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Reconceptualising graduate resilience – an integrated multi-level framework for future research

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on Bourdieusian social theory to reconceptualise graduate resilience in post-industrial societies to provide a fresh perspective on a concept that has gained increasing prominence in recent years. Through a review of sociological critiques of resilience, this paper argues that graduate resilience is a complex social phenomenon shaped by a range of factors, including material and social resources. In response, we propose an integrated multi-level framework that identifies different stages of graduate resilience, in the context of early transitions into the labour market, and how these stages are shaped at the micro, meso, and macro levels. This framework places resilience in the context of neo-liberalism and highlights structural barriers that hinder the building and signalling of graduate resilience. We argue that the framework enables current representations and understandings of graduate resilience within research, policy, and practice to be problematised and provides a critical starting point for advancing understanding.

Introduction

The concept of resilience and the ability to overcome adversity has long been a celebrated theme within popular culture and social policy, in particular education (Allen and Bull 2018; Duckworth 2016). In recent years resilience has been increasingly adopted in the context of higher education (HE) and graduate employment. Resilience has been positioned as a key graduate 'attribute' to navigate the volatilities and challenges of the graduate labour market (UCAS 2023). Furthermore, in a context where graduate employers have been concerned about 'less than expected' levels of resilience (ISE 2023), graduates are urged to engage in activities to demonstrate their potential as a future resilient employee. This is not unique to the UK, and globally employers highlight resilience as a key skills gap for future development (QS 2019; WEF 2023). This is rooted in notions of resilient employees being able to contribute to the overall resilience and success of an organisation (Bouaziz and Hachicha 2018).

In this article, we argue that dominant portrayals of what we term 'graduate resilience', in the context of early transitions into the graduate labour market within post-industrial societies, are problematic. To recognise individual graduates as resilient, employers attempt to 'decode' personal qualities and characteristics as indicators of potential (Brown, Hesketh, and Williams 2003). However, dominant framings of graduate resilience focus on individual attributes and agency, which fails to acknowledge the differing power of individuals to 'deploy their material, cultural and social capital in the competition for credentials and jobs' (Brown 2000, 638) and package themselves as resilient to employers. This is important to consider now as there is increasing recognition of the ways in which evaluations of 'objective' skills and characteristics are shaped by broader societal factors which can result in inequalities of opportunity to enter the graduate labour market (Ingram and Allen 2019). Current HE and graduate employment research has tended to not focus on the structural issues within resilience, instead it has been afforded a much more agentic character. As such, this paper builds on previous literature examining social inequalities within HE and the graduate labour market to problematise resilience in the same way as other individualised neo-liberal concepts, for example notions of choice (Reay, David, and Ball 2005).

We draw on a growing body of critical work that moves away from overly agentic understandings of graduate employability and the graduate labour market (Burke et al. 2017; Ingram et al. 2023). We engage with this work to reconceptualise graduate resilience in the context of early transitions to the labour market and present an alternative framing which provides a greater balance between individualistic and structural dimensions and moves beyond an emphasis on the role and responsibility of the individual. In doing so, this article seeks to move away from such depoliticised understandings of resilience in the graduate labour market to examine how social inequalities impact the relative opportunities that individuals have to build, deploy and signal resilience (Brown 2000; Mu 2021).

We begin with a review of sociological concepts of resilience more broadly in relation to its political history and the influence of neo-liberalism and outline the current representation of resilience within both HE and graduate employment literature. We then provide a discussion of how Bourdieusian social theory can be used to reframe graduate resilience as a complex social phenomenon mediated by different factors, in particular the role of material and social resources. Next, we propose an integrated multi-level framework which reconceptualises graduate resilience through critically considering different stages of graduate resilience and the way in which these stages are shaped at the micro, meso and macro levels. We then discuss structural barriers to building and signalling graduate resilience and the potential consequences stemming from these barriers. To conclude, we consider the implications of this framework for future research and practice.

Resilience: models, departures and debates

With roots in psychology (Rutter 2012), resilience research has developed through various (non-sequential) stages or waves (Masten 2001; Mu 2022). An initial wave of research, outlined by Masten (2001), presented resilience as a rare and exceptional individual trait, establishing a narrative that some people possess a unique quality that enables them to adapt, navigate and recover from adverse situations (Garmezy 1985; Murphy 1974; Werner and Smith 1982). However, a separate wave of research challenged this view, arguing that resilience is an ordinary attribute which can be found in everyday life, rather than a unique

characteristic (Masten 2001). While this wave moved away from the concept of unique individuals, it continued to emphasise individual agency, presenting resilience as a product of individual motivation, self-confidence and personal agency (Masten 2001; Rutter 2006)

Alongside these bodies of work, a new wave of resilience research emerged which called for an examination of the role of the environment and access to resources in promoting resilience, understanding resilience as something that is provided and supported external to the individual (Ungar 2011). This 'ecological' perspective shifted from individual subject-centred approaches and advocated for reviewing and adjusting the social and physical environment to enable individuals to be resilient (Ungar 2011, 2021). Mu (2021, 2022) argues that whilst moving away from an overemphasis on the individual present in other waves of research, the ecological perspective overlooks the role of agency by assuming that access to resources within an environment is the same for everyone. Consequently, it risks eclipsing the individual in favour of focusing on the environment. As such, Mu (2022) calls for a reconceptualisation of resilience which considers the inter-relation between structure and agency.

