

Class anxiety: The more you have, the more you want?

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Introduction

Social class influences people's goals, perceptions, and psychological wellbeing. The present research provides evidence that class affects not only people's aspirations, but also their identification with the group and how they define themselves.

Study 1

An online survey of 461 participants in the US

IV: Self-reported SES, personal income

DV: Desire for money (e.g., "One of my goals in life is to be a rich person") and desire for status (e.g., "I would like to be well-regarded"), Preference between money and status, Perceived individual mobility in the US (e.g., "In the US, anyone can become wealthy").

Results

- Higher SES was significantly correlated with more desire for both money and status (**Fig. 1**)

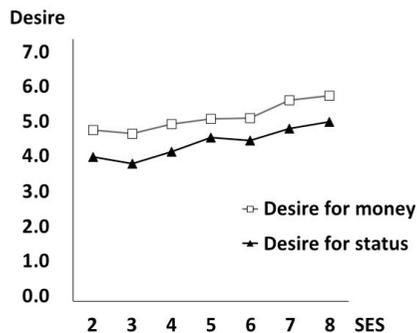


Figure 1*

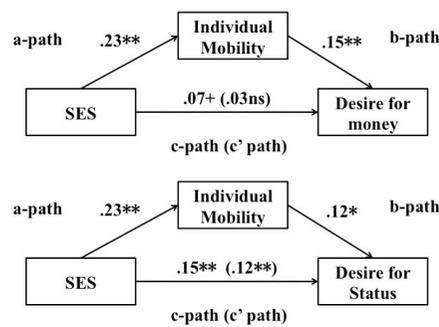


Figure 2

- Higher SES individuals were more likely to accept "newcomers A" who would bring wealth increase but status decrease, rather than "newcomers B" who would bring wealth decrease but status increase.
- The relationship between SES and desire for money was mediated by perceived individual mobility. (**Fig. 2**)

Study 2 & 3

Online surveys of 518 and 320 participants in the US

IV: Perceived individual SES manipulated through two different social comparison paradigms (unsuccessful)

DV: Belief in the American Dream (e.g., "the American Dream is real and tangible"), the rest were the same as in Study 1

Results

- Study 1 findings were largely replicated in Study 2 and Study 3.
- Higher SES individuals reported more endorsement of a belief in the American Dream.

Study 4

An online survey of 167 participants in the US

IV: Perceived group SES manipulated in a fictitious society (successful)

DV: Desire for money and status, perceived importance of money and status in defining the ingroup (e.g., "Do you think money is important in defining your group").

Results

- Higher SES group members reported more desire for money and status. (**Fig. 3**)

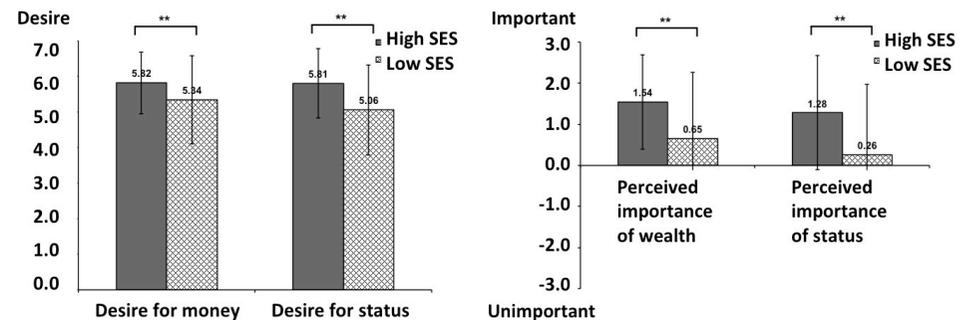


Figure 3

Figure 4

- Higher SES group members regarded money and status as of more importance in defining their group. (**Fig. 4**)

Discussion

- ✓ Higher SES is associated with greater endorsement of an upward mobility ideology, and in turn, this motivates and justifies people to aspire for more
- ✓ Money and status affect people's self-definition as well. For example, to those higher in SES, threat to money and status might equal threat to their identity .

* SES levels with N<10 were not shown in the figure.