

Paired Peers: The Impact of Class on Student University Experience

Getting in, Getting on and Getting Out

Paired Peers Research Team:

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Overview

- ▶ Background to Paired Peers study (Ann-Marie Bathmaker)
- ▶ Section 1: Getting In (Richard Waller)
 - *Issues of social class inequality in entering university*
- ▶ Section 2: Getting On (Nicola Ingram)
 - *The classed nature of the wider 'student experience'*
- ▶ Section 3: Getting Out (Jessica Abrahams)
 - *The classed and gendered nature of early destinations*

Extensive public interest in HE and social mobility

If we want to see social progress and economic prosperity in an increasingly competitive global market, the principle we should, as a country, aim for is to ensure that all those who have the ability, aptitude and potential to benefit from a university education have a fair chance to do so. (Milburn, 2013)

Latest report from the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission

HE as a basis for future opportunities

Britain is going through a tough time economically and socially. Five years on from one of the worst financial crises in our history and our economy is still struggling to recover, our budget is in deficit, unemployment is too high and wages are being squeezed. Our people look to the future with great uncertainty, asking where the jobs of the future will come from and whether the next generation will see fewer opportunities than their parents did.

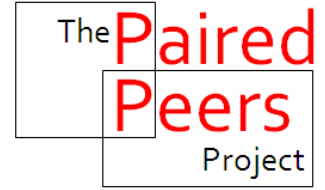
In the face of this uncertainty, the global strength of our higher education system stands out as a cause for confidence. (IPPR, 2013)

IPPR Commission on the Future of Higher Education (2013)

However, research points to continued class differences

- ▶ Ken Roberts (2010)
Higher education is ‘a distinctive and *middle-class* life stage’. HE is strengthening the distinction between an upper middle-class and the rest of the middle-classes, rather than increasing opportunities for social mobility amongst the intermediate and working-classes.
- ▶ Brown, Lauder and Ashton (2010)
A ‘*global war*’ for the most talented graduates.
- ▶ Diane Reay, Gill Crozier, John Clayton (2009)
Working-class students in elite universities – ‘*Strangers in Paradise*’?

The Paired Peers project



The overall aims of the project were to discover:

- ▶ How the experiences of students at the two universities of Bristol (one 'modern' post-1992, one 'elite' Russell Group) were differentiated by class.
- ▶ What kind of capitals students brought into university with them (economic, social and cultural) and what capitals they acquired during their university years.
- ▶ In this way, to begin to explore in what ways university might promote, or not promote, social mobility.

Methodological approach

- ▶ Longitudinal study (2010–2013)
- ▶ Following students at UWE and the UoB from the first to third year of undergraduate study.
- ▶ Students selected from subjects taught at both universities:
Biology; Drama; Economics/Accounting/Finance;
Engineering; English; Geography; History; Law;
Politics; Psychology and Sociology.
- ▶ Students ‘matched’ by social class and gender.

Social Class data on students at UWE and UoB

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) record for 2010/2011 entrants

	UoB	UWE	All
Middle Class (NS-SEC 1-3)	86%	71%	78.5%
Working Class (NS-SEC 4-7)	14%	29%	21.5%

Identifying participants

- ▶ Short questionnaire to all Y1 students in selected subject disciplines at introductory lectures at beginning of their UG study.
- ▶ 2,159 questionnaires completed.
- ▶ We requested:
 - demographic information (parents' occupations, parents' and family members level of education, type of school attended, home post code, self-defined social class); willingness to participate in full study.

Selecting participants

- 910 volunteers for the full study
- Questionnaires reviewed, and pairs identified, based on: subject studied, social class, gender

Research sampling design

WC = working-class student, MC = middle-class student

Pre-1992 Russell Group university				Post-1992 university			
Subject area 1		Subject area 2		Subject area 1		Subject area 2	
2 x WC	2 x MC	2 x WC	2 x MC	2 x WC	2 x MC	2 x WC	2 x MC

Total participants at start of PP project = 90

Total participants at first interview (Y1 term 1, 2010)

	UWE	UoB	Total
Total	46	44	90
Total working-class	24	21	45
Total middle-class	22	23	45

Total participants at end of PP project
= 70

Final interviews completed (Y3 term 3, 2013)

	UWE	UoB	Total
Total	29	37	66
Total working-class	13	18	31
Total middle-class	16	19	35

Data collection

In-depth interviews on 2 occasions each year with each participant

Interview #	Focus of interview	# of interviews completed
Y1/1	Biographical	90
Y1/2	Settling in	78
Y2/3	A week in the life of	73
Y2/4	Making progress	68
Y3/5	Engagement with the city	70
Y3/6	Reflecting back and looking forward	66

