

‘Luck’, entitlement and struggle: the employment transitions of UK graduates in congested labour markets

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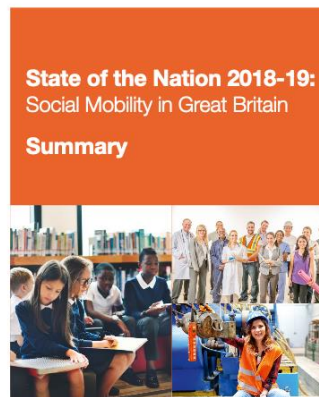
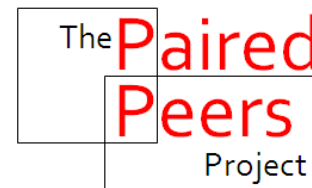


The Leverhulme Trust

Drawing on collaborations with K.Allen, J. Abrahams, A-M Bathmaker, L. Bentley, H. Bradley, T.Hoare, V. Papafilippou, R.Waller,

Policy context

- ▶ Employability and HE
 - TEF 'Employment metric' (2016 HE White Paper)
 - Source of anxiety, mediates students' decision making (Allen 2015; NCUB 2015; Vigurs et al 2016)
- ▶ Social mobility and 'fair access to the professions'
 - Differences in graduate employability rates & earnings by social class, ethnicity, gender and institution (Britton et al 2016; HEFCE 2016; Purcell et al 2012)
 - Employers use 'social magic' to 'objectively' value embodiments of privilege (Ingram and Allen 2018)
 - 'Top jobs' disproportionately composed of the socially privileged (SMC 2014; 2015; 2019) 'Class ceiling' (Laurison & Friedman 2016; 2019)
 - *'Despite over 10 years of initiatives aimed at social inclusion within the professions there has been little sign of significant change in outcomes to date'.* (Ashley and Empson 2016)



Inequality, employability and graduate transitions

- 'A degree is not enough': boosting employability via internships and other extra-curricular activities (Tomlinson 2008; Brown et al 2011); social media, strategic intimacy and 'personal-branding' (Gershon 2016) for graduate employability
- Persistent inequalities in who can play the employability game (Allen et al 2012; 2013; Burke 2015; Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller 2013; Bathmaker et al 2016).

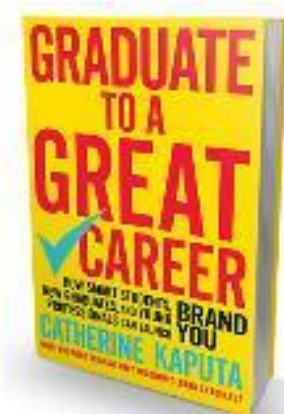
Don't Get a Job ... Make a Job

How to make it as a creative graduate

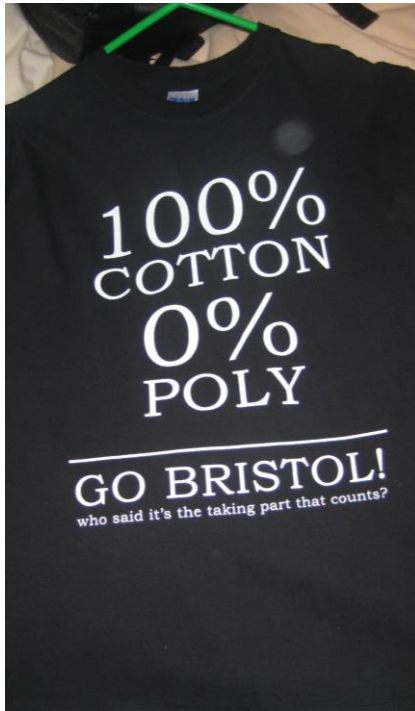
Gem Barton

Propaganda / Put yourself out there / Release early, release often / **Going Mobile** / Go guerrilla / Bend the rules / Don't reinvent the wheel / **Specialism vs Diversity** / Learn from your idols / Swim against the tide / Question everything / **Tough Calls** / Trust your instincts / Move mountains / Imagine best-case scenarios / **Going it Alone vs Teaming up** / Don't run before you can walk / Exploit your interests / Feel your way / Be true to yourself / Push, pull, test, tear / **Gusto** / Reinvent yourself / Create positive change / Keep on learning /

The **Paired**
Peers
Project



About the Paired Peers project



“who said it’s the taking part that counts?”

