “to look for every opportunity to hear the voices of people social workers work with. Wanting to help people live their best lives, to love and be loved, to be part of families and communities is why most social workers choose the profession. Watching documentaries and films, reading memoirs and novels will give you an insight into lives which are often troubled and difficult but are also messy, loving, complex and joyful.”

(Also available as an audiobook)