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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

Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals
• 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