

Perceived socioeconomic status and inequality alter one's ability to identify emotions

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What is Empathic Accuracy?

the ability to infer the specific content of another person's thoughts and feelings

- Implications:
 - Clinical
 - Relationship satisfaction
 - Social interactions
 - Prosocial behaviour
 - Empathy responses

What impacts one's empathic accuracy?

- Kraus and colleagues (2010) found that higher socioeconomic status (SES) is associated with lower levels of empathic accuracy
 - Differences in the way they navigate their environments

Environmental orientation

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graph TD; A[Environmental orientation] --> B[High SES]; A --> C[Low SES]; B --> D[Internal Focus on the self]; C --> E[External Focus on context]; D --> F[Worse at identifying other's emotions]; E --> G[Better at identifying emotions]
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High SES

Internal
Focus on the self

Worse at identifying
other's emotions


Low SES

External
Focus on context

Better at identifying
emotions



Different levels of inequality change the psychological
experience of being at that SES



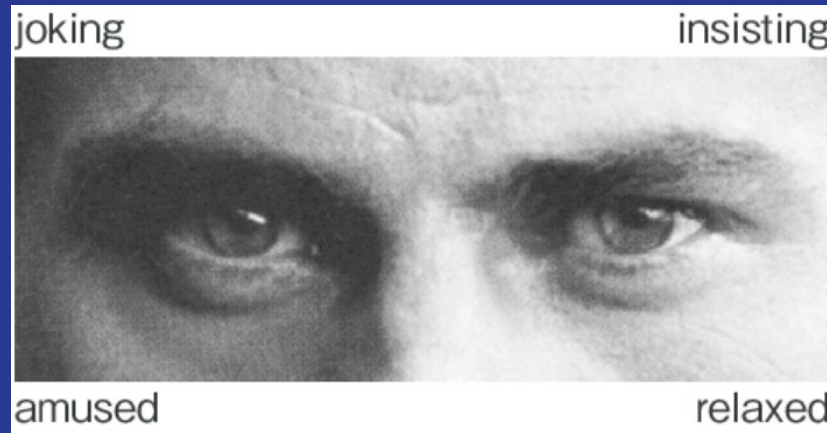
How does perceived economic inequality impact the relationship between SES and empathic accuracy?

Research Questions

1. Does socioeconomic status impact one's empathic accuracy?
2. How is this relationship affected by perceptions of economic inequality?

Study Methods

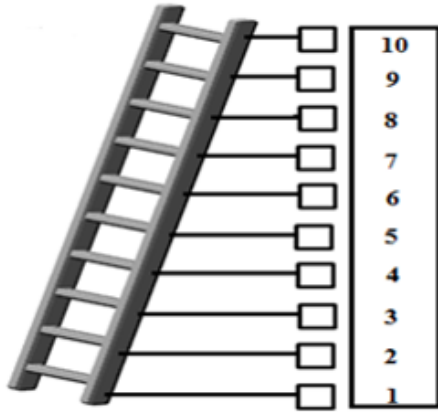
- 284 participants from MTurk
- Asked to complete the Reading the Mind in the Eyes of Others test



Baron et al., 2001

Study Methods

Subjective Socioeconomic Status



The best off: most money, most education, and most respected jobs.

The worst off: least money, least education, and least respected jobs.

Adler et al., 2000

Subjective Inequality

Almost all of the money that is earned goes to only a few people.

