Is being elite the same as living an easy life? Two distinct ways of experiencing subjective SES

Kristin Laurin (corresponding author, klaurin@psych.ubc.ca)

Holly R. Engstrom

Adam Alic

Jessica L. Tracy

University of British Columbia

Abstract

Socioeconomic status (SES) predicts a large number of thoughts, feelings and behaviors; here, we build on these findings to try to paint a comprehensive picture of what people who occupy different SES ranks are like. Existing findings attribute a mixed set of psychological patterns to people who consider themselves near the top of the socioeconomic hierarchy; these individuals are variously portrayed as selfish yet generous, entitled yet happy, narcissistic yet tolerant. Building on previous efforts to characterize distinct dimensions of SES, we wondered whether there might be distinct but overlapping ways of experiencing one's status in the socioeconomic hierarchy, each linked to a different psychological profile, and each potentially corresponding to a different theoretical approach to the study of SES. We employed a bottom-up, participant-driven approach (total N=3338) to identify the thoughts, feelings and behaviors that factor into people's subjective SES. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses showed that these experiences are best represented by two distinct dimensions—a sense that one belongs to a historical cultural elite (corresponding to SES as early-life cultural context) and a sense that one's life is easy (corresponding, though less conclusively, to SES as current rank). We developed scales to measure each dimension, and, using these scales, found that the two dimensions help categorize the known correlates of SES into two separate but internally coherent sets of psychological patterns—one magnanimous and one self-focused.

Picture a person high in socioeconomic status (SES). What are they like? Materially, and by definition, they are likely to have a high income, be well-educated, and have the kind of occupation that others respect (Adler et al., 1994; Cohen et al., 2017; Manstead, 2018). Setting these objective, external descriptors aside, however, we might wonder what this person is like *psychologically*: Are they generous or selfish, outgoing or shy, emotionally stable or neurotic?

A burgeoning psychological literature on SES (e.g., Belmi & Laurin, 2016; Cundiff & Matthews, 2014; Destin et al., 2017; Kraus et al., 2013; Kraus & Park, 2014) answers these questions in the affirmative: All of these patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviors have been positively associated with a person's SES, and particularly their subjective sense of it, even though on the surface some of them appear contradictory. In the present research, we propose that one way to make sense of these findings is to posit that people's sense of their SES is comprised of more than one dimension, and that each of these dimensions is linked to a unique and more internally coherent subset of characteristics. Using a bottom-up, participant-driven approach, we therefore sought to: (1) identify the number and nature of dimensions that constitute people's perceptions of their SES, (2) develop scales to measure these dimensions, (3) use these scales to test how each dimension is related to various markers of objective SES, and (4) test whether these distinct dimensions can account for the complex and seemingly contradictory array of psychological patterns previously linked with SES.

SES predicts two seemingly distinct sets of psychological patterns

A large body of findings depicts the high SES person as a narcissistic and entitled (Côté et al., 2021; Foster et al., 2003; Martin, Côté, & Woodruff, 2016; Piff, 2014) social climber (Belmi & Laurin, 2016) who has little sympathy for others (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015; Callan et al., 2016; Piff et al., 2010; Stellar et al., 2012; Varnum et al., 2015). In drawing these

conclusions, this literature has relied on a variety of measures of SES, most subjective but some

objective. People who report high subjective SES—as well as those who objectively earn high

salaries or have highly educated parents—feel entitled to special treatment (Piff, 2014) and are

willing to manipulate others and embellish their accomplishments to get ahead (Belmi & Laurin,

2016). Likewise, people who report fewer financial difficulties across the lifespan, or higher

parental income when they apply for college, are more narcissistic and particularly likely to look

at themselves in a mirror (Martin, Côté, & Woodruff, 2016; Piff, 2014). Furthermore,

participants with higher subjective SES—and also those with higher parental education, current

objective social class and childhood social class—may report that they are more empathic, but

their brains tell a different story: They show a muted neural empathic response to faces

expressing pain, compared to individuals lower on these SES metrics (Varnum et al., 2015; see

also Stellar et al., 2012). Moreover, this muted response carries through to behavior: Individuals

who report high SES struggle to recognize others' facial expressions (e.g., Dietze & Knowles,

2021; *Authors*, under review). Finally, participants experimentally induced to feel higher,

compared to lower, SES are less supportive of redistributive policies that give a leg up to those

most in need (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015).

A different but equally large body of findings paints a contrasting picture of the high SES

individual, as tolerant and sensitive to those in need (Fiddick et al., 2013; Korndörfer et al.,

2015; Ma et al., 2011), happy and unflappable (Kraus et al., 2011), and mentally stable (Scott et

al., 2014). This literature also derives its conclusions from a combination of objective and

subjective SES measures. Individuals scoring higher (versus lower) on a composite index of

objective SES expect others to behave more benevolently and are less likely to display hostility

in response to a friend's teasing (Kraus et al., 2011). Similarly, participants asked to imagine

themselves in a high SES position become more understanding of a colleague who defaults on a debt to them, and more willing to continue the relationship (Fiddick et al., 2013). Across several large datasets, participants with higher objective SES (on a composite measure of income, education, and occupational prestige when available) were more likely to make donations to charity (Korndöfer et al., 2015, see also Nettle et al., 2011; Silva & Mace, 2014). Furthermore, merely perceiving oneself as high SES, independent of objective markers, is linked with a lower incidence of mental illness (Scott et al., 2014).

According to the accumulated literature, then, people with high SES, especially those who self-report this high status, are *self-focused* ("having excessive concern for the self and its needs"; APA, n. d.): They are entitled, dishonest to the point of self-deception, and inattentive to others in their pursuit of their own self-interest. But they are also *magnanimous* ("generous and forgiving, especially toward a […] less powerful person", Oxford Learner's Dictionary, n. d.): tolerant, generous, and mentally and emotionally stable. This juxtaposition warrants further exploration, as it is challenging to imagine a single person who, in a stable and consistent way, embodies both sets of characteristics.

Approaches to reconciling self-focused and magnanimous correlates of SES

There are at least three ways one might make sense of the existing state of the literature. A first approach is to note that self-focused and magnanimous psychological patterns are not diametrically opposed, so there may be nothing to reconcile. It is not difficult to imagine a person who, for example, both feels entitled to special treatment, perhaps expecting or even demanding promotions long before they are due, but at the same time regularly makes generous donations to charity. A limitation of this approach, however, is that the co-occurrence of traits in the self-focused and magnanimous clusters would not explain why different studies have

produced completely contradictory results; for example, that the ability to read others' emotions, correlates with SES both positively (Deveney et al., 2018) and negatively (Dietze & Knowles, 2021; Schmalor & Heine, 2021). In other words, although there could be a single prototype for the high SES person who is consistently both entitled and generous, that single prototype cannot be both consistently low and high in empathic accuracy.

A second approach might resolve this issue by dispensing with the idea of consistency. That is, people high (and low) in SES might behave differently (and even completely oppositely) in different situations. Some research has begun to explore this possibility; for example, individuals who scored higher on various composite measures of social class were found to be more prosocial in public settings, where they might earn others' admiration, but less so in private settings that offered no social rewards (Kraus & Callaghan, 2016). This approach clearly holds promise; however, it may not suffice on its own either: At least from a theoretical standpoint, some of the correlates of SES are presumed to be the result of enduring cultural socialization beginning in childhood (e.g., Stephens & Townsend, 2013; see also Bourdieu, 1987; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Lareau, 2002, 2011), resulting in broad and stable traits that are unlikely to change, much less to reverse, from situation to situation (McRae et al., 2005). (It is important, however, to bear in mind that, given their origins in cultural socialization processes associated with the availability of resources, even such broad and stable patterns are unlikely to be essential [i.e., immutable, inherent or hard-wired] characteristics of higher and lower SES individuals themselves.)

We therefore pursue a third, complementary approach, inspired by the observation that existing work has used a wide variety of measures to assess SES, and the possibility that different measures tap into different forms of the construct. In other words, perhaps there are not

one but two (or more) distinct prototypes of the high SES person—one who tends to be consistently self-focused and one who tends to be consistently magnanimous—because there are two (or more) distinct facets of SES, each correlated with its own set of psychological characteristics. Some existing work has pointed to the utility of considering specific facets of SES separately; for instance, we now know that a person's income is a stronger predictor of their well-being than their education, and that at least some of the predictive effects of objective SES are mediated by people's subjective perceptions (Tan, Kraus, Carpenter, & Adler, 2020; see also Anderson et al., 2012). In short, a person's socioeconomic status does not exist simply as a single position on a single spectrum; rather, it has multiple dimensions.

Here, we apply this reasoning specifically to subjective SES, or people's experience of where they fall on the social hierarchy. Because subjective SES is often the stronger predictor of psychological patterns, compared to objective measures (Kraus et al., 2012), we wondered whether there might be two correspondingly distinct forms of high SES experiences: If feeling like one is on top of the socioeconomic hierarchy is not a unitary experience, then the two (or more) different ways of feeling high status may each predict a distinct set of psychological characteristics. We sought to test this possibility and whether it might explain the existing literature's contradictions by addressing four research questions.

Question 1: What are the dimensions of subjective SES?

In principle, people's experience of their SES could vary along any number of dimensions. If people represent their social standing along more than one dimension, they might, for example, differentiate between their financial, educational and occupational statuses. Alternatively, people may have a unitary sense of their status, combining rather than distinguishing between various possible status markers. Our first research aim was therefore to

use a bottom-up, participant-driven approach to identify the number of dimensions present in

people's spontaneous descriptions of their subjective SES.

Some existing work has examined how subjective SES might have different material

antecedents for different people (Cohen et al., 2017); for instance, White Americans' sense of

their social standing is more closely tied to their income and education than is Black Americans'.

Other research (Yu & Blader, 2020) has examined how subjective SES might be linked with the

same consequence through multifaceted mechanisms: people with higher subjective SES also

have higher well-being, and this is mediated independently and to different degrees by their

sense of general status (e.g., feeling respected by others) and their sense of power (e.g., having

control over people and resources). Our general approach also anticipates that SES might be

differentially *associated* with distinct material assets and psychological states, like power or

status, but our fundamental aim was to test whether subjective SES *itself* might exist in (at least)

two distinct psychological forms. Moreover, our work is more bottom-up than prior efforts in

psychology to study social class, in that we began not with our own necessarily limited ideas

about what these states might be, but with participants' unconstrained and spontaneous reports

(though scholars in other disciplines have used even more fully exploratory ethnographic

approaches; e.g., Lareau, 2002, 2011). In short, we sought to understand the specific participant-

generated experiences that constitute people's sense of their SES.

Question 2: How can we measure the distinct dimensions of subjective SES?

If there are two or more distinct dimensions of subjective SES, it would be useful to

measure them independently—both to understand the psychological characteristics related to

each dimsension so as to better conceptualize the distinctions between them, and so that future

researchers can assess, manipulate (where possible), and otherwise understand social status.

Existing measures of subjective SES are ill-suited for this purpose, because they most typically are comprised of a single item that cannot on its own distinguish multiple facets. The most common way of assessing subjective SES is to ask participants to select the rung on which they stand on a ladder representing their society's status hierarchy; another is to have participants self-select a label from a set of options, such as "working class", "upper-middle class", and so on. Even objective SES is typically measured with a single item: whether one has a college-educated parent, one's current income, etc. Furthermore, when prior research has used multi-item scales (e.g., Yeates & Taylor, 1997), these scales typically have not intended to capture more than a single dimension, nor was it systematically tested whether they did so inadvertently (see also Griskevicius et al., 2011; Mittal & Griskevicius, 2014).

The idea that new instruments—ones that account for multidimensionality—are needed to assess subjective SES broadly resonates with recent calls to better measure and define subjective perceptions of status-linked constructs like inequality (e.g., Jachimowicz et al., 2022; Phillips et al., 2022). It also echoes a point made in a recent review paper about the measurement of SES writ large—subjective and objective (Antonopolis, 2022). That paper advocates retaining existing measures, but proposes a multistep decision tree whereby researchers first develop theoretical predictions that include detailed mechanisms, then specify exactly which aspects of SES (income, social capital, parental education, subjective SES, etc.) should produce those mechanisms, and ultimately either measure and aggregate those specific aspects of SES, or skip SES and measure mechanisms directly. Such an approach clearly has value, but in our view also suffers from at least two drawbacks. First, it requires that researchers reason in a top-down manner about which aspects of SES are likely to produce which psychological effects. It may be premature to assume that our field has already identified all aspects of the SES experience, and

understands them sufficiently to allow for detailed mechanistic predictions. Second, this approach is likely to yield findings that are difficult to compare across papers, as different researchers report aggregates of different existing measures. Our bottom-up approach instead starts from participants' own reports and uses them to *develop brief and convenient scales* to assess the dimensions present in the naturally occuring experience of SES, for use in the current research as well as future work on distinct forms of subjective SES.

Question 3: How do distinct dimensions of subjective SES correlate with different measures of objective SES?

Our third research aim was to *clarify how each dimension of subjective SES relates to the material markers of objective SES*. During the course of our research, we became interested in a distinction present in the extant literature regarding the core psychological ingredient of SES.

On the one hand, some scholarship claims (or at least implies) that the critical aspect of SES, and one that accounts for many of its psychological effects, is *current rank*. Perhaps best operationalized as relative income or wealth, this variable is tied to a person's perception of where they currently stand in the social hierarchy, relative to others (Kraus et al., 2013). People who hold this form of SES feel they can control and influence others (Keltner et al., 2003), and react less strongly to threats (Kraus et al., 2011). The rank perspective is inherently relative, as it has to do with how people feel their current assets stack up against those of some chronically or temporarily salient reference group (Kraus et al., 2013).

