Does class shape the way people think about, explain, and understand inequality?

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INTRODUCTION

Problem
- Inequality is persistent across time, is found throughout many countries, and shapes human development (U.S. Census, 2019)
- Education, housing, and economics are three of the primary domains that contribute to resource inequality
- Disparities in each of the domains is important for understanding inequality

Gap in Research
- Limited studies have explored the role of social class on thinking about inequality
- The proposed research explores how those with relatively more resources (e.g., higher class; HC) think about, explain, and understand challenges within resource domains

Theoretical Background
Class as Culture

The PRESENT RESEARCH

Think: Analytic vs holistic cognition
- How people think about objects in relation to the social context (Choi, Koo, & Choi, 2007)

Explain: Dispositional vs situational attribution
- Extent to which people ascribe causality to characteristics of a person or the environment (Solomon, 1978)

Understand: Hierarchy-enhancing (HE) vs hierarchy-attenuating (HA) understanding of the problem
- There are two types of forces that determine the stability of hierarchical relations between groups
  - HE forces: contribute to the maintenance of group-based hierarchies (e.g., assimilation ideologies
  - HA forces: promote equality within social systems (e.g., multicultural ideologies

HYPOTHESES

1. Lower class (LC) individuals will score higher on holistic cognition, situational attributions, and will have a HA understanding of educational problems relative to upper-class (UC) individuals
2. Holistic cognition, irrespective of social class, will be strongly associated with a HA understanding of educational problems

METHOD AND MATERIALS

Socioeconomic status
- Objective SES will be measured using the MacArthur Scale of subjective SES (Adler et al., 2000)
- HE understanding of educational problems
- Subjective SES will be measured via parental education and family income

Challenge in a resource domain
- A challenge will be defined as “any situation in which an individual is striving to achieve something in the face of difficulty.” For example, a student may be falling behind (challenge) in school (resource domain) and may require a HA understanding of educational problems

Analytic-Holistic Cognition
- Locus of attention subscale (Analysis-Holism Scale; Choi et al., 2007)
- Ex: It is most important to pay attention to details of the individual, rather than the environment

Attributions
- Extent to which features of the student and environment cause the student to fall behind in school
- Ex: The student’s personal motivation to do well

HE/HA Understanding of the Problem
- HE understanding of educational problems:
  - All students (irrespective of background) could do more to maximize their potential
  - Individual students are (at least partially) responsible for not making use of opportunities that come their way
- HA understanding of educational problems:
  - The education system is the source of the problem
  - Structural inequities don’t give all students an equal chance

Procedure
- Demographics
- Participants will read a vignette about a student experiencing a challenge in education
- Participants will answer main DVs (shown above)

EXPECTED RESULTS

Figure 1. Through shared experiences, individuals develop class-specific behaviors (Kraus et al., 2012)

Figure 2. Lower class individuals will think more holistically, make more situational attributions, and have a HA understanding of educational problems

Figure 3. Holistic cognition will be positively correlated with a HA understanding of educational problems

REFERENCES


IMPORTANCE
- The study of social class has notable implications for reducing inequality
- Knowing how people think about, explain, and understand social problems is a critical first step for talking about inequality
- Understanding how those with more resources engage with others in the three domains (e.g., education, housing, economics) can help develop policies aimed to reduce inequality