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Degrees of Choice: Social Class, Race and Gender in Higher Education

By Reay, Diane; David, Miriam E.; Ball, Stephen

Trentham Books, U.S.A., 2005. Soft cover. Book Condition: New. Degrees of Choice provides a sophisticated account of the overlapping effects of social class, ethnicity and gender in the process of choosing which university to attend. The shift from an elite to a mass system has been accompanied by much political rhetoric about widening access, achievement-for-all and meritocratic equalization. This book gives a full and contrary picture, drawing on qualitative and quantitative data to show how the welcome expansion of higher education has also deepened social stratification, generating new and different inequalities. While gender inequalities have reduced, those of social class remain and are now reinforced by racial inequalities in access. Employing perspectives from the sociology of education and particularly Bourdieu's work on distinction and judgment, the book links school institutional habitus and family class habitus, with individual choice making in a socially informed dynamic. The contradictions and tensions arising from attempts to expand student numbers rapidly are vividly brought alive through the narratives of prospective applicants to higher education. Students are seen to confront vastly different degrees of choice that are powerfully shaped by their social class and race. This rich empirical study of 500 applicants to higher education draws...



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