On the other hand, there is work arguing that broad norms and socialization processes unfolding over longer time periods create SES differences in value orientations (Markus & Conner, 2013; Stephens & Townsend, 2013). This work implies that the critical aspect of SES, and the one that accounts for many of its psychological effects, is *cultural privilege*. This cultural

privilege might provide people with particular norms (e.g., Bourdieu, 1979) or informal

knowledge (e.g., Lareau, 2002, 2011) that make it easier for them to conform to the expectations

of important institutions like schools and business. This type of cultural privilege might be

operationalized with long-term socioeconomic variables that instill enduring sets of values, such

as experience in elite educational institutions, or parents' income during childhood. The cultural

norms and values associated with different levels of SES have to do with the (absolute) level of

resources different communities have access to: Whether people have the money, the

opportunities, and the freedom to operate self-sufficiently (Stephens, Townsend, & Dittman,

2019).

If subjective SES has more than one dimension, it may be fruitful to explore these

dimensions' connections with these two existing theoretical conceptualizations of what should

define SES. That is, we planned to explore how the dimensions of subjective SES relate to

objective markers more in line with current rank on the one hand, and those more in line with

cultural privilege on the other. Of course, these conceptualizations are overlapping, and no

objective measure is indicative of one completely independently of the other. Nonetheless, we

considered that measures of current wealth and income were most closely tied to the current rank

conceptualization: How much you have now can be directly compared to how much others (at

least others around you) have, and provide a sense of how you measure up. Likewise, we

considered that measures of education and parental SES were most closely tied to the cultural

privilege conceptualization: These variables contribute to one's childhood socialization and help

determine values as well as access to informal knowledge useful for navigating important social

institutions.

Question 4: How do distinct dimensions of subjective SES correlate with psychological patterns?

Our final research aim was to *clarify how each dimension of subjective SES relates to the characteristic psychology of high subjective SES in general*. In particular, we were interested in exploring whether separate dimensions of subjective SES might be differentially linked to the subset of either self-focused or the magnanimous patterns.

To the extent there is a dimension that reflects a feeling of currently high relative rank, we suspected that it might relate to patterns of magnanimous thoughts, feelings and behaviors. It stands to reason a person who feels well-off and comfortable would also feel able to weather inconveniences posed by others and willing to help those who need it. If so, research findings showing that general measures of SES are positively linked to tolerance, generosity, and stability might be based on the extent to which these general measures capture feelings of current rank. Notably, this reasoning highlights how, if (one dimension of) higher subjective SES is linked with magnanimous psychological patterns, this is not a reflection of some unchangeable essence of people with higher subjective SES; rather, they may simply feel more able to extend magnanimity due to a sense of being free and unburdened.

In contrast, to the extent there is a dimension that reflects a feeling of having inherited cultural privilege, that dimension might relate to patterns of self-focused thoughts, feelings and behaviors. It stands to reason that such a person would feel special and self-centered; at the same time, recognizing that their inherited status may not be (perceived as) deserved might cause anxiety about their position relative to others, and make them preoccupied with reaffirming it. Research finding a positive association between general measures of SES and entitlement, inattention to others, and self-interest may therefore be based on the extent to which these

general measures capture feelings of cultural privilege. As above, this reasoning in no way suggests self-interest would be a reflection of an unchangeable essence; rather it would be a reaction to a certain set of experiences and circumstances.

Research overview

Prior to conducting this research, we wondered whether SES might have multiple dimensions, but had specified no explicit hypotheses about what they might look like, how many there might be, or whether there even were more than one. As we collected empirical evidence, however, a pattern emerged, and we realized that the dimensions we consistently identified in people's self-reports mapped reasonably well onto top-down cultural conceptualizations of SES as culture and (to a lesser degree) current rank. Our approach thus embodies the iterative relationship between theory development and data collection.

Studies 1, 2a and 2b tackled our first research question: identifying potential dimensions of SES through a bottom-up approach, starting from people's open-ended accounts of their sense of social standing. Factor analyses determined that these experiences reflected two distinct dimensions that traditional measures of subjective SES (e.g., the ladder measure) risk conflating. Studies 2a, 2b, and Study 3 tackled our second research question: developing scales to measure each dimension. Studies 2a through 5 (along with an additional pre-registered study, drawn from a different participant population and reported in the SOM because it replicates other studies' findings with no major additions) tackled our third and fourth research questions: identifying the objective SES correlates and basic psychological patterns characteristic of each dimension's high and low end. Together, these studies tested the utility of our dimensional account in organizing the diverse psychological patterns past work has linked with SES, and began to bridge distinct conceptualizations of SES as culture versus rank.

Transparency and Openness

Materials, data, analysis scripts, and pre-registrations (where applicable) are available here: https://osf.io/hcgz5/. Data were analyzed using a combination of SPSS and R (see analysis scripts at OSF link). For each study, we report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations and all measures. All studies received ethical clearance from the authors' institution.

Study 1

Study 1 pre-selected American participants who indicated having either high or low SES, because groups at the extremes of the spectrum are particularly distinct (Côté et al., 2017) and we aimed to develop a pool of items that could be used to assess the experience of subjective SES on its continuous linear dimension(s) going from low to high. To do so, we needed to identify experiences that characterize the high and low end of the SES pole in a way that distinguishes them, in order to then develop items based on those experiences that participants might endorse as more or less strongly self-descriptive. In other words, our goal with this first study was not to capture people at all levels of SES, but rather to come up with a set of items that best define the two poles. Researchers aiming to assess the dimension of agreeableness might follow an analogous process, beginning by soliciting the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of the distinctly agreeable and the distinctly disagreeable. We therefore did not collect data from participants in the middle of the SES spectrum, though their experiences could be of interest to researchers aiming to study discrete non-linear categories such as social class groups (e.g., Fendinger et al., 2023).

These pre-selected individuals provided open-ended reports of the thoughts, feelings and behaviors that had led them to claim their status level. We identified frequently recurring themes

in these open-ended reports, with particular attention to those that distinguished higher from

lower SES participants. This exercise provided raw, bottom-up materials for subsequent studies

to identify characteristics that reliably differentiate the experience of high versus low SES.

Method

Participants

In pre-selecting participants, we operationalized SES broadly, using a modified version

of the 10-rung MacArthur Ladder (Adler et al., 2000). The traditional version asks participants to

compare themselves to others on objective markers like income, education and occupational

prestige. Our version retained the comparative element while replacing the objective markers

with the more culture-oriented element of social class labels, asking people to select their rung

by "think[ing] about your social class, or where you stand relative to others in society". This

hybrid measure provided participants with greater freedom in defining their social status

according to whatever criteria—those related to rank, culture, both or neither—spontaneously

came to mind. By not defining the term social class for participants, but rather allowing them to

interpret it as they saw fit, we followed precedent from other bottom-up work seeking to develop

a construct's nomological net and to build scales that capture lay-person conceptualizations of

the construct (e.g., Tracy & Robins, 2007; Weidman et al., 2018).

To provide sufficient diversity in this initial exploratory study, we recruited participants

based in the United States from Amazon's Mechanical Turk in an ongoing manner until we

reached a minimum of 75 higher SES participants (those who placed themselves one of the top

three rungs of the 10-rung ladder) and 75 lower SES participants (those who placed themselves

on one of the bottom three rungs). Participants who selected rungs 4 through 7 were filtered into

a different study. This procedure resulted in 83 high SES participants (50 men and 33 women;

mean age = 36.3 years old) and 112 low SES participants (64 men and 48 women; mean age =

33.2 years old). Both groups were predominantly White (87% of the high SES group and 90% of

the low SES group).

Procedure

Participants generated "a list of words or phrases that reflect the things that you think,

feel, and do that made you place yourself where you did on the SES ladder on the previous

page." We told them these words or phrases could characterize "the thoughts in your head, the

behaviors you have shown, or the way you feel emotionally and physically that make you feel

like you have relatively HIGH [LOW] social class". After reading these instructions, participants

filled as many of 20 free-entry textboxes as they wished; each was preceded by the stem "I feel

relatively high [low] social class because…". High SES participants reported an average of 7.09

entries for a total of 794; low SES participants reported an average of 8.22 entries for a total of

921.

Results

Figure 1 displays descriptive word clouds for all participant entries, separately for the two

subsamples; the relative sizes of the words in each image are proportional to the frequency with

which they appeared. Higher and lower SES participants used similar words to describe their

experiences, but subsequent coding (described below) suggested they were using these words to

reference opposite states.

Figure 1: Word clouds of low SES (left-hand side) and high SES (right-hand side) entries

Our first analytic step was to identify distinct themes among participants' entries. The first and third author categorized each entry into a theme, generating new themes as needed to capture all responses. They resolved disagreements through discussion. This resulted in 255 themes: 140 capturing the high SES terms and 115 capturing the low SES terms. We retained these large numbers of themes at this initial stage, aiming to preserve subtle differences that might or might not be psychologically meaningful. For example, we retained separate themes for *having low earnings* and *having no savings or investments*, and for *being connected with wealthy others* and *being connected with powerful others*.

Simply perusing this list offered several preliminary insights. For instance, the three themes listed most often by participants with high subjective SES were *being educated* (7% of entries; e.g., "I am an educated person", "Masters Degree"), *having no financial worries* (6% of entries; e.g., "don't have to worry too much about paying bills", "I have not needed social assistance"), and *earning money* (5% of entries; e.g., "income", "my salary"). The three themes listed most often by participants with low subjective SES were *having no money* (11% of entries; e.g., "don't have much money", "no money"), *not having a car* (11% of entries; e.g., "I ride the bus", "I no longer have a car"), and *having financial worries* (10% of entries; e.g., "I worry about how much I can spend", "I live paycheck to paycheck"). Beyond these top themes, most of

which related to current material ease or difficulty, we noted other prominent themes that appeared to relate to cultural privilege; for example, 4% of high SES entries specifically referenced *elite* education (highly selective or expensive education) or family wealth, and 4% of low SES entries referenced a lack of education or a poor family background.

Returning to the entire list, our goal was to capture experiences that clearly distinguish people with high versus low SES (we leave for future research the possibility that some experiences might be common at both high and low extremes of the spectrum). To do so, we identified matching pairs of themes that were present as mirror images in each group. For instance, several high SES participants indicated they did not worry about money, and several low SES participants indicated they worried a great deal about money; these formed a matching pair. Likewise, several high SES participants indicated that they felt lucky, and several low SES participants indicated that they felt unlucky; these formed another matching pair. We identified 79 such matching pairs, and reasoned that we should retain these, as they had a high chance of distinguishing people with high versus low SES.

Thirty-five themes remained as singletons themes that were mentioned by only one SES group (e.g., feeling that one's status could not change [low SES only], feeling annoyed with one's status [low SES only], showing wealth through spending [high SES only], or feeling pressure [high SES only]). We reasoned that many of these would be unlikely to effectively distinguish between high and low SES individuals. For example, no one in our low SES sample reported that they felt no or little pressure, so an item asking people how much pressure they feel in their daily lives would be unlikely to correlate strongly with their SES. At the same time, there could be key experiences at both ends of the spectrum that are invisible to outsiders. Indeed, this is one particularly insidious aspect of cultural privilege: People at the lower end of the spectrum

may not always know what they are denied, and those at the higher end may not know what they take for granted (e.g., Bourdieu, 1987). Thus, we perused the list of 35 singletons, and identified 11 worth retaining for theoretical reasons; we generated a mirror image counterpart for each of these. As one example, several high SES participants indicated feeling that they had control over their lives, so we generated a mirror image item about a lack of control, even though no low SES participant mentioned this, because past research has found that feelings of control are reliably positively associated with SES (Kraus et al., 2013). In combination with the 79 pairs we identified in the data, this resulted in 90 pairs of items, which for subsequent studies were transformed into 90 potential scale items (see SOM for the complete list).

Studies 2a-2b

In Studies 2a and 2b participants rated themselves on the 90 items we created from Study 1's participant-generated data. These and all subsequent studies recruited participants across the entire SES spectrum (as opposed to Study 1's targeting of high and low SES groups): Soliciting our pool of items from the extremes allowed us to identify promising candidate items, with the ultimate goal of identifying dimensions of experience most likely to covary with SES as an entire spectrum. Studies 2a and 2b touched on all four of our research questions. First, we identified the naturally emerging factor structure of the 90 items, using exploratory factor analyses. Second, we used factor loadings to select candidate items to include on scales measuring the dimensions of SES. Third, we examined zero-order and partial correlations between each dimension and various other measures of SES.

Fourth, we began to map out the typical psychological profile of people scoring low and high on each dimension of SES. We did so by assessing the Big Five personality traits along with narcissism. Personality is often stable across the lifespan (Bleidorn et al., 2022; Damian et al.,

2019), whereas SES can change (e.g., Martin & Côté, 2019), sometimes even moment to moment (e.g., Kraus et al., 2010), so some readers might find this decision surprising. That is, they might wonder whether stable personality dispositions and fluctuating levels of current SES could be meaningfully related. We note, however, that SES mobility is not especially common in most developed countries (e.g., Chetty, Grusky, et al., 2017; Corak, 2006), and that major life events (including, perhaps, a big shift in one's social standing) can alter basic personality traits (Bleidorn et al., 2018; Jackson et al., 2012). Given that the Big Five traits are thought to cover the most fundamental dimensions of individual differences in personality, and that personality and SES are both relatively stable but changeable nonetheless, it seemed reasonable to measure the associations between them as a starting point.

Method

Participants

Demographic characteristics of our quantitatively analyzed samples (all US-based) are available in Table 1, alongside comparison figures from the 2020 US Census. On the whole, our studies underrepresented non-White people, men, and the wealthiest people; most of our studies also overrepresented older people (perhaps because our studies were restricted to adults). Studies 2a and 2b specifically overrepresented the more educated. We return to these issues in the General Discussion.