Overall aim: to consider the classed experience of university in two different types of institution in the one city, and to explore the complexities of social mobility through education

- ▶ Phase 1: Cohort of students from UWE/UoB tracked through UG degree (2010-2013)
- ▶ Phase 2: 56 graduates tracked through labour market transitions (2014-2017)
- ▶ Matched pairs from 9 subjects taught at both HEIs
- ▶ PP1 Biannual interviews, plus diaries, time logs, maps etc (interviews 1-6)
- ▶ PP2 (Interviews 7-10).
- ▶ All remaining participants in part 2 were in some form of employment or continued to study (self selection bias)

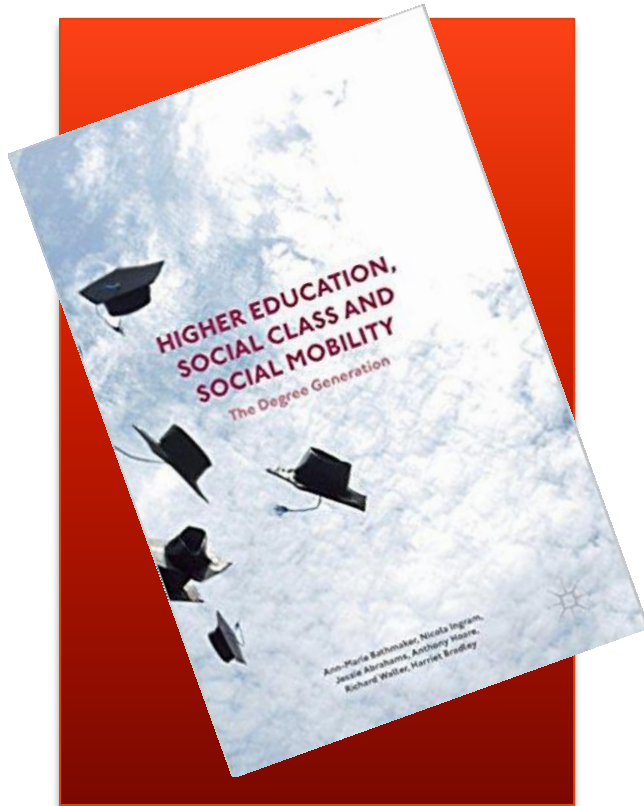
****NOTE: the students in this study were babies or toddlers in 1992**

Social Class data on students at UWE and UoB

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) record for 2010/2011 entrants <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/pis/urg>

	UoB	UWE	UK Average
Middle Class (NS-SEC 1-3)	86%	71%	69%
Working Class (NS-SEC 4-7)	14%	29%	31%

Main findings from phase 1



- With massification of Higher Education university has become a hoped for destination for working-classes and an expected rite of passage for the middle-class
- University experience is classed regardless of institution attended
- Middle-class students are well positioned to adapt to the changing demands of the HE game and are well supported by institutional habitus chime and forms of capital
- Working-class negotiation of habitus requires an ever present defense of self (especially in the elite university)
- When a degree is not enough forms of capital outside of academic credentials are utilised to prevent middle-class downward mobility
- Middle-class 'fish out of water' engage in hypermobilsation of capital

Paired Peers: moving on up?

- Findings show that despite policy and institutional commitments to widening participation for working-class young people, the playing field is not levelled through access to university. Advantage is maintained in two ways. First, working-class students are more likely to gain access to lesser valued institutions. Second, even when access is gained to elite institutions for working-class people (or when the elite only access 'lesser valued' institutions) the inventiveness of the privileged to adapt their game to the changing conditions of the field orientates them towards drawing on, developing and mobilising their stocks of other capitals to maintain advantage.



