

Graduate Prospects: Expectation, Disillusion and Precarity

Natasha Furmidge

My dissertation examined how recent graduates conceptualize and interact with the future. It investigated how they attempt to design their own futures, how they battle feeling precarious and if their view of the future has changed from prior to graduation and now. How do they understand the future and use it to shape their actions in the present?

My informants ranged from those who extensively planned the future and were following their chosen path, those who had planned the future but could not achieve their goals, and those who could not even begin to envision the future from their place in the present – it was a blind void. I also investigated the varying theme of hope for my informants and how it influenced their lives. My informant group broadly share a set of key values that they use to shape their lives; these include ideas of independence and achieving financial security for themselves. Such values were explored throughout in relation to how they shaped my informants' views of the future. It is important to identify these values, especially the desire for independence and movement away from their childhood environments, as they profoundly affect my informants' actions and attitudes.

I chose this topic as the subject of my dissertation primarily because it is something that is affecting almost everyone I know around my age at the moment, including myself and my classmates as we enter our final year at university. Many of my friends and family members who have recently graduated are struggling with issues like unemployment, inability to afford housing deposits and feelings of drifting and listlessness. This is an experience that has deeply personal dimensions and is a pivotal aspect in people's lives. Seeing this unfold around me inspired me to take up their experiences as the subject of my ethnographic research. Listening to and engaging with their perspectives was rewarding for me and, from what they reported to me in their interviews, cathartic for my informants, who had not yet had an opportunity to voice the difficulties they had experienced.

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Recently, graduates have been the subject of extensive media coverage regarding issues like the housing market and graduate employment statistics, but I was interested in accessing the personal experiences that lie underneath these headlines and understand a perspective of a surprisingly vulnerable group. In this study of the future, for my informants it was not a hollow, empty temporal frame space but formed the poignant potential of the direction in which they wanted to take their lives, the dreams they wanted to pursue and the hopes for all that they could achieve.