For Studies 2a and 2b, as well as all subsequent studies, we determined sample sizes by aiming for a minimum of 250 usable participants (see Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013), and increasing that number where lab resources permitted. For Study 2a, we recruited 425 participants based in the United States from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. The study included no attention checks so no participants were excluded. For Study 2b, we recruited 400 participants

based in the United States from Amazon's Mechanical Turk, and excluded 55 who failed either

of two attention checks, described below. The final sample size for Study 2b was therefore 345

participants. Both final samples covered the entire range of the ladder measure from 1 to 10 (M_{2a}

= 5.25, median$_{2a}$ = 5, SD_{2a} = 1.71; M_{2b} = 4.96, median$_{2b}$ = 5, SD_{2b} = 1.69).[1]

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of all quantitatively analyzed samples

Variable	Category	2a	2b	3	4	5	SOM	Census
Age	Median	N/A	32	49	49.5	41	50	38.8
Gender	women	59	54	56	55	58	52	50.5
	men	40	45	43	45	41	48	49.5
	White	80	69	83	76	79	73	61.2
Ethnicity	Black	10	9	6	11	8	13	12.3
	Asian	3	10	3	5	5	5	5.9
	<$50k	36	47	45	46	47	48	36.5
Household	$50k-$100k	43	37	33	29	34	31	29.6
income	$100k-$150k	13	9	17	14	10	12	16.3
	>$150k	4	6	6	6	5	9	17.7
	no college degree	41	46	61	61	52	60	65.0
Education	4 year degree	39	42	23	24	33	28	21.2
	post-grad degree	17	11	15	12	12	11	13.8

Notes: SOM refers to an additional pre-registered study reported in the SOM. Age is reported as a median, everything else as %s. The (wo)men categories include trans (wo)men; in all studies besides Study 4 and the SOM study, non-binary participants constituted 1% of the sample. Income and education were assessed with finer-grained categories, collapsed here for brevity. %s within variables may not sum to 100 because we included only the most frequent categories, and because of missing data. Census education figures are for adults aged 25 and over.

Procedure: 2a

---

[1] During the editorial process, a reviewer asked if we had screened our data for duplicate IP addresses. We had not, as these do not necessarily indicate duplicate participants and they could just as easily result from participants using a VPN. Nevertheless, we have now re-examined our data and found that in most studies only a small fraction (on average 2%) of participants matched IP addresses with another participant. Moreover, in all studies, new analyses excluding participants with matching IP addresses produced very similar results. Some very small differences in factor loadings would have led us to retain a slightly different pool of items after Studies 2a and 2b, which we do not view as a major problem: The point of scale development is to identify *a* set of items that does a reasonably good job at assessing a construct of interest, not to identify *the* definitive set of items that *must* be used as the *only* way of assessing it.

Participants first completed a demographics form that included the same ladder measure of SES as in Study 1. They then read the following instructions:

> Below are 90 pairs of statements. If you completely agree with either statement, please select the box on the corresponding end. If you feel that you fall somewhere in between, select a box in between the two options that most appropriately reflects how closely you agree with either end of the spectrum.

The 90 pairs of statements that followed were the 90 matched themes from Study 1, with one mirror-image theme anchoring each end of a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = I am lucky, 7 = I am unlucky). We randomized across items whether the high anchor corresponded to the high or low SES statement. Participants rated all 90 items in three blocks; to prevent fatigue, they completed a filler task between each block that involved looking at pleasant images for about 10 seconds. We presented the statements paired in bipolar scales, rather than individually in twice as many unipolar scales, to minimize participant fatigue and because we had explicitly identified the themes as pairs of statements that represented responses given by high versus low SES participants.

After completing all three blocks, participants completed two brief personality measures: the Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003) to assess the Big Five personality dimensions, and the 16-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16 (NPI-16; Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006). We chose these measures because together they cover a broad spectrum of individual differences, including some more magnanimous (e.g., agreeableness) and others more self-focused (e.g., narcissism). NPI-16 showed strong reliability (α_{2a} = .83, α_{2b} = .84), but TIPI reliabilities were low (with correlations between items as follows: extraversion, 2a: .66, 2b: .61; agreeableness, 2a: .40, 2b: .26; conscientiousness, 2a: .47, 2b: .56; neuroticism, 2a: .68, 2b: = .64; openness, 2a: = .33, 2b: = .27); Study 3 addressed this limitation by including a different and more comprehensive measure of personality.

At the end of the survey, participants completed additional measures of SES: total household income (using a scale ranging from of below $25,000 to above $200,000, in increments of $25,000), level of education (1 = some high school, 2 = graduated from high school / GED, 3 = some college / university, 4 = graduated with a bachelor's degree, 5 = some graduate / professional school, 6 = graduated from graduate / professional school), and the highest level of education attained by either of their parents (same scale as own education).

Procedure: 2b

Study 2b followed the same procedure as Study 2a, with two exceptions. First, we eliminated the 36 items from the initial pool of 90 that, in Study 2a, correlated less than +/- .30 with the ladder measure of SES. We reasoned that with such low correlations these items were unlikely to represent an important dimension of SES. Second, we presented the remaining 54 items in two blocks, rather than three, and included an attention check in each block. For each attention check, participants saw a seven-point Likert scale anchored at either end with a statement, similar to the other 54 items within which they were embedded. In one case, one of the anchors read "I am currently filling a survey (please click this box)"; in the other, one of the anchors read "If you are reading this question and have read all the other questions, please select this box"; we retained participants who selected the requested point on the Likert scale in both cases.

Results

We report results organized according to our four research questions, with results from both Studies 2a and 2b presented together for each question.

What are the dimensions of subjective SES: Exploratory factor analyses?

We conducted two exploratory factor analyses using maximum likelihood estimation on participants' ratings of the 90 items included in Study 2a. One EFA used oblimin and the other used varimax rotation; substantive results from both were very similar. The two SES-linked factors identified in the oblimin rotation were moderately intercorrelated ($r = .37$); for this reason, we focus here on the results from the oblimin analysis, but report results with varimax rotation, which artificially forces the factors to be orthogonal, in the SOM.

The scree plot indicated a three-factor solution; eigenvalues for the first five factors were 26.6, 7.3, 4.0, 2.5, and 2.3, and the first three factors accounted for 42.3% of total variance. To understand these factors, we examined the items that loaded most strongly onto each (see SOM for full list of factor loadings). One of these factors reflected items that described having an elite versus ordinary life; high-loading items (identified by their high SES pole) included "I am a member of the elite" and "The people I have connections with are generally wealthy". Many of the items on this factor appear to point to long-term and entrenched cultural factors that can bestow privilege (i.e., education, familial wealth, connections to the elite), suggesting that this first subjective dimension may correspond to the cultural conceptualization of SES. A second factor reflected items that described having an easy versus difficult life; high-loading items (identified by their high SES pole) included "I am able to buy basically anything I want" and "I have an easy life". These items point to *current* wealth and material ease, and as such reflect factors that could in principle contribute to people's sense that right now, they stand at a high rank. However, these items are not clearly comparative, so this second dimension seems to represent the sense that life is easy versus difficult, but not necessarily that one's current rank is higher *than others*'. The third factor reflected items that seemed to describe positive self-views;

high-loading items included, "I am nice to others" and "I am well-mannered". These items do

not tend to correspond to either the cultural or current rank conceptualizations of SES.

These results suggest that people's spontaneous explanations for why they felt

themselves to be high or low in SES can be organized into three distinct factors. However, this

does this not necessarily mean that all three are dimensions of SES. Although we had eliminated

themes mentioned by only one participant, we retained many others mentioned by only a handful

of participants or fewer; some of these could be idiosyncratic responses that do not track SES in

most people. We therefore saved factor scores and examined their correlations with the ladder

measure. Factor 1 (henceforth, "elite life") and Factor 2 (henceforth, "easy life") correlated

positively and strongly with the ladder measure; r_{elite} =.55, r_{easy} =.56; both ps < .001. In contrast,

Factor 3 (the general positivity factor) did not correlate significantly with the ladder measure, r =

-.09, p = .079, suggesting that this factor does not capture what it means to experience high or

low SES.

Next, we tested whether these results were robust by repeating the same analyses on

Study 2b participants' ratings of the 54 items they viewed, but specifying a three-factor solution

for consistency with Study 2a (the initial scree plot indicated either two or four factors, with the

first five eigenvalues being 20.8, 3.4, 2.4, 2.2, 1.7; as in Study 2b the oblimin and varimax results

were highly similar so we report the latter only in the SOM). Examining the factors' contents

revealed the same three dimensions: An elite life factor, an easy life factor, and a general

positivity factor. Moreover, the pattern of correlations with the ladder measure was similar to

that observed in Study 2a, r_{elite} =.61; r_{easy} = .58, both ps < .001, although this time the positivity

factor showed a positive correlation, r = .33, p < .001. This correlation, though substantially

weaker than the other two, was higher than in it had been in Study 2a, presumably because Study

2b retained only those positivity items that had been moderately correlated (above .30) with the

ladder measure. In fact, given this methodological difference between studies, the observed

correlation with the positivity factor is near the minimum we might have expected.

The results of these two studies together suggest that people may indeed experience their

high or low SES in two different ways. Broad measures of SES may therefore be capturing some

combination of the extent to which people believe they do versus do not belong to the

sociocultural elite, and how easy versus difficult people experience their lives to be.

How can we measure the distinct dimensions of subjective SES: Selecting candidate items?

We examined the factor loadings across all four factor analyses (oblimin and varimax

rotations in each of Study 2a and 2b). We searched for items that, in at least three of the four

analyses, loaded at or above .50 on their primary factor and had cross-loadings no greater than

.40 (see Tracy & Robins, 2007; Weidman et al., 2018). This initial process resulted in 6 items for

the elite life factor and 10 items for the easy life factor. For each factor we added one further

item that did not quite meet our selection criteria but that seemed to capture the essence of the

dimension in question. Table 2 presents the 18 items and their loadings on all three factors.

Table 2: Retained items' factor loadings; Studies 2a (90 initial items) and 2b (54 initial items)

Factor	Elite life		Easy life		Positivity	
Study	2a	2b	2a	2b	2a	2b
The people I have connections with are generally wealthy / the people I have connections with are generally not very wealthy	**.736**	**.529**	.139	.222	.150	-.019
I am a member of the elite / I am definitely not a member of the elite	**.702**	**.561**	.098	.227	.138	-.078
I am well connected with powerful others / I am not very well-connected with powerful others	**.702**	.447	.101	.188	.113	.161
I have a fancy lifestyle / I live a modest life[a]	**.585**	.495	.164	*.453*	.240	-.262
I have special advantages / I have no special advantages	**.581**	**.628**	.100	.137	.010	-.040
I received / am receiving an elite education / I never have and never will receive an elite education	**.570**	**.739**	.033	-.169	.033	.103
My parents are wealthy / my parents are not very well-off	.451	**.622**	.215	-.009	.166	-.078
I have an easy life / I have a difficult life[a]	-.026	.149	**.799**	.420	.009	.292
I have few struggles in life / I have many struggles in life	.052	.026	**.735**	**.522**	.014	.315
My life is generally free from worry / my life is filled with worry	.094	-.123	**.711**	**.546**	.005	.393

I generally have enough money / I don't have enough money	.222	.062	**.693**	**.809**	.062	.004
I can comfortably buy necessities / I cannot buy necessities	.115	.065	**.646**	**.639**	.096	.120
I am happy with what I have in life / I want more than what I have in life	-.077	-.171	**.646**	**.629**	.033	.118
I can buy basically anything I want / I am not able to buy whatever I want	.358	.101	**.594**	**.832**	.134	-.067
I don't think much about money / I have financial worries	.205	-.111	**.588**	**.736**	.077	.068
I can go on vacations / I cannot go on vacations	.320	.144	**.536**	**.634**	.001	.145
I have savings or investments / I have no savings or investments	.314	.033	**.535**	**.653**	.074	.035
I can go out / I cannot go out much	.262	.176	**.511**	**.589**	-.028	.098

Note. **Bold text** denotes primary loadings above .500; *italicized text* denotes cross-loadings above .400

[a]Item retained for conceptual reasons

How do the distinct dimensions of subjective SES correlate with different measures of objective SES?

We computed subscale scores for the easy life and elite life dimensions (the means of their respective candidate items, listed in Table 2), and examined their correlations with objective indicators of SES (see Table 3). We computed zero-order correlations and partial correlations that controlled for the other subscale, separately within each dataset. This yielded four estimates for each relationship, allowing us to look for patterns that held across all four.

Table 3: Zero-order (and partial) correlations of elite (7 items) and easy (11 items) subscales with other SES variables

Dimension	Elite		Easy	
Study	2a	2b	2a	2b
Ladder measure	**.55 (.32)**	**.61 (.40)**	**.59 (.41)**	**.58 (.36)**
Household income	**.43 (.23)**	**.34 (.11)**	**.45 (.28)**	**.45 (.33)**
Education	**.42 (.35)**	**.28 (.20)**	**.24 (.01)**	**.21** (.06)
Parental education	**.34 (.34)**	**.23 (.28)**	**.11** (-.10)	.02 **(-.14)**

Note. For zero-order correlations, Ns = 425 (2a) and 345 (2b); for partial correlations controlling for shared variance between easy and elite life (shown in parentheses) we entered all variables at once so Ns = 406 (2a) and 331 (2b), with no missing data across any of these variables. Correlations significant at $p < .05$ are **bolded**.

These analyses yielded two observations: First, the partial correlations show that both the elite and easy life dimensions are independently associated with our class-label version of the

SES ladder measure, consistent with the suggestion that each dimension represents a distinct facet of the broad construct of subjective SES. Second, both dimensions are consistently positively linked with household income, but elite life is more strongly linked with education and parental education. This latter observation further suggests that the elite life dimension may correspond to the cultural conceptualization of SES: People who have personal and familial experience with historical institutions of privilege and wealth seem especially likely to feel that their lives are special and that they belong to an elite cultural group. These distinct associations with objective measures consistently replicated across studies; a summary table following our last study illustrates this point.

The SOM reports analyses testing whether interactions between the two dimensions predict any other SES measures, in these and all subsequent studies. These interactions were generally non-significant.

How do distinct dimensions of subjective SES correlate with psychological patterns?

We employed the same zero-order and partial correlation strategy to determine the psychological profiles linked with each dimension's higher and lower ends (see Table 4). Individuals scoring high on either dimension tended to be extraverted, but the two dimensions were associated with otherwise distinct psychological profiles. Those who scored high on the elite life dimension tended to be narcissistic, and, at least when considering the partial correlations, disagreeable and low in conscientiousness. Together, these results paint a picture of elite life individuals as self-important (Foster et al., 2003), unkind (Brown Iannuzzi et al., 2015), and somewhat disorganized or irresponsible, suggesting they may embody the self-focused psychological profile that prior literature has linked with high SES.

