

# University education and the replication of the social hierarchy through pseudo-illumination and shallow-mirroring

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## Abstract

This paper focusses on how University students are made to believe that through university education, they will be able to challenge the existing structures, whilst they are in fact controlled by these very structures, processes and practices. The higher education system therefore lures students with an illusion of empowerment and illumination which can be referred to as pseudo-illumination. Students are unable to see how, through these structures, processes and practices, as well as their own pre-dispositions and aptitude, they are made to replicate the social hierarchy. Those who form part of the ruling elite and are expected to take up leading positions in society undergo a completely different educational trajectory from those who are expected to occupy middle-management positions, or more subordinate roles. Thus, admission to a specific university is a signal of even greater social differentiation, rather than an equaliser. In addition, whilst their parents (and the students) have high expectations when they join the world of higher education, this will not necessarily lead to positive outcomes in terms of climbing the social ladder or improve their ability to understand how they are being compartmentalised based on their initial position in the social hierarchy. They are made to believe that they have a fair chance and that the most deserving students make it to the top, whilst in fact, the race is rigged from the very beginning. What takes place on the ground is that, despite the rhetoric of university as an equaliser, university education contributes to a shallow mirroring of the social hierarchy, where there is mere replication of the initial stratification present within society.

**Keywords:** Higher education; Structures; illusion; replication; social differentiation