

## Striking connections: Tales of ties and affinities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Date / Time: Friday 13th September 2019, 12:00 to 17:00

Venue: Upper Hall, Friends' Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester, M2 5NS

This Morgan Centre event explores contemporary sentiments of connectedness and affinity. A striking experience of connectedness, even chemistry, is often associated with the sphere of the family and intimate relationships. However, recent scholarship exploring and contributing to the emerging sociological field of personal life shows how meaningful notions of being and feeling connected also emerge outside of that context, in unusual places and often in subtle, nuanced and surprising ways. This afternoon seminar is dedicated to bringing into light experiences of meaningful connectedness that remain less well explored and little understood. It brings together scholars whose work in a variety of ways throws light on the meaning of being and feeling connected, in order to explore ties that matter, and how they matter, in everyday life.

Start	Finish	Seminar Topic
12:00	12:30	Registration opens Vegetarian lunch served, with tea and coffee
12:30	12:45	Welcome
12:45	13:45	<b>Jennifer Mason:</b> Affinities
13:45	15:15	<b>Tangible and intangible connections: Reflections from research case studies</b> Morgan Centre members reflect on the nature and meaning of connectedness as they emerge within recent research
		<b>Vanessa May</b> Connecting with and through place
		<b>Brian Heaphy</b> Medicalised affinities: The relational imaginary of HIV
		<b>Andy Balmer</b> Secret connections
		<b>Petra Nordqvist and Leah Gilman</b> Donating as way of connecting: Egg, sperm and intense personal lives
15:15	16:00	Coffee and tea with a scone
16:00	17:00	<b>Deborah Dempsey</b> Complex connections: when sperm donors apply to the Victorian donor registers

Everyone is welcome to come along for food and drink (self-funded) after the event.

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## List of abstracts

### Affinities

#### Jennifer Mason

In my recent book *Affinities: Potent Connections in Personal Life* I argue that affinities are charges and charismatically lively connections that rise up and matter in the experience of living in the world, and that enchant or toxify the everyday. Affinities are encounters that can occur in any context or sphere of life. Yet although these are part of everyday life and experience, affinities are difficult to grasp conceptually using conventional sociological approaches, which either tends to want to classify and categorise, or to focus on what is connected rather than the dynamics of connection. Instead, I suggest that affinities can constitute an invitation to think differently, in particular by helping us to become attuned to the sensory-kinaesthetics, the ineffabilities and the 'socio-atmospherics' of everyday life, and to the significance of 'potency' in the dynamics of connection. In my talk I shall use some of these ideas to begin to explore the theme of 'striking connections in the 21st Century'.

### Connecting with and through place

#### Vanessa May

This paper is concerned with what we can learn about belonging to place by exploring what might be striking about people's connections to place. Using empirical examples from three research projects, I unpack some of the nuances of the different meanings associated with the concept 'striking'. A striking connection can be one that is easily noticeable and conspicuous, while out of the ordinary connections to place can be difficult to explain. A noticeable connection can be experienced as part of the ordinary flow of things, to the extent that it can become unremarkable. In contrast, the extraordinary connection stops people in their tracks and is less likely to lose its unusual or uncanny character. I conclude by exploring what the concept of striking connections adds to our understanding of belonging to place and of the shifting boundaries between the ordinary and the extraordinary.

### Medicalised affinities: The relational imaginary of HIV

#### Brian Heaphy

From the 1980s onwards people living with AIDS and HIV were imagined to be connected in biological, social, emotional and life-political ways. Nowadays, with the advent of medical therapies that are successful in managing HIV and preventing infection, it is worth re-examining the relational imaginary of HIV. In doing so, we can explore the changing nature of 'medicalised affinities', and their social, material, affective and political implications.

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## Secret Connections

Andy Balmer

Our most potent affiliations are not always our most visible ties. This talk will reflect on how secrecy figures within the realm of 'striking connections', exploring some of the paradoxes of secrecy, which seems at once to bind and cut, attract and repel, hide and expose.

## Donating as way of connecting: Egg, sperm and intense personal lives

Petra Nordqvist and Leah Gilman

Drawing on the ongoing ESRC-study 'Curious Connections: The Impact of Donating Egg and Sperm on Donors' Everyday life and Relationships', in which we interview egg and sperm donors, and kin, we offer some preliminary reflections about how donating gametes may engender a striking sense of connectedness in personal life. We discuss our emerging data, showing that being and becoming an egg or sperm donor can, for many people, mean engaging in significant yet transient, intense yet impersonal, and short lived yet lifelong ties of connectedness.

## Complex connections: when sperm donors apply to the Victorian donor registers

Deborah Dempsey

Since well-publicised changes to assisted reproduction legislation in 2015-17, more sperm donors in the State of Victoria, Australia have applied to discover the identity of children born of their donation. For some donor conceived adults, the phone call received from the statutory authority as part of this process also reveals the knowledge that they are donor-conceived. This paper will explore how sperm donors and the adults conceived of their donation negotiate this new and often distressing knowledge of multiple 'donor relatives', along with the complex connections across families that ensue. To what extent is Australian law blurring the boundaries between a donor and a parent, and what are the potential consequences of this for families created through gamete donation?