Table 4: Zero-order (and partial) correlations of elite (7 items) and easy (11 items) subscales with other SES variables

Dimension	Elite		Easy	
Study	2a	2b	2a	2b
Extraversion	**.26 (.16)**	**.27 (.15)**	**.23 (.11)**	**.27 (.15)**
Agreeableness	-.05 (-.16)	-.06 (-.13)	**.14 (.20)**	.07 (.13)
Conscientiousness	.09 (-.14)	.03 (-.12)	**.36 (.38)**	**.22 (.25)**
Neuroticism	**-.23** (.09)	**-.13** (-.05)	**-.52 (-.48)**	**-.29 (-.26)**
Openness	.09 (.06)	.01 (-.002)	.08 (.03)	.02 (.02)
Narcissism	**.41 (.39)**	**.40 (.34)**	**.16** (-.09)	**.23** (-.002)

Note. For zero-order correlations, Ns = 425 (2a) and 345 (2b); for partial correlations (shown in parentheses) we entered all variables at once so Ns = 413 (2a) and 342 (2b) participants with no missing data across these variables. Correlations significant at $p < .05$ are **bolded**.

By contrast, those who scored high on the easy life dimension tended to be conscientious, agreeable, and emotionally stable. These results suggest that individuals high on the easy life dimension may be generous (Korndörfer et al., 2015) and even-keeled (Kraus et al., 2011) suggesting they may embody the magnanimous psychological profile that prior literature has linked with high SES; they may also be especially careful and meticulous. These exploratory and preliminary findings thus hint at the utility of considering the broad construct of SES as housing two overlapping but distinct dimensions: Each may predict a different set of thematically related psychological patterns.

As we did with objective measures of SES, we also considered whether psychological patterns could be predicted from the interaction between easy and elite life. These analyses, for this and all subsequent studies and including simple effects, are reported in the SOM; the easy × elite interactions were generally not consistent. However, examining as a whole the self-focused variables we assessed, a general tendency appeared (seven significant and two marginal interactions, all in the same conceptual direction, out of 16 tests): People who feel they have elite lives may be especially self-focused if they also feel they have easy---as opposed to difficult—

lives. Stated differently, people who feel they have easy lives are especially *un*likely to be self-focused if they feel they have modest, ordinary—as opposed to elite—lives.

Discussion

Studies 2a and 2b revealed two dimensions of the subjective experience of SES, and began to test these dimensions' associated psychological profiles. These dimensions were moderately intercorrelated and both independently correlated fairly strongly with a broad measure of subjective SES, as one might expect of two facets of this construct. Yet they were linked with distinct combinations of objective SES markers and psychological patterns: The easy life dimension was associated with current income and with magnanimous and friendly characteristics like agreeableness, emotional stability, and conscientiousness. The elite life dimension was also associated with current income but also with personal and parental education, perhaps suggesting it corresponds to the conceptualization of SES as cultural privilege, as well as with self-focused characteristics like narcissism and disagreeableness.

The subjective SES dimensions that have begun to emerge are correlated, in some cases strongly, with objective metrics of SES. On the one hand, these correlations allow for confidence that both dimensions capture SES, and their magnitude helped guide our interpretations of each dimension, as described above. On the other hand, these correlations raise an important question: Notwithstanding the strong precedent for considering subjective SES as important in its own right (e.g., Adler et al., 1994; Kraus et al., 2012), do the elite and easy life dimensions buy any predictive power beyond more objective measures? The SOM presents additional analyses of all of our data, suggesting that objective measures of SES are generally less strongly associated than our subjective scales with the psychological characteristics we assessed, and that these

comparatively weak associations between objective SES and psychological characteristics are mediated in predictable ways by our scales (Tan et al., 2020).

Study 3

Study 3 was a pre-registered (https://osf.io/scd7a/) replication, using quota sampling to recruit a more representative sample in terms of SES, of Studies 2a and 2b. Like those studies, it touched on each of our four research questions, aiming to replicate the dimensional structure of SES, further trim the list of items to finalize two practical subscales that could be used to reliably measure these dimensions, replicate the associations between the dimensions and other measures of SES, and replicate the associations between the dimensions and distinctive psychological patterns.

Participants

Using the Prime Panels service (now Cloud Research), we recruited 316 American participants; as pre-registered, this excludes an additional 39 participants who failed more than one of four attention checks. In recruiting the initial sample (i.e., prior to exclusions) we used quotas to match the US census in terms of gender, income and education. This quota matching requirement, which we also used in subsequent studies, made our sample more representative in terms of education, but the very wealthy (and presumably the very poor who may lack regular access to computers) are still underrepresented. The final sample spanned the entire range of the ladder measure from 1 to 10 ($M = 5.27$, median $= 5$, $SD = 1.99$).

Procedure

The procedure followed that of Studies 2a and 2b, with four modifications:

1) We included only the 18 candidate items we identified in those studies as capturing the two dimensions of SES, and among these items we included the first attention check described in Study 2b.

2) We used the 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI-44, John, & Srivastava, 1999) instead of the TIPI to assess the big five factors of personality. We embedded therein a second attention check that asked participants to rate the item "I am definitely a human being"; participants passed this check if they strongly agreed.

3) The narcissism measure included a third attention check: Participants selected between "Please select this item" and "Please do not select this item", and passed if they selected the former.

4) We included the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965) to assess self-esteem. Past research has found that SES predicts self-esteem, as well as narcissism (Twenge & Campbell, 2002); including this measure allowed us to test whether that positive relation is specific to one SES dimension or shared by both. We embedded a fourth attention check among RSE items; this item read "Select 5 for this question" and participants passed if they indeed selected 5 on the seven-point response scale.

As pre-registered, in addition to computing scales for self-esteem and narcissism, we created variables reflecting genuine self-esteem (self-esteem with its shared variance with narcissism partialled out) and self-aggrandizing narcissism (narcissism with its shared variance with self-esteem partialled out; see Paulhus, Robins, Trzesniewski, & Tracy, 2004).

Results

Replicating the dimensions of subjective SES

As pre-registered, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis of the 18 items assessing subjective SES using oblimin rotation and extracting two factors (the scree plot confirmed that this was appropriate, with the first five eigenvalues being 8.7, 2.0, 0.9, 0.8 and 0.7). The two factors together accounted for 59.2% of total variance, and all items loaded as expected (see Table 5). Thus, even in a more representative sample that varied substantially in SES, people's experience of their status was best characterized as falling into two distinct dimensions.

Table 5: Item loadings and reliabilities of subscales comprised of 4 to 7 items each, Study 3

Item	Elite life	Easy life	α of scale comprised of this and higher-loading items
I am a member of the elite / I am definitely not a member of the elite[a]	**.791**	.040	
I am well connected with powerful others / I am not very well-connected with powerful others[a]	**.759**	.064	
The people I have connections with are generally wealthy / the people I have connections with are generally not very wealthy[a]	**.748**	-.017	
I received / am receiving an elite education / I never have and never will receive an elite education[a]	**.738**	-.089	.805
I have a fancy lifestyle / I live a modest life[a]	**.668**	.157	.831
My parents are wealthy / my parents are not very well-off	**.619**	-.041	.834
I have special advantages / I have no special advantages	**.566**	.165	.845
I can comfortably buy necessities / I cannot buy necessities[a]	-.165	**.811**	
I generally have enough money / I don't have enough money[a]	.091	**.801**	
I have an easy life / I have a difficult life[a]	-.094	**.799**	
I don't think much about money / I have financial worries[a]	.066	**.788**	.836
My life is generally free from worry / my life is filled with worry[a]	-.056	**.768**	.861
I can go on vacations / I cannot go on vacations	.163	**.717**	.883
I have few struggles in life / I have many struggles in life	.125	**.712**	.900
I can go out / I cannot go out much	.150	**.692**	
I am happy with what I have in life / I want more than what I have in life	-.079	**.666**	
I have savings or investments / I have no savings or investments	.129	**.654**	
I can buy basically anything I want / I am not able to buy whatever I want	.282	**.627**	

[a]Item retained for final subscales

Trimming the pool of candidate items for final scales

In a first pre-registered pass at trimming items, we planned to reject any that did not load most strongly on its intended factor, or whose cross-loading was either above .40 or within .20 of its primary loading. No items met either criterion for rejection (see Table 5). Our second pre-registered step was to sort items according to their primary loadings, then examine reliabilities

for scales comprised of the top loading four, five, six, and seven items. Our pre-registration

specified our plan to retain the smallest number of items that when scaled together yielded a

Cronbach's alpha above .80, to ensure reliability while limiting burden on future participants.

This plan prescribed two four-item subscales (see Table 5, right-most column). However, closer

inspection led us to make an ad hoc decision to favor the five-item subscales. Pragmatism not

theory drove this decision: In both cases the fifth item provided a greater gain in reliability than

any subsequent item; one additional item per subscale does not greatly add to the burden on

participants; and the pattern of results described below was virtually identical using either four or

five item subscales. Because their performance is similar, researchers with a strong need to

minimize survey length might opt to use four-item subscales, but on balance, the gain in

reliability leads us to recommend all five items.

Associations with objective measures of SES

We computed the five-item subscale scores for easy life and elite life and, as pre-

registered, examined their respective zero-order and partial correlations with other indicators of

SES. We statistically compared the magnitude of these correlations using Steiger's (1980) test[2],

and the partial correlations using Fisher's *z* test (see Table 6).

Table 6: Zero-order (and partial) correlations of elite versus easy life with other SES variables

SES measure	Correlations		Tests of difference	
	Elite	Easy	Between *r*s	Between $r_{partial}$s
Ladder measure (*N*=316)	**.51** (**.39**)	**.39** (**.20**)	*t*=**2.40**, *p*=.017	*z*=**2.61**, *p*=.009
Household income (*N*=315)	**.33** (**.19**)	**.35** (**.24**)	*t*=-0.48, *p*=.632	*z*=-0.69, *p*=.490
Education (*N*=312)	**.34** (**.29**)	**.18** (.03)	*t*=**2.78**, *p*=.006	*z*=**3.32**, *p*<.001
Parental education (*N*=307)	**.37** (**.36**)	**.13** (-.06)	*t*=**4.41**, *p*<.001	*z*=**5.32**, *p*<.001

Note. N for all partial correlations (shown in parentheses) is the 305 participants with no missing data on these variables. Correlations, *t*s and *z*s significant at *p* < .05 are **bolded**.

---

[2] Our pre-registrations, for this and Study 2, prescribed Fisher's test in both cases, but because it cannot account for the overlapping variables drawn from the same sample, Steiger's *t* was more appropriate for comparing the zero-order correlations. We retained Fisher's test for the partial correlations as there was no clear alternative.

As in Studies 2a and 2b, both dimensions were similarly related to household income, but

elite life was related more strongly than easy life to education and parental education.

Unexpectedly, elite life was also more strongly related to the ladder measure; this difference did

not emerge in any past or subsequent studies.

Associations with psychological patterns

We followed the same pre-registered analysis plan to examine the trait measures (Table

7). As predicted, the elite life dimension was the stronger predictor of narcissism and self-

aggrandizing narcissism. Also as predicted, the easy life dimension was the stronger predictor of

agreeableness and emotional stability. These findings further confirm the results of both Studies

2a and 2b; we therefore take them to be relatively reliable.

Table 7: Zero-order (and partial) correlations of elite vs. easy life with psychological measures

Measure	Correlations		Tests of difference	
	Elite	Easy	Between rs	Between $r_{partial}$s
Extraversion	**.43 (.36)**	**.26 (.07)**	*t*=**3.22**, *p*=**.001**	*z*=**3.92**, *p*<**.001**
Agreeableness	-.05 (-.13)	**.14 (.19)**	*t*=**-3.33**, *p*<**.001**	*z*=**-4.03**, *p*<**.001**
Conscientiousness	.05 (-.06)	**.21 (.22)**	*t*=**-2.99**, *p*=**.003**	*z*=**3.55**, *p*<**.001**
Neuroticism	**-.15** (.02)	**-.35 (-.32)**	*t*=**3.66**, *p*<**.001**	*z*=**4.39**, *p*<**.001**
Openness	**.28 (.25)**	**.14** (.01)	*t*=**2.50**, *p*=**.013**	*z*=**3.03**, *p*=**.002**
Narcissism	**.40 (.36)**	**.20** (.01)	*t*=**2.85**, *p*=**.005**	*z*=**4.69**, *p*<**.001**
Self-aggrandizing Narcissism	**.36 (.35)**	.11 (-.08)	*t*=**3.38**, *p*<**.001**	*z*=**5.53**, *p*<**.001**
Self-esteem	**.23** (.03)	**.44 (.39)**	*t*=**-2.96**, *p*=**.003**	*z*=**-4.69**, *p*<**.001**
Genuine Self-esteem	**.15** (-.05)	**.41 (.39)**	*t*=**-3.50**, *p*<**.001**	*z*=**-5.72**, *p*<**.001**

Note. *N* for all analyses is 316 (there was no missing data for any variables); partial correlations
are presented in parentheses. Correlations, *t*s and *z*s significant at *p* < .05 are **bolded**.

Several unpredicted findings also emerged: Elite life more strongly predicted

extraversion and openness, whereas easy life more strongly predicted self-esteem, genuine self-

esteem, and conscientiousness. The extraversion and openness findings diverge from those in

Studies 2a and 2b, so at this point we hesitate to interpret them. Studies 2a and 2b did not assess

self-esteem; we probe that finding further in Study 4. The conscientiousness finding replicates

Studies 2a and 2b, so we take it to be reliable, but have no strong theoretical interpretation for it. One possibility is that individuals who fit the easy life characterization tend to attain (or to think they have attained) their status through hard work, rather than through the inheritance of cultural privilege; in contrast, those who belong to the cultural elite may have had less need to work conscientiously in order to climb the ranks of SES. Study 4 will shed more light on this issue by assessing belief in a just world, which is also relevant to individuals' feelings about the deservingness of their status.

