



UNIVERSITY OF
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Department of Psychology

Researching social problems: Putting the cart before the horse?



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Social and Developmental Psychology Seminar Series

Tuesday October 24th 2017, 1.00 pm
Ground Floor Lecture Theatre, Downing Site
Department of Psychology
Downing Street, Cambridge, CB2 3EB

What do we gain in defining and researching social problems as ‘objective’, ‘quantifiable’, and ‘measurable’ phenomena? In his influential 1971 paper, Herbert Blumer critiqued the social sciences for chasing what is usually taken as the ‘objective’ aspect of social problems. Guided by their objective, quantifiable formulation, we often purport knowing what a social problem is before we begin researching it — in other words, we put the cart before the horse. Using my research on poverty as an example, I will logically examine both realist and constructivist approaches to the study of social problems and point out some common errors in each. I will argue that in researching social problems, psychology has come to suffer from what Francis Bacon called the *idola theatri* — the dogmatic tendencies of research borne out of wrong laws of demonstration.

Dr Apurv Chauhan completed his MPhil in Social and Developmental Psychology at the University of Cambridge, and PhD at the London School of Economics. He is now a Lecturer at the University of Brighton.

This seminar is free, and is open to all interested in attending, with no ticket required.

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