

What the College Admissions Scandal Reveals

A Tweetstorm.

1/ The signaling theory of education is correct.

Except a degree is not a signal of employability.

It's a signal of adherence to the dominant social status religion of the day.

2/ Evidence is everywhere.

The mother who pressures her successful, happy, entrepreneur child to get a degree, while she proudly brags about her depressed, unemployed, basement-dwelling degreed child.

3/ The human capital theory of education is clearly bunk. Most people then conclude that degrees are bought because they are an employability signal.

This is also untrue, though it's easy to see why it can appear that way sometimes.

4/ Not only are there classic correlation problems (e.g people with sports cars/degrees have more money on average), but social status games play a part in other games, like workplace politics, etc.

5/ The signal of social status games has overlap with the signal of employability. Some people prefer to hire other people who play the same social status games.

But employment signal is not the fundamental, causal mechanism for why people buy degrees.

6/ This is proven in so many ways but it's hard to see until the blinders fall off.

People go into debt and suffer boredom for years "because I have to get a job" without ever asking what it would take to get a particular job.

7/ Imagine someone training for and running a marathon "because I have to to get customers for my artwork", without every exploring the market to see what customers would need to make it worth buying your art?

8/ That is precisely how 90% of students/parents approach college. They have no idea what they want to do and whether college will help or hinder, yet they go in totally blind to the employment signal ROI, and spend irresponsible amounts of money on the degree.

9/ Why? Because they cannot resist the shame/envy/fear of being outside the dominant

social status doctrine.

Again, pride for unemployed degree-holders dramatically exceeds that for successful drop-outs and opt-outs. Not even close.

10/ Multimillion dollar athletes and entertainers go back and buy degrees later in life and get treated as heroes. The employment signaling theory cannot explain any of this, because it's not the dominant cause of degree buying.

11/ Degrees are a purchase made almost always for other people, not for you. They are made to make those around you feel comfortable with your opting in to their envy games.

12/ If an individual has a career goal and they plan the next few steps to it, if it doesn't involve a degree, everyone pressures them and tells them they are a loser.

If it involves a degree, no one demands any plan, or any successful outcome at all and they get praise.

13/ Those who opt out of status games are a threat to the herd. They cannot be manipulated, they are unpredictable, they are bold.

They are also the only ones who every create progress and improve the lot of the herd.

14/ Make each step your step, not the step that makes everyone clap and give you cheap praise.

Make your goals about you.

Go build the life you want, don't seek the badges that keep everyone happy.

15/ Your individual scoreboard is more important to your flourishing than your relative status on the collective status scoreboard.

16/ Fin.

Addendum:

I think it once was primarily an employment signal and status second. That became a religious belief and the social status part flipped to dominant.

Like buying a home was a good investment, that advice became religion, then people bought homes based on status.

(And subsidies and propaganda)