Resilience does not operate in a social/political vacuum, nor has its importance and prominence in society been developed in isolation from larger social structures and systems. As such it is important to consider the political and policy context in which discourses of resilience emerge and dominate, namely the neo-liberal context. The last four decades have seen the emergence, development and dominance of neo-liberalism within post-industrial societies. As outlined by Harvey (2005) this includes the mass privatisation of industry and other public assets, commodification of services and provision, reduction in welfare and increased individualisation. Through the rolling back of state and civil protections and welfare support (Hall and Lamont 2012), the reality of neo-liberal society is a harsher and more challenging environment to occupy and navigate. This is coupled with a highly individualised narrative of responsibility and human capital – what one puts in one gets out. In the case of HE, the returns of hard work are equated with increased life chances and financial success (Brown, Lauder, and Cheung 2020).

In order to maintain this individualised narrative, in the face of harsh and ever decreasing conditions, neo-liberalism relies on notions of resilience and the image of a striving individual who works through adversity and finds success. Such representations of resilience serve to maintain the focus on the individual, relying on a highly individualised sense of survival and success, rather than questioning the processes which lead to such adverse conditions (Bottrell 2013; Evans and Reid 2014; Slater 2022; Stokas 2015). As such, Bottrell (2013, 2009) argues that the type of resilience discussed above by authors such as Ungar (2011) and Masten (2001) has been distorted or hijacked and is no longer concerned with recovery from adversity but rather this 'resilient imaginary' serves by 'normalising insecurity' (Slater 2022, 11).

Joseph (2013) catalogues the stages of neo-liberalism beginning with policy interventions and the reduction of the state to later stages where the focus is on developing and cementing neo-liberal values and attitudes within individuals. This is what Bull and Allen (2018) term as the 'character turn' in neo-liberalism or what Gill and Orgad (2018) refer to as the 'psychological turn' in neo-liberalism where the focus is on influencing how individuals feel, think and act including justifying the need to be resilient. As such, Joseph presents resilience as a form of governmentality leading to the curation of individuals based on particular principles which they then enact. While there are clear critiques of this position

pointing to opportunities to develop beyond neo-liberalism (Chandler 2014; Schmidt 2015) and to refuse the neo-liberal imaginary (Ball 2016) the power and reach of neo-liberalism points to the success of this political and social project, with resilience as a key cog in this machine. Stokas (2015) argues that the dominance of the type of resilience neo-liberalism relies on, namely the driven individual 'beating the odds', further demonstrates the grip which neo-liberalism has on post-industrial societies.

It is within the context of an overly agentic reading of resilience that an emerging body of research has begun to provide sociological interpretations of resilience (Boyden and Cooper 2009; Mu 2022; Schafer, Shippee, and Ferraro 2009) proposing an examination of the relationship between structure and agency related to building and signalling resilience. Applying a sociological perspective to resilience allows for a critical examination of neo-liberal narratives which congratulate resilient individuals while effectively depoliticising resilience (Clay 2019; Mu 2021, 2022; Zembylas 2020). As Clay (2019) argues, previous models of resilience tend to gloss over structural inequalities and struggles that individuals face, instead rewarding the 'grit' of those who made it. This process of drowning out systemic inequalities by celebrating the success of the few, echoes Bourdieu's (1998) critique that neo-liberalism celebrates the conditions which require resilience. Such debates resonate with HE and graduate employability research more broadly but not specifically in relation to the notion of graduate resilience. We maintain that framing such debates through a sociological understanding of resilience is central to critically examine interactions between structure and agency in the context of the graduate labour market.

Graduate resilience

Whilst in this paper we focus on graduate resilience specifically, it is important to acknowledge the evolution of resilience within the broader context of education research, policy and practice. Education has been identified by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) as a site of social reproduction where power and privilege are consolidated and social structures are reinforced. As discussed above, Joseph (2013) outlines that neo-liberalism moves from structural changes/dominance to a focus on the individual. There are a number of state instruments and institutions to support the development of neo-liberalism's values and attitudes at the individual level, however for Joseph the education system is a central one.

A particular policy moment concerning the role of education in developing a resilient neo-liberal individual can be seen through the (re)introduction of character education – the encouragement of personal development and growth with an emphasis on 'character strengths' such as resilience and grit (Bull and Allen 2018). For Bull and Allen (2018) the culmination of character education policy is seen in the publication of the Character and Resilience Manifesto from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility (Paterson, Tyler, and Lexmond 2014) and the White Paper 'Educational Excellence Everywhere' (DfE 2016). Similar policies have been enacted in the USA (Stokas 2015) and Australia (Cranston et al. 2010). The rationale for such policies has been to frame character and resilience as a policy solution to the problem of social inequality and mobility (Spohrer and Bailey 2020). However, as Allen and Bull (2018) outline those who have pursued and supported the development and integration of character education in schools (both in the UK and US) have done so in the pursuit of a social, political and economic agenda.

Character education research (Morrin 2018; Spohrer 2024; Spohrer and Bailey 2020) maintains that the inculcation of 'character' is a form of self-governance putting responsibility (including fault) with individuals, and in particular on members from disadvantaged groups. Slater (2022) contends that the weaving of resilience within a curriculum is damaging and dangerous for young people. Such practice, he argues, reintroduces an achievement ideology where effectively resilience is seen as something to build in order to become more socially mobile rather than questioning the system.

