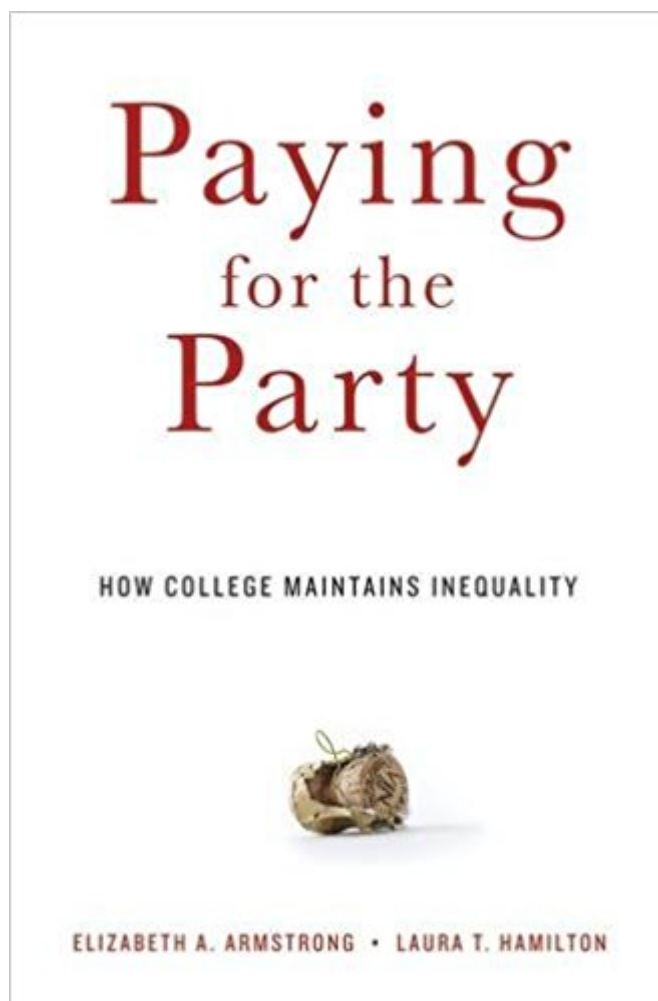


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Paying For The Party: How College Maintains Inequality



Synopsis

In an era of skyrocketing tuition and concern over whether college is “worth it,” this is an indispensable contribution to the dialogue assessing the state of American higher education. A powerful exposé of unmet obligations and misplaced priorities, it explains in detail why so many leave college with so little to show for it.

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Customer Reviews

In typical frat parties, Armstrong and Hamilton see much that is wrong with college education today. Such parties allow daughters of the affluent to flaunt their social advantages while exposing the vulnerabilities of female students from less-privileged backgrounds. Unfortunately, the authors find such parties well established in the “party pathway” through the university. Focusing on female students, the authors find from campus observations and interviews ample evidence that four years on the party pathway will open doors of power for the elite while stranding the wannabes with mountains of student-loan debt and few employment options for paying off that debt. The authors suggest a number of reforms—including the abolition of Greek fraternities, the termination of legacy admissions for the offspring of rich alumni, and the replacement of the college “party pathway” with a “mobility pathway” giving struggling students generous financial aid, supportive remedial courses, and a direct path to good careers. A provocative exposé of socially polarizing trends in higher education—certain to spark debate. --Bryce Christensen --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In this bold book, Armstrong and Hamilton capture the strikingly different pathways women undergraduates can take through public universities--'party,' 'professional,' or 'mobility'--and show how the dominant campus culture indulges the upper-middle class and limits the prospect of the upwardly mobile. The authors show the complex connections between parental resources, sociability, educational outcome, post-graduation lives, and the importance of the right brand of shoes. This book illuminates the realities of the college experience today, when an adult life without crushing debt is fast becoming the privilege of the few. (Michelle Lamont, author of *How Professors Think*)

