



## City Research Online

### City, University of London Institutional Repository

---

**Citation:** Isopahkala-Bouret, U., Tholen, G. & van Zanten, A. (2023). Introduction to the special issue: positionality and social inequality in graduate careers. *Journal of Education and Work*, 36(1), pp. 1-8. doi: 10.1080/13639080.2023.2169995

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

---

**Permanent repository link:** <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/29769/>

**Link to published version:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2023.2169995>

**Copyright:** City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

**Reuse:** Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

---

---

---

City Research Online:

<http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/>

[publications@city.ac.uk](mailto:publications@city.ac.uk)

---



## City Research Online

### City, University of London Institutional Repository

---

**Citation:** Isopahkala-Bouret, Ulpukka, Tholen, Gerbrand & van Zanten, Agnès (2023). Introduction to the special issue: positionality and social inequality in graduate careers. *Journal of Education and Work*, 36(1), doi: 10.1080/13639080.2023.2169995

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

---

**Permanent repository link:** <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/29763/>

**Link to published version:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2023.2169995>

**Copyright:** City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

**Reuse:** Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

---

---

---

City Research Online:

<http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/>

[publications@city.ac.uk](mailto:publications@city.ac.uk)

---



## Introduction to the special issue: positionality and social inequality in graduate careers

Ulpukka Isopahkala-Bouret, Gerbrand Tholen & Agnès van Zanten

To cite this article: Ulpukka Isopahkala-Bouret, Gerbrand Tholen & Agnès van Zanten (2023) Introduction to the special issue: positionality and social inequality in graduate careers, Journal of Education and Work, 36:1, 1-8, DOI: [10.1080/13639080.2023.2169995](https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2023.2169995)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2023.2169995>



Published online: 21 Jan 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 159



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



## Introduction to the special issue: positionality and social inequality in graduate careers

Ulpukka Isopahkala-Bouret <sup>a</sup>, Gerbrand Tholen<sup>b</sup> and Agnès van Zanten<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Education, University of Turku, Finland; <sup>b</sup>Department of Sociology, City/University of London, UK; <sup>c</sup>The Centre for Research on Social Inequalities, Sciences Po/CNRS, France

This Special Issue entitled *Positionality and social inequality in graduate careers* concerns the changing status of Higher Education (HE) graduates as privileged occupants of highly desirable jobs. As a result of the global expansion of higher education, there is now a large and diversified body of graduates in a crowded graduate labour market and, given the less dramatic expansion of high-skilled well-paid jobs, only a fraction of them will attain the leading positions and the ranks of top earners (e.g. Figueiredo et al. 2017; Tholen 2017; Brown, Lauder, and Ashton 2011). The recent labour market shocks have made graduates' labour market entry and career trajectories even more complex. Within the last two decades, we have seen the global economic crisis in 2008, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2022, and, more recently, the influence of geopolitical armed conflict hurting (sections of the) graduate labour markets. The distribution of graduates' labour market opportunities and the traditional role of credentials in facilitating access to desired forms of employment is in flux (e.g. Brown and Souto-Otero 2020; Tholen 2020; Tomlinson 2017; Isopahkala-Bouret and Ojala 2022).

Within changing and uncertain labour market conditions, it is timely to ask how graduate careers actually develop. Furthermore, social inequality within the graduate labour market is among the most pressing issues to investigate in a critical and comprehensive manner. In labour markets where the supply outstrips the demand, positional competition is thought to be heightened (Brown, Hesketh, and Williams 2004) meaning that labour market opportunities increasingly will depend on how well graduates can signal their worth relative to other graduate competitors. Yet too often the positional competition for graduate jobs has become rather a mechanical queuing process through which supply and demand of educational credentials are coordinated. We need to have a more sophisticated understanding about the social, cultural, and educational conditions through which the positional competition becomes meaningful to both employers and graduates.

In this special issue, our purpose is to provide new insights into graduate careers by examining the institutional and social conditions under which the positional competition takes place and, in particular, examining how graduates with various backgrounds manage their labour market trajectories in different countries. We aim to advance the state of the art of scholarship by examine the mediating role of HE systems, policies and practices in access to different job positions and labour market inequalities. The main questions that we explore are:

- How educational credentials are used and interpreted by employers and graduates in an era in which the value of educational credentials is often found to be in decline?
- How are advantages based on social origin intensified or reduced in and through HE?
- What is the role of HE systems and institutions in mediating positional competition and the impact of graduates' social origins in the labour market?

