

Title: Gender, work and the new economy
Author: West, Jackie
Awarded: 2011

Abstract:

The thesis is a critical contribution to the sociology of gender and work. It argues for a more nuanced understanding of work and employment than generally provided by feminism, political economy or cultural preoccupations with identity. Beginning with my own research on intersectionality, I call for an alternative 'relational mapping' of work that goes beyond the inequalities of gender, sex, class and race, one which attends to wider relations, both social and material. The thesis is developed through six refereed journal articles and three chapters in edited volumes (one journal special issue). Part One consists of four empirical studies of women and the labour market: on employment trends, with particular reference to part time work and occupational segregation, on the position of South Asian women in the household and local economy, on gender discrimination and equality strategies in the academy, and on the impact of changes in the medical profession on sexual health care. Part Two is focused on the normalisation of gambling and prostitution in the entertainment industry, with three papers on sex work and two papers on gambling. The first identifies problems with conventional paradigms in the analysis of women's employment and the service sector more generally. Part Two as a whole develops earlier themes of accountability, variation and specificity in regulation and markets. It highlights the role of diverse social actors and also technologies in the (re)organisation of work. The commentary explains the background to each of the publications, situating them in relation to the development of my academic career and wider currents in the sociology of gender and work both at the time they were written and subsequently. It discusses at some length the conceptual threads that link the published work and its overall coherence, from questions of difference between women to issues of place and relational networks, from connections between labour market and family to those between production and consumption. It also clarifies the ways in which my own approach is distinctive, and its implications for the theorisation of work and its sociological study.