

Top and Bottom, Rich and Poor: Understanding Social Hierarchies

Background

Hierarchical relations are ubiquitous in human and non-human primates and other animal societies. In hierarchical structures, those at the top with high power enjoy easier access to social and material resources than those at the bottom with low power. The aim of this project is to understand how social hierarchies emerge and how they affect people at the top and at the bottom. Within this broad area, the project can take different directions, such as how people regulate hierarchical relations non-verbally, how hierarchies impact people's psychological states and basic needs, and what the downstream implications are for people's health and well-being.

Aims and Methods

The project will employ a mix of quantitative methods, combining surveys and experiments to understand how social hierarchies emerge and how they affect people. Experiments may involve physiological measures and/or virtual reality applications. The primary target population are adults, but the work can transcend geographic (cross-cultural) and age (developmental) boundaries depending on the precise nature of the investigation.

Relevance

The project is grounded in social psychology but contributes to advance social and behavioural science. The findings emerging from this work can be of relevance to policy makers seeking to understand and tackle inequality. The work may also have applications in business settings.

Training

Students will be based in the Department of Psychology. Besides a training in general

research methods, students will develop skills in advanced statistical techniques, including multilevel modelling.

Suitable For

PhD and MSc by Research students.

References and Further Reading

Kraus, M. W., Piff, P. K., Mendoza-Denton, R., Rheinschmidt, M. L., & Keltner, D. (2012). Social class, solipsism, and contextualism: How the rich are different from the poor. *Psychological Review*, *119*, 546-572.

Leach, S., & Weick, M. (2018). From grumpy to cheerful (and back): How power impacts mood in and across different contexts. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *79*, 107-114.

Moon, C., Weick, M. & Uskul, A. K. (2018). Cultural variation in individual's responses to incivility by colleagues of different rank: The role of descriptive and injunctive norms. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *48*, 472-489.

Rucker, D. D., & Galinsky, A. D. (2017). Social power and social class: Conceptualization, consequences, and current challenges. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *18*, 26-30.

Weick, M., McCall, C. & Blascovich, J. (2017). Power moves beyond complementarity: A staring look elicits avoidance in low power perceivers and approach in high power perceivers. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *43*, 1188-1201.