By way of introducing this special issue, we present below the dominant theoretical conceptualisations of the relationship between credentials and positional competition and show the growing scholarly interest in social inequalities in entry to graduate labour.

## **Credentials and the positional competition**

The credential literature, often associated by the work of Randall Collins (1979, 2011; see also Brown 2001; Bills 2003; Bills and Brown 2011; Tholen 2020) underscores the fact that the growth patterns in the number of degrees within the labour force have the hallmarks of a self-driven circle of rising higher education attainment and rising occupational requirements, resulting in consistent inflationary and stratificatory processes. Particularly in Anglo-Saxon contexts the growth of mass credentialing is sustained and legitimated by new forms of credential commodification as part of the marketisation of higher education (Tholen 2022; Tomlinson and Watermeyer 2020).

Higher Education systems play a pivotal role in credential inflation. David P. Baker (2011) argues that it is exactly through the processes of greater horizontal and vertical institutionalisation of education that credentialing is deeply integrated into the occupational structure. Baker explains how horizontal institutionalisation entails that the demands for a high-level degree concern not only the elite and the most sought-after occupations but also spread across occupations and jobs; moreover, vertical institutionalisation explain how new demands for the 'right' kind of academic degree and advanced credentials, such as professional licences and certificates, distinguish elite jobs from the mass occupations.

However, increasing demand for more and better degrees does not tell the full story. In the current context of HE expansion, degrees appear to have become a 'defensive tool' in the labour market rather than a differentiating factor for the majority of jobs (Brown and Souto-Otero 2020; Tomlinson and Anderson 2020; Tomlinson 2008; Brown, Hesketh, and Williams 2003). Graduates are increasingly positioned as in need of 'adding value' to their university degrees by exhibiting non-strictly academic qualities and skills (Brown, Hesketh, and Williams 2004). Educational credentialing in general and the current emphasis of 'adding value' to educational credentials in particular can be seen as a process of social exclusion by which the educational elite systematically restrict upward mobility from the rest (cf., Bills 2004; Brown 2001). This process is partly driven by elite graduates' fear of increased competition from working-class and minority background students, some of who have gained access to HE thanks to a variety of widening participation initiatives (Harrison and Mountford-Zimdars 2017; van Zanten et al. 2017). The credentials inflation is not evenly realised in the increasingly hierarchical systems of higher education. There are credentials offering exceptionally high positional value (Mangset, Maxwell, and van Zanten 2017; van Zanten, Ball, and Darchy-Koechlin 2015; Rivera 2011; Brown, Lauder, and Ashton 2011) and others offering little value. Moreover, the national systems differ in how closely the higher education and labour market are aligned; how employers perceive the value of different educational credentials; how common qualification standards are regulated; how vocationally orientated the different sectors and fields of HE are; and how involved labour market representatives are in university boards, and in curriculum development.

## **The symbolic differentiation between degree holders**

An emerging number of educational sociologists today are concerned with graduate labour and how positional competition produces and maintains social inequalities. Positional competition entails that opportunities for graduates in the labour market do not depend only on their own skills, experience, and abilities, but on how other graduates act and the different forms of capital that they possess (Isopahkala-Bouret and Ojala 2022; Blackmore and Rahimi 2019; Siivonen and Isopahkala-Bouret 2016; Tholen 2015, 2017; Brown, Lauder, and Ashton 2011). The extent to which higher education degrees are devaluated has important consequences for the debate regarding

social inequality in graduate careers. Tomlinson's (2008) study showed that students are concerned about the declining currency of their hard credentials (degrees), and aware that one needs to add value and significance to a degree. This tendency applies especially to privileged, high achieving students from a high-status university.

Prior research, mainly drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's sociological conceptions, has recognised that the impact of social origins can be traced back to classed socialisation, expectations and preparedness (Burke, Scurry, and Blenkinsopp 2020), raising children in a competitive culture (Friedman 2013), the awareness of how to 'play the game' (Bonnard 2020; Bathmaker, Ingram, and Waller 2013) and convert acquired educational capital into success (Hurst 2018). There are differences however in how strategic the different groups of students are for example in their choice of major, in taking part in extracurricular activities, and in finding a good internship, as well as being mobile after graduation. Student exchanges, such as the Erasmus year abroad, serve the same function as internships in allowing students to improve their competitive capitals and the social class has similar impact on their experiences too (Courtois 2019). Moreover, social origin makes a difference in how willingly graduates' are using social networks in order to advance their careers (Culliney 2020; Abrahams 2017).