Paying for the Party is very provocative and should be read by every dean of students on every residential campus. At a time when women are making rapid progress in educational attainment compared to men, Armstrong and Hamilton show how young women's academics, social lives, and labor-market opportunities get aligned in college--and what happens when they do not. (Mitchell Stevens, author of *Creating a Class*)

By focusing on the lives of young women who spent freshman year living on a 'party floor,' Armstrong and Hamilton help us understand critical issues facing American higher education, including the out-sized role of sororities and fraternities and how the values of affluent students coincide with the interests of universities to empower the 'party pathway.' Richly observed and vividly narrated, this is an important ethnography of American campus life. (Steven Brint, University of California, Riverside)

With astute observations and insights, *Paying for the Party* sheds new light on the lived experiences of contemporary students. It is a very important piece of scholarship that will inform the national discourse on the current state of U.S. higher education. (Richard Arum, author of *Academically Adrift*)

Armstrong and Hamilton report the results of their five-year study of a group of young women who began in the same freshman dorm but ended up in very different situations. The constraints of social and economic class remained formidable, and moving into the professional class seemed virtually impossible, especially for those women who followed what the authors call 'the party pathway.'

Women from more privileged backgrounds survived their partying through school due to their more substantial support systems at home. We also see how difficult the college adjustment was for less talented students and for women from modest backgrounds and small towns...The conclusions are sobering, if not depressing. Armstrong and Hamilton assail the university itself for a number of failures, including an ineffectual system of student advising; a plethora of meaningless majors and courses designed to attract full-paying students, many of whom have no intention of actually pursuing such a career; and its continuing support for the fraternity/sorority system, which the authors contend undermines the very academic mission of the university. Athletics take some major

blame, as well. The authors also discovered that some of the women who transferred to regional campuses performed better and were happier. (Kirkus Reviews 2013-02-15) In typical frat parties, Armstrong and Hamilton see much that is wrong with college education today. Such parties allow daughters of the affluent to flaunt their social advantages while exposing the vulnerabilities of female students from less-privileged backgrounds. Unfortunately, the authors find such parties well established in the 'party pathway' through the university. Focusing on female students, the authors find from campus observations and interviews ample evidence that four years on the party pathway will open doors of power for the elite while stranding the wannabes with mountains of student-loan debt and few employment options for paying off that debt...A provocative exposé of socially polarizing trends in higher education--certain to spark debate. (Bryce Christensen Booklist 2013-04-01) Armstrong and Hamilton pepper the book with student interviews, and ultimately suggest substantial changes to university structure for creating an egalitarian, merit-based environment. The extensive research and approachable writing style make this book useful to any audience interested in learning more about social differences within the education system. (Publishers Weekly 2013-04-26) Focusing on the pathways leading to the college experience, the authors reveal an honest, if at times unflattering, look at the reality of the academic experience for women of both high and low socioeconomic status. Packed in with the data derived from the authors' interviews is an intimate portrait of the study's participants combined with researcher commentary that clarifies what the data represent: an unsettling picture of universities failing to lessen the disadvantages facing many of their students...This work will provide spectacular insights into gender and schooling and serve as a useful example of how to report ethnographic research. (Rachel Wadham Library Journal (starred review) 2013-05-15) A striking new book...Although full of the comedies, rivalries and mini-dramas one might find in a high school movie or romcom, it is also a serious--and seriously depressing--study of American higher education. (Matthew Reisz Times Higher Education 2013-05-09) Instead of being a great equalizer, Paying for the Party argues, the American way of college rewards those who come not just academically but socially prepared, while treating working-class students more cruelly, and often leaving them adrift. (Ross Douthat New York Times 2014-05-03) Paying for the Party is well written and perversely hard to put down. Readers who did their own share of partying in college may cringe in rueful recognition. (Mary Taylor Huber Change 2014-09-01) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

