

James Coleman Symposium 2025 - Program and Abstracts

Title: *Inequality by Chance? The role of randomness and luck in people's fate*

Date: Friday, 4 April 2025

Location: Belle van Zuylen room, Academy Hall, Utrecht University, Domplein 29, 3512 JE Utrecht

Program:

13:00 Coffee and welcome

13:15 -14:00

Ineke Maas: *You can't choose your parents: the role of luck in explaining educational inequality*

14:00-14:45

Arie Glebbeek: *Artificial scarcity: an important concept?*

14:45-15:15 – Coffee/tea break – report from the JCA

15:15-16:00

Zoltán Lippényi: *Equality by Design: Corporate Quotas and Gender Inequality in Organizations*

16:00-16:45

Arnout van de Rijt: *The long-term effects of chance on life course achievement*

16:45-17:00 Discussion and Closing

17:00-18:00 Reception- reunion

Abstracts:

Ineke Maas

You can't choose your parents: the role of luck in explaining educational inequality

The often made distinction between ascription and achievement suggests that which position individuals reach in society is to a large extent determined by their own efforts (achievement). It is often overlooked that also achievement is strongly affected not only by social, but also by genetic characteristics of the parents. In my presentation I will give a brief overview of our research on how educational attainment is influenced by genes, social background and their interplay.

Arie Glebbeek

Artificial scarcity: an important concept?

Economists and sociologists differ on the reason why education plays such a prominent role in the labour market. For economists it is predominantly human capital, sociologists give more room to

positional goods and social closure. However, both alternatives have run into empirical difficulties. Could artificial scarcity be the missing element?

Zoltán Lippényi

Equality by Design: Corporate Quotas and Gender Inequality in Organizations

Donald Trump's recent executive order prohibiting Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEUI) policies in U.S. federal organizations has revitalized discussions on government involvement in organizational resource allocation. Some stakeholders argue that such policies might compromise merit-based selection, while others consider them essential for addressing existing inequalities. This presentation outlines key preliminary findings from a Dutch Science Foundation project examining the impact of nationally mandated Dutch boardroom quotas on gender equality. Over a ten-year period, we observed a modest average positive impact on women's representation in corporate leadership and the gender wage gap, with significant variation across organizations. These findings indicate that both sides of the debate may overestimate the influence of government mandates and neglect the significance of local organizational processes in shaping inequality. I will discuss initial explanations for this variation and consider the implications for developing a local sociology of inequality.

Arnout van de Rijt

The long-term effects of chance on life course achievement

In this talk I report on research I have conducted with Martin Arvidsson and Marc Keuschnigg using Swedish register data. We trace pairs of Swedes who lead similar lives until one gets unlucky. We investigate if over the subsequent years the scars gradually heal or if the unlucky Swede's achievement increasingly falls behind that of their luckier counterpart. We present a model that says what happens depends on the cumulative disadvantage effect being above some critical level. Then we use US panel survey data to see if things look different in a less forgiving society, where cumulative disadvantage arguably is stronger.