Ann-Marie Bathmaker, Ingram, and Waller (2013) have argued that it is not the case that (all) working-class students do not know that degrees need to be supplemented by 'other' valuable stuff, they just have less capitals to do it in practice, because of monetary or time constraints, or lack of social networks (See also: Burke, Scurry, and Blenkinsopp 2020; Hurst 2018). Parental economic capital has a large impact in being able to convert forms of capital into desired outcome (Hurst 2018). Especially in systems of HE where students pay high fees, parental resources influence higher education outcomes more strongly for advanced-degree holders than for those with a bachelor's degree alone (Torche 2011). Other research highlights the various economic and cultural barriers that working-class graduates face to move into higher positions within firms once they have been recruited (Friedman and Laurison 2019; Lehmann 2019). Merrill et al. (2020) have further pointed out how the availability and volume of capitals accumulate in a life course and effect labour market outcomes of working-class mature students.

Furthermore, the robust gender differences in higher education attainment indicate gendered credentialing values. Women often need more credentials than men in similar positions are under-represented in certain sectors, especially in science and technology, but for different reasons than graduates from working-class backgrounds (van Zanten and Maxwell 2015). Entry to graduate career is also stratified by race or ethnicity (Smith et al. 2019; Lessard-Phillips et al. 2018) and patterns of racial discrimination have been clearly documented despite employers' growing discursive emphasis on increasing 'diversity' as a main focus of their recruitment strategies (Pager and Quillian 2005; Pager and Shepherd 2008; Bereni 2009). These results highlight the need to develop intersectional theory and analysis in research on positionality and symbolic differentiation in graduate careers.

### **The role of higher education institutions in mediating the positional competition**

Against the background of educational expansion, credentialing, and social inequalities, it is timely to ask how higher education institutions mediate, and co-construct the positional competition beyond their role as a provider of educational credentials. HE institutions are sites for equalising and/or enforcing graduates' positional competition. The institutional policies and practices in everyday settings shape graduates' subjectivities, aspirations and ideas about prospective careers (Binder, David, and Bloom 2016; Rivera 2011): '*... [A]ctors' dispositions on specific campuses are learned through their participation in shared understandings in meaningful contexts on campus. This learning is collective and interactional. Informal group settings and formal organisational arrangements – where students learn, live, debate, and search for jobs together – lend cultural support for leaning into the dominant style of their university, and considerable constraints against branching off into unendorsed styles or choices.*' (Binder et al. 2018, 381)

The unique organisational features of HE institutions, such as course registration procedures, classroom size, and availability of career services, socialise graduates to think of themselves as a certain kind of people with a certain kind of careers (Binder, David, and Bloom 2016; Binder et al. 2018). Moreover, institutional 'devices', such as meetings with alumni, on campus recruitment exhibitions, career guidance and mentoring, orient graduates' choice of career trajectories. Inherited social capital makes a difference in acquisition of work placements (Abrahams 2017; Bathmaker, Ingram, and Waller 2013), but HE has also a role to play in the development of social networks and trainee opportunities for the benefits of graduates. Students' drive for credentials and the degree inflation influence higher education policy, institutional reforms and academic practices (Collins 1979, 2011). Moreover, HE policy and governance, especially New Public Management tools and practices affect the recurrence of structural inequalities in accessing favourable labour market outcomes (Tomlinson and Watermeyer 2020).

Highly resourced institutions with high student-teacher ratio, all-round curriculum, and high provision of extracurricular activities, do appear to equalise, to some degree, class differences while in HE; however, even such elite institutions fail to erase the impact of social origins after graduation (Hurst 2018). Some HE institutions have implemented specific widening participation programmes that intent to respond to demands for corporate 'diversity' and affirmative action in business and state administration (van Zanten and Maxwell 2015; van Zanten et al. 2017). Existing research nevertheless highlights the limited capacity of higher education to change wider social structures in the labour market and in society (Merrill et al. 2020). These results raise important questions: is HE just another site for the middle and upper classes to compound and exploit their advantage, or can HE institutions actively provide opportunities to have 'more than just a degree' in order to address inequalities of working-class graduates (Bathmaker, Ingram, and Waller 2013)? Is it possible to develop a critical social justice agenda in HE to proactively address social inequalities in graduate careers (Morrison 2019; Burke, Scurry, and Blenkinsopp 2020)?