Discussion

A pre-registered study using a nationally representative U.S. sample replicated the findings of Studies 2a and 2b, further supporting the conclusion that there are two distinct ways of experiencing high SES. First, a person can feel higher SES based on their sense of belonging to an elite segment of society. People scoring high on this dimension tend to be well-educated high earners with well-educated parents, suggesting that this dimension may align with conceptualizations of SES as culture. Moreover, these individuals tend to be narcissistic, consistent with past research findings that people high in SES tend to be self-focused. Note that, whereas the items we used to capture subjective SES are bipolar, the measure of narcissism (like most of the measures of psychological characteristics we use in this paper) is not. Thus, it is accurate to say that people who feel they lead ordinary, modest lives are low in narcissism, but not necessarily high in whatever its opposite might be (selfless, self-sacrificing).

Second, a person can feel higher SES based on their sense that they have an easy and carefree life. People scoring high on this dimension tend to have high incomes but do not necessarily come from higher class backgrounds. Moreover, their agreeableness, emotional stability, and high self-esteem may underlie the kind of magnanimous behaviors prior research

has linked with SES. Note that the Big Five measures we used are also bipolar, so it *is* accurate to say that people who feel they lead difficult lives also report being disagreeable (the opposite of agreeable) and neurotic (the opposite of emotionally stable).

It is tempting to think that, if elite life corresponds to the cultural conceptualization of SES, easy life must correspond to the current rank conceptualization. Our findings until now provide limited support for this notion: The easy life dimension is not more strongly related to people's household incomes—presumably a reasonable indicator of current rank—than is the elite life dimension. However, the rank perspective is inherently comparative in nature but we measured household income in absolute terms (i.e., asking for specific amounts earned); moreover, the highest point on the scale combines all participants with household incomes above a certain threshold, obscuring potential differences between the highest earners. We return to this issue in Study 5.

This uncertainty over easy life notwithstanding, the two dimensions that emerged from our bottom-up approach make sense from a theoretical standpoint. At the same time, it may be somewhat surprising that they emerged from explicit self-reports: Some work suggests people are often motivated to downplay the kinds of privileges the elite life items describe possessing (e.g., Phillips & Lowery, 2020). Moreover, this work suggests that when confronted with evidence of these privileges, people emphasize the kinds of hardships that the easy life items indicate a lack of. These authors' conclusions hint that responses on our scales (and other similar ones) may be biased toward the lower SES pole. They may even indicate that the correlation between elite and easy life is systematically suppressed, if people who cannot avoid reporting an elite life may want to compensate by understating how easy their life is. Intriguingly, but extremely speculatively, the trending pattern of easy × elite interactions on self-focused

measures may explain why that correlation is still robust: The generally strong self-focus among individuals scoring high in elite life may prevent them from feeling the social / reputational pressure to play up their hardships. In any case, Study 4 may partially address the question of whether responses on our scales are connected to people's desire to feel their status is deserved.

Study 4

Study 4 (pre-registered at https://osf.io/za587/) aimed to more comprehensively examine the elite life dimension we reasoned might be linked with self-focused psychological patterns. To test this account, we measured feelings of entitlement, accuracy of social perception, and communal orientation. We predicted that the elite life dimension would more strongly predict high entitlement, low social accuracy, and low communal orientation. A small ($N = 103$) pilot study, as well as a larger ($N = 1139$) pre-registered additional study from a different participant pool, both provided additional support for each of these predictions; we report the first of these in the SOM because of its small sample size, and the second because it attempted to replicate (and did so successfully) only a subset of findings from Studies 4 and 5 with no major additions, and therefore did not warrant lengthening the main text of this paper.

Study 4 also measured five additional variables not related to the central theme of self-focus. The first of these was self-esteem, to test whether we would replicate the pattern observed in Study 3. The next two were sense of power and belief in a just world; for these we predicted equally strong associations with both dimensions of SES, given our expectation that a sense of both ease and privilege could make people feel powerful and motivate them to see their status as deserved. The final two were subjective health and life satisfaction; prior research has linked these with SES (e.g., Adler et al., 1994; Hoebel & Lampert, 2020) but we made no predictions

for whether their links with our respective dimensions would be similar or different. Like Study 3, Study 4 used quota sampling to achieve a representative distribution of SES.

Method

Participants

We used Prime Panels to recruit 373 American participants; as pre-registered, this excludes an additional 69 participants who failed more than one of four attention checks. The initial sample (i.e., prior to exclusions) used quotas to match to the US census in terms of gender, income and education. The final sample covered the entire range of the ladder measure from 1 to 10 ($M = 5.31$, median $= 5$, $SD = 1.99$).

Procedure

Participants first reported demographics, including their position on the SES ladder. Next, they completed the final 10-item measure of the easy and elite dimensions of SES. We included three additional items for exploratory purposes (we do not analyze them here; including them along with the primary 10 yields very similar results). Embedded within that measure was the attention check from prior studies that asked participants to indicate whether they were currently completing a survey. Next, participants completed eight different measures of psychological characteristics (see Table 8), separated into two blocks of four; the measures assigned to each block were randomly determined for each participant, and presented in a random order within block. To prevent fatigue, between each block participants completed a filler task which involved looking at pleasant images for about ten seconds. We included three additional attention checks within these eight measures (one asking participants whether they are human, one asking them to select the scale option in the middle, and one asking them to select the scale option on the far left). At the end of the survey, participants completed the objective measures of SES.

Table 8: Measures included in Study 4

Measure	Additional details	α	Pre-registered predictions
Entitlement (Campbell et al., 2004)	e.g., "Things should go my way"	.90	More positive with **elite** life
Communal orientation (Clark et al., 1987)	Overall score and two subscores (see below for sample items)	.78	More negative with **elite** life
Social perception (Baron-Cohen et al., 2001)	Mean accuracy: 67%	N/A	More negative with **elite** life
Self-esteem (Robins et al., 2001)	Single item ("I have high self-esteem")	N/A	More positive with **easy** life
Generalized Sense of Power (Anderson et al., 2012)	e.g., "I can get other people to do what I want"	.82	Equally positive for **both**
Belief in a Just World (Lipkus, 1991)	e.g., "I feel that people get what they are entitled to have"	.87	Equally positive for **both**
Satisfaction with Life (Diener et al., 1985)	e.g., "In most ways my life is close to ideal"	.90	No prediction
Subjective health	Single item ("Overall, how would you rate your health?")	N/A	No prediction

Note. All items used 1-7 scales, except the subjective health measure which used a 0-10 scale, and the social perception task (described in the text).

Measures

Details on all eight measures, including their original source, are presented in Table 8.

Three measures in particular assessed self-focus (entitlement, [low] communal orientation and

[in]accurate social perception); these we expected to relate more strongly to the elite life

dimension than to the easy life dimension. Previously developed self-report scales assessed

entitlement and communal orientation. For the latter, in addition to the overall scale score we

pre-registered that we would consider two subsets of items: Those assessing people's desire to

help others (e.g., "I often go out of my way to help another person"; α = .82), and those

assessing people's desire for others to help them (e.g., "It bothers me when other people neglect

my needs" on the same 7-point scale; α = .67). We expected that elite life individuals would

score especially low on the desire to help others. An empathic accuracy task, "Reading the Mind

in the Eyes", assessed the accuracy of social perception. In this task, participants complete 36

trials in which they see a photograph of another person's eyes and choose from among four

options which best describes that person's emotional state; each participant's score is the total

number of trials on which they selected the correct answer. After collecting data, we realized that

eight participants skipped trials on this task (one skipped 34 trials, three skipped 31, three

skipped 19, and one skipped eight). For these participants, the total number of correct answers

would not be a fair representation of their ability, but neither would be the proportion correct

since it is, for instance, much easier to score a perfect 1.00 on only two trials than on the full 36.

We thus made the post hoc decision to exclude these eight participants from analyses on the

social perception variable; the SOM reports virtually indistinguishable results including them.

(One additional participant skipped the entire task and thus could not be included in either

analysis.)

Results

Confirming the two-dimensional structure of subjective SES

Our first set of analyses examined for one final time the dimensional structure of

subjective SES. A pre-registered exploratory factor analysis on the ten subjective SES items used

the same specifications as in Study 3. The scree plot indicated a two-factor solution (with the

first five eigenvalues being 4.8, 1.7, 0.6, 0.6, and 0.5). The items loaded as expected onto their

respective factors (see Table 9).

Next, pre-registered confirmatory factor analyses using the lavaan package in R tested

both a two-factor structure and a one-factor structure (Table 10, top two rows). Comparing the

relative chi square, CFI and RMSEA values confirmed that a two-factor solution was a better fit

than a one-factor solution. The absolute values of the two-factor solution's RMSEA and CFI did

not quite meet our pre-registered criteria for good model fit (RMSEA below .05 and CFI above

.95). However, we had anticipated this possibility; model fit can suffer if some but not all items within a given subscale share a similarity not based entirely on substantive content. For example, two of the elite life items use the word "elite"; this could increase their correlation, making them appear like a distinct sub-facet of the elite life dimension. Our pre-registration therefore included the option to allow a maximum of four correlations between the residuals of items within the same subscale. When we allowed three such supplementary covariations (or four, but we limited ourselves to three given that fewer is considered better), model fit met our criteria (Table 10, bottom row).

Table 9: Item loadings, Study 4

Dimension	Elite	Easy
I am a member of the elite / I am definitely not a member of the elite	**.833**	-.027
I am well connected with powerful others / I am not very well-connected with powerful others	**.769**	.055
The people I have connections with are generally wealthy / The people I have connections with are generally not very wealthy	**.779**	.014
I received / am receiving an elite education / I never have and never will receive an elite education	**.759**	-.096
I have a fancy lifestyle / I live a modest life	**.666**	.176
I can comfortably buy necessities / I cannot buy necessities	-.123	**.847**
I generally have enough money / I don't have enough money	.078	**.838**
I have an easy life / I have a difficult life	.011	**.827**
I don't think much about money / I have financial worries	.105	**.823**
My life is generally free from worry / my life is filled with worry	.023	**.794**

Table 10: Confirmatory factor analysis model fit statistics; Study 4

Model	Chi square (lower is better)	CFI (higher is better)	RMSEA (lower is better)
One-factor	509***	.745	.190
Two-factor	131***	.948	.087
Two-factor, correlated residuals	57**	.986	.048

**: $p < .01$; ***: $p < .001$

Thus, both exploratory and confirmatory analyses indicated that the 10-item measure of SES we developed is comprised of two distinct dimensions, one representing the experience of

an elite life, and the other the experience of an easy life. The pilot study as well as the pre-registered additional study reported in the SOM both replicated findings from these analyses.

Associations with objective SES measures

As in Study 3 and as pre-registered, we computed five-item subscale scores for easy life and elite life. We then examined these scales' respective correlations with other indicators of SES (see Table 11), computing and comparing the zero-order and partial correlations (controlling for the other subscale) to each other.

Table 11: Zero-order (and partial) correlations of elite versus easy life and other SES variables

	Correlations		Tests of difference	
SES variable	Elite	Easy	Between rs	Between $r_{partial}$s
Ladder measure ($N=373$)	**.51 (.36)**	**.53 (.38)**	$t=-0.53$, $p=.596$	$z=-0.28$, $p=.780$
Household income ($N=351$)	**.38 (.25)**	**.39 (.26)**	$t=-0.04$, $p=.968$	$z=-0.08$, $p=.936$
Education ($N=361$)	**.26 (.19)**	**.23** (.10)	$t=0.70$, $p=.484$	$z=1.15$, $p=.250$
Parental education ($N=356$)	**.30 (.32)**	.04 (**-.12**)	$t=$**4.94**, $p<.001$	$z=$**6.09**, $p<.001$

Note. N for all partial correlations (shown in parentheses) is the 347 participants with no missing data on these variables. Correlations, ts and zs significant at $p < .05$ are **bolded**.

Results supported our predictions that both dimensions would equally strongly predict subjective SES and household income, but elite life dimension would more strongly predict parental education. Unexpectedly, the two dimensions had similar relationships with participants' own education, but given that the predicted difference emerged in all prior and subsequent studies, we do not discuss this exception further.

Is the elite life dimension especially linked with self-focus?

The key analyses for Study 4 tested the association between the elite and easy life dimensions and self-focused characteristics. Table 12 reports results using the same zero-order / partial correlation analysis strategy described previously. Results supported two of our three predictions: The elite life dimension predicted entitlement and inaccurate social perception more strongly than did the easy life dimension. For communal orientation, results were less

straightforward: People who scored high in elite life tended to score *higher* on the measure of communal orientation, but closer scrutiny revealed that this was due to a stronger desire for *others* to help *them,* not a stronger desire to help others. That finding aligns with the pattern for self-focus, though it does not provide support for a difference in communal orientation per se. Interestingly, recent research has similarly failed to find expected connections between SES and self-reported communal orientation (Weick et al., 2022). The findings from Study 4, along with results from the pilot study and from the additional pre-registered study reported in the SOM, provide additional support for separately considering the desire for others to relate communally to the self and the desire for the self to relate communally to others.