Unlike previous stages of education, there is not one policy moment or document to point to as the (re)introduction of resilience within the curriculum or broader concerns in HE. That said, there are parallels between how character and resilience have been framed as a solution to adversity and social mobility within education (Spohrer and Bailey 2020) and how resilience has been interpreted and developed within HE. This is evident in the increasing importance that key stakeholders place on resilience as a central characteristic for students to develop in order to survive the uncertainty and adversity within both HE and the graduate labour market. (OfS 2021a).

Individual student resilience has therefore become more prominent in the HE landscape as employers, policymakers and those with responsibility for supporting student well-being and careers have called for the development of resilience in three key areas. First, to help address student challenges with mental health and wellbeing (Hughes et al. 2022). Second, for preparing students to cope in high stress and demanding occupations (e.g. nursing/ social work) (Grant 2013). Finally for equipping students to survive a highly challenging and competitive labour market (Norton and Dalrymple 2021; Norton and Penaluna 2022). Consequently, there has been an increase in interventions to develop resilience (Green 2017; Tibby 2015), the incorporation of resilience as a graduate attribute within a range of subjects across disciplines and institutions (QAA 2019, 2024) and an emphasis on resilience by the UK HE regulator (OfS 2023, 2021b, 2020; Redwood 2020).

Against this backdrop, a body of research focusing on resilience and HE, has emerged which acknowledges the challenge of accessing and negotiating HE for individuals (Holdsworth, Turner, and Scott-Young 2018; Price 2023; Turner, Scott-Young and Holdsworth 2017). In a scoping review of resilience and wellbeing in HE, Price (2023) reports that general definitions within the HE literature understands resilience to include recovery, adaptation, tolerance and building stronger networks in the face of adversity. Adaptation is presented as a central characteristic of resilience within HE (Brewer et al. 2019; Holdsworth, Turner, and Scott-Young 2018; Reay, David, and Ball 2005). However, Mu (2022, 2021) argues that the focus and celebration of adaptability is problematic as it frames resilience as an individual responsibility to survive current adverse conditions.

Existing research focusing on resilience in HE is dominated by agentic representations of resilience which positions it as a responsibility of individuals (Ayala and Manzano 2018; Brewer et al. 2022). Holdsworth, Turner, and Scott-Young (2018) report that HE students articulate these agentic definitions when defining resilience as coping and bouncing back from adversity and placing themselves as having central responsibility for developing resilience. The extension of an agentic reading of resilience can also be seen in literature discussing how it can be trained or developed (Dickinson and Dickinson 2015; Holdsworth, Turner, and Scott-Young 2018; Turner, Scott-Young and Holdsworth 2017). However, such understandings of resilience do not consider underlying structural barriers to developing resilience in HE. For example, extra-curricular activities have been identified as a key

opportunity to develop resilience more broadly (Cotton, Nash, and Kneale 2017; Mu 2022). However, there is little acknowledgement of critical literature which highlights the social barriers to engaging in such activities (Bathmaker et al. 2016; Brown, Hesketh, and Williams 2004; Burke 2016).

Like accessing HE, early entry and navigation of the graduate labour market is characterised by challenge and adversity (Burke 2016) positioned as requiring significant levels of resilience (Price, Mansfield, and McConney 2012). As such resilience is understood as a key graduate attribute for successful navigation of the graduate labour market (Artess, Mellors-Bourne, and Hooley 2017). A central conceptual model for exploring preparation for and early experience of the graduate labour market is Tomlinson's (2017) graduate capitals. Here, Tomlinson outlines a series of interconnected capitals which graduates develop to support entry and maintenance of early graduate employability. One of Tomlinson's capitals is 'psychological capital' which he describes as 'psycho-social' resources which are used to deal with adversity experienced in the labour market. Core elements within this form of capital are 'adaptability', 'self-efficacy' and 'resilience'. Tomlinson's broader graduate capitals model has been criticised for its overly agentic presentations of developing and employing various capitals (Ingram et al. 2023). We maintain that this is a central issue within Tomlinson's presentation of psychological capital with Tomlinson understanding it to be driven by a 'high locus of self-control' (2017: 347) without acknowledging potential structural barriers or inequalities. Applications of Tomlinson's model in broader graduate employment literature (Pesonen et al. 2022; Pham, Tomlinson, and Thompson 2019; Singh and Fan 2021) have continued to present resilience (as a component of psychological capital) as a highly agentic process.

Current HE and youth research has demonstrated the central role of counter narratives in developing resilience in the face of adversity (Gallagher, Starkman, and Rhoades 2017; Gonzalez 2020; Hess 2019; Liu et al. 2022; López et al. 2020). For example, López et al. (2020) outline how resilience is fostered through developing a community between Latina/o academics and students to construct a counter narrative. They advocate that resilience is a multi-faceted model where individuals draw on their culture and community, which had been a source of adversity including racism, to develop resilience. While counter narratives are both a powerful response to adversity and a key expression of resilience, this may bring negative consequences for graduates. Individual graduates seeking to enter the graduate labour market need to demonstrate their resilience and employability to gatekeepers in this process (e.g. recruiters etc.) (Holmes 2013). They are therefore often being judged against dominant neo-liberal narratives of resilience. However, this does not mean that a counter narrative may not eventually be developed and employed by graduates. Whilst there is an emerging body of work which presents how unplanned and challenging trajectories in the graduate labour market can be potentially beneficial to individuals and their communities (Burke 2016; Christie and Burke 2021) notions of counter narratives and graduate resilience remain unexamined.

