

it is a model of how to think about how such positions are inhabited and practised. Humphris is also compelling about how these individual workers and volunteers come to be the ‘faces of the state’ for the mothers: not just an abstract institution but embodied in particular individuals and their practices. As she puts it: ‘these intimate state encounters are both forms of hyper-surveillance and spaces of constrained opportunities to gain informal support’ (195). Critically, she makes visible the ambivalent and contradictory feelings about the state that animate these encounters: both workers and mothers have desires (to help, to be helped, to be recognised as ‘good citizens’ and ‘caring people’), yet the encounters are overshadowed by fears and anxieties (about the possibility of failure and loss, especially the loss of children).

It is striking how much discretionary space is available to workers and volunteers – affecting decisions about children’s status (the threat of children being taken into care hangs heavy over these encounters); access to other forms of support (from state services to charity); and support in negotiating their official status (applying for national insurance numbers; indefinite leave to remain and so on). Here Humphris makes important contributions to the study of citizenship. She highlights the strange, and unsettling, mingling of established categories – these citizenship decisions emerge at the intersection of public and private, formal and informal, political and personal realms, where citizenship is usually treated as lying on the formal, public and political side of those distinctions. Equally important is her insistence that the analysis of the state and citizenship needs to move from an emphasis on ‘state acts’ to ‘state encounters’, highlighting the processual and relational quality of how states are made in practice. She argues that ‘the perspective of encounters makes the situated positions of *all* social actors visible without privileging one side. In essence, encounters bring relational struggles into focus’ (193).

This is a remarkable book: grounded in rich fieldwork with mothers, workers and volunteers, it illuminates many critical debates at the heart of social policy, state analysis and citizenship studies. It speaks powerfully to the contemporary state of Britain and to the state in contemporary Britain (as we reorder our relationships with the rest of the world again).

Reference

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JOHN CLARKE
The Open University
john.clarke@open.ac.uk

Sam Friedman and Daniel Lauriston (2020), *The Class Ceiling: Why it Pays to be Privileged*, Bristol: Policy Press, £9.99, pp. 224, pbk.

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In his plenary address at the 2019 Annual Conference of the British Sociological Association, Professor Satnam Virdee concluded that the current phase of neo-liberalism was bringing about a ‘recycling of the same old crap: racism, sexism and classism.’ Anybody wanting to find out how this recycling plays itself out, particularly on the latter, could do no better than study this fine and readable book by Sam Friedman and Daniel Lauriston, which shows clearly how class privilege is reproduced in the current labour market.

The authors address the issue of social mobility – or the lack of it – into elite occupations through a two-stage methodology. First, in chapters 1-3, they use class data newly included in the Labour Force Survey to study not only how people from different class backgrounds ‘get in’ to top occupations, but how they ‘get on’ within them. On the basis of this they distinguish the existence of a ‘class ceiling’ which blocks promotion into the very top and to highest-paid jobs for those from working or even intermediate class backgrounds. They then explore, in chapters 4-9, material from four case studies (a TV company, an international accountancy firm, an architects’ practice and a group of actors) to reveal how the processes of class privilege and exclusion actually work. Taken together this fusion of quantitative and qualitative analysis produces an account of social mobility into upper-middle class jobs which is processual and dynamic, thus going beyond the static picture offered by conventional social mobility analysis.

Traditional studies of social mobility are known to be rather ‘dry’ and technical, thus off-putting to the non-expert reader. In the introduction to this book Friedman and Lauriston make the bold claim that they intend to write in a way that will be generally accessible, and it is to their great credit that they succeed in this endeavour. The text is clearly written, with technical issues addressed in a methodological appendix; the Bourdieusian theory that frames their thinking is confined to chapter 10, and omissible if desired. The useful tables from their statistical analysis are even reproduced in colour in a special section to make them more easily grasped! Thus the book can be highly recommended for students studying inequalities from second-year undergraduate level upward.