## Organisation of the special issue articles

The contributors for this special issue represent a wide range of approaches, methodologies, and empirical work. Focusing on the meaning and value of educational credentials and/or the effects of social origin (and the intersecting social differences) in graduate careers, the six papers collected in this special issue demonstrate how higher education shapes the labour market opportunities.

This special issue begins with an article written by Gerbrand Tholen who demonstrates that positionality within the graduate labour market is not a simple demand and supply issue. The value of credential for employers is contingent on the type of role advertised, the availability of alternative signals, and the educational composition of those making hiring decisions. Tholen provides an overview of the key theoretical perspectives to understand why employers value and seek out educational credentials in hiring. Qualifications can function as proof of productive skills (Human Capital Theory), as a signal of desirable characteristics (Signalling and Screening theories) or as a means for social closure (Closure Theory). Drawing on semi-structured interview data with external recruitment consultants in England, the findings demonstrate that employers' reasoning can include more than one of the three theoretical perspectives, creating hybrid forms.

Cora Lingling Xu and Yin Ma in their contribution highlight that the value of credentials are not universally accepted or drawn on by all actors. They demonstrate how regional inequalities influence employment opportunities through the concept of 'geography-mediated institutionalised cultural capital'. Their study looks at the opportunities and labour market strategies of Chinese graduates who chose to work as the 'targeted selected graduates' (TSG) of an elite university located in an underdeveloped region; while their credentials from qualified them for these elite TSG programmes, they were disadvantaged by being excluded from TSG recruitments at economically developed regions. The regional authorities' official and unofficial interventions can thus shape the graduates'

employment opportunities. The study highlights the importance of regional and geographic inequalities across national, economic, higher education, and graduation employment fields.

The value and role of particular credentials can also not be understood in isolation from other educational credentials individuals may hold. In their article, Valentina Goglio, Sonia Bertolini and Paolo Parigi take a somewhat different perspective in relation to educational credentialing and graduates' social positioning in the labour market. They look at the perceived labour market value of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which are 'micro credentials' often issued by prestigious universities. The analysis focuses on how individuals living in United States and Europe, who have undertaken MOOCs, have strategically used such courses to leverage on their career opportunities. Theoretically, the article situates MOOCs and their potential impact within the literature of human capital theory, job competition model and educational credentialism. The analysis reveals some interesting tensions: while university graduates, who represented a majority of the participants in this study, were able to use MOOCs to boost specific skills (human capital) and to signal motivation for continuing learning and professional development, individuals who lack the formal university credentials were unable to improve their careers despite their effort invested in MOOCs. The authors conclude that the MOOCs do not have the potential of substituting formal university degrees; nevertheless, they contribute to a broader signalling strategy pursued by (highly educated) individuals.

The higher education system forms a key field through which graduates aim to improve their labour market position. Ulpuukka Isopahkala-Bouret, Päivi Siivonen & Nina Haltia expand the discussion on higher education practices and their mediating role in the reproduction of social inequalities in graduate careers. Their article focuses on how students' participation in extracurricular activities (ECA) is affiliated with educational and job market competition. ECA refer in this study specifically to cultural and social activities organised by student associations at Finnish Business Schools. By applying the insights of a positional conflict theory, Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' and insights from contemporary theories of gender and capitals, ECA is here understood as a site of classed and gendered practices. The analysis demonstrates that ECA provided opportunities to accumulate valuable cultural capital and to become a member in the professional middle class. Participation in student-led ECA was especially important for young women as they could acquire valuable employability skills, refine their career aspirations and attain masculine cultural capital. The article advances the critical, gender-sensitive approach to cultural capital and graduate employability.