Overall, ideas of graduate resilience in the labour market have received limited critical attention (Scurry et al. 2020). Within much of the literature there is little political argument offered as to whether labour market relations which require and reward resilience are right or just – it is simply accepted as 'how it is'. Echoing previous critiques of neo-liberalism and resilience discussed above, Price, Mansfield, and McConney (2012) are deeply sceptical of championing resilience as they argue resilience has been co-opted by neo-liberalism as a

form of performativity where there is value in being seen to battle adversity. Current sociological research examining inequalities within HE and graduate employment has not problematised resilience in the same way as other highly individualised neo-liberal concepts for example, notions of choice (Reay, David, and Ball 2005). Often resilience has been presented as a trait to counter inequalities which facilitates increased levels of agency, however there is little critical questioning of the social inequalities impacting on building and deploying resilience (Clegg 2011; Gao and Adamson 2022). Burke and Scurry (2019) maintain that graduate resilience would benefit from a greater sociological lens with a relational understanding of structure and agency. Applying such a lens is important, as it allows for a consideration of how neo-liberal narratives of resilience reinforce notions of individual success and fault (McIntosh and Shaw 2017).

Bourdieu and graduate resilience

To consider the role of structure and agency to reconceptualise graduate resilience through a sociological lens, we maintain that Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice provides us with appropriate theoretical tools. As such, we echo Mu's (2022) argument that while Bourdieusian inspired research has tended to not engage with resilience that there is significant potential to re-politicise the concept and move beyond highly agentic individual representations. It is not our intention in this paper to provide a detailed unpacking of each of Bourdieu's thinking tools, however we feel it is important to outline how we understand Bourdieu's central concepts; habitus, capital and field and how they relate to and support a sociological examination of graduate resilience.

For Bourdieu, the concept of habitus was developed to allow for a theory of practice which considered both the role of structure and agency. Habitus is a set of dispositions of individuals or a group (Bourdieu 1977, 1992) which frame attitudes, expectations and practices. Habitus is formed through encounters and instruction from a range of actors and institutions, primarily education and family but to a lesser extent peers and social environment. Internalisation of some practices or attitudes can be harmful to the individual but presented as 'normal' or 'how it is', what Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) term symbolic violence. As Mu (2022) argues, the ways in which an individual or group approaches, applies or rejects resilience will be influenced by their dispositions, by their habitus. However, the objective conditions which form habitus are not equal and as such individuals may present contrasting approaches and attitudes toward resilience building and application.

The level to which habitus is open to change or augmentation is significant to graduate resilience as it relates to the durability of an individual's dispositions. Habitus has received significant critique, in particular Archer (2003) presents habitus as a rigid and fixed model of identity and practice. For Bourdieu (1992), conditions can exist to change and develop a habitus, however this requires a significant and prolonged effort on the part of the influence and therefore is unlikely to happen as an individual's *a priori* habitus directs them to familiar social spaces.

Our final point on habitus focuses on reflexivity, or more appropriately the assumed lack of reflexivity within the concept. Bourdieu has been criticised that the lack of reflexivity in his theoretical model points toward structural determinism (Archer 2003). However subsequent work (Ingram 2018) outlines the role of reflexivity within habitus. Here Ingram contends that when an individual's 'steps out' into a different social space, this experience

can generate reflexivity influencing practice and attitudes when returning to a familiar social space. However, it is important to recognise the continuing influence of the *a priori* habitus' dispositions before this 'stepping out' and on return. For Mu (2022), reflexivity is a powerful weapon to deconstruct the processes and impact of symbolic violence. As such, reflexivity provides an opportunity for critical engagement with social space and questions those relations which normalise and excuse adversity. It is reflexivity that provides an increased generative element of practice, in this way individuals are actively creating, or resilience building, rather than pre-reflexively reacting.

Turning to the concept of capital, Bourdieu (2004) outlines three main forms of capital: economic, social and cultural. Capitals are resources and like many other resources are not equally available to all. The power of capital comes through its recognition (or misrecognition) as legitimate, or not, this is what Bourdieu (1992) referred to as symbolic capital. To be resilient, an individual needs access to resources – this is effectively capital (Byrom and Lightfood 2012; Çelik 2017; Mu 2022; Obrist, Pfeiffer, and Henley 2010). In the context of graduate resilience, we reflect on Friedman, O'Brien and Laurison's (2017) depiction that capital 'insulates us' during challenging times. Previous research examining resilience in HE has advocated to look beyond Bourdieu's capitals (Clegg 2011; Gao and Adamson 2022; Yosso 2005), to avoid perpetuating a deficit perspective. We argue however not recognising such capitals, acknowledged and rewarded by the field, obscures relations and reproduction of power to the detriment of those not part of the elite.

