**Rent Strikes and Resistance: An Illustration of Raising Critical Consciousness**

Wenham, Lucy. University of Bristol, Bristol, U.K.

Young, Helen. London South Bank University, London, U.K.

Presenter: Wenham, Lucy.

Presentation Type (A)

Student rent strikes took place in many universities in England, against the backdrop of waves of the Covid-19 pandemic. Similar social movements emerged in other universities world-wide. As lockdowns and moves to online learning came and went, students were at times required to pay rent for accommodation they were unable to occupy, or which offered significantly reduced amenities. In England, these students were largely first-year undergraduates, housed in accommodation owned, overseen or marketed by their university. They often did not know other students even within their accommodation blocks, as the pandemic lowered occupancy-levels and movement and mixing were frequently restricted. Nonetheless, these students joined together to resist, to act collectively and to refuse to pay their rent. Their action resulted in at least partial victory, in some places, for some moments. This paper stems from qualitative research exploring the lived-experience of participating in these rent strikes, drawing from thematic analysis of a series of semi-structured interviews. While the data sheds fresh light on many facets of the neo-liberalization of higher education, here we argue how it is that these accounts wonderfully illustrate the concepts of Paulo Freire. Ideas of dialogue and praxis pervade the data. Exploring this particular coming-together through political action and resistance, elucidates a tangible thread, fleshing-out the stages which interweave, blend and coalesce to raise critical consciousness, to alter how a person sees themselves and their place in the world and thus create the possibility for change. The analysis reaffirms the relevance and importance of Paulo Freire’s work, providing an accessible, timely, explicit example of his ideas in practice, to support those new to his work. Moreover, we argue that at this time of both the climate crisis and global inequality, a concrete understanding of pedagogies for social justice has never been more urgent.