The final two contributions demonstrate how the value of educational credentials become meaningful through people's own class position. Agnès van Zanten analyses the obstacles faced in the labour market by graduates who benefited from a positive discrimination scheme at an elite French higher education institution. She adopts a Bourdieusian perspective combined with insights from research focusing on groups who suffer from an 'intercategorical ceiling' due to their simultaneously belonging to different categories subjected to inequality and discrimination. Based on interviews with beneficiaries of this scheme, who are at the early stages of their professional careers, the article shows that the graduates' disadvantages and ways of coping with them, as well their chances of being stigmatised and reactions to this process, vary considerably. The author explores the extent to which this is due to differences in students' social origin and ethnoracial characteristics and to differences in their axiological positions towards employability and social mobility. Concerning the latter, she highlights that 'purists' are more likely to invest in increasing their technical cultural capital while 'players' are more likely to put forward 'soft skills' including, in some cases, those associated with their 'diversity'.

Wolfgang Lehman's article provides a complementary analysis of non-traditional students' higher education and work careers. Using data from a qualitative longitudinal study of first-in-family, working-class students in Canada, he analyses the evolution of their goals in terms of employment and mobility and the kinds of strategies they developed to reduce the potential disadvantages associated to their social background. The article shows that most youngsters revised their initial

very ambitious career goals opting for positions offering stability and evoking a broader notion of mobility beyond career achievement. It also highlights the fact that in order to compensate for their initial lack of economic and cultural capital these youngsters invested in post-graduate programmes offering close connection to employment and in networking while also being more likely than traditional students to take jobs below those they could expect given their education and to work more intensively to be recognised. However, rather than talking about their career experiences in terms of stunted ambitions, middling achievement, and substantial sacrifice, most of them told a story of success, stability, and contentment.

## Acknowledgement

The work of the first author has been supported by the Academy of Finland under Grant 315797.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

*Ulpukka Isopahkala-Bouret* is a professor at University of Turku, Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning and Education (CELE). Her research interest include equality in/through higher education, access to higher education, graduate employability, educational credentialing and professional career trajectories. She is also a chief editor of *Aikuiskasvatus*, a peer-reviewed adult education journal.

*Gerbrand Tholen* is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at City, University of London. His research evolve around the sociology of work and education, examining the relationship between higher education, skills, credentials, jobs and careers as well as professions, social inequality, elites and the social construction of labour markets. His latest book is 'Modern Work and the Marketisation of Higher Education' (Policy, 2022).

*Agnès van Zanten* is a Senior research professor working for the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) at the Centre for Research on Social Inequalities (CRIS) of Sciences Po, Paris and Director of the series "Education and Society" at the Presses Universitaires de France. She is interested in class-based educational inequalities, elite education, transition to higher education, positive discrimination and widening participation in higher education and education.

## ORCID

Ulpukka Isopahkala-Bouret  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8535-8874>

## References

- Abrahams, J. 2017. "Honourable Mobility or Shameless Entitlement? Habitus and Graduate Employment." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 38 (5): 625–640. doi:10.1080/01425692.2015.1131145.
- Baker, D. 2011. "Forward and Backward, Horizontal and Vertical: Transformation of Occupational Credentialing in the Schooled Society." *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 29 (1): 5–29. doi:10.1016/j.rssm.2011.01.001.
- Bathmaker, A.-M., N. Ingram, and R. Waller. 2013. "Higher Education, Social Class and the Mobilisation of Capitals: Recognising and Playing the Game." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 34 (5–6): 723–743. doi:10.1080/01425692.2013.816041.
- Bereni, L. 2009. "« Faire de la diversité une richesse pour l'entreprise »." *Raisons politiques* 35 (3): 87–106. doi:10.3917/rai.035.0087.
- Bills, D. 2003. "Credentials, Signals, and Screens: Explaining the Relationship Between Schooling and Job Assignment." *Review of Educational Research* 73 (4): 441–449. doi:10.3102/00346543073004441.
- Bills, D. 2004. *Sociology of Education and Work*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Bills, D., and D. Brown. 2011. "Introduction. New Directions in Educational Credentialism." *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 29 (1): 1–4. doi:10.1016/j.rssm.2011.01.004.
- Binder, A. 2018. "Afterword: New Institutional, Inhabited Institutional, and a Cultural-Organizational Approach to Studying Elites and Higher Education." In *Universities and the Production of Elites: Discourses, Policies, and Strategies*

