



“It's about having money, but also happiness:” A qualitative investigation of how adolescents understand subjective status in themselves and others

Alexa Martin-Storey^{a,*}, Sarah Marcellin^a, Kelly M. Purtell^b, Anne-Marie Tougas^a, Anne Lessard^c

^a Département de Psychoéducation, Université De Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke, Quebec, Canada

^b Department of Human Sciences, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, USA

^c Département de Études en Adaptation Scolaire et Sociale, Université De Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke, Quebec, Canada



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Subjective SES
Stigma
Qualitative research

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Understanding why adolescent subjective assessments of status matter to their psychosocial outcomes over and above objective assessments of socioeconomic status (SES) requires a better comprehension of how adolescents construct status in themselves and others. Using a qualitative approach, the goal of the current study was to better understand what factors adolescents use to assign status, and how their perceptions of this status vary according to their own SES.

Method: Qualitative interviews were conducted with 32 adolescents from Quebec, Canada, from varied socioeconomic backgrounds. In particular, they were shown the ladder from the Subjective Social Status Scale and asked what defined scale placement in their communities. They were also asked where they would place themselves on this scale, and why.

Results: The importance of traditional indicators of SES such as money, educational level, and occupational prestige were underlined by almost all adolescents, but other factors (e.g., well-being, family life, values concerning work, other-orientation, or rule-following) were also frequently discussed. Adolescents used similar criteria in the placement of themselves and others. Contradictions often emerged, however, as adolescents' scale placement was often higher than what would be expected based on traditional SES indicators.

Conclusions: These findings provide a starting point for understanding why adolescents' subjective assessments of status may matter above and beyond traditional assessments of SES, and how we can better measure this construct.

Adolescents' subjective assessments of status within their communities matter for adolescent health and wellbeing outcomes above and beyond objective assessments of family socioeconomic status (SES) (e.g., Chen & Paterson, 2006; Goodman, Maxwell, Malspeis, & Adler, 2015; Huynh & Chiang, 2016; Quon & McGrath, 2014). While existing research suggests that adolescent perceptions of SES and status have a unique and additive effect on predicting psychosocial outcomes, why these perceptions matter is still poorly understood. Parsing the additive impact of adolescent-perceived status requires understanding how adolescents conceptualize and evaluate status in themselves and others. Indeed, adolescents are the target of intense messaging efforts across multiple platforms about money and the association between money and status (Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010; Strasburger, Jordan, &

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: alexa.martin@gmail.com (A. Martin-Storey).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2018.08.004>

Received 9 March 2018; Received in revised form 4 August 2018; Accepted 9 August 2018

0140-1971/ © 2018 Published by Elsevier Ltd on behalf of The Foundation for Professionals in Services for Adolescents.

Donnerstein, 2010), but also frequently endorse the importance of having a more economically equitable society (Flanagan & Kornbluh, 2017). In order to unpack why adolescent perceptions of status matter, the current study employs qualitative interviews to understand the criteria used by French-Canadian adolescents in describing status, to help understand why these perceptions may provide different information than objective assessments of SES.

1. Status and subjective SES

Status refers to an individual's position within a hierarchy, and SES refers to a combination of educational attainment, wealth, or occupational prestige that influences overall status in society (Diemer, Mistry, Wadsworth, López, & Reimers, 2013). How adolescents assess status, and the ways that these assessments shape self-perception and motivation have long been central themes in research on the replication of social class (Bettie, 2014; MacLeod, 2008; Willis, 1977). Conceptualizations of the link between status and socioeconomic factors, moreover, may be particularly relevant during adolescence (Quon & McGrath, 2014), when adolescents increasingly engage in intense social comparison (Crosnoe, 2011), and SES becomes more strongly linked with positive self-concept (Twenge & Campbell, 2002).