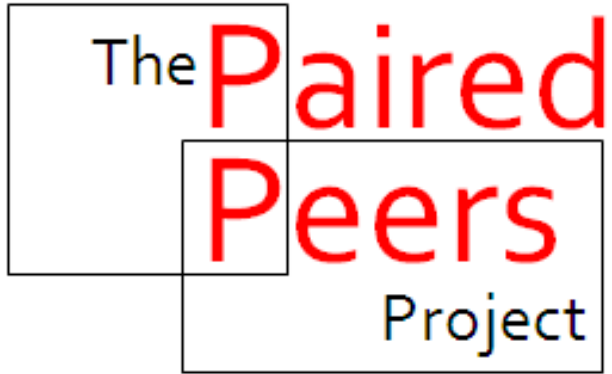
Key theme in analysis: mobilising and generating valuable ‘capitals’

Economic, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986)

Personal capital (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011)

Previous researchers talk of how students need both tacit and explicit *know-how of how to ‘package’ their experiences, opportunities, and attributes* into valuable ‘personal capital’ (Tchibozo, 2007; Tomlinson, 2008)

Capitals deemed to be valuable may enable students to gain advantage in education and in labour markets (Lareau, 2003)



Section 1: Getting In

Classed differences in university entry

Dr Richard Waller

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Classed expectations or hopes of university?

- ▶ Although not universal amongst the cohort, there were clear class-based tendencies between students' (and their family's/school's/peer's) dispositions towards university study
- ▶ Many middle class students, particularly those from the upper middle class and/or private schools, had *expected* to go
- ▶ Many working class students, especially from low participation areas or where there was no family history of HE involvement had *hoped* to go

Middle class *expectations*

It's kind of just a standard thing for my school, everyone went to uni.....and then my parents both went to uni, both my sisters went to uni, so it's just kind of a standard thing that I would go to university as well I suppose.It was one of those things that everyone did their UCAS application, everyone just went to uni.

(Joel)

- ▶ For students like Joel, it was almost taken for granted they would go – to not do so would be considered 'strange'. All structures were in place to support this transition

Working class *hopes*

But a vast majority of people I went to high school with didn't go to uni, that wasn't on their radar as it wasn't done. It just....that wasn't part of what they grew up with, their parents didn't go to uni. I think a lot of people, especially now that I've come to uni, it's expected, whereas where I come from it isn't really expected, it's more "oh, you're going to uni?"
(Adele, WC, UWE)

- ▶ Structures mitigated against Adele going, the onus largely upon her managing the process

A typology of pathways into university

- ▶ Using the participants' accounts of how the decision to come to university was made, we constructed a typology of six different pathways:

1. The *Taken for granted* pathway
2. The *Planning* pathway
3. The *Drifting* pathway
4. The *Rescue* pathway
5. The *Derailment* pathway
6. The *Disorganised* route

NB these were not mutually exclusive – there was overlap or combination on some occasions

The *Taken for granted* pathway

- ▶ Going to university is seen as ‘normal’, it’s expected, everybody in family has a degree, siblings are already at university, most people at school are going. Many middle class students fall into this category, particularly the upper middle class fractions and/or privately educated. To *not* go would be ‘strange’

The *Planning* pathway

- ▶ Going to university was a long-term goal and choices and actions were deliberately and strategically taken to achieve it. Aspirant and academically gifted young people from the working class may follow this route, possibly without many supporting structures to draw upon. Highly motivated middle class students can come through this route too, albeit often resulting in people entering different *types* of university depending upon class background

The *Drifting* pathway

- ▶ Some young people could not really give an account of how they decided to go to university. They apparently lacked aims and objectives, but somehow ended up going there. ‘Drifters’ can come from all classes, though again access to different types of university arises from different social backgrounds

The *Rescue* pathway

- ▶ The young person did not envisage going to university, was drifting, possibly falling into bad habits, but somebody happened to take an interest and motivated them into applying. 'Rescues' may involve less academic working class students and some de-motivated middle class students

The *Derailment* pathway

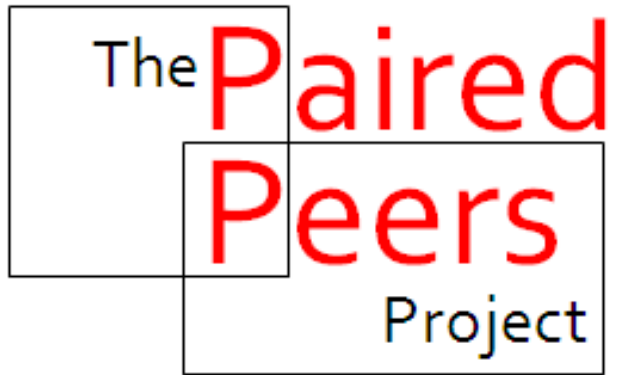
- ▶ The opposite of 'rescue'. The young person starts off on a positive course towards university but something happens – illness, exam failure, family break-up – which disrupts their progress and results in drop-out or setback. This can affect all class groupings, and may result in someone entering a lower status university than they'd originally intended e.g. through achieving lower grades.