- of Excellence and Stratification in Higher Education*, edited by R. Bloch, A. Mitterle, C. Paradeise, and T. Peter, 373–385. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Binder, A., D. David, and N. Bloom. 2016. "Career Funneling: How Elite Students Learn to Define and Desire 'Prestigious' Jobs." *Sociology of Education* 89 (1): 20–39. doi:10.1177/0038040715610883.
- Blackmore, J., and M. Rahimi. 2019. "How 'Best Fit' Excludes International Graduates from Employment in Australia: A Bourdeusian Perspective." *Journal of Education and Work* 32 (5): 436–448. doi:10.1080/13639080.2019.1679729.
- Bonnard, C. 2020. "What Employability for Higher Education Students?" *Journal of Education and Work* 33 (5–6): 425–445. doi:10.1080/13639080.2020.1842866.
- Brown, D. 2001. "The Social Source of Educational Credentialism: Status Cultures, Labor Markets, and Organizations." *Sociology of Education* 74 (1): 19–31. doi:10.2307/2673251.
- Brown, P., A. Hesketh, and S. Williams. 2003. "Employability in a Knowledge-Driven Economy." *Journal of Education and Work* 16 (2): 107–126. doi:10.1080/1363908032000070648.
- Brown, P., A. Hesketh, and S. Williams. 2004. *The Mismanagement of Talent: Employability and Jobs in the Knowledge Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, P., H. Lauder, and D. Ashton. 2011. *The Global Auction: The Broken Promises of Education, Jobs, and Incomes*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, P., and M. Souto-Otero. 2020. "The End of the Credential Society? An Analysis of the Relationship Between Education and the Labour Market Using Big Data." *Journal of Education Policy* 35 (1): 95–118. doi:10.1080/02680939.2018.1549752.
- Burke, C., T. Scurry, and J. Blenkinsopp. 2020. "Navigating the Graduate Labour Market: The Impact of Social Class on Student Understandings of Graduate Careers and the Graduate Labour Market." *Studies in Higher Education* 45 (8): 1711–1722. doi:10.1080/03075079.2019.1702014.
- Collins, R. 1979. *The Credential Society. A Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification*. New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Collins, R. 2011. "Credentials Inflation and the Future of Universities." *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education* 2: 228–251.
- Courtois, A. 2019. "From 'Academic Concern' to Work Readiness: Student Mobility, Employability and the Devaluation of Academic Capital on the Year Abroad." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 40 (2): 190–206. doi:10.1080/01425692.2018.1522241.
- Culliney, M. 2020. "Personal Contacts, Employment and Social Mobility in Britain." *Journal of Education and Work* 33 (2): 115–128. doi:10.1080/13639080.2020.1722987.
- Figueiredo, H., R. Biscaia, V. Rocha, and P. Teixeira. 2017. "Should We Start Worrying? Mass Higher Education, Skill Demand and the Increasingly Complex Landscape of Young Graduates' Employment." *Studies in Higher Education* 42 (8): 1401–1420. doi:10.1080/03075079.2015.1101754.
- Friedman, H.L. 2013. *Playing to Win. Raising Children in a Competitive Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Friedman, S. and Laurison, D. 2019. *The Class Ceiling: Why It Pays to be Privileged*. Bristol: Policy press.
- Harrison, N., and A. Mountford-Zimdars, edited by. 2017. *Access to Higher Education: Theoretical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges*. London: Routledge.
- Hurst, A. L. 2018. "Classed Outcomes: How Class Differentiates the Careers of Liberal Arts College Graduates in the US." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 39 (8): 1075–1093. doi:10.1080/01425692.2018.1455495.
- Isopahkala-Bouret, U. and Ojala, K. 2022. "You Can Be Taken More Seriously: Finnish Business Graduates' Perceptions of the Employability and Social Prestige of Their Degrees." *Journal of Further and Higher Education*. doi:10.1080/0309877X.2022.2130196.
- Lehmann, W. 2019. "Forms of Capital in Working-Class Students' Transition from University to Employment." *Journal of Education and Work* 32 (4): 347–359. doi:10.1080/13639080.2019.1617841.
- Lessard-Phillips, L., V. Boliver, M. Pampaka, and D. Swain. 2018. "Exploring Ethnic Differences in the Post-University Destinations of Russell Group Graduates." *Ethnicities* 18 (4): 496–517. doi:10.1177/1468796818777543.
- Mangset, M., C. Maxwell, and A. van Zanten. 2017. "Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions: The Socialisation and 'Training' of Elites." *Journal of Education and Work* 30 (2): 123–128. doi:10.1080/13639080.2017.1278902.
- Merrill, B., F. Finnegan, J. O'Neill, and S. Revers. 2020. "When It Comes to What Employers are Looking For, I Don't Think I'm It for a Lot of Them': Class and Capitals In, and After, Higher Education." *Studies in Higher Education* 45 (1): 163–175. doi:10.1080/03075079.2019.1570492.
- Morrison, A. 2019. "Contributive Justice: Social Class and Graduate Employment in the UK." *Journal of Education and Work* 32 (4): 335–346. doi:10.1080/13639080.2019.1646414.
- Pager, D., and L. Quillian. 2005. "Walking the Talk? What Employers Say versus What They Do." *American Sociological Review* 70 (3): 355–380. doi:10.1177/000312240507000301.
- Pager, D., and H. Shepherd. 2008. "The Sociology of Discrimination. Racial Discrimination in Employment, Housing, Credit and Consumer Markets." *Annual Review of Sociology* 34 (1): 181–208. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131740.
- Rivera, L. A. 2011. "Ivies, Extracurriculars, and Exclusion: Elite Employers' Use of Educational Credentials." *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 29 (1): 71–90. doi:10.1016/j.rssm.2010.12.001.

