The Class Ceiling: Applying Gender Theorizing of the Reproduction of Inequality to Understand Class Inequality in Higher Education

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Transcript

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LISA MCCLAIN
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DEANA BROWN
Don't record. Okay.

[Laughter]

SHARON PATERSON
So in considering the um...inequality in higher education I began to think wow, that looks very similar to a class ceiling and so I'm using that frame of class ceiling very intentionally to connect with the glass ceiling. So this is a work in progress um Michelle and I worked with the same-so her methodology is the same as my methodology. But there's two things I want to really wanna kind of impress upon. One is if we think about the gender frameworks that we look at structural aspects of inequality and apply that to class it can help us illuminate the structural things, and also by swapping out class for gender or race it kind of makes us say, "Oh my gosh! Why do we do this with class, but we would never do it with some other um...varies of inequality?"

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[Cough] There we go. So we think about race and um ethnicity it does explain a lot of inequality, but in particular for higher education class explains, um, that. So some data from Boise State University thinking about the class ceiling as a case example from Boise State. You can see that in 2005 the Pell eligible and non-Pell eligible - I'm using that for a proxy for inequality - were roughly, um, similar. We had to--we ran the track of um all university average it would be around 66 the end for each of these are similar. Um, so in terms of the numbers of students that are represented in each of these categories of resident Pell, resident non-Pell, and non-resident non-Pell. Um, you can see that our retention efforts have made some gains, but that has not been consistently experienced by low-income students. Similarly when you look at graduation rates, the six year graduation rate, also is exacerbated through that trend line to show that those.um those efforts are not, um, keeping up. So we think about that most of the work around retention and graduation have been at the fixed and student levels similar to the fixed, the women, we've looked at- gosh- um What do successful students do? They live on campus. They're involved on campus. They talk to faculty. They have internships. So all of these things
that are um-class based and almost kinda logical, um when you think about using that gender lens when we say oh we're using the male standard and so women need to-to do that. So I looked at some of the um-the frameworks of which-- did I--look at my--my friend Joan Acker from the University of Oregon and she looked at the same, gosh what are the ways--what are the process that the organization actually does? that make it gendered? That make it orientation class based? That then starts to advantage, disadvantage, control, exploit, um based on those criteria. So swapping out gender for class we can see and illuminate what those processes are instead of saying, "Gosh how do we fix the student?". So, um, there's a nice article that basically says, "Gosh what are some of those generic processes that organizations, institutions, cultures use to perpetuate that inequality?" To give us a way to look at those processes. And I do have some handouts if anybody's interested in this. So basically the notion of othering that classification process that um, makes it so you're ex-stratifying because you've created these categories. Um, another aspect of a generic process of inequality is that the subordinates have to say, [inaudible] am I gonna accept or reject that? Am I gonna modify or am I gonna account for my defiance from that-from that standard? That's another kind of generic process that we can look at in the university, in institutions and say where is that happening? Um, similarly that boundary of setting, you know you're an in-group or out-group, so I use this as a way to illuminate this. So lots of information, but essentially there's some pillars that are holding up the class ceiling, again looking at this as a case study of how does an institution perhaps do this? So there's the pillar of the ideal student standard. You can see that from some of the things we've talked about going to football games, expectations of living on campus, and these are not just general things. We use the ideal student standard as a way to organize what we do. For example, convocation is on Friday 3 o'clock. Move-In Day for new students. So the students that are new that don't live on campus are not part of that event planning for the institution so it's a way that when we find ideal we construct other and we set boundaries, and just to kinda use that as a-as an example of the ideal student. These are our student-student quotes. Yeah so it's that part. So the other thing in terms of commodifying is if you have this standard to say you're deficit if you don't live the ideal student, um, we can then sell it. We can commodify it. So another way if the institution is organized around class-I'll point to this last piece here-is that of the student fees and tuition that is paid, 30% of that money goes to the student fee piece. Not the tuition instruction fees, and you look at all of those categories within that, um, $800-90% of that activity fee go to the ideal student experience. ASBSU, it goes to athletics um, the 10% that's left over is health services and child health care. So the rest, um, is interesting though in the graduating senior survey only 27% ever live on campus, and only 40% report having been involved in any of these kinds of activities. Um, we think about the residence hall. I'll point you to the last line in terms of both commodifying and the impact of this class base. Um, you'll see that the private residence hall now is an Honors, but it's gone up 41% if you want to have that opportunity to live in the Honor's
Dorm, um, it's now gonna be ten thousand, compared to eight. So again commodifying that ideal student, um experience. Um, Grit is another one that is used to um, construct other, to um, create those boundaries and have students respond to that particular thing and Grit is something - not to critique our scholar that's coming to talk about resilience - but this notion that if you work hard, um, you'll be set. Um, so "Making College Count", the narrative about "Beyond the Major" these things they have to do on top of working, going to school, paying fees, and it's interesting because The Grit Narrative as it relates to um, the class-based aspect is basically saying that poverty is your opportunity to learn sacrifice which then helps you have the hard work ethic to be successful. So um, The Grit Narrative from Duckworth is really based on WestPoint and Spelling Bee um, competitors that said that effort and um [laughing] yes, I know it's quite silly - um, effort and um persistence to a goal are what you need to be successful. And even the survey that they used to identify Grit talks about, did the new idea distract you from an old idea, is how they assess grit in these particular settings. The other way that Grit plays itself out is how we classify first generation college students, and this is not data from Boise State, but this is some other folks that talk about again thinking about um, again if we think about using that gender lens to ask these class questions, really?! Um, so here's a student that says, "My friend and I were talking about this dinner for the first generation college students. We feel like we're molded into these upper class people. Because we're supposed to like wear fancy things, we're supposed to listen to classical music, have fancy food, talk and socialize. These little glasses of sparkling water, and whatever." They're talking about how uncomfortable that was. That they were expected to have this benefit of feeling supported, but it really was this class simulation. Um, again would we use that gender perspective to ask the same questions. So I'm basically arguing that we need to look at, and use these gendered frameworks to ask the structural questions instead of the individual questions of the bootstraps, um, to see where the institution is perpetuating that inequality, um, so that we can have these trend lines addressed institutionally as compared to plugging holes that are perceived to be from the students, um, deficits.

[Audience applause]

End of Transcript.