The *Disorganised* route

- ▶ An extreme version of the 3 former routes. Because of their own or family actions – e.g. moving around the country, leaving school, changing schools etc – the trajectory is disrupted, even ruptured. The young person may start a degree, leave it, return to another course later in life, or enter into employment for a time before entering HE. This pattern is common with mature students (not included in our sample). Two students from the study who quit during the 1st year fit into this category

Conclusion from first section

- ▶ In all these six routes, there may be 'critical moments' and/or 'significant others' impacting on the trajectory and affecting the outcomes, as some of our other publications including the full report launched today will show. We shall also consider the role of schools, parents and the universities themselves on students' decision-making processes



Section 2: Getting On

Classed differences in university experience

Dr. Nicola Ingram

The Student Experience



University as an Important Life Stage

- ▶ Many students recognise university as an important stage in their life, not just a means to further their education and career
 - Opportunity for trying new things
 - Gaining freedom and independence
 - A time and a place for self-development
- ▶ Also recognise the competitive nature of the graduate employment market
 - 'A degree is not enough'
 - Importance of making oneself marketable to future employers
 - 'The student experience' becomes a formalised process of capital accumulation and advantage pursual

Academic Achievements

Classification in Second year by **University**

Classification	UoB (%) (n=36)	UWE (%) (n=29)	Total (n=65)
First	14	17	15
2:1	83	66	75
2:2	3	17	9

Note: (%) have been rounded

Classification in Second year by **Social Class**

Classification	Middle Class (%) (n=32)	Working Class (%) (n=33)	Total (n=65)
First	16	15	15
2:1	75	76	75
2:2	9	9	9

Note: (%) have been rounded

Middle-Class Advantages

- ▶ Extra-Curricular activities building on already developed skills and experiences
- ▶ Freedom of resources: time and money
- ▶ An understanding of the ways in which to mobilise the skills to make them marketable

Every year me and my parents talk about how much I need for everything that I need to do. They pay for my bus and all my sports fees and everything, so I can't really complain.

(...)

Like a lot of people just couldn't like be bothered to do extra-curricular stuff and I didn't really understand why you would come to uni and at least not try any of that sort of stuff.

(Francesca, MC, UWE)

Over the past three years what have you been doing (if anything) to prepare yourself for finding and getting a job?



CV Building

Get exposed to the companies and the industries that you might want to work for as early as possible. Research the opportunities available, (which I did), and summer internships (which I did and got the job off the back off). Join societies and clubs and try and take up leadership positions in those clubs that are relevant to the potential career that you want – if the society doesn't exist, create it. (...) Just try and do everything to build up your CV, just add little bits of experience, add little bits of training, competitions if you can, and make yourself look busy.

(Nathan, MC, UOB)

Working-Class Constraints

- ▶ Financial constraints = less money to engage in extra-curricular activities
- ▶ More likely to work during term-time = less time to engage in extra-curricular activities

You're stood up all day running around after people. When I first started it did feel like a lot of work but I think I've got used to it now, so it doesn't seem to take so long and doesn't seem to hurt my feet quite as much. I don't think we're paid enough for it, we get minimum wage... [it] just about covers all my costs basically. I got paid on Saturday and after all the bills went out I think I've got £20 left, so that 18 hours a week for a month has just about paid for my bills.

(Zoe, WC, UoB)

Resilience

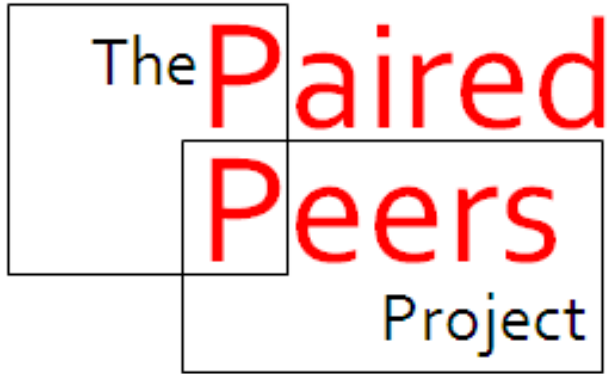
Do you know what, against all the odds I'm going to make something of myself

(Zoe, WC, UoB)

Considering my background and getting to university is....I've not come from a private school, which so many of my friends have, and actually the one thing I've always had from that I felt was maybe a bit more of an understanding, or tolerance and idea of the real world. And this kind of proves to me that maybe there is some evidence towards that, but I don't know.