Omnipresent Classism

- ▶ Social class is not considered to be a legally protected characteristic under the UK's 2010 Equality Act, unlike gender, ethnicity and sexuality.
- ▶ Materializes in reputational affect to create and maintain inequalities through subtle forms of class boundary drawing

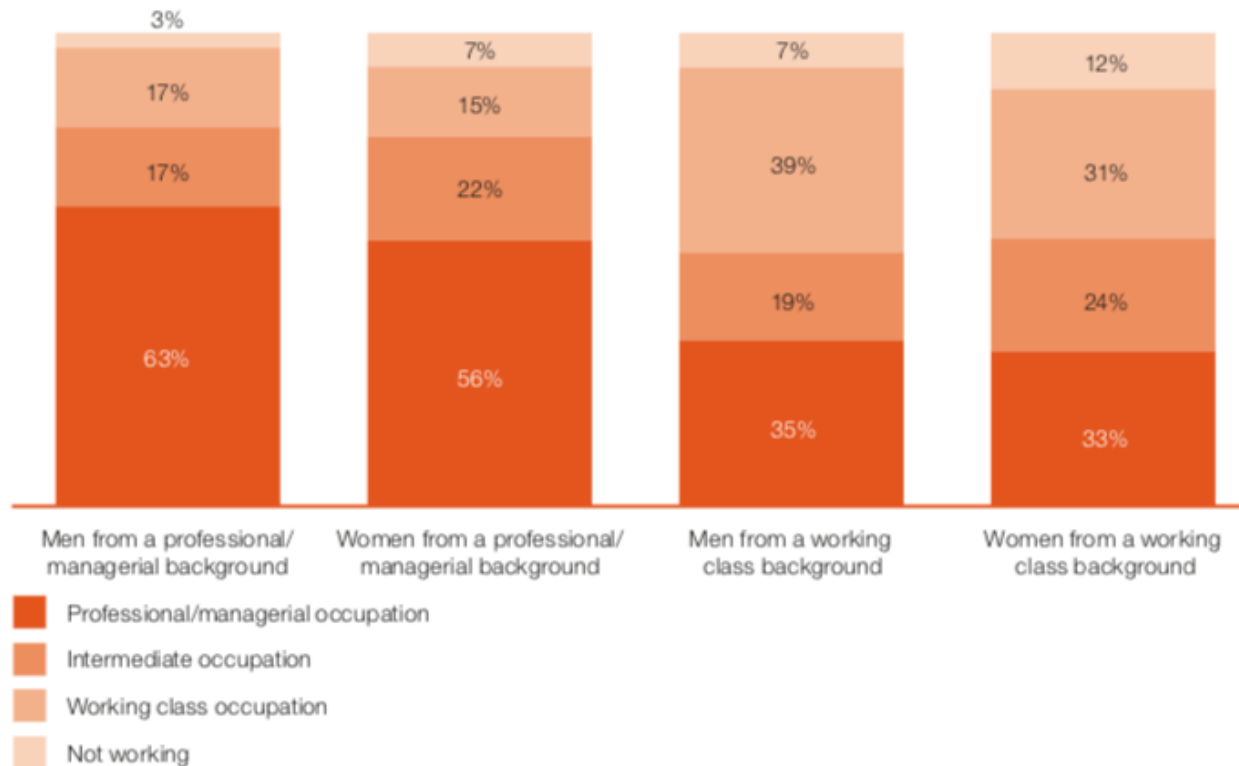
Class, it seems, is everywhere. It spans the length of billboards and broadcasts itself in the media, up close, right in the face of things. It runs through the city and down its segregated highways. It manifests unabashedly on Wall Street and heaps on the corner of Main Street. It has colour. It is what you eat. It resounds through language and its jurisdiction is knowledge. It shapes reputation. It opens and closes doors. It is a roving eye, never dormant. It is with us until the end - in sickness and in health - lengthening or shortening that span. And though seemingly omnipresent it remains strongly absent from the collective conscious. (Stich, 2012, p.105)

Wider picture on class and gender and graduate transitions in UK

- ▶ Social class and gender are the most important influences on HE participation and associated labour market outcomes
 - Fewer A/B grade HE applicants from W/C backgrounds are in top earnings bands (33K–60K)
 - Fewer women than men are in top earnings band
- ▶ Graduates from routine and manual backgrounds are:
 - More likely to be unemployed and under-employed
 - Less likely to have accessed graduate job
 - Have lower average earnings
 - Source: Futuretrack survey 4 and PP/FT joint workshop

Class, Gender, employment and mobility

Figure 1.12: Percentage of people from different backgrounds in each occupational group by gender in 2018



Source: SMC analysis of Labour Force Survey (ONS)

Graduates' understandings of their own successes: the trajectories of Adele and Luke