Table 12: Zero-order (and partial) correlations of elite vs. easy life with psychological measures

	Correlations		Tests of difference	
Measure	Elite	Easy	Between *r*s	Between $r_{partial}$s
Self-focus related				
Entitlement (*N* = 372)	**.31 (.35)**	-.001 (-.17)	*t*=**6.19**, *p*<.001	*z*=**7.23**, *p*<.001
Social perception (*N* = 365)	**-.20 (-.22)**	-.01 (.09)	*t*=**-3.55**, *p*<.001	*z*=**-4.16**, *p*<.001
Communal (*N* = 370)	.05 (.08)	-.06 (-.08)	*t*=**1.98**, *p*=.048	*z*=**2.17**, *p*=.030
I should help others (*N* = 370)	.01 (.03)	-.04 (-.05)	*t*=0.95, *p*=.342	*z*=1.04, *p*=.298
Others should help me (*N* = 370)	.10 (**.13**)	-.04 (-.08)	*t*=**2.58**, *p*=.010	*z*=**2.85**, *p*=.004
Not self-focus related				
Self-esteem (*N* = 370)	**.41 (.26)**	**.44 (.31)**	*t*=-0.61, *p*=.542	*z*=0.76, *p*=.447
Power (*N* = 370)	**.42 (.28)**	**.43 (.29)**	*t*=-0.32, *p*=.749	*z*=-0.19, *p*=.849
Belief in a just world (*N* = 371)	**.31 (.17)**	**.35 (.26)**	*t*=-0.88, *p*=.379	*z*=-1.16, *p*=.246
Life satisfaction (*N* = 371)	**.51 (.29)**	**.72 (.65)**	*t*=**-5.81**, *p*<.001	*z*=**-6.25**, *p*<.001
Subjective health (*N* = 369)	**.28 (.15)**	**.34 (.25)**	*t*=-1.08, *p*=.281	*z*=-1.36, *p*=.174

Note. *N* for all partial correlations is the 359 participants with no missing data on these variables; partial correlations are in parentheses. Correlations, *t*s and *z*s significant at *p* < .05 are **bolded**.

Turning to variables not related to self-focus and the more exploratory predictions we made for them, results again supported two out of three. First, both dimensions similarly predicted feeling that the world is just, speaking against the idea that either dimension is more strongly linked with a feeling (or with a desire to feel) that one's status is deserved. Second, both similarly predicted feeling powerful, suggesting the distinct *experiences* of subjective SES we

identify here are different from prior work on the distinct *consequences* of SES having to do with power and status (Yu & Blader, 2017). Third, we did not replicate the self-esteem finding from Study 3 and the pilot study; instead, both dimensions showed similarly strong positive correlations with self-esteem.

Regarding the variables for which we had made no predictions, scoring high on both dimensions of SES was similarly and positively related to subjective health, and the easy life dimension was especially strongly related to life satisfaction.

Discussion

Our two newly developed subscales appear to tap into two distinct dimensions of SES—one that reflects a person's sense of leading an elite and special life, and one that reflects a person's sense of leading an easy and stress-free life. People who score high (versus low) on the elite dimension come from families and institutions of privilege; they also feel entitled to special treatment, believe others should go out of their way to help them, and underperform when reading emotions from others' facial expressions. These patterns, also present in two additional studies described in the SOM, bolster the idea that the elite life is linked with both historical cultural privilege and a cluster of self-focused patterns.

By contrast, people who score high (versus low) on the easy life dimension feel satisfied with their lives. We had not pre-registered this as a prediction, but it aligns with our prior findings showing that the easy life dimension is positively related to emotional stability. Thus far, however, it is not clear whether the easy life dimension cleanly corresponds with any pre-existing theoretical conceptualization of SES, nor have we tested its associations with actual magnanimous behavior.

Study 5

Study 5 included additional measures of SES to more comprehensively assess both current rank (current wealth and available assets) and historical cultural privilege (participants' parents' and grandparents' economic standing), and more conclusively test the ways in which these two conceptualizations of SES are associated with easy and elite life; the additional study reported in the SOM measured and analyzed these same variables and observed the same results. Study 5 also sought to address previous mixed findings regarding SES and prosocial behavior (e.g., Piff et al., 2010, Korndörfer et al, 2015; Stamos et al., 2020). If the easy life dimension is linked with magnanimity, those high in this dimension should demonstrate greater prosociality; if the elite life dimension is linked with self-focus, those high in this dimension should demonstrate lower prosociality.

Moreover, the existing literature on SES and prosociality hints at a potential nuance to this pattern. Recall that high SES participants in one study reported stronger feelings of empathy while their brains revealed muted empathic responses (Varnum et al., 2015), and that high SES participants in another study they were more likely to act prosocially in public than in private, presumably because they were motivated by the reputational rewards and not by a genuine desire to help (Kraus & Callaghan, 2016). These findings of discrepancies between self-reported feelings and revealed brain activity, and between public and private behavior, paint a broader picture of high SES, in at least one of its forms, as linked with *declaring* prosociality but not actually *enacting* it. That is, perhaps (at least some subset of) individuals with high SES want to portray themselves as generous and prosocial without having to actually bear the cost of acting that way. This preference for declaring prosociality and reaping its benefits, compared to

enacting it and bearing its costs, would fit particularly well with the self-focus characteristic of those high on the elite life dimension.

We did not pre-register Study 5, instead replicating methods and analyses across two relatively large samples (referred to as Samples A and B, with Sample B using quotas as in Studies 3 and 4). We obtained very consistent results across the samples, so we here analyze them collapsed into one, while noting the few differences that emerged between the individual samples.

Method

Participants

For Sample A, we recruited 422 participants based in the United States from Amazon Mechanical Turk. For Sample B, we used Prime Panels to recruit 403 American participants. Sample B used quotas to match to the US census in terms of income and education. Due to an oversight, we included no attention checks. Both final samples covered the entire range of the ladder measure from 1 to 10 ($M_{\text{Sample A}} = 5.02$, median$_{\text{Sample A}} = 5$, $SD_{\text{Sample A}} = 1.79$; $M_{\text{Sample B}} = 5.27$, median$_{\text{Sample B}} = 5$, $SD_{\text{Sample B}} = 2.07$).

Procedure

Participants first reported demographics, including their position on the SES ladder, and then completed our 10-item measure of subjective SES ($\alpha_{\text{elite}} = .84$, $\alpha_{\text{easy}} = .89$). Next, they completed two pairs of measures of prosocial behavior. The first pair were global self-report measures—an estimate of how many hours per month they had volunteered over the past year (rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 hours per month to 7+ hours per month), and the percentage of their household income they would hypothetically be willing to give up so it could be redistributed to households with income lower than theirs. In both cases, participants were

free to declare prosociality without having to prove it in any concrete way: Few people keep records of the time they spend volunteering, and no one would hold them to giving up the reported percentage of income.

The second pair of measures more closely assessed actually enacted prosocial behavior. One asked participants to report the amount and recipient organization for each individual charitable donation they had made over the past year. This required people to access specific records or at least memories, as opposed to providing global impressions of their own generosity. We summed the amounts to arrive at high fidelity estimates of each participant's total charitable donations. The data were highly skewed, so we analyzed this variable in both raw and log transformed form (we increased everyone's prior donation amounts by $0.01 prior to log transforming, given that one can only compute log of numbers greater than 0). Many participants wrote in names of one or more recipient organizations without providing amounts; we coded these participants as having donated $0. The SOM reports virtually indistinguishable results treating these data as missing instead.

As another measure of actually enacted prosocial behavior, we gave participants the opportunity to make a real charitable donation at a personal cost. At the end of the study, we told them that, as researchers interested in studying prosocial behavior, we wanted to join them in effecting real change. We told them they could donate any amount up to $0.75, which would be deducted from their study compensation of $1.25, and that we would match that donation out of our own funds. Participants who chose to donate selected a charity from among the following before entering the amount of their donation: Cancer Research Institute, World Resources Institute, American Red Cross, National Alliance to End Homelessness, Doctors Without Borders USA, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America, and Against Malaria Foundation. We

provided participants a summary of the mission statement for each organization. We reduced participants' compensation according to their decisions, and made their donations along with our matching donations when data collection ended.

Near the end of the study, but before the last donation behavior measure, participants completed measures of familial SES and wealth. For familial SES, participants reported their parental SES using a version of the ladder measure that asked about their parents' social class when they (the participants) were children. They also reported grandparental SES by indicating their grandparents' financial position (we did not specify the timepoint as we expected that from the time people became aware of their grandparents' financial status, that status was not likely to have changed very much). We asked participants to consider their most well-off grandparent, specifying that this grandparent should be one who played a role in raising one of their parents. For this grandparent, they selected their position on the following scale: "below the poverty line", "struggling to get by", "managing but not easily", "average", "comfortably well-off", "wealthy", "extremely wealthy".

For wealth, participants used free-entry textboxes to report their net worth, as well as the total amount of cash they could come up with by liquidating or selling their assets in a financial disaster. Many chose not to enter a response; we treated those cases as missing data. Because responses on these two measures were highly skewed, as with self-reported charitable donations, we analyzed the data both in raw and log transformed form. Prior to log transforming the net worth variable, we artificially increased everyone's net worth by $200,000.01 (several participants reported negative net worth, with the lowest being -$200,000). Prior to log transforming the liquidity variable we increased everyone's liquidity by $0.01.

Results

Results were very similar across Sample A and Sample B, so we present the results

collapsed across samples, but we note here (in the main text) all instances where individual

sample results (presented in full in the SOM) diverged.

Associations with objective measures of SES

As in past studies, we computed and compared zero-order and partial correlations

(controlling for the other subscale) (see Table 13).

Table 13: Zero-order (and partial) correlations of elite versus easy life with other SES variables

SES variable	Correlations		Tests of difference	
	Elite	Easy	Between rs	Between $r_{partial}$s
Ladder measure ($N = 825$)	**.55 (.38)**	**.58 (.42)**	t=-1.23, p=.219	z=-0.87, p=.385
Current rank markers				
Household income ($N = 786$)	**.34 (.18)**	**.37 (.24)**	t=-0.92, p=.358	z=-1.15, p=.250
Net worth ($N = 481$)	**.18** (.03)	**.32 (.28)**	**t=-3.27, p=.001**	**z=-4.63, p<.001**
Log net worth ($N = 481$)	**.16** (.02)	**.29 (.25)**	**t=-2.94, p=.003**	**z=-4.17, p<.001**
Liquidity ($N = 487$)	**.16** (.03)	**.27 (.22)**	**t=-2.50, p=.013**	**z=-3.52, p<.001**
Log liquidity ($N = 487$)	**.27** (.08)	**.42 (.35)**	**t=-3.70, p<.001**	**z=-5.16, p<.001**
Cultural privilege markers				
Education ($N = 799$)	**.32 (.29)**	**.15** (-.01)	**t=4.96, p<.001**	**z=6.00, p<.001**
Parental education ($N = 772$)	**.30 (.31)**	**.07** (-.10)	**t=6.52, p<.001**	**z=7.99, p<.001**
Parental SES ($N = 806$)	**.36 (.31)**	**.18** (-.01)	**t=5.75, p<.001**	**z=6.48, p<.001**
Grandparental SES ($N = 804$)	**.25 (.21)**	**.12** (-.01)	**t=3.88, p<.001**	**z=4.25, p<.001**

Note. As noted above, many participants did not report their net worth or liquidity; because of these missing data, we analyzed partial correlations (shown in parentheses) separately for these variables. For all other partial correlations *N* is the 749 participants with no missing data on all other variables. Correlations, *t*s and *z*s significant at *p* < .05 are **bolded**.

Consistent with our prior findings, the two dimensions were equally strongly related to

SES and income. Further cementing its connection to the cultural conceptualization of SES, the

elite life dimension was more strongly related to education, parental education and all measures

of familial SES. The easy life dimension was more strongly related to all measures of wealth,

providing the first piece of evidence that this dimension may in fact reflect the current rank

conceptualization of SES. All of these patterns emerged in both samples examined separately

(with one exception: the effect on liquidity did not emerge in Sample B's untransformed wealth scores, though it did on all other comparisons: log transformed scores in Sample B, and both versions in Sample A; see SOM). Moreover, these same patterns emerged in the additional study reported in the SOM (with the exception of, again, the effect on un-transformed liquidity).

Associations with prosocial behavior

Next, we tested whether individuals who score high on either dimension differ in terms of their prosocial behavior, attending to differences in how well our measures captured participants' unverifiable declarative self-reports compared to their actually enacted behaviors (see Table 14).

Table 14: Zero-order (and partial) correlations of elite versus easy life with prosociality variables

	Correlations		Tests of difference	
Prosociality variable	Elite	Easy	Between rs	Between $r_{partial}$s
Declared prosociality				
Volunteering ($N = 808$)	**.15 (.16)**	.06 (-.03)	t=**2.27**, p=**.006**	z=**5.44**, p<**.001**
Percent redistributed ($N = 784$)	**.34 (.35)**	**.15** (-.05)	t=**6.80**, p<**.001**	z=**12.35**, p<**.001**
Demonstrated prosociality				
Past donations ($N = 820$)	.05 (-.04)	**.15 (.16)**	t=**-2.79**, p=**.005**	z=**-3.96**, p<**.001**
Log past donations ($N = 820$)	.06 (-.03)	**.15 (.14)**	t=**-2.79**, p=**.005**	z=**-3.36**, p<**.001**
Donation behavior ($N = 803$)	-.02 (**-.09**)	**.11 (.14)**	t=**-3.78**, p<**.001**	z=**-6.39**, p<**.001**

Note. For all partial correlations N is the 776 participants with no missing data on these variables. Correlations, ts and zs significant at $p < .05$ are **bolded**.

These analyses revealed a divide between the two types of measures, and this distinction replicated across each of the samples analyzed separately. The elite life dimension was more strongly related to *declaring* greater prosociality on global self-report measures for which there was no accountability. That is, scoring high on elite life was an especially strong predictor of self-reporting weekly volunteer hours, and of hypothetically donating a percentage of one's income toward redistribution. On the surface, this would seem to suggest that elite life individuals hold more prosocial attitudes than easy life individuals.

In contrast, the easy life dimension was more strongly related to *enacting* greater prosociality on specific measures grounded in concrete behavior. That is, scoring high on easy life was an especially strong predictor of our high-fidelity measure of past charitable donations, and of actual in-study donations. (The only exception to this pattern, when we examined the two samples separately, was that the effect on past donations did not emerge in Sample B's zero-order correlations, though it did on partial correlations and actual in-study donations, as well as everywhere in Sample A; see SOM).

There are multiple possible interpretations for these divergent patterns, but they are clearly consistent with the emerging picture of the two dimensions. Elite life individuals (who are relatively disagreeable and yet feel entitled to others' respect) may wish to *appear* prosocial, as this would benefit them individually, and so they may proclaim prosocial attitudes when doing so comes at little or no cost. Easy life individuals (who are agreeable and emotionally stable) may be driven by their magnanimity to *be* prosocial, and engage in such behaviors at least under some conditions, though they may feel no special need to shout it from the rooftops.