(Marcus, WC, UoB)





Section 3: Getting Out

Classed and Gendered Destinations

Ms Jessica Abrahams

Destinations

Destinations of students by **University** and **Social Class**

	University		Social Class		
	UOB (%) (n=34)	UWE (%) (n=25)	Middle Class (%) (n=33)	Working Class (%) (n=26)	Total (%) (n=59)
Graduate Job	15	0	9	8	9
Further Study (PGCE)	12	8	9	12	10
Further Study (Other)	12	4	12	4	9
Summer internship/work experience	9	12	15	4	10
No Destination secured	53	76	55	73	63

Note: % have been rounded

“They don’t know what work is”

The vast majority of people in this university have never worked – worked but they’re had work experience because someone’s arranged it. They don’t know what “work” is yet. But I already know what work is, so I think that any employer that I talk to would appreciate and value that as much, or even more, as saying “oh I have this work experience” blah, blah. “Oh well you couldn’t really have work experience at the time because you had other commitments, you were working – working to support yourself through university”. So I think that’s probably more of a beneficial thing to have – well I hope anyway.

(Zoe, WC, UOB)

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Hidden Entrepreneurialism

I've got a bit of an alcohol distribution company that I've set up (...) It's really annoying because it's really good but I can't really mention it in the interviews. Like in some of the internship applications they have stuff like "name a business opportunity that has presented itself to you and how you've capitalised", (...) I don't know what they could possibly expect, other than stuff that I do that I can't really talk about.

(...)

I'd much rather be in their position where they don't have to worry about other things other than their studies and stuff.

(Harvey, WC, UOB)

Social Capital and Work Experience

- ▶ Inequality experienced in work experience step

One of the law firms I went to, I said “is there any chance I can gain some work experience”. She’s like “oh do you know someone at the firm then” and I was like “no”, and she’s like “oh, no we don’t unfortunately”.

(Bianca, WC, UoB)

Social Capital and the Middle Class

[publishing is] kind of an area that you need to know people in it to progress, and I was like talking to my parents and I was like “I don’t know anyone” and then we were like “we must know someone”. And I’ve got a family friend whose daughter, our mum’s were in the antenatal group together, her dad though is like a CEO of a publishing house or something, so I was like “oh, I’ll go and see him over the summer”

(Harriet, MC, UWE)

Social Capital and the Working Class

Do you think your family will be able to help you find a job?

No because I wouldn't want my family to help me because I want to be able to say "I've achieved this without the help of someone else", whereas some of my friends from school are very much relying on who their grandparents know or who their parents know to get them a job at the end of it, which I don't agree with because if your parents have managed to get a career for themselves so why can't you.

(Rob, WC, UWE)

I could get contacts and stuff like that and a step up easily from the family but I just wouldn't. [Why not?] Out of principle really. I just would hate to be that guy in the workplace who just got there not on his own merit, off like just knowing someone higher up.

(Charlie, WC, UWE)

Gendered Destinations

Destinations of students by **Gender**

	Female (%) (n=35)	Male (%) (n=24)	Total (%) (n=59)
Graduate Job	3	17	9
Further Study (PGCE)	17	0	10
Further Study (Other)	9	8	9
Summer internship/work experience	6	17	10
No Destination secured	66	58	63

Note: % have been rounded

A couple of friends who are girls have been asked if they are hoping to have a family in the future (...) I think it is kind of bad that women are asked that, because I doubt they'd ask men if they want a family, do you know what I mean?

(Bianca, WC, UoB)

Gendered Destinations

I think teaching's quite an easy one with time off, (...) like you won't have to worry too much about working out of school hours, because your job is in school hours and you'd get weekends and school holidays off

(Jackie, WC, UOB)



Gendered Destinations

I was going to be a hot-shot lawyer, and now I'm a failure and I'm going to be a teacher.

(Sally, MC, UOB)





Unequal Futures

Jessie: do you think that people from different backgrounds will have the same opportunities as each other after university?

Luke: No. No, it is all about who you know. I mean obviously my job is essentially who I know. And even if I didn't get this job I would have been able to get another decent one just because of family members, or people that I know through my dad, or mum, (...) I could think of about 3 or 4 people that would give me a decent paying job. I mean obviously maybe it is also to do with the fact that I have proven that I'm capable enough of doing it with the whole uni thing, but it is just a foot in the door. Like if you don't know anyone there's not really much to distinguish you, so I guess yeah, your opportunities are different.

(MC, UOB)



Conclusions

Getting in...

- ▶ Inequalities were noted in schools' and parents' abilities to prepare and support young peoples transitions.

Getting on...

- ▶ Inequality within university is maintained through the wider 'student experience' rather than through the formal learning process.

Getting out...

- ▶ Inequality in the graduate labour market is maintained through a focus on internships and work experience – a realm which is not an even playing field.

For more information:

bristol.ac.uk/pairedpeers