Earlier research, such as the Nuffield and Essex mobility studies, has of course highlighted the superior chances of those from advantaged class origins maintaining their class position; and recent work by Brown (2013) and Reay (2017) and others has shown the disadvantage faced by working-class graduates from Higher Education (HE) in obtaining elite jobs. What is particularly original in this study is the material from the case studies which reveal the mechanisms underpinning the ‘class ceiling’, the metaphor for blocked promotion they use by analogy with the well-known ‘glass ceiling’ discerned by researchers into gender disadvantage. These mechanisms include economic support from family (the well-known Bank of Mum and Dad), informal sponsorship (picking out ‘talent’ to groom for promotion), ‘fitting in’, often linked to homophily – the tendency to recruit and promote ‘people like us’ and micro aggressions (such as mocking people’s accents or clothing). There are also processes of ‘self-elimination’ whereby people who become aware they don’t ‘fit’ simply opt out of the competition.

One of their important insights is that these mechanisms vary according to the specific occupational context. Thus they note that family support is particularly crucial in occupations marked by precarity and short-term contracts, such as acting or TV work. Moreover, one of their four case studies, the architectural firm, they found to have a class ceiling. This they ascribe to the fact that technical skills and experience are the most valued assets in this environment; my own reading of their account might lean more to the fact that the leading partner of the group was himself from a disadvantaged working-class background, so a kind of reverse sponsorship might have operated there.

They point out that while lacking a class ceiling, the firm, like the architecture profession as a whole, definitely had a glass ceiling. Though the focus of analysis in the study is class, gender and ethnicity are not ignored, and some very interesting examples of intersectionality are offered in the discussion of the ‘class pay gap’. They calculate that working-class people in elite occupations earn an average £6,400 less than those from privileged background, a pay gap of 16%. But there is a double disadvantage for working-class women, where the pay gap amounts to, as they say, a staggering 60%. And if we turn to Black working-class women, triple disadvantage means they earn £20,000 less than privileged white men.

Friedman and Lauriston show that this disadvantage is more than additive, as intersectional theory has long claimed.

This is an important book which sets out a new model for the discussion of social mobility both methodologically and theoretically. In their discussion of Bourdieu in chapter 10, without being hagiographic, the authors make a strong case for the utility of his concepts in understanding the causes of class distinction, in terms of the interplay between fields and various capitals. I was struck, in particular, by their discussion of different forms of ‘cultural capital’, embodied and technical. Embodied cultural capital relates to ways of being and behaving through which ‘merit’ is socially constructed; deportment, accent, dress style, confidence of manner – a style of being which one of the participants in the Paired Peers project (Bathmaker *et al.*, 2018), where I was part of the research team, described as ‘the perfect public schoolboy’. In the accountancy firm the term used to describe this set of desired attributes was ‘polish’, seen as necessary for effective relationships with clients. Similarly actors whose natural accent was not RP (Received Pronunciation) found themselves typecast as criminals or policemen. Technical cultural capital, by contrast, refers to knowledge and expertise which is not class-specific and this explains why architecture, like engineering, is more open to less advantaged entrants.

Politically, this book mounts a challenge to the view that occupational achievement is caused by ‘merit’, or ‘raw talent’ in the phrase of Boris Johnson. Johnson, of course, elected Prime Minister in 2019 with a background of Eton and Oxford so common among Conservative politicians (and not so uncommon among politicians from other parties): the Establishment holding political as well as economic power. The stories of the working-class people the authors interviewed make powerful reading illustrating the emotional costs of aspiration: as Douglas the actor told them ‘*You are living in this strange zone. You are not part of that world, the acting world, the middle-class world, and you are also not part of where you came from. So you are a very isolated kind of figure.*’

The only slight disappointment I had with this book was with the epilogue, co-written with Nik Miller of the excellent Bridge Group which promotes diversity in recruitment. The recommendations for employers it sets out were helpful and achievable, but I hoped for something more radical. Their call for an end to unpaid, unadvertised internships is crucial, but a complete overhaul of recruitment practices is in my view the only hope for change, including the reform of the current apparatus of headhunters, employment agencies and class-biased assessment centres and psychometric testing.

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HARRIET BRADLEY

University of the West of England and University of Bristol

Harriet.Bradley@uwe.ac.uk