Discussion

Two independent samples expanded our understanding of material and psychological differences between the two dimensions: Elite life individuals, in line with the conceptualization of SES as culture, come from wealthy upper-class backgrounds stretching back at least two generations, and their self-interest may motivate them to declare unverifiable prosocial attitudes when doing so comes at no cost. Easy life individuals, perhaps in line with the conceptualization of SES as current rank, have more current wealth (a pattern we confirmed in a third independent sample in the additional study), and their agreeableness and emotional stability may motivate them to take more verifiable prosocial actions.

The wealth finding observed here was robust across three separate samples, but stands in contrast to results in the prior studies for income, which, we consistently found, does not differentiate between elite and easy life. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that income's similar relationship with both dimensions might be due to the fact that one's absolute income is not comparative, whereas the idea of SES as rank is explicitly so. However, our wealth measures were not comparative either, making this an unlikely explanation for the absence of strong positive correlations between income and the easy life dimension. An alternative possibility is that our measure of household income, which was capped at "$200,000 or more", was not well-suited to capture the distinction; had we included more fine-grained income categories at the higher echelons, perhaps we would have found differential correlations, as we did with the open-ended wealth and liquidity measures included in this study. Yet another possibility is that a high income may be a poor marker of rank if a large portion of that high income goes to repaying debts, which a measure like net worth would take into account. These are open questions for future research. At this point, we interpret the wealth findings as consistent with the suggestion that the easy life dimension reflects SES as current rank, though we acknowledge that the income findings are difficult to understand in that light.

General Discussion

We began this line of work wondering whether our field's operationalization of subjective SES might mask the construct's multiple dimensions. Driving this question was the observation that existing literature has linked social standing with two distinct sets of psychological characteristics. These sets are not mutually exclusive, and to some extent certain patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviors might be linked with SES only under specific conditions. However, a second observation—that there are two different theoretical

conceptualizations of what SES is fundamentally about—helped bring into focus another interpretation: Perhaps subjective SES exists along more than one dimension, and each dimension predicts a distinct set of psychological characteristics that existing unidimensional measures fail to appreciate.

The raw materials for our investigation were participants' own self-reports of what factors led them to select either relatively high or relatively low rungs on a ladder intended to measure subjective SES. Coding these responses, converting them to assessment items, and then asking new samples of participants to rate the resulting items, consistently revealed that there are two distinct dimensions of subjective SES. Moreover, each of these dimensions predicts an overlapping but distinct set of objective SES markers and psychological characteristics. If existing measures of SES conflate these two dimensions, that could be the reason for unreliable associations that have at times emerged in the prior literature. Table 15 summarizes our findings across studies.

Before continuing, we should acknowledge that our studies took place in a specific cultural context: All participants were American residents sampled between 2016-2019. Our studies also underrepresented the wealthiest Americans (though we managed to proportionally sample this group in our additional SOM study), as well as White respondents and women. For these reasons, we cannot claim that these two dimensions of SES are necessarily universal. Nonetheless, the SOM reports detailed analyses suggesting that results are consistent across gender and racial categories, implying there may be few differences in how the two dimensions of subjective SES function within American culture. Regarding between-culture differences, while we do not think it implausible that many of the findings uncovered apply cross-culturally, but more research is needed to thoroughly examine this question. Ultimately, our intention with

this research was to seek some clarity in the existing (and primarily recent, primarily US-based) literature, and our findings indeed suggest that this literature may be conflating distinct dimensions of SES and its subjective experience, at least within this particular cultural context.

Table 15: Summary of key findings across studies

Variable	Predicted pattern	2a	2b	3	4 pilot	4 main	5	SOM
Ladder measure	Same + association w/ both dimensions	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No[a]
Current rank markers								
Income	More + correlation with easy life	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Net worth								Yes	Yes
Liquidity								Yes	Yes
Cultural markers								
Education	More + correlation with elite life	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Parents' education		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parents' SES							Yes	Yes
Grandparents' SES							Yes	Yes
Magnanimous patterns								
Agreeableness	More + correlation with easy life	Yes	Yes	Yes				
(low) Neuroticism		Yes	Yes	Yes				
Self-esteem				Yes	Yes	No		
Demonstrated prosociality							Yes	
Self-focused patterns								
Narcissism	More + correlation with elite life	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			
Entitlement					Yes	Yes		Yes
(low) Social perception					Yes	Yes		Yes
(low) Communal					Yes	Yes[b]		Yes
Declared prosociality							Yes	Yes

Note: SOM (top of rightmost column) refers to the additional pre-registered study in the SOM
[a] The ladder measure in this additional study was more strongly linked to the easy than to the elite life measure. However, the ladder measure in this additional study was also different than the one in other studies: Rather than our hybrid version that asked participants to *rank* their *social class*, it was the traditional version that asks participants to compare themselves to others on objective markers like income, education and occupational prestige, and is more linked with current rank
[b] The expected pattern did not emerge on the overall scale in this studies; however pre-registered subscale analyses indicated that elite life was more positively correlated with wanting others to care for one's needs, compared to easy life. This is broadly consistent with the self-focus prediction.

How many dimensions of subjective SES are there, and what are they?

Taken together, our first three studies identified two dimensions of subjective SES. These dimensions emerged from a bottom-up process that began with participants' own introspective reports.

Assessing our method

The strength of this approach is that does not rely on top-down assumptions about how participants experience their SES; instead, it elicits those experiences directly from them. In other words, our empirical approach did not pre-suppose that there would be any particular number of dimensions, and it easily could have determined that there was only one, or that there were more than two. The present findings are therefore likely to reflect genuine distinct dimensions that emerge in people's minds when they consider their SES.

By the same token, one drawback of this approach lies in the limitations of human introspection: It is a truism in psychology that people are not always aware of why they do what they do (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Given that we relied on people verbalizing why they chose a particular rung, we may have missed aspects of their subjective experience that shaped their rung choice but did so outside of their awareness. Moreover, our measure of subjective SES necessarily relies on self-report, which makes its associations with other self-report variables vulnerable to common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). With that in mind, we were especially encouraged by our measures' associations with participants' behavior (e.g., their performance on the social perception task) and with their reports about relatively objective indices (e.g., their parents' education levels). Nonetheless, it is clear that the door is open for future scholars to theorize about additional dimensions, which they could test using top-down approaches.

Something else worth emphasizing is that, on the whole, our approach follows the field's general understanding of SES as a spectrum. In Study 1 we sampled two groups of people—those at the higher and lower ends of this spectrum—but we did so following the spectrum-based assumption that people with midrange SES would look more or less like the midpoint between the two groups we sampled. Analyses in our subsequent studies put that assumption to the test, treating SES as a linear predictor. One approach to describing the results of these analyses could have more explicitly acknowledged this linearity. For example, we could have described (a subset of) our findings thus: We found one dimension that characterizes the degree to which people find that their lives are ordinary and modest versus elite and special, and to the degree people score lower versus higher on this dimension, they tend to have less versus more access to cultural privilege, and to be less versus more focused on themselves. Discussing our results in this manner, explicitly highlighting the entire SES spectrum, produces accurate but bulkier, clunkier text; for ease of expression, we therefore discussed our findings in terms of how they portray people with higher SES, but with the implicit understanding that this is by comparison with people who score relatively lower on our dimensions.

Elite life, easy life, culture and rank

We would suggest that scholars use and build off of the two dimensions we identified here: One of these corresponds to people's sense that their current life is materially easy and carefree, and the other corresponds to their sense that they belong to an elite and special segment of society. Just as our bottom-up methodological approach did not pre-suppose the number of dimensions, it also did not pre-suppose these dimensions' contents. In fact, we did not come armed with *a priori* hypotheses, and instead followed the lead of participants' responses. It therefore strikes us as particularly meaningful that, even in the absence of researcher intentions

or expectations, the two dimensions we uncovered mapped reasonably well onto a theoretical

division that permeates the literature on SES and social class.

As is evident in Table 15, in nearly every test we ran, the elite life dimension correlated

especially strongly with indices more associated with the view that SES is a cultural variable.

People who scored high on this dimension consistently reported being educated and having

educated parents; moreover, in Study 5 we extended further back into participants' family trees

and found additional evidence that their sense of their SES may reflect longstanding inherited

privilege. This is particularly notable given that most scholars conceptualize the ladder as a

measure of current (subjective) privilege. Our findings suggest that, when placing themselves on

the ladder, people may also consider more historical forms of privilege.

The evidence linking the easy life dimension with the view of SES as current rank was

somewhat more mixed. On the one hand, the easy life dimension was never especially strongly

associated with participants' current income, a variable that, on its face, seems like it should

capture something about the current socioeconomic hierarchy. On the other hand, when we

measured participants' net worth, and the amount of cash they would be able to come up with in

an emergency, a variety of analyses across three independent samples robustly showed that

individuals who score high on the easy life dimension *do* have more wealth. Moreover, whereas

our wealth measures were open-ended, the highest income bracket our participants could report

was a household income of $200,000 per year. This restriction may have obscured important

variation between people with relatively high SES: In many of the country's largest states, over

10% of households would find themselves in that highest bracket (World Population Review,

2022). On the whole, our findings offer greater certainty regarding the connection between the

elite life dimension and the view of SES as culture, but also suggest that the easy life dimension may reflect the view of SES as current rank.

An alternative interpretation

Along the way, we considered alternative interpretations of the dimensions we uncovered and their utility. In particular, we noted that the elite life items make reference to respondents' history, while the easy life items are exclusively focused on the present. This fits with our (historical) cultural privilege / current rank interpretation; however, one might wonder whether this would also fit with the interpretation that easy life represents upward mobility—i.e., greater comfort and ease now than in the past. The additional pre-registered study measured perceptions of upward mobility directly; in Study 5 we were also able to index this construct as the difference between participants' (standardized) current SES and their (standardized) reports of their parents' SES while they (the participants) were growing up. The SOM presents additional analyses showing that these mobility variables do indeed correlate with our easy life measure. However, the correlations are far from strong enough to suggest that the measures reflect the same underlying construct ($r_{\text{additional study}} = .36$; $r_{\text{Study 5}} = .39$), and additional analyses find that in both studies, mobility and the easy life variable have independent associations with wealth and with psychological characteristics. Easy life is therefore linked with, and may function similarly to, perceived upward mobility, but the two constructs are nonetheless distinct. We therefore retained the elite / easy interpretation.

Do these dimensions help organize the existing literature?

Our studies cannot definitively reconcile every finding from the thriving literature on SES. Nevertheless, these findings do underscore the promise of systematically disentangling the dimensions of (subjective) SES. On the one hand, when people's sense of social standing comes

from their degree of cultural privilege, from their family's historical status and education, this sense can be reliably measured with our elite life scale, and high scores on this scale are linked with a set of self-focused psychological characteristics. Specifically, people who score high on this measure are disagreeable, narcissistic, entitled, and out of touch with others' mental states. They present themselves as prosocial and concerned with others' welfare, but when it comes time to act generously, they may hang back. These findings fit well with prior work on the independent (interdependent) worldviews of people high (low) in cultural privilege (e.g., Stephens & Townsend, 2013). Independence and interdependence are separate dimensions, rather than opposite ends of a single spectrum (Giacomin & Joran, 2017), but one distinction between them is that an independent orientation focuses one's attention on the self (at the expense of others), whereas an interdependent orientation focuses one's attention on others (perhaps at the expense of the self). That high (low) scores on our elite life scale predict high (low) self-focus may reflect this difference in cultural worldviews.

On the other hand, when people's sense of their social standing comes from their degree of comfort and ease, from assurances provided by their current wealth and material goods, this sense can be reliably measured with our easy life scale, and high scores on this scale are linked with a set of magnanimous psychological characteristics. Specifically, people who score high on this measure are agreeable, conscientious and emotionally stable. Rather than publicly promoting their altruism, they show it with their actions. These magnanimous characteristics are less well-connected to independence and interdependence: Merely being *focused* on other people and *aware* of one's place in relation to them does not guarantee one will treat them agreeably or altruistically.

Together, these findings point to a potential resolution to some debates in the literature, like the one regarding the association between social status and prosociality. Our findings suggest the nature of this relation depends on the dimension of status one measures (as well as the way one assesses prosociality; see Kraus & Callaghan, 2016). Our results also offer a possible explanation for empirical inconsistencies in the literature: Existing measures of SES such as the ladder measure conflate the two dimensions, and therefore yield unreliable associations with constructs linked with only one of the two (e.g., Piff et al., 2010, vs. Stamos et al., 2020 vs. Korndörfer et al., 2015).

Moving forward

The present research provides a set of brief, reliable, and valid scales that allow researchers to measure both distinct dimensions of subjective SES quickly and in parallel. This novel contribution is likely to be of use to scholars who wish to understand not only whether participants see themselves as high in status, but also what they mean by that. However, these scales may not be of use to every research project addressing questions related to SES. For example, some projects may be more concerned with *objective* status hierarchies—e.g., do people tend to vote for or against their economic self-interest? Projects like these might not benefit from any innovation in the measurement of subjective SES, instead demanding accurate assessment of actual wealth or income. Furthermore, there are times when both dimensions will operate similarly; for example, in Study 4 we found similar associations between the two dimensions and feelings of power, as well as beliefs that the world is fair. In such instances, there may be little benefit to separating the dimensions, and researchers might prefer to use a single-item measure like the ladder measure.

Nonetheless, the short, reliable scales offered here are likely to be useful and generative to the many researchers interested in understanding subjective SES. Our labs have already begun to make use of this methodological tool, supplementing objective measures of SES and helping shed light on the theoretical pathways through which SES comes to be linked with different characteristics. As this research area continues to expand, we see great potential in these new measures to help advance our scientific understanding.

Conclusion

Objective and subjective SES are distinct constructs that each predict different kinds of psychological, behavioral and physical outcomes (e.g., Belmi & Laurin, 2016; Cundiff & Matthews, 2017; Kraus et al., 2013; Kraus & Park, 2014). Objective SES contains distinct facets—people's income may predict different outcomes than their level of education. The research reported here suggests the same may be true of subjective SES. Two people who say they have high status may mean very different things by this statement, and to the degree they do they are likely very different people in other ways as well. We should take this into account if we want to advance our understanding of the psychology of SES.