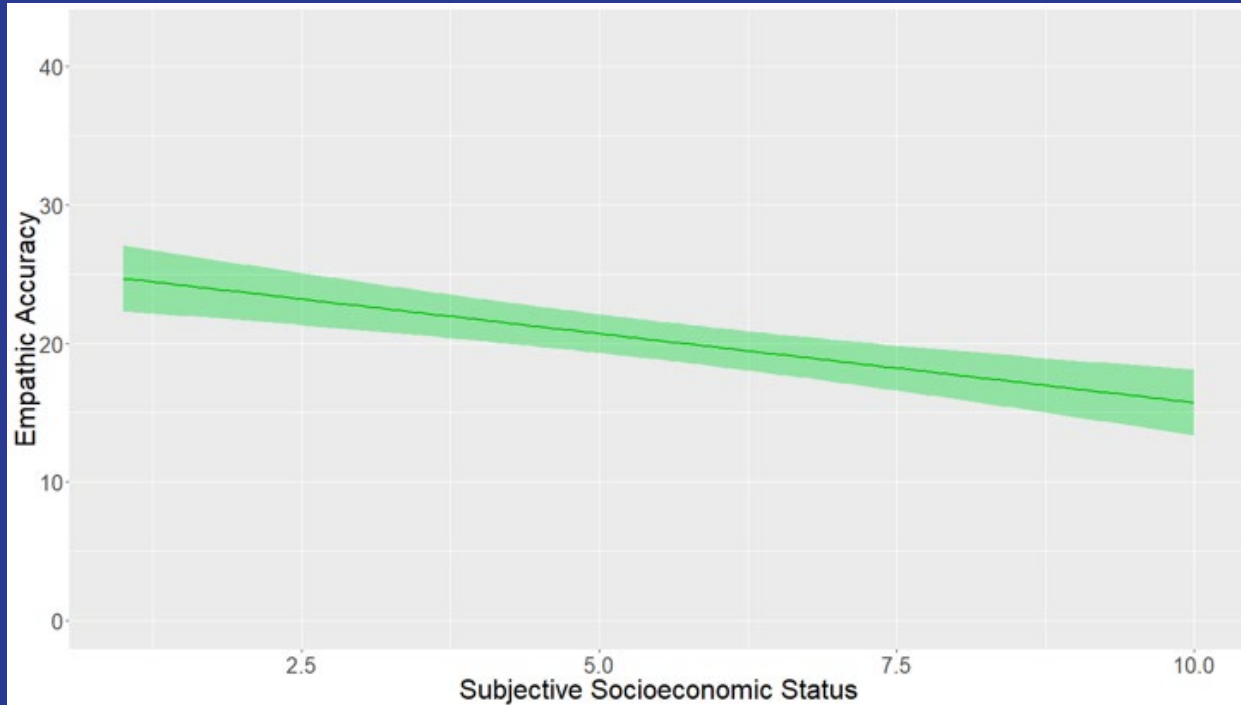
Besides those at the very top, no one else has much money at all.

Real opportunities to succeed in life are only available to the wealthy.

Only those at the top own any wealth at all.

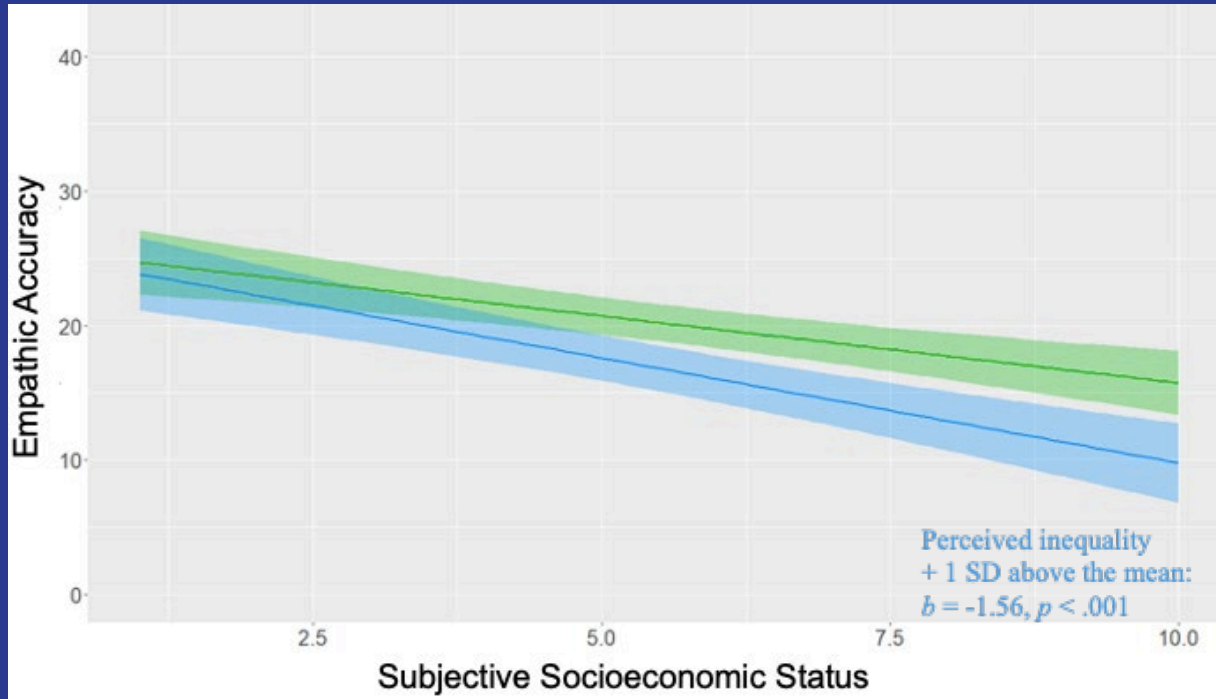
Schmalor & Heine (under review)

