



KEEPING THEM IN THEIR PLACE

**Social mobility and the de-
construction and reconstruction of
higher education**

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Social mobility: the rhetoric

- Apparent desideratum of all political parties
- Part of a 'vocabulary of meritocracy': along with 'choice; merit; freedom; aspiration; achievement; talent' etc
- No real resemblance to sociological theorisations of movement between classes – just vague idea of everybody doing better than their parents(v Payne 2012) , everybody getting 'middle-class jobs'.
- Myth that soc mob is attainable to all if a) they have ability b) work hard
- Part of the legitimating ideology of capitalist democracies
- Failure to progress blamed on 'lack' of aspiration, effort, talent etc
- For both NL and the Coalition this has led to attempts at social control of w/c; thus Osborne said that welfare cuts are 'beneficial' to the unemployed as it gives them motivation
- Attempts to reconstruct w/c young people's behaviour to make them behave like the middle-class – a dirty trick when there are no spare middle-class jobs available

Social mobility: the reality

- Substantial period of soc mob in postwar decades because of a) mortality in the war b) reconstruction and expansion of occ. structure
- *Ordinary Lives* research reveals the complexity of class movements over three generations- including big shift towards university education.
- In 21st century UK soc mob is more limited
- Upper and middle-classes in recession experience anxieties about possible downward soc mob
- Hence become even more determined to pass on their situation of class privilege
- (Lareau 2003, Devine 2004)

The role of universities

- Universities as gatekeepers to professional work?
- Importance of qualifications as a means to gaining well-paid jobs
 - Hills *New Inequalities*
 - Crompton & Sanderson – qualifications lever
 - High take up of HE by BME groups
- Degree as signifier of cultural capital – also a way to acquire social networks
 - OBNs and Bullingdon Club

Vehicle for individual upward mobility?

- *Paired Peers* project
- HE is the norm for m/c youth
- For aspirational w/c it is seen as a way to succeed:
 - Getting professional jobs
 - Getting any kind of stable employment
 - Making a lot of money

‘The degree generation’

It was the sort of thing that everyone did at my school. It was definitely expected of you to go to university ... in fact I don't think I know anyone that didn't, so... I just went with what everyone did (f UoB m/c)

People of my generation, it's just going to be the “degree generation”, everyone's going to have a degree. So it's just how you can distinguish yourself from those other people... that's the base rate (m UWE w/c)

The ratchet effect

- Originally just an undergraduate degree, then a masters as well
- Now a BA, MA and an internship or placement as a route into law, city finance etc

These can be seen as m/c strategies – upping the ante to ensure they stay on top

- I need to start volunteer work pretty soon or some sort of work experience , cos they've been drilling it into us from the start that it's all well and good that you've got qualifications now because everyone's got the same qualifications, like theres' going to be however many of us, hundreds of us graduating with this degree , we need something to make us stand out. (f w/c studying law at UWV)

The ratchet effect

- This is grasped by students
 - I need to start volunteer work pretty soon or some sort of work experience , cos they've been drilling it into us from the start that it's all well and good that you've got qualifications now because everyone's got the same qualifications, like theres' going to be however many of us, hundreds of us graduating with this degree , we need something to make us stand out. (f w/c studying law at UWE)
 - Networking and social skills may be a perfectly natural practice for UoB students but are one of the assets most valued by employers (article in *Epigram* 19/3/12)



It's who you know..

- Some relation on my mum's side like works for Northern Ireland Industrial Employment Tribunal, and so I did work experience there. I'll probably do that again, it's only a phone call. And then one of the people at my church back home is a Crown Prosecution Service barrister. But I'm sort of thinking trying more to get into the sort of big top firms.. and my dad got me work experience with a solicitor as well, just by nature of being a GP. (m UoB m/c)
- I've got a placement at a big investment banking firm..My dad met the head of internships and he did like a charity motorbike ride in Africa, it was all businessmen like, you had to raise like £10,000 for doing it and that pays for your bike and then they give it to the people in the community where you finish the ride. He got really friendly with the head of internships. And we had a talk and he was like 'yeah, I think you'd be perfect..like you're.. work hard, kind of thing, put in the hours, he liked the thing I'm quite likeable. (m UWE w/c)

Schooling the middle-class

- Research by Reay, Devine, Lareau, etc reveals how schooling channels children by class
 - u/m/c - established private schools
 - m/c - newer private schools, grammars, better state schools, better academies, 'free' schools
 - w/c – lower-rated state schools
- Mary Bousted (Gen Sec ATL): schools increasingly divided along class lines, making it harder than ever for poor children to succeed. M/c withdrawal creating clusters of 'schools for the dispossessed', with toxic effects for w/c
 - (reported Guardian 5/4/12)

Reconfiguring HE

- Current policy will reproduce the three tiered school system:
 - Prohibitive fees
 - AAB 'centres of excellence'
 - RPA and new forms of training
- Elite research universities - u/m/c, m/c
- New universities – l/m/c , u/w/c
- Vocational training – excluded w/c

Reversal of NL policies to promote WPT

- The myth of meritocratic competition will maintain the myth of opportunity

It's not for the likes of them...

- Increasingly elitist culture within RG HEIs
- Provides a culture which fits with m/c private school habitus, in which w/c do not feel they fit.
- Backed by elitist research culture and managerialist regime which has no time for those perceived as not 'world-class'
- This favours the rise of confident m/c males, often from Oxbridge
- Increasingly RG units likely to become m/c enclaves excluding staff as well as students from other backgrounds
- 'The Tory party at school'?

Conclusions

- Universities have been deconstructed and reconstructed by both external and internal forces to play the market
- They have lost their universality and openness to diversity and are deteriorating into vehicles for class reproduction
- Bristol and its ilk cater for the privately educated elite