Economic capital's relationship to graduate resilience is perhaps the most readily understandable, it provides a financial comfort during times of adversity. Social capital defines the unequal access to resources available through social networks and connections which can provide opportunities or social support/comfort therefore reducing periods of adversity requiring resilience. Cultural capital, in particular embodied cultural capital, is the embodied articulation of habitus (Ingram 2018) and as such expresses and employs those dispositions to support or reject resilience building and application. Alongside this, cultural capital also signals a level of belonging within social space (graduate labour market) and therefore also situates an individual within that space which may or may not require graduate resilience.

The final thinking tool we discuss is field. Effectively this is the context in which the interactions between habitus and capital play out. For Bourdieu, the field is often set up in such a way as to reproduce privilege and value or legitimise capitals and habitus of the dominant group. The field is not a passive arena but an active and dynamic concept. This dynamism can be demonstrated through the impact of a shift in the field's recognition of legitimate capitals and congruent habitus. Bourdieu argues that when such a shift happens there is a 'hysteresis of habitus' (Bourdieu 1984), this is a period between when the field shifts and members within the field understand the new requirements and act accordingly. When the field does shift, creating hysteresis of habitus, it may require all members of the social space to be resilient – however the level and duration of employing resilience will differ by social groups.

Reconceptualising graduate resilience

We now apply Bourdieusian social theory to provide a reconceptualisation of graduate resilience in a graduate's early transition into the labour market. We present an integrated

multi-level framework (Figure 1) which can be used to reframe graduate resilience as a complex social phenomenon operating within the context of neo-liberalism and mediated by different factors, in particular the role of material and social resources. We draw on Bourdieu to highlight the different stages of graduate resilience within our framework (recognition, development and judgement/evaluation) and the way in which these stages are shaped at the micro, meso and macro levels. These three stages present key periods within an undergraduate's/graduates' transition to the labour market. The framework allows for a consideration of structural barriers to building and signalling graduate resilience within and between these levels and the potential consequences stemming from these barriers. We will now provide a detailed consideration of each stage.

Stage 1 - recognition of adversity

The first stage within our framework for reconceptualising graduate resilience is recognition, here we mean that individuals and groups recognise a context or experience as being adverse and something for which they need to be resilient. Previous research (Bottrell 2013; Joseph 2013) has presented neo-liberalism as inherently uncertain and adverse which requires individuals to be resilient. However, within our model we maintain that individuals need

Levels/Stages	Recognition	Development	Judgement/Evaluation
Micro-level	Recognition of adverse/unfavourable circumstances by individuals	Developing capitals to navigate adverse/unfavourable circumstances	Utilising capitals to signal resilience to gatekeepers
Meso-level	Social/environmental triggers for supporting recognition of adverse circumstances	Available support to engage in activities to acquire/develop capitals	Affirmation/confirmation of resilience by gatekeepers
Macro-level	Unequal labour market opportunities Adverse economic conditions	Opportunities for and access to work experience, internships, volunteering to develop capitals	Labour market defining and rewarding resilience
Structural Barriers	Stratified recognition based on forms of capital	Unequal opportunities for valid capital acquisition and utilisation. Seeing the need to focus on developing capitals beyond educational capital	Elite and narrow understandings of resilience
Individual Manifestations	Misrecognition of adverse circumstances/ future opportunities	Recognising and developing valid capitals Resources to access support and opportunities	Ability to signal resilience

Figure 1. Integrated multi-level framework for reconceptualising graduate resilience.

to first recognise adversity which cannot be assumed. We propose that the action of recognition and the processes leading to recognition happens within three interconnected levels, this is an important distinction to avoid presenting recognition as solely an individual process.

The *micro level* involves recognition of a circumstance or experience as being adverse and therefore requiring a response or a reaction, typically framed as resilience. These circumstances can include a highly competitive graduate labour market at odds with a relatively supportive HE system with a focus on student satisfaction and rights (Naidoo and Williams 2015). Without recognising adversity individuals may continue to act in a way which does not question conditions and inequalities which lead to adverse contexts and/or experiences. At the *meso level*, the recognition of adversity can come through social contacts who prompt individuals to recognise adverse contexts (e.g. differential career outcomes for different groups of graduates on the basis of ethnicity and gender). These could be personal/informal or formal relationships including family, friends and HE professionals such as teaching staff and careers practitioners. At the *macro level*, the market effectively creates the adverse circumstances. In the context of the graduate labour market, this is the skewed levels of supply and demand and increasingly high levels of graduate unemployment and underemployment (Scurry and Blenkinsopp 2011) exacerbated by global events. In addition, there is also the constantly evolving and shifting labour market including the deregulation of work (Haapakorpi 2022) and an increase in self-employment/portfolio/precarious careers.

Barriers and individual manifestations

To present a more sociological understanding of graduate resilience it is important to consider why individuals may differ in their recognition of adversity. There are two central structural barriers to consider within this stage; recognition and misrecognition of adverse circumstances and stratified recognition based on forms of capital. We argue that individuals' (mis)recognition of adverse circumstance in the graduate labour market can differ due to contrasting understandings based on social position and habitus. Conceptually this can be seen to align with Bourdieu's notion of misrecognition which 'refers to an everyday and dynamic social process where one thing (say, a situation, process, or action) is not recognised for what it is because it was not previously 'cognised' within the range of dispositions and propensities of the habitus of the person(s) confronting it' (James 2015, 100).

