UNIVERSITY OF
GLOUCESTERSHIRE

This is a pre peer-reviewed, pre-print (draft pre-refereeing) version of the following published document and is licensed under All Rights Reserved license:

Folkes, Louise ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7857-6953 (2017) Book Review: Higher Education, Social Class and Social Mobility- The Degree Generation. Higher Education Review, 50 (1). pp. 107-108.

EPrint URI: https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/9161

Higher Education, Social Class and Social Mobility- The Degree Generation.

Ann-Marie Bathmaker, Nicola Ingram, Jessie Abrahams, Anthony Hoare, Richard Waller, Harriet Bradley, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, £60.00, (Hardcover), 188pp, ISBN: 9781137534804

> "University thus does not necessarily become a social leveller; rather, it becomes another site where the middle-classes may compound and exploit their advantages." P.97

Considered as central to improving social mobility in the UK, higher education expansion has been central to government policy. What this book aims to highlight is the inherent classism within the UK higher education system which works to limit universities' aims of building "a fairer and more open society" (p.9). By reporting the findings of the longitudinal 'Paired Peers project', which matched working-class and middle-class students by degree subject across two of Bristol's universities (University of Bristol and the University of the West of England), this book explores how students' experiences of higher education are ultimately shaped by their social class positioning. This in turn affects the extent of mobility that can be achieved, as opportunities and obstacles that arise for students are a product of a stratified higher education system. Within this certain institutions are considered more prestigious, and middle-class students have more capitals to draw upon in order to maintain advantage over their working-class peers.

On an organisational level, this book is well-structured, well-written and the chapters flow nicely on from each other. Following the introduction, there is an essential chapter about social class and how this has been operationalised in the project. Next we have a chapter based on rich descriptions about the two universities in Bristol. The following three chapters make up the core of the analysis, focusing on: getting in, getting on and getting out of university. In addition, there is a chapter focusing on narratives of class and 'race' before a final concluding chapter. There is good illustrative use of data extracts within all chapters which helps to narrativise participants' accounts, although at times it did feel as though there was overreliance on data extracts, and this is not necessary as there is a strong engagement with theoretical literature throughout. Each chapter ends with a 'concluding comments' section to round it off nicely, although sometimes these brought in new information which had not been explored within the chapter.

One of the key strengths of this book is its theoretical engagement. It works with Bourdieu but recognises a need to move beyond surface understandings of habitus and capitals in order to explore the affective boundary-making work achieved within higher education, and how this in turn produces 'reputational affect' within students. This 'reputational affect' impacts the everyday experiences of students at university, how they internalise their positioning, and the discourses they draw upon within the competitive, stratified field of higher education. The image of the University of Bristol varsity t-shirt (100% cotton, 0% poly, p.46) demonstrates how the jovial things which we may laugh at and take for granted, work to reproduce these discourses of privilege, prestige and status. The book dares to say what everybody in higher education experiences- the underlying snobbery and distinction between institutions which has become hyper-normalised in today's marketised higher education system.

Admittedly, I was initially cautious about the defining of class and how students were designated as either 'working-class' or 'middle-class'. This book however, has an open and frank discussion about social class and its omnipresence, emphasising the need to explore and discuss this within current debates around higher education and social mobility. The authors are honest about the difficulties of operationalising class, and recognise weaknesses with the methods of classification used (such as ignoring fractions within classes). Key variables used to classify students were: occupations of parents; educational level of parents; receipt of maintenance grant or bursary; and self-assigned social class. Classification was achieved collectively across researchers and although a little clumsy, it does the job to explore the book's aims.

It is also important to highlight the book's engagement with both intersectionality and policy recommendations. Despite the core focus of the project being social class, the authors discuss in detail instances where both gender and ethnicity intertwined with class experiences. Particularly in the chapter around narratives of class and 'race', we see how universities operate as predominantly white-centric, middle-class spaces. In the conclusions chapter, there are practical policy-orientated suggestions that could be taken forward following the project, although ultimately the book concludes by suggesting that the meritocratic model of social mobility needs to change, in order to address inequality on a structural level. This book is built on rich, in-depth, longitudinal qualitative data and is a recommended read for anybody interested in the structural inequalities present in higher education in the UK.

Cardiff University   Louise Folkes