

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

Dr Mandy Winterton
Edinburgh Napier University

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 2nd 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

▶ m.winterton@napier.ac.uk