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Widening participation and the media student experience

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Abstract

Despite an increase in higher education uptake in the UK, participation rates for working class students remain low. When working-class students attend university, they are often attracted to lower status universities to enrol in new subject areas, such as media studies. This study uses Bourdieu's theory of stratification, and its reproduction via cultural and educational capital, to examine the experiences of a group of 55 media students using qualitative methods. The study finds that working class students often struggle to find their way to university, while middle-class ones may arrive through much easier routes. Working-class students are often circumscribed in their mobility by financial factors or caring roles. The students' experiences of seminars can be alienating and difficult as the teaching may draw on implicit middle-class cultural capital with particular modes of address and verbal dexterity. The partnership model of teaching assumes a normative construction of a specific mode of studenthood and students may find themselves marginalised if they are not able to engage with this; the concept of independent learning may serve to aggravate this marginalisation. The students often receive strong support from families, particularly mothers, but may also experience

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distanciation between themselves and their friends from home. Middle-class students are able to project an assured career trajectory; working-class students are often ambitious but do not have access to the privileged cultural and social capital to realise their goals as effectively. Despite the relatively large numbers of students from working-class backgrounds, the institutional habitus of the university remains alien to some of its students. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Devas, Angela, E-Mail: angela.devas@tvu.ac.uk