- Siivonen, P., and U. Isopahkala-Bouret. 2016. "Adult Graduates' Negotiations of Age(ing) and Employability." *Journal of Education and Work* 29 (3): 352–372. doi:10.1080/13639080.2014.939161.
- Smith, S., E. Taylor-Smith, L. Bacon, and L. Mackinnon. 2019. "Equality of Opportunity for Work Experience? Computing Students at Two UK Universities 'Play the Game'." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 40 (3): 324–339. doi:10.1080/01425692.2018.1489219.
- Tholen, G. 2015. "What Can Research into Graduate Employability Tell Us about Agency and Structure?" *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 36 (5): 766–784.
- Tholen, G. 2017. *Graduate Work. Skills, Credentials, Career, and Labour Markets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tholen, G. 2020. "Degree Power: Educational Credentialism Within Three Skilled Occupations." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 41 (3): 283–298. doi:10.1080/01425692.2019.1690427.
- Tholen, G. 2022. *Modern Work and the Markertisation Fo Higher Education*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Tomlinson, M. 2008. "'The Degree is Not Enough': Students' Perceptions of the Role of Higher Education Credentials for Graduate Work and Employability." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 29 (1): 49–61. doi:10.1080/01425690701737457.
- Tomlinson, M. 2017. "Introduction: Graduate Employability in Context: Charting a Complex, Contested and Multi-faceted Policy and Research Field." In *Graduate Employability in Context. Theory Research and Debate*, edited by M. Tomlinson and L. Holmes, 1–40. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tomlinson, M., and V. Anderson. 2020. "Employers and Graduates: The Mediating Role of Signals and Capitals." *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 43 (4): 384–399. doi:10.1080/1360080X.2020.1833126.
- Tomlinson, M., and R. Watermeyer. 2020. "When Masses Meet Markets: Credentialism and Commodification in Twenty-First Century Higher Education." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 43 (2): 173–187. doi:10.1080/01596306.2020.1814996.
- Torche, F. 2011. "Is a College Degree still a Great Equalizer? Intergenerational Mobility across Levels of Schooling in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 117 (3): 763–807.
- van Zanten, A. 2017. "Widening Participation in France and Its Effects on the Field of Elite Higher Education and on Educational Policy." In *Policy and Inequality in Education*, edited by S. Parker, K. Gulson, and T. Gale, 73–89. Singapore: Springer.
- van Zanten, A., S. Ball, and B. Darchy-Koechlin. Eds. 2015. *Elites, Privilege and Excellence: The National and Global Redefinition of Educational Advantage*. London, New York: Routledge.
- van Zanten, A., and C. Maxwell. 2015. "Elite Education and the State in France: Durable Ties and New Challenges." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 36 (1): 71–94. doi:10.1080/01425692.2014.968245.