

Dr Caroline Howarth

What is your current position?

Associate Professor, London School of Economics

Could you say a bit about your career trajectory so far? How did you get to be where you are today?

My passion for Social Psychology has its roots in my childhood growing up in the culturally divided contexts of Kenya, Fiji and Papua New Guinea. However it was living and teaching in apartheid South Africa that really shaped my quest for a Social Psychology that is theoretically and methodologically rigorous enough to ask and answer the important questions of our time: what are the social and psychological conditions for social change, political engagement and constructive intercultural relations? How can we use Social Psychological studies not only to understand the complexities of the worlds we live and produce, but also to promote social change and improved social conditions?

When did you decide to be an academic? What was it that prompted this decision?

Sometime during my PhD – I think when I started to teach undergraduates I realized I loved it – both the discipline itself and teaching. I realized early on that teaching Social Psychology (with focus on the production of knowledge, identity, agency and social change) was a joy, as the very topics under discussion are also essential aspects of good teaching (how to engage pupils, how to debate, how to encourage innovation and reflection).

What have been the challenges so far in your career in academia?

I think that all universities (and all organisations!) have yet to manage equality and diversity well, and so one major challenge is dealing with gendered inequalities at work. Motherhood has made me more aware of the intangible forms of discrimination in many professional contexts and I strive to challenge these (alongside other forms of institutionalized discrimination). This is compounded by the creeping managerialism we also see in all universities – and a major challenge to keep one's politics alive despite the pressures to conform to bureaucratic exceptions.

What advice would/do you give to other female academics?

Join a gender equality forum or diversity forum at work – or set one up if there isn't one! Talk to other women – particularly those at your own level, as well as other groups that may be marginalized – and find mutual support strategies.