Individual students/graduates need to recognise a situation as being adverse to respond. However, for Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) the process of symbolic violence can inform dispositions within the habitus to misrecognise adverse conditions as legitimate and normal. We argue that there is value in considering the role of symbolic violence (Burke 2016; Reay, David, and Ball 2005) to reconceptualise graduate resilience as it impacts on levels of reflexivity shaping awareness and attitudes to adversity. In terms of individual manifestations of these barriers, Burke (2016) outlines classed differences in graduates' attitudes to conditions which reproduce classed inequalities. Burke found that working class graduates accepted adverse conditions arising from structural inequalities, as being normal and excluded themselves from opportunities, due to a perceived lack of suitability based on identity rather than qualifications/skills. Such self-exclusion removes the opportunity to develop and employ resilience. This is in contrast to the more agentic presentations of resilience within character education policy (Allen and Bull 2018) and HE (Price 2023).

The unquestioning pre-reflexive acceptance of social conditions and relations that can result from symbolic violence can be amplified through core social connections that an individual has access to (e.g. family, friends and wider social connections) which shape an individual's habitus and subsequent attitudes toward relations within the graduate labour market (Burke, Scurry, and Blenkinsopp 2020). This results in a stratified recognition of adverse circumstances based on forms of capital. There is a need to consider the ways in which social connections influence if and how an individual recognises circumstances as being adverse (James 2015). This is due to an individual's habitus orientating an individual to social groups that they identify with and share subjective outlooks based on occupying similar social spaces (Bourdieu 1992). The consequence being that core social connections can reinforce an individual's misrecognition of adversity. For graduate resilience, key formal relationships through education, (e.g. lecturers and careers practitioners) can play a formative role in challenging or reinforcing individuals' habitus. However, arguably the emergence and establishment of neo-liberalism within HE has shifted professional practice away from one that is critical to one which is more passive or 'safe' (Naidoo and Williams 2015) questioning how effective these relationships are for challenging the status quo. Scurry et al. (2020) report on the hesitancy of HE careers practitioners to characterise the labour market as challenging and adverse for fear of contradicting meritocratic assumptions concerning HE's relationship to the graduate labour market and increased life chances. Consequently, misrecognition of the graduate labour market may continue throughout education and early transitions to the labour market.

Stage 2 – development of capitals to navigate adverse circumstances

Building on stage one, recognition of adversity, our second stage of the framework is developing capitals to navigate these adverse circumstances. Here we propose that individuals need to develop and acquire capitals that shape their ability and opportunities to navigate adversity – typically portrayed as 'being resilient'. We argue for an examination of how the development of capitals is shaped by the micro, meso and macro levels to avoid an overly individualised understanding of 'being resilient'. At the *micro level*, individuals can be understood to develop resources or capitals, for example work experience or extra-curricular activities (Bathmaker et al. 2016; Tomlinson 2017), that support navigation of adverse circumstances in the graduate labour market. The *meso level* can provide support to raise awareness of and facilitate access to opportunities to engage in activities, similar to recognition this can include family and friends and more formal connections such as HE staff. The *macro level* involves the availability and access to opportunities for developing resources and capitals through education or work (e.g. internships, work placements) which may then demonstrate levels of resilience to gatekeepers/employers in the labour market.

Barriers and individual manifestations

To continue our sociological examination of graduate resilience we argue it is essential to consider not only how individuals may differ in their recognition of adversity but to also consider how this shapes individuals' responses to adverse circumstances. Effectively, this is how they seek to develop resources and capitals which they perceive will support entry and navigation of the graduate labour market. Drawing on Bourdieu, we argue, that what

is typically framed as 'being resilient' in the context of a challenging graduate labour market, is not simply about human capital and individual skills but rather is a complex integration of resources and capitals. However not all are able to access or develop these resources and capitals equally (Brown, Hesketh, and Williams 2004; Burke, Scurry, and Blenkinsopp 2020). There are three central structural barriers to consider within this stage, these are concerned with recognising the value of different capitals in the labour market, knowing how to develop them and subsequently having opportunities to then develop them.

In the context of the decreasing buying power of a degree, a key issue is how students react to this shift in the labour market to support successful entry and navigation, which will be based on their recognition of what is valued by 'the market' - employers. Bourdieu (1984) specifically references changes in degree/market relations as a form of hysteresis of habitus, where non-traditional students may experience a prolonged stage of operating under an outdated system. However, Tomlinson (2013) presents students as reflexive agents who aware of this market shift have moved toward a parallel model of academic credentials and additional/extra-curricular resources to rebalance this relationship. A central issue remains however concerning which students recognise this shift and successfully respond. In their research focusing on final year undergraduate students' employment expectations and plans, Burke, Scurry, and Blenkinsopp (2020) present classed contrasts in student attitudes toward the meritocratic nature of the graduate labour market and the continued buying power of a degree. The consequence being that students from working class backgrounds may not recognise the value of additional capitals and the need to develop these resources.

