

*‘Intersections of gender and  
class: working-class men’s  
journey’s to elite higher  
education’*

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# The study

Look at social class & HE participation in a different way

- ▶ Mature male students
- ▶ Elite HE spaces

Sociological analysis: Bourdieu

- ▶ Elite + working class as 'exceptions that prove the rule'
- ▶ Other dimensions of capital (gender and emotional capital)
- ▶ Biographical interests - educating Rita, @ mother of boys, HE+FE educator
- ▶ Working class in elite spaces - surely not just luck ?

# Plans (unless I go off track)

- ▶ Research design and methods
- ▶ Areas of analytical note
- ▶ Reflections on theory
- ▶ Policy implications

# Research design

Comparative and qualitative

‘First generation in your family to go to university’, male, 27+yrs

Two Scottish ancient universities

- ▶ Geographically similar, differences re access indicators
  - ▶ EU: 67% state school, 17% low SES, 8% low part neighbourhoods,
  - ▶ GU: 87% state, 23% low SES, 17% low part neighbourhoods,
  - ▶ 11% mature students, (GU 14% from low part neighbourhoods)

▶ = above benchmark

# Participants

21 mature male students

**16 undergraduates:** mostly social science & education, +1 law, 1 medicine

**5 Postgrads:** 3 PhD, 1 PG medicine, (younger cohort) + 1 PG teaching in oldest cohort

Post-hoc Separation into 3 age cohorts,

- ▶ up to 30 (n=6): PGs/professionals,
- ▶ 30-49 (n=6), vocational/professional degrees
- ▶ 50+ (n=9): UG social sciences

# Younger cohort

- ▶ 4/6 = PG,
- ▶ 5 = married/cohab with graduate partners

## ‘Interrupted HE trajectories’

### More cultural capital in this cohort than the others

- ▶ 2 = birth families have Cultural capital but no financial
- ▶ 2 = lack of familial understanding and support about continued HE
- ▶ Why more? We’re not letting a few thousand stand in your way
- ▶ 1 = rectifying ‘wrong’ choice of original degree

# Participants (cont)

## Middle age cohort (30-40s)

- ▶ 2 professions (PG medical + UG Law),
  - ▶ 2 professions both cohab with graduate partners, 4 UG are single
  - ▶ 'we've all married Mrs Macbeth
  - ▶ 1 = rectifying 'wrong' choice of institution
- ▶ UGs: 3 education, 1 social science

## Oldest cohort (50yrs+)

- ▶ 8/9 are UG social science, complex relationship histories
  - ▶ A third are with their original long term partners,
  - ▶ A third are in 2<sup>nd</sup> long term relationships,
  - ▶ 2 others are estranged from original partner/children
  - ▶ Parental differences in education
  - ▶ Employment less of a consideration for HE

# Emergent themes

- ▶ Importance of graduate others
  - ▶ Partners, work colleagues, incidental others
  - ▶ Structural factors: university rich cities, changing employment patterns,
    - ▶ military as working class escape route
  - ▶ Socially proximate
- ▶ Cultural patterns
  - ▶ Women as nurturers/supportive (work colleagues and current partners)
  - ▶ Women as drivers (mothers who married down, males who've married up)?
  - ▶ Narratives of entitlement from those with children (time for me;)
  - ▶ Reproduction of separate spheres (home/uni)
  - ▶ Female partners as breadwinners.....

# Cont ...

- ▶ Bourdieu and marriage as a field
  - ▶ Structured opportunities
  - ▶ But why take up with 'a man wi nae teeth!?'
  - ▶ i.e. what do some of these female partners have to gain?
- ▶ Emotional capital
  - ▶ Developed in private sphere, mostly possessed and passed on by women
  - ▶ Evidence of mens emotional capitals (developed in crises? Mmmm)
  - ▶ Men here benefit from emotional capitals in (mc) families (support linked to familiarity)
- ▶ Gendered capital
  - ▶ Studenthood as more identity
  - ▶ Confidence in own abilities (unlike mature female students) - validation through employment)

# Implications for white paper

- ▶ An ever more complex choice agenda?
  - ▶ Need to look upstream and/or in a tributary
  - ▶ Affective contexts of social mobility
- ▶ Cost effective HE
  - ▶ Opportunity costs re wellbeing (individual, familial, social)
- ▶ Disrupting enduring inequalities
  - ▶ Intergenerational family lens
  - ▶ Affective contexts of social mobility

# Please be in touch:

- ▶ WP initiatives embedded in the family/community
  - ▶ Example of military families

- ▶ Comparative research

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