Results



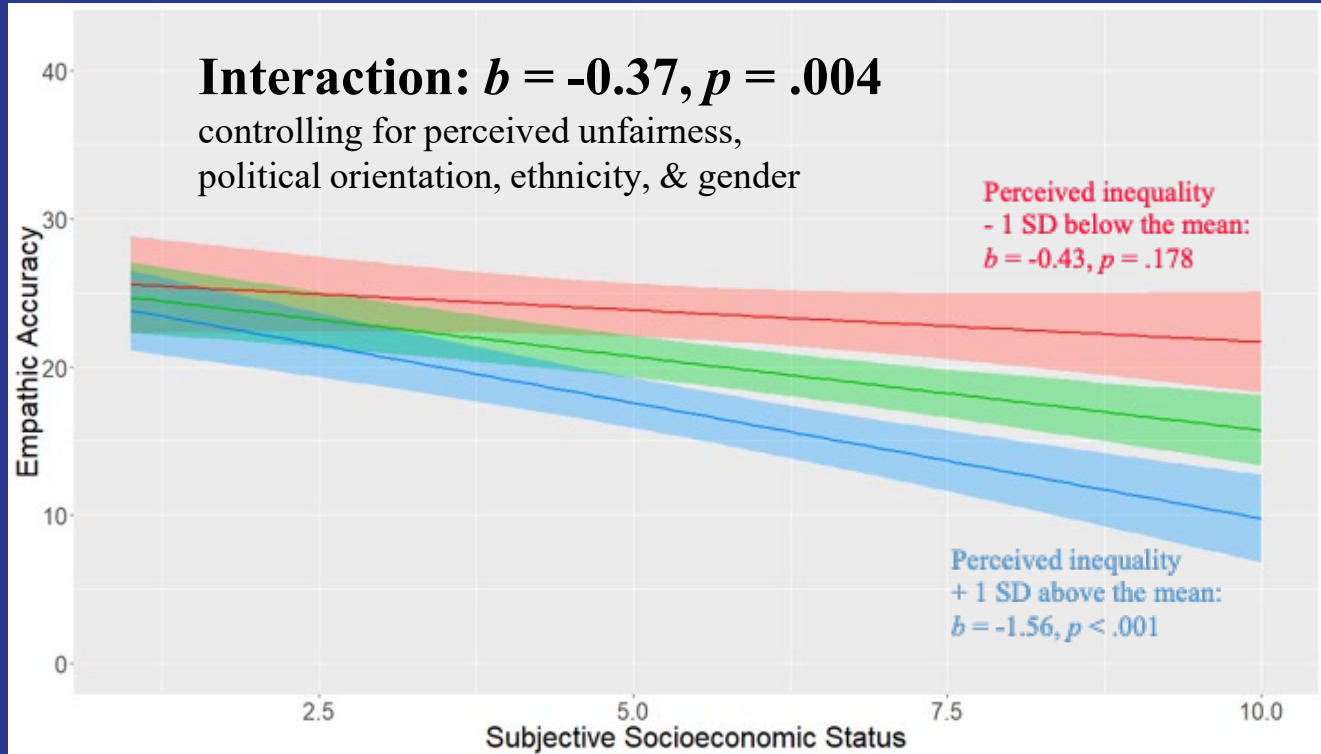
Perceived inequality
at the mean:
 $b = -1.00, p < .001$

Results



Perceived inequality
at the mean:
 $b = -1.00, p < .001$

Results



Implications

High SES

- Diminished neural empathic responses
- Less prosocial behaviour
- Increased propensity for aggression
- Decreased relationship satisfaction

Low SES

- Increased neural empathic responses
- More prosocial behaviour
- Negative affect
- Higher relationship quality

Implications

High SES



Low SES

Perceiving high inequality measurably increases the differences between SES

- Poorer health outcomes
- Increased conflict between classes

Future research directions

- Replicate with an experimental design
- What other factors moderate the relationship between SES and empathic accuracy?
- What are some of the positive and negative effects of heightened empathic accuracy at lower social classes?



Questions?