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An exploration of the influences of class, gender and ethnicity on student engagement with graduate employment opportunities

Ruth Brooks
• 1960’s Elite less than 5%

• 1980’s Mass passed 15%

• 2012 Approaching Universal peaked at 49%
Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals
Challenges in the graduate labour market

- Number of applicants increased – competitive
- Underemployment
- Changes in the occupational structure
- Inequality of opportunity
- More than a degree- non-meritocratic characteristics (Jackson, 2007)
My Research

• Qualitative Exploration of Graduate’s Stories
• 2-3 interviews each
• 31 interviewees
• Subject Areas
• Reay, David and Ball (2005). Degrees of Choice

• Skeggs (1997). Formations of Class and Gender

• Structural location of class, gender and ethnicity

• Widening access → stratification
Discourse of Employability

• “Employability is having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful.”

(Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007: 280)
CareerEDGE Model
(Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007: 280)
Employability is not so simple:

- Class (Greenbank and Hepworth, 2008)
- Gender (Andrew, 2009; Wilton, 2011)
- Ethnicity (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006)
Alternative view of employability

- Role of agency and structure (Tholen, 2013)

- Employability is relational, contextual and conflictual.

- Competition exposes social, cultural and economic background – difficult for those from disadvantaged origins. (Marshall and Swift, 1993)
Bourdieu (1977; 1984)
• Field - graduate labour market and higher education

• Capital - economic, cultural, social and symbolic

• Habitus - dispositions influencing individual practice
Early findings

- Gender – females marriage and children
- Ethnicity – following their parents wishes
- Class – not always class conscious themselves but present in attitudes
In their career students are looking for:

- Stability
- Interesting work
- Personal fulfilment
- Progression
- Money
Graduate recruitment process

- Challenging
- Competitive
- Long
- Stressful
- Varies by industry
- Frustrating
- Feelings of success and failure