Name	Adele	Luke
Social Class	Working	Middle
Race/Ethnicity(self-defined)	Mixed race	White
University	UWE	UoB
Subject Studied	History	Biology
Degree classification	2.1	2.1
Aspirations whilst at university	Journalist/historian (1) Politics/civil service (2) Third sector (helping people) (3)	Unsure/maybe banking (1) Unsure/conservation (2) Unsure but have job in dad's company (3)
Job Title (3 years post graduation)	Fundraising officer for a charity	Network administrator for Investment Company
Income	£21K	£31K plus 10-15% bonus
Career Progression?	Yes	Yes

Adele: 'luck' or stuck

- ▶ Everybody stayed in Bristol that I knew and I was close with, none of us really went home, so I was just here continuing on with my job, which I really enjoyed and I really liked and I was ***quite lucky in the fact that I...unlucky and lucky. Lucky that I had a job that I could go into which I liked and that paid, unlucky in the fact that maybe I didn't really kind of have time to have a break, go travelling, really kind of discover what I wanted to do...*** So it's kind of weird, I don't know how I ended up in the charity sector, I was just kind of like...***I don't understand how it happened, I just kind of like...I obviously just got lucky. I didn't get lucky because I did work my arse off in that internship and then they offered me a full time job.***
- ▶ ***And I haven't really got much kind of luck in kind of getting interviews or anything.*** I've had two interviews. The last one I went for was for Cardiff Met Uni and to be honest I think I was over qualified for that role which sounds really, but like it was a fund raising role and I'd done it all before, like it wouldn't have challenged me. I didn't get it... But apart from that ***I haven't really had kind of much luck*** and I suppose it's just keeping your spirits up and keeping going and keeping applying for things, and yeah, it's kind of a long process.

Luke: 'luck' or privilege?

- ▶ Everyone is basically considering themselves middle class these days anyway because they don't do those sorts of jobs [mining] and everyone's got to university, but that's not going to mean what it once did – and I think it already doesn't really. And it will keep on going like that and people will have to do Masters. Even I sort of felt it a little bit in my job, it's like the two that had Masters in Economics, it was like *'yeah you're great, cool but you've ended up in the same position I have, and I've just lucked my way into this.'*
- ▶ But I think that you kind of need even that, just go and do a Masters to differentiate yourself. It's like the whole Red Queen situation which is how evolution works. *It's like an arms race.* And that's essentially how the world has gone. So the more and more people who get qualified, the more qualified other people will have to get, and it will eventually get to the point where it just keeps on going, the whole Red Queen thing. I think it comes from Alice in Wonderland actually, where the Red Queen runs fast and the Hatter has to run faster. And then he's like *'well run faster', it's like 'but it looks like we're barely running at all'.*

The Craft of Social Magic

"Social magic is a sleight of hand trick that transforms subjective value judgements into seemingly objective assessments, without anyone recognising the illusion" (Ingram and Allen, 2018)

"Social magic works to eclipse the social relations that produce it in the first place, casting some persons as naturally bearing the distinctions that give them value" (Lawler forthcoming)



Socially Structured Criteria

Magically transformed into 'Objective' Criteria

Degree from an elite university	Strong educational credentials
Internship funded by parents' economic capital	Highly motivated
Entrepreneurial activity supported by economic capital	'Go-getting self starter' / entrepreneurship
Posh accent	Intelligent/good communicator
Confidence, deportment and dress	Global acumen

Privilege is magically transformed into luck!!

The structures of disadvantage are obscured by a belief that outcomes are the product of both a meritocratic society and luck

Conclusions : who needs to run to stand still?

"Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!" (Lewis Carroll)



- Parallels between Adele's and Luke's pathways to graduate employment in terms of taking it at their own pace
- However that pace is set unequally by structural conditions
- Adele's career decision making is constrained by economic necessity
- Luke's career path has been facilitated by privilege
- Both see luck as contributing to their positioning and trajectory
- Adele's 'luck' presents initially as gratitude (but she 'worked her arse off')
- Social inequalities misrecognised as bad luck
- Views difficulties in progressing her career as lack of luck
- Luke views his easy route as good luck
- Privilege interpreted as luck

Thank you for listening

For further information please contact me at:
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- ▶ Bathmaker, A.M., Ingram, N., Abrahams, J., Hoare, T., Waller, R., Bradley, H. (2016) *Higher Education, Social Class and Social Mobility: the Degree Generation*, Palgrave Macmillan