

# Student-led research in medical sociology: A case study in organ transplantation



Source: The Telegraph

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Source: Online Career Tips

**Aim:** To complete a literature based analysis of themes surrounding organ transplantation which would aid the teaching of medical sociology at Newcastle University.

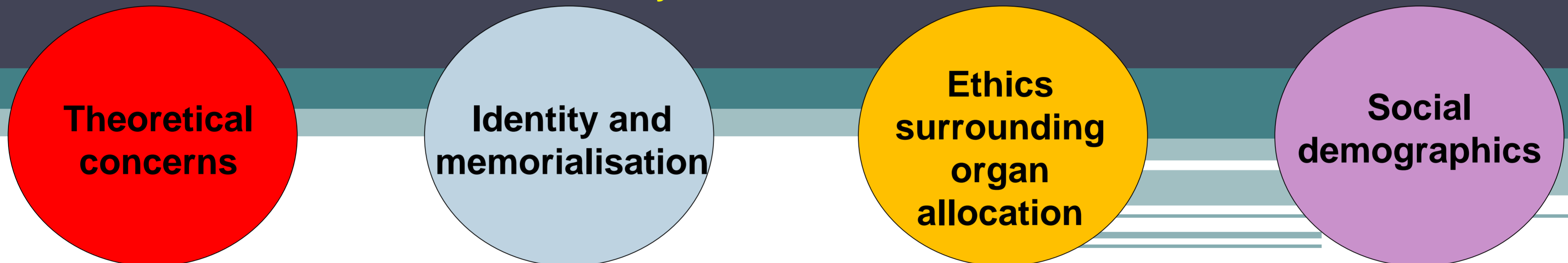
## Context of the research

Social and political issues around organ transplantation are ever-changing and evolve as society evolves too. Societal and cultural differences allow for a great deal of disagreement about how these issues should be handled and there are many ethical considerations which should be taken into account. There is a significant amount of literature written on the topic from a social scientific point of view, which highlights that these issues are extremely prevalent and deserve attention from the surrounding disciplines; particularly medical sociology.

## Methodology

Given the level of significance sociological research can have on addressing the different themes surrounding organ transplantation, I aimed to devise a portfolio which could be used for future teaching of the topic. I worked together with another candidate to produce an annotated bibliography which would thematically organise the most significant literature from a variety of sources. Over the 6 weeks of the project, I identified 4 key themes which appeared most relevant to those completing empirical and theoretical research around the topic.

## The key themes I identified were:



**Theoretical concerns**

**Identity and memorialisation**

**Ethics surrounding organ allocation**

**Social demographics**

This section was focused on how theory could be used to explain different experiences and opinions across the transplant trajectory. The two articles I used here, written by Moloney and Walker (2000) and Martin et al (2009) use mass media and the theory of uncertainty to discuss issues of stigma and changes in relationships when looking at, and going through transplantation.

This was arguably the most significant section of the bibliography, drawing on issues of identity and memorialisation during and after transplantation. This section encompassed many of the main societal issues around the topic including: definition of death, embodiment, autonomy, relationships with family and medical professionals, the self and memorial.

This theme discusses historical issues surrounding supply and demand and how to address the unequal divide between the two. The theme is probably the most applicable today as it encompasses debates around new technologies, organ markets and trafficking, scientific developments in cloning and use of animals in transplantation and ethical concerns in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This theme acts as a potential counter-argument to the previous theme, taking into account the highly sociological issues concerning social demographics (such as age, gender and ethnicity) and how they influence giving and receiving of transplants. Focusing particularly on ethnic minorities, this section discusses at length concerns around education and engagement of citizens.

## Discussion and conclusion

By completing the annotated bibliography and discussing the important themes associated with the topic of organ transplantation, I hope to:

- Give students the tools to complete portfolios and essays using a range of literature.
- Help with teaching methods by incorporating materials for use in lectures and seminars which considered methodological issues and themes surrounding the topic.
- Enrich students' knowledge, increase awareness and spark interest in issues surrounding organ transplantation.
- Enhance skills in approaching, utilising and analysing literature by using sources such as 'web of knowledge' and 'endnote' (pictures taken from a presentation on this at the dissertation conference 2013)
- Enrich my own knowledge and learning around the topic and increase my ability to work well in a team with medical sociologists and fellow undergraduates.