Alongside this issue of recognising the need to develop additional capitals is how a student begins to develop legitimate/symbolic capitals expected and welcomed by the graduate labour market. Research from Paired Peers (Bathmaker et al. 2016; Ingram et al. 2023) presents contrasting strategies that students/graduates employ to develop such resources. Ingram, Abrahams, and Bathmaker (2018) outline one working class student who expected their profile of studying full time and maintaining at least part-time employment throughout their degree as a sign of resilience and strong work ethic. However, they were increasingly disillusioned that this was not recognised as valuable by employers as they applied for graduate jobs. This graduate's labour market experience supports Bottrell's (2013) assertion that the form of resilience expected and rewarded by neo-liberalism is at odds with the broader understanding of resilience as overcoming adversity and succeeding.

In addition to seeing the value in and identifying capitals to develop, it is important to consider that individuals also need support and opportunities to develop them. Reflecting on Bourdieu's (2004) three main forms of capital, discussed previously, we argue for a need to examine the nuanced development of each form. In terms of economic capital, this is the clearest form of capital that can support an individual when navigating an adverse situation. Existing research tends to emphasise the importance of social and cultural capitals for graduates (Tomlinson 2017). However, financial resources for example parental economic capital, the 'Bank of Mum and Dad' (Toft and Friedman 2021), provide both a safety net and opportunities to engage in activities to develop resources/capitals for career progression. However, access to these financial resources is less likely for non-traditional students (Bathmaker et al. 2016; Reay, David, and Ball 2005).

When considering social capital, we propose a need to explicitly recognise challenges in developing this form of capital. Key sites that support the development of social capital

during HE include extra-curricular activities and internships/work placement (Tomlinson 2017). However, access to these opportunities are unequal (Bathmaker et al. 2016; Bradley, Waller, and Bentley 2022). Barriers around extra-curricular activities can include the need for students to engage in paid employment during termtime, expense of participation and a need to balance care responsibilities. In addition, extra-curricular activities have been shown to be gendered, and exclusionary to some ethnic minority groups (Isopahkala-Bouret, Siivonen, et al. 2023). In terms of internships and work placements, these can be subject specific with not all degree programmes or institutions having these opportunities. (Tholen et al. 2013). Furthermore, the chance to take up often unpaid internships, outside of formal university terms/teaching, relies on having financial support and/or existing social connections, through family or friends (Bradley, Waller, and Bentley 2022; Toft and Friedman, 2021).

Within graduate employment literature cultural capital is often presented as soft skills and attributes to support entry and navigation of the labour market. We maintain that cultural capital is central for understanding, developing and signalling resilient dispositions and situating an individual within social space. This is a specific capital within Tomlinson's (2017) graduate capital model, which he argues can be developed through cultural exposure to new institutional practices and norms. However, we argue that developing cultural capital is more complex than a case of exposure to new situations. Our rationale being that effectively the form of cultural capital that broader graduate employment literature and Tomlinson (2017) is referring to is embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu 2004). Understanding embodied cultural capital to be the articulation and embodiment of habitus (Ingram 2018; Reay, David, and Ball 2005), this form of cultural capital therefore has the same durable nature as the habitus. While being open to change, this requires prolonged engagement and substantial effort on the part of the individual/institution who is attempting to influence the development of embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu 1992).

Viewing cultural capital in this way allows for an understanding of differences in opportunity for individuals to recognise and develop this resource to navigate adverse circumstances. This reflects the positional competition (Brown 2000; Isopahkala-Bouret, Tholen, et al. 2023) in the graduate labour market which focuses not only on credentials but also on how graduates know how to behave in settings related to labour market entry and navigation. For example, Bradley, Waller, and Bentley (2022) discuss the expectations and requirements of prospective barristers to attend and 'pass' numerous formal dinners in their pursuit to secure a pupillage at one of the four historic chambers in London. Their point being that working class graduates may not possess levels/forms of cultural capital recognised by the field, in this case the legal profession, and therefore navigating this space is increasingly challenging.

Stage 3 - judgement and evaluation

The third stage of resilience in our framework, draws attention to the judgement/evaluation of an individual graduate's resilience as they transition into the labour market. Here we propose that individuals are required to signal their ability to be 'resilient' to gatekeepers – in the case of the graduate labour market, those involved with recruitment and selection processes. We argue that examining this at the micro, meso and macro levels furthers understanding of how signalling resilience is bound up and shaped by wider structures.

At the *micro level,* to gain entry to the labour market, individuals are required to signal resilience within the recruitment stage, this may be through their application or early and

advanced shortlisting. The main stakeholders at the *meso level* will be recruiters and employers who, as gatekeepers, play a key role in recognising and confirming graduate resilience (Holmes 2013). At the *macro level,* judgement/evaluation involves the recognition and valuing of resilience within the context of the graduate labour market, for example the prevalence of resilience being listed as a key attribute/strength by graduate employers (QS 2019; WEF 2023) and or the requirement for the demonstration of resilience through recruitment and selection processes. This reflects the celebration and desirability of resilience at the macro level.

Barriers and individual manifestations

In this stage, judgement and evaluation, we argue that it is important to recognise that graduate resilience is reliant on graduates being able to signal resilience within recruitment and selection processes in ways that are recognised by the labour market. Holmes (2013) highlights how gatekeepers are central to confirming a graduate's identity. Tomlinson and Anderson (2021) discuss the importance of signalling resources (we argue including resilience) beyond credentials as this can demonstrate a suitable level of 'fit' between an individual and an organisation. Blackmore and Rahimi (2019) argue that 'best fit' approaches can result in unconscious cultural and gender bias. This echoes previous research on the role of employers in graduate and elite recruitment (Brown and Scase 1994; Friedman and Laurison 2019; Ingram and Allen 2019) which illustrates how recruitment practices often reproduce the social status quo. Extending these arguments to graduate resilience, the process to decide what resilience looks like falls to those within established powerful positions whose preference for those with whom they share an affinity is masked by a narrative of natural attributes and individual grit. In other words, we propose that there is a need to consider the likelihood for a stratification of representations of resilience (stronger vs weaker) based on social class, gender, race and ethnicity.

