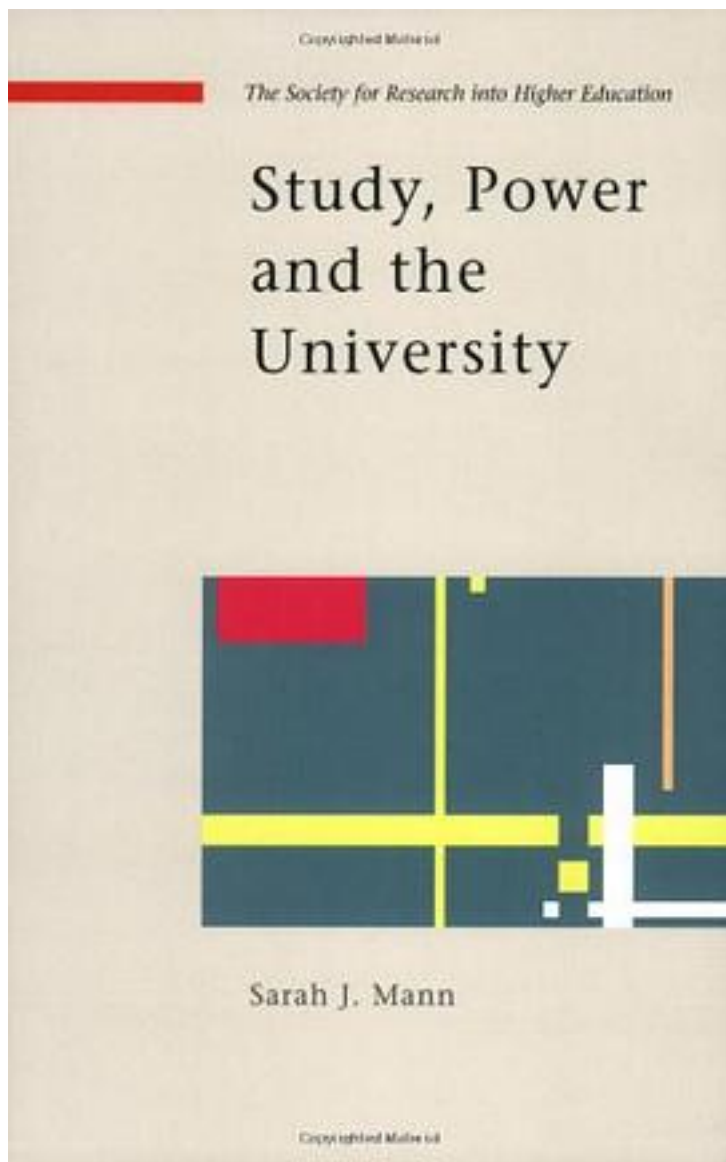


Study Power and the University



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Higher education is neither neutral in its effects, and neither is it natural. Universities have evolved as institutions over time to perform certain key social, cultural and economic functions. Higher education has its own particular culture, social relations and practices, governed by certain social and discursive norms. As such, it is always implicated in relations of power through its function in society and its effects on individuals. For the student, these effects can be enabling and engaging, or limiting and diminishing. The purpose of this book is to add to more cognitive and pedagogic ways of understanding student learning and student experience in higher education, by exploring the effects of the institutionalisation of learning as studying within the university and the workings of power implicated within this. To this end, Part 1 of the book offers a review of our understanding of student learning and an account of the student experience as indicated by qualitative research in this area. It concludes that for some students and at certain times in a student's career a potentially productive and enlivening learning experience can be undermined by institutional norms and practices. In order to understand how this 'undermining' effect might come about, the second part of the book proposes a framework for conceptualising the institution as a context for learning which takes account of the role of power within this. The book then focuses specifically on the social and economic functions of higher education; the hidden curriculum produced by the institutionalisation of time, space, activity and the self; the social and discursive nature of productive (writing and speaking) and interpretive (reading and listening) learning tasks; and the special case of assessment. The final part of the book summarises the implications of this perspective for our understanding of the student experience and the challenges facing the student, and argues that the challenge for the institution is not the enhancement of learning per se, but the enhancement of the student's freedom to learn. The book aligns itself with the view that support for the realisation of an individual's potential to learn in an enlivening and engaging way is an issue of social justice. The book ends by proposing five conditions for enabling the achievement of this. The ideas discussed in this book are informed by theory and research on student learning and experience in higher education, the sociology of education, critical theory, psycho-analysis, critical discourse analysis, post-modernism, and critical humanism. The book provides an analysis of the complexities of the teaching and learning process in higher education and a reminder of the issue of power and social and institutional context within this. The book will be of interest to higher education researchers, educational developers, academics, and higher education managers.

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