While I had a little trouble keeping of the various women on the floor on my Kindle version, I found this be an enjoyable, easy, and thought-provoking read. I'm not a social scientist so can't comment

on whether the methodology and sample size "confirm" the findings, but there is no doubt that the authors have captured some important truths in their study, and they should be noted by students, parents, and administrators. Particularly at a school such as the one highlighted here which attracts students with varying resources and objectives -- but really at any -- several of the "pathways" may be highly seductive yet inappropriate for a portion of the student body. When colleges (public or private) report on "outcomes", they don't put an asterisk next to the ones that required the graduate's family to support him/her financially and/or to use the family's network to create that outcome. (The fact that 95% of the class is employed or in grad school 6 months after graduation may say more about the demographics of the student body than the value of the degree or effectiveness of the Career Placement office.) Good advising, academic and social, is critical to success and needs to be calibrated to the student's circumstances. I would recommend this book for anyone looking for a framework for thinking about the academic and social options at any school and coming up with a strategy for navigating them.

There have been some anthropological and sociological studies of college life over the years. I was actually a participant in Michael Moffatt's classic "Coming of Age in New Jersey," but I'd be the first to say that he was just scratching the surface. "My Freshman Year" by Cathy Small (under the name Rebekah Nathan) is also occasionally insightful but based only on the author's limited experience. Holland and Eisenhart's "Educated in Romance" comes closer to what Armstrong and her group of grad students were trying to achieve, in trying to understand the female experience of college, but the end result in "Paying for the Party" is so much more detailed and all-encompassing of student life than that or any book written so far. We can talk all we want about raising academic standards and such, but if we ignore the role of student life at college we are missing the most important dimension of the college experience for students -- and the part of their experience that most determines how much they will focus on their studies, whether or not they will persist in school (much more than academics), and what sort of success they will have after they graduate. This book is an absolute revelation -- showing how important the party culture is for students who follow "the party pathway" through school, and just how that culture serves the interests of the most affluent and well connected students to the detriment of all the rest. A powerful and compelling thesis.

This is a review of the college 'track' system with reference to multiple case studies. Overall, it just paints yet another way of how the US education system is furthering the lack of social upward

mobility.

It was a beautiful fall day my freshman year in 1976 as I walked across campus at the Midwestern University I attended. With a combination of scholarships, Pell Grants and working fifty hours a week during the summer, I was able to attend this land-grant university. A bright red convertible drove by, driven by a "Frat-Rat" with several "Sorority Sisters" riding in the back. They were all beautiful. I was in awe. At that moment, I knew then I would never be able to compete socially with that type of group and at that moment made a decision to never aspire to do such a thing. I am very pleased with the education I received at the University and the doors that education opened to me. But I did know my place. Thirty years later, I was well aware that my daughters, though very capable academically, would do better at a smaller college with less social jockeying. It was a good decision for all three. I just ordered this book and look forward to having that epiphanic moment substantiated. (I'm giving this book 4 stars based on the portion I've already read.) Update: I received the book and read it from cover to cover in a few days. This book substantiates what I've come to know teaching high school and checking in with graduates for 35 years. Students with intention will make it! That intention starts with following through with proper course-work before stepping on campus, getting internships while in college, and studying/working like crazy while in college. The poorer the student is, the more they need to practice those things. The rich do have a leg up; a safety net of money. The book seems slightly skewed toward writer bias, but is still a great read, with good points.

Great study. The authors lament on the lack of money students have, but other than that, it provided great insight to the growing issue of inequality in education.

This book about the varying fates of a floor of freshmen at "Midwest University" tells a worthwhile and interesting story. The authors do a good job of explaining the social dynamics of the school and of these women, and their methodological choices in doing the research that resulted in this book. My only quarrel with it as a book is that it ends up being somewhat repetitive as it describes the same women in the same way numerous times, albeit often in slightly different contexts. I don't know how much of this comes from the demands of writing a scholarly book, but the end result is a book which is a fair bit longer than it needed to be.

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