Subjective status reflects how an individual perceives their own (or in the case of adolescents, their family's) status, generally in comparison to others. This construct is frequently assessed among adolescents using scales such as the Subjective Social Status Scale (SSSS: Goodman et al., 2001), a version of the McArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status that was modified for adolescents (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovis, 2000). The SSSS asks adolescents to place their families on a 10-rung ladder prompting them with economic indicators (e.g., money, schooling) and non-economic indicators (e.g., respect). Children and adolescents' perceptions of status using the SSSS are moderately correlated with objective assessments of SES such as family income and parental education (e.g., Goodman, Huang, Schafer-Kalkhoff, & Adler, 2007; Mistry, Brown, White, Chow, & Gillen-O'Neel, 2015), and thus, some of the influence of perceived status on adolescent outcomes likely reflects the well-documented impact of objective SES (McLoyd, 1998). The moderate nature of these associations, and the fact that perceived status is significantly associated with developmental outcomes even after controlling for many traditional SES measures (Elgar et al., 2016; Goodman et al., 2007), suggests that adolescents' subjective assessments may tap into constructs not directly associated with parental SES, that can contribute to understanding how SES influences adolescent outcomes.

Existing theory can inform why measures such as the SSSS may be anticipated to be associated with adolescent outcomes over and above traditional SES indicators. To start, the stigmatized nature of lower status, particularly with regards to SES, may provide some insight into how and why subjective assessments of status, such as the SSSS, matter differently than objective assessments of family SES. Stigma, and the consequences of stigma have well-documented negative impacts on individual outcomes across the lifecourse (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, & Garcia, 2014), and five decades of research have established that adolescents hold negative attitudes towards the socioeconomically disadvantaged, regardless of their own economic situation (Dittmar & Pepper, 1994; Sigelman, 2012; Simmons & Rosenberg, 1971). Moreover, the link between money and positive qualities becomes stronger and more coherent as children develop (Rauscher, Friedline, & Banerjee, 2017). In line with stigma theory (e.g., Link & Phelan, 2001; Goffman, 1963), coming from a lower or even middle class family may reflect a devalued identity, while coming from a wealthy family provides a more privileged identity. As is the case with other, more frequently studied stigmatized identities (e.g., sexual minority status, racial minority status), individuals who consider themselves as having lower levels of SES compared to those around them may see themselves more negatively and subsequently experience higher levels of stress and worse overall functioning (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). Indeed, some previous work suggests that perceived status is linked with adolescent outcomes partially via emotional distress (Destin, Richman, Varner, & Mandara, 2012).

While previous research has not explored if or how stigma shapes how adolescents report their own status, it does provide a framework for understanding what kinds of strategies adolescents may be anticipated to employ in discussing their status. Following from social comparison theory, and similar to how individuals cope with other types of stigmatized identities, adolescents may be expected to employ a variety of self-protective strategies to buffer themselves from the consequences of the stigma associated with SES (Crocker & Major, 1989). As a result, when asked about status, adolescents may be anticipated to vary the centrality of a stigmatized identity, adjust their reference group, or identify the importance of characteristics for their identity based on the attainability of those characteristics, as these are strategies that adolescents employ to cope with other stigmatized identities (e.g., Brown, Alabi, Huynh, & Masten, 2011; Spencer-Rodgers & Collins, 2006).

Adolescent use of strategies to mitigate the stigma associated with lower levels of status are hinted at by some of the existing quantitative literature. First, adolescents on average report SSSS scores slightly above the midpoint (e.g., Elgar et al., 2016; Goodman et al., 2007), suggesting mild inflation. One longitudinal study with the SSSS has shown that while the majority of adolescents had SSSS scores commensurate with external markers of SES, a subset (but not all) low-SES adolescents consistently overestimated their own status over time (Goodman et al., 2015). These findings suggest that some low SES adolescents may inflate their evaluations of status. While the literature suggests that adolescents may inflate their status, however, it remains unclear if this inflation reflects response bias or an active strategy to mitigate stigma. Similarly, evaluations of subjective SES among adults relies in large part on a hierarchical comparison to others (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011). Similarly, mixed methods work with low, middle and high SES college students suggests that low SES students were less likely to identify social class as being important to their identities when compared with students from more advantaged families (Aries & Seider, 2007; Thomas & Azmitia, 2014). These researchers proposed that these strategies might be protective in navigating a stigmatized identity. Finally, research with an adult sample suggests how individuals may focus on more attainable aspects of status. A single, non-peer reviewed study with adults suggests that participants considered health and other non-traditional markers when describing their own scale placement, even when specifically prompted to

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7240680>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7240680>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)