

Consequences of Economic Inequality and Marginalization – The Role of Social Recognition Experiences and Self-Respect

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Economic inequality remains at a high level worldwide despite the fact that research has consistently demonstrated severe negative consequences for individuals and societies. In the first part of this talk, I present a new model of psychological underpinnings of the relationship between economic inequality and marginalization and negative (health-related) outcomes for individuals (Martiny & Renger, 2022). I argue that economic inequality and marginalization have psychological consequences by reducing individuals' global self-esteem. I further argue that global self-esteem has a tertiary structure and that three independent dimensions of global self-esteem need to be distinguished: self-liking, self-competence, and self-respect and that each of these dimensions dependent on different social recognition experiences (Renger, 2018). Focusing on self-respect and conceptualizing it as a internalization of input from the social world (Bratu, 2019; Honneth, 1995; Renger et al., 2013), I argue that members of marginalized groups (e.g., individuals with low SES and marginalized individuals) have had less respect-based experiences and therefore it is harder for them to develop high levels of self-respect. I propose that low levels of self-respect can lead to mental health issues. In the second part of the talk, I provide first empirical evidence for the theoretical propositions. First, I focus on the antecedents of self-respect and –using a multi-methods approach– I present three studies that show that low income is indeed negatively related to self-respect (Renger, Lohmann, Renger, & Martiny, under review). Next, I present a quasi-experimental study showing that individuals with physical or mental disabilities report lower levels of self-respect than individuals without disabilities and that this relationship is mediated by respect-based social recognition experiences (Josten, Renger, & Martiny, under review). Turning to the consequences of low self-respect, I present two correlational, cross-national studies that investigate the relationship between self-respect and mental health. First, I present results from a study conducted in three Western countries that show that self-respect is moderately negatively correlated with depressive symptoms. Then I present results from a study conducted in three non-Western countries that replicate the negative relationship between self-respect and depressive symptoms and further show that depressive symptoms are related to suicidal ideation (Renger, Reinken, Krys, Gardani, & Martiny, under review). I discuss the theoretical contribution of the present work by focusing on the importance of distinguishing the three dimensions of global self-esteem – that is self-liking, self-competence, and self-respect, their differential antecedents and consequences. Finally, I discuss societal implications of the present findings by highlighting the important role of governments in ensuring that all members within a society have respect-based experiences.