Ashley and Empson (2013) highlight how recruiters in certain professions associate 'talent' with performances of cultural display – accent, confidence, 'polish'. Extending these discussions on more broad concepts of 'fit', we argue that signalling, 'resilient behaviour' specifically, can only be done if you are able to do this in a way that is recognised by a prospective employer. However, as Ingram and Allen (2019) argue the evaluations of objective criteria within graduate recruitment, are in fact underpinned by subjective recognition of dispositions and capitals. The largely informal and tacit signalling of resilience requires a particular 'feel for the game' supported by habitus and forms of capitals recognised by the field (Bourdieu 1984). In the context of the graduate labour market, we argue that non-traditional or less privileged students/graduates are less likely to possess this habitus/capital combination and may struggle to then articulate resilient behaviour in a way that is recognised by gatekeepers. In addition, the extent to which individuals are willing to utilise experiences beyond their HE credentials to signal resilience may also be subject to variation. Abrahams (2017) demonstrates that non-traditional graduates prefer to be evaluated on their credentials and not to supplement this with previous experiences or non-scholastic capital, which we argue could shape if and how individuals are able or willing to signal resilience.

Next steps and future research agenda

The aim of this article was to challenge dominant portrayals of resilience in the context of graduate employability which tend to over emphasise the agency of individual graduates

in developing and displaying resilience, whilst ignoring structural conditions that shape and complicate the reality of the labour market. This paper began by examining sociological concepts of resilience more broadly and outlined the current representation of resilience within both HE and graduate employment literature, and how this has evolved within a broader political and historical context. We maintain that graduate resilience has not been afforded the same critical examination as other areas of HE and graduate employment. Our framework illuminates the challenges within dominant portrayals of graduate resilience in early transitions to the labour market, providing a basis for more critical understandings. We argue for the development of a broader definition of graduate resilience as - *navigating adverse situations within the graduate labour market which come to a positive outcome for individuals involved.*

Further to this definition, we suggest the following caveats for clarification:

- Positive outcomes are subjective to an individual, as such these span from becoming socially mobile and increasing one's life chances to having an increased sense of self and accomplishment.
- Final outcomes may differ from original desired aspirations.
- Resilience is an emergent concept, one which is developed and requires both individual action and external recognition.

This reconceptualisation of graduate resilience considers both the subjective wellbeing of the individual and the influence of wider structural barriers. However, as our framework highlights, the central barriers to moving toward this realisation of graduate resilience lie in the highly neo-liberalised presentation of resilience, the power of symbolic violence and misrecognition and a narrow understanding of measures of success for both graduates and employers. In unpacking these barriers this paper makes three main contributions to advance a critical understanding of graduate resilience in early labour market transitions. First, we provide a critical unpacking of graduate resilience and present a case for the application of Bourdieu's theory of practice to this topic. Second, we construct an integrated multi-level framework to reconceptualise graduate resilience. In keeping with the sociological focus on structure/agency and individual/society we present three stages of graduate resilience and consider the role of the individual, group and broader society. Importantly, we then unpack the barriers that individuals may face within and between these stages. Finally, in framing graduate resilience as a political concept (Zembylas 2020) rather than an individual characteristic our framework identifies a meaningful way forward for future research examining graduate resilience.

We propose that applying our framework in future research will provide an opportunity to consider graduate resilience in a much more critical and sociological manner. There are a range of research agendas which this framework can support. First, an exploration of institutional support and the role of student characteristics in recognising, developing and signalling resilience. Second, examining the ways in which sector specific organisational dynamics shape definitions and recognition of graduate resilience at the recruitment and appointment stage. Third, our framework highlights the value for future research to adopt a longitudinal approach to data collection which would allow for a deeper understanding of the interactions between structures and agency over time and in response to changing labour markets.

We maintain that our framework offers a critical contribution to a sociological understanding of graduate resilience within post-industrial societies. It provides a conceptual account of inequalities within a concept which is positioned as a highly agentic response/solution to adversity and social inequality. Research informed by our framework will have practical implications for different stakeholder groups. For HE institutions, it encourages the consideration of inequalities, barriers and systemic biases impacting on developing and signalling resilience. Recognising and responding to these barriers is a first step for HE institutions to address such issues in line with responsibilities to support successful outcomes for all students. For employers, we demonstrate the need to proactively engage in reviewing policies and practices to consider the role of social reproduction in the signalling and confirmation of resilience in the graduate labour market. This aligns with wider debates around equality and social mobility in the workplace. For policy makers our framework raises questions about the need for labour market interventions to address social inequalities. Importantly, for policy and practice stakeholders we have demonstrated the durable nature of neo-liberalism and the central role notions of resilience play within this. As such, any significant changes or progress to a more equitable recognition will be a prolonged and challenging process.

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