References

Adler, N. E., Boyce, T., Chesney, M. A., Cohen, S., Folkman, S., Kahn, R. L., & Syme, S. L.

   (1994). Socioeconomic status and health. The challenge of the gradient. *The American*

   Psychologist, *49*, 15–24.

 Adler, N. E., Epel, E. S., Gastellazzo, G., & Ickovics, J. R. (2000). *Health Psychology, 19*, 586-

   592.

Ames, D. R., Rose, P., & Anderson, C. P. (2006). The NPI-16 as a short measure of narcissism.

   Journal of Research in Personality, *40*, 440–450.

Anderson, C., John, O. P., & Keltner, D. (2012). The personal sense of power. *Journal of*

   Personality, 80, 313-344.

Anderson, C., Kraus, M. W., Galinsky, A. D., & Keltner, D. (2012). The local-ladder effect:

   Social status and subjective well-being. *Psychological science, 23*, 764-771.

Antonopolis, S. (2022). Studying socioeconomic status: conceptual problems and an alternative

   path forward. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*.

A. P. A. (n. d.). Self-focus. https://dictionary.apa.org/self-focus

Authors. (in principle acceptance). Lower social class, better social skills? A registered report

   testing diverging predictions from the rank and cultural approaches to social class.

Baron-Cohen, S., Wheelwright, S., Hill, J., Raste, Y., & Plumb, I. (2001). The "Reading the

   Mind in the Eyes" Test revised version: A study with normal adults, and adults with

   Asperger syndrome or high-functioning autism. *Journal of Child Psychology and*

   Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines, *42*, 241–251.

Belmi, P., & Laurin, K. (2016). Who wants to get to the top? Class and lay theories about power.

   Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *111*, 505–529.

Bleidorn, W., Hopwood, C. J., & Lucas, R. E. (2018). Life events and personality trait change. *Journal of Personality, 86*, 83-96.

Bleidorn, W., Schwaba, T., Zheng, A., Hopwood, C. J., Sosa, S. S., Roberts, B. W., & Briley, D. A. (2022). Personality stability and change: A meta-analysis of longituindal studies. *Psychological Bulletin, 148*, 588-619.

Bourdieu, P. (1979). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group

Bourdieu, P. (1987). The forms of capital (pp. 241-258). In: Richardson, John G. (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for Sociology of Education*. Greenwood Press, New York.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1990/1970). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. Richard Nice (trans.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Brown-Iannuzzi, J. L., Lundberg, K. B., Kay, A. C., & Payne, B. K. (2015). Subjective status shapes political preferences. *Psychological Science, 26*, 15-26.

Callan, M. J., Kim, H., Gheorghiu, A. I., & Matthews, W. J. (2016). The interrelations between social class, personal relative deprivation, and prosociality. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 8*, 660-669.

Campbell, W. K., Bonacci, A. M., Shelton, J., Exline, J. J., & Bushman, B. J. (2004). Psychological entitlement: Interpersonal consequences and validation of a self-report measure. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 83*, 29-45.

Chetty, R., Friedman, J. N., Saez, E., Turner, N., & Yagan, D. (2017). *Mobility report cards: The role of colleges in inter- generational mobility* (NBER Working Paper No. 23618). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Clark, M., Ouellette, R., Powell, M., & Milberg, S. (1987). Recipient's mood, relationship type, and helping. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 53*, 94–103.

Cohen, D., Shin, F., Liu, X., Ondish, P., & Kraus, M. W. (2017). Defining social class across time and between groups. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *43*, 1530–1545.

Corak, M. (2006). Principles and practicalities for measuring child poverty. *International Social Security Review*, *59*, 3–35.

Côté, S., Kraus, M. W., Carpenter, N. C., Piff, P. K., Beermann, U., & Keltner, D. (2017). Social affiliation in same-class and cross-class interactions. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 146*, 269–285.

Côté, S., Stellar, J. E., Willer, R., Forbes, R. C., Martin, S. R., & Bianchi, E. C. (2021). The psychology of entrenched privilege: High socioeconomic status individuals from affluent backgrounds are uniquely high in entitlement. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 47*, 70-88.

Cundiff, J. M. & Matthews, K. A. (2017). Is subjective social status a unique correlate of physical health? A meta-analysis. *Health Psychology, 36*, 1109-1125.

Damian, R. I., Spengler, M., Suu, A., & Roberts, B. W. (2019). Sixteen going on sixty-six: A longitudinal study of personality stability and change across 50 years. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 117*, 674-695.

Destin, M., Rheinschmidt-Same, M., & Richeson, J. A. (2017). Status-based identity: A conceptual approach integrating the social psychological study of socioeconomic status and identity. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 12*, 270-289.

Diener, E. D., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of personality assessment*, 49, 71-75.

Dietze, P., & Knowles, E. D. (2016). Social class and the motivational relevance of other human beings: Evidence from visual attention. *Psychological Science*, *27*, 1517–1527.

Fendinger, N. J., Lou, S., & Knowles, E. D. (2023). Moving beyond the gradient: Social classes as group contexts defined by multiple forms of capital. OSF Preprints. https://osf.io/ph3ze/

Fiddick, L., Cummins, D. D., Janicki, M., Lee, S., & Erlich, N. (2013). A cross-cultural study of noblesse oblige in economic decision-making. *Human Nature, 24*, 318-335.

Foster, J. D., Campbell, W. K., & Twenge, J. M. (2003). Individual differences in narcissism: Inflated self-views across the lifespan and around the world. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *37*, 469–486.

Giacomin, M., Jordan, C. (2017). Interdependent and Independent Self-Construal. In: Zeigler-Hill, V., Shackelford, T. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*. Springer, Cham.

Gosling, S. D., Rentfrow, P. J., & Swann, W. B., Jr. (2003). A very brief measure of the Big Five personality domains. *Journal of Research in Personality, 37*, 504-528.

Griskevicius, V., Tybur, J. M., Delton, A. W., & Robertson, T. E. (2011). The influence of mortality and socioeconomic status on risk and delayed rewards: A life history theory approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 100*, 1015-1026.

Hall, J. A., Schmid Mast, M., & Latu, I. M. (2015). The vertical dimension of social relations and accurate interpersonal perception: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 39*, 131-163.

Hoebel, J., & Lampert, T. (2020). Subjective social status and health: Multidisciplinary explanations and methodological challenges. *Journal of Health Psychology, 25*, 173-185.

Jachimowicz, J. M., Davidai, S., Goya-Tocchetto, D., Szaszi, B., Day, M. V., Tepper, S. J.,

Phillips, L. T., Mirza, M. U., Ordabayeva, N., & Hauser, O. P. (2022). Inequality in researchers' minds: Four guiding questions for studying subjective perceptions of economic inequality. *Journal of Economic Surveys*.

Jackson, J. J., Thoemmes, F., Jonkmann, K., Lüdtke, O., & Trautwein, U. (2012). Military training and personality trait development: Does the military make the man, or does the man make the military? *Psychological Science, 23*, 270-277.

John, O. P., & Srivastava, S. (1999). The Big-Five trait taxonomy: History, measurement, and theoretical perspectives. In L. A. Pervin & O. P. John (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (Vol. 2, pp. 102–138). New York: Guilford Press.

Keltner, D., Gruenfeld, D. H., & Anderson, C. (2003). Power, approach, and inhibition. *Psychological Review*, *110*(2), 265–284.

Korndörfer, M., Egloff, B., & Schmukle, S. C. (2015). A large scale test of the effect of social class on prosocial behavior. *PLoS One, 10*, e0133193

Kraus, M. W., Adler, N., & Chen, T. D. (2013). Is the association of subjetive SES and self-rated health confounded by negative mood? An experimental approach. *Health Psychology*, *32*, 138–145.

Kraus, M. W., & Callaghan, B. (2016). Social class and prosocial behavior: The moderating role of public versus private contexts. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 7*, 769-777.

Kraus, M. W., Horberg, E. J., Goetz, J. L., & Keltner, D. (2011). Social class rank, threat vigilance, and hostile reactivity. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 37*, 1376-1388.

Kraus, M. W., & Park, J. W. (2014). The undervalued self: Social class and self-evaluation. *Frontiers in Psychology, 5*, article 1404.

Kraus, M. W., Piff, P. K.m 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, 546-672.

Lareau, A. (2002). Invisible inequality: Social class and childrearing in Black Ffamilies and

White families. *American Sociological Review, 67*, 747-776.

Lareau, A. (2011). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life, with an update a decade

later* [second edition]. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Laurin, K. (2023, November 30). Dimensions of subjective SES. Retrieved from osf.io/hcgz5

Lipkus, I. (1991). The construction and preliminary validation of a global belief in a just world

scale and the exploratory analysis of the multidimensional belief in a just world scale.

Personality and Individual Differences, 12, 1171-1178.

Ma, Y., Wang, C., & Han, S. (2011). Neural responses to perceived pain in others predict real-

life monetary donations in different socioeconomic contexts. *NeuroImage, 57*, 1273-1280.

Manstead, A. S. R. (2018). The psychology of social class: How socioeconomic status impacts

thought, feelings, and behaviour. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 57, 267–291.

Markus, H., & Conner, A. (2013). *Clash!: 8 cultural conflicts that make us who we are*. New

York, NY: Penguin Group.

Martin, S. R., & Côté, S. (2019). Social class transitioners: Their cultural abilities and

organizational importance. *Academy of Management Review, 44*, 1-25.

Martin, S. R., Côté, S., & Woodruff, T. (2016). Echoes of our upbringing: How growing up

wealthy or poor relates to narcissism, leader behavior, and leader effectiveness. *Academy of

Management Journal, 59*, 2157-2177.

McCrae, R. R., Terracciano, A., & 78 members of the Personality Profiles of Cultures Project

(2005). Personality profiles of cultures: Aggregate personality traits. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 89, 407–425.

Mittal, C., & Griskevicius, V. (2014). Sense of control under uncertainty depends on people's childhood environment: A life history theory approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 107*, 621–637.

Nettle, D., Colléony, A., & Cockerill, M. (2011). Variation in cooperative behaviour within a single city. *PloS one, 6*(, e26922.

Nisbett, R. E., & Wilson, T. D. (1977). Telling more than we can know: Verbal reports on mental processes. *Psychological Review, 84*, 231-259.

Oxford Learner's Dictionary. (n. d.). Magnanimous.

https://www.google.com/search?q=magnanimous&client=firefox-b-d&ei=YBIJZKbSH6GS0PEPs_OWQA&ved=0ahUKEwimgqXlts39AhUhCTQIHbO5BQgQ4dUDCA8&uact=5&oq=magnanimous&gs_lcp=Cgxnd3Mtd2l6LXNlcnAQAzINCAAQsQMQkQIQRhD5ATIICAAQsQMQkQIyBQgAEJECMgUIABCRAjIFCAAQkQIyBQgAEIAEMgUIABCABDIFCAAQgAQyBwgAEIAEEAoyBQgAEIAEOgoIABBHENYEELADOgYIABAWEB5KBAhBGABQpQVYoA5gkRFoAnABeACAAUuIAZ0CkgEBNZgBAKABAcgBCMABAQ&sclient=gws-wiz-serp

Paulhus, D. L., Robins, R. W., Trzesniewski, K. H., & Tracy, J. L. (2004). Two replicable suppressor situations in personality research. *Multivariate Behavioral Research, 39*, 301-326.

Phillips, L.T. & Lowery, B.S. (2020). I ain't no fortunate one: On the motivated denial of class privilege. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 119*, 1403-1422.

Phillips, L. T., Tepper, S. J., Goya-Tocchetto, D., Davidai, S., Ordabayeva, N., Mirza, M. U.,

Szaszi, B., Day, M. V., Hauser, O. P., & Jchimowicz, J. (2022). Inequality in people's

   minds. *Unpublished manuscript retrieved from* https://psyarxiv.com/vawh9/

Piff, P. K. (2014). Wealth and the inflated self: Class, entitlement, and narcissism. *Personality*

   and Social Psychology Bulletin, *40*, 34–43.

Piff, P. K., Kraus, M. W., Côté, S., Cheng, B. H., & Keltner, D. (2010). Having less, giving

   more: The influence of social class on prosocial behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social*

   Psychology, 99, 771-784.

Robins, R. W., Hendin, H. M., & Trzesniewski, K. H. (2001). Measuring Global Self-Esteem:

   Construct Validation of a Single-Item Measure and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

   Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27, 151-161.

Rosenberg, M. (1965). Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSE). *Acceptance and Commitment*

   Therapy. Measures Package, *61*, 52.

Schönbrodt, F. D., & Perugini, M. (2013). At what sample size do corelations stabilize. *Journal*

   of Research in Personality, 47, 609-612.

Scott, K. M., Al-Hamzawi, A. O., Andrade, L. H., Borges, G., Caldas-de-Almeida, J. M., Fiestas,

   F., Gureje, O., Hu, C., Karam, E. G., Kawakami, N., Lee, S., Levinson, D., Lim, C. C. W.,

   Navarro-Mateu, F., Okoliyski, M., Posada-Villa, J., Torres, Y., Williams, D. R., Zakhozha,

   V., & Kessler, R. C. (2014). Associations between subjective social status and DSM-IV

   mental disorders. *JAMA Psychiatry, 71*, 1400-1408.

Silva, A. S., & Mace, R. (2014). Cooperation and conflict: field experiments in Northern Ireland.

   Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, 281, 20141435.

Stamos, A., Lange, F., Huang, S.-c., & Dewitte, S. (2020). Having less, giving more? Two

   preregistered replications of the relationship between social class and prosocial behavior.

Journal of Research in Personality, 84.

Steiger, J. H. (1980). Tests for comparing elements of a correlation matrix. *Psychological Bulletin, 87*(2), 245–251.

Stellar, J.E., Manzo, V. M., Kraus, M. W., & Keltner, D. (2012). Class and compassion: