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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%





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# 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)



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# My Research

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- 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

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# Discourse of Employability

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- “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)

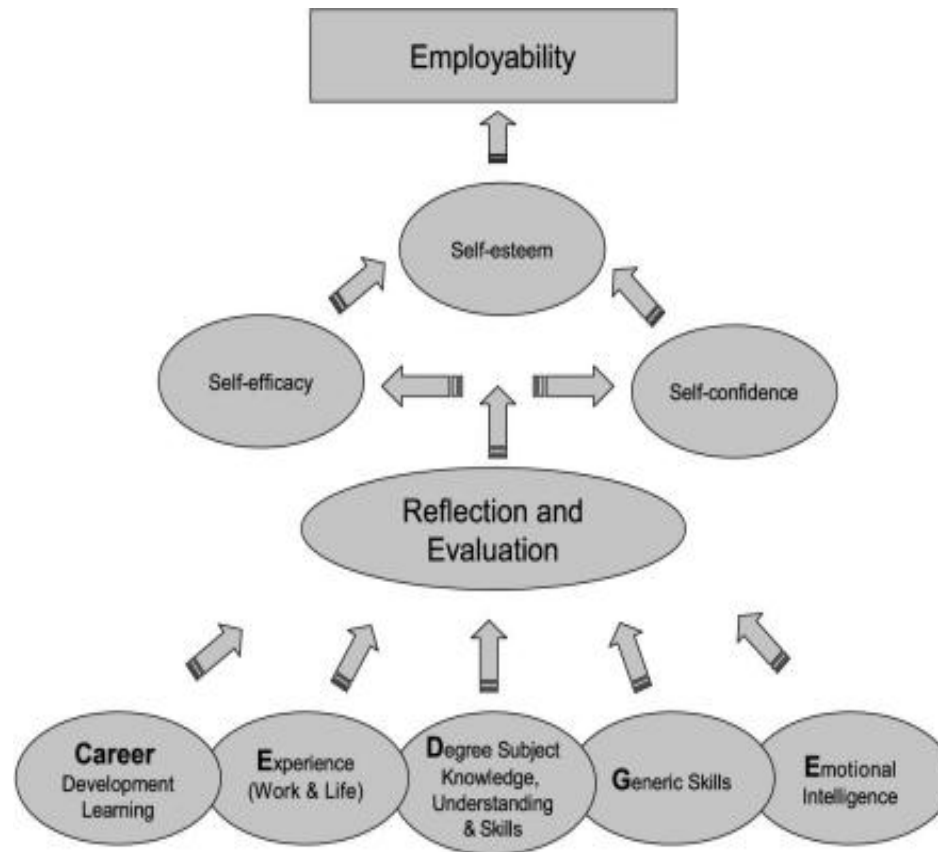
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# CareerEDGE Model

(Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007: 280)



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- **Employability is not so simple:**
  - Class (Greenbank and Hepworth, 2008)
  - Gender (Andrew, 2009; Wilton, 2011)
  - Ethnicity (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006)

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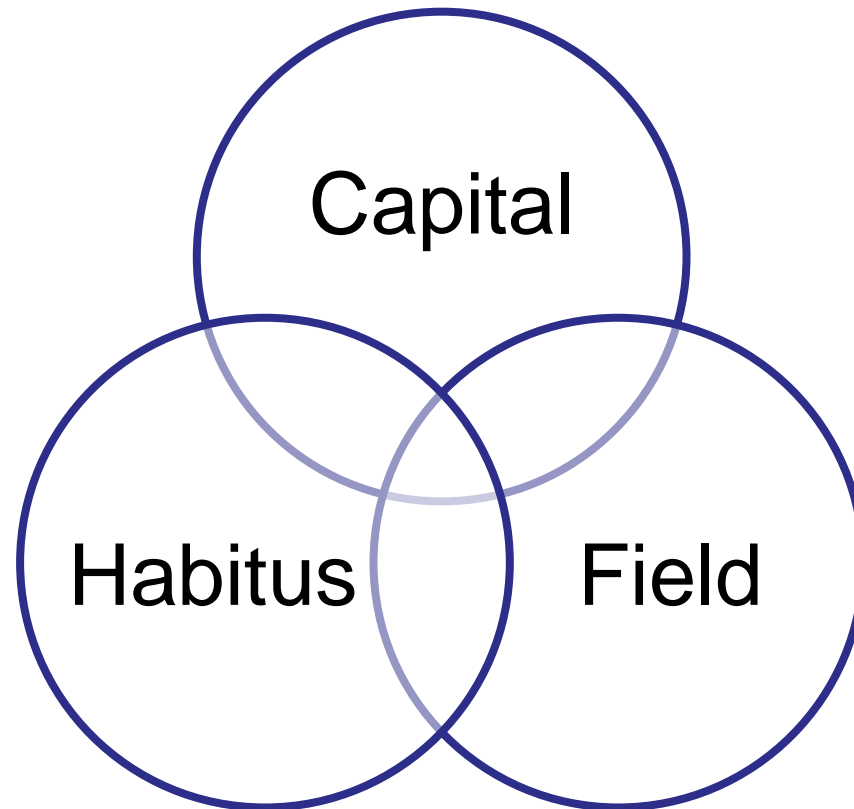
# Alternative view of employability

- 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)

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# Bourdieu (1977; 1984)

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- **Field** - graduate labour market and higher education
- **Capital** - economic, cultural, social and symbolic
- **Habitus** - dispositions influencing individual practice



# Early findings

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- Gender – females marriage and children
- Ethnicity – following their parents wishes
- Class – not always class conscious themselves but present in attitudes

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# In their career students are looking for:

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- Stability
- Interesting work
- Personal fulfilment
- Progression
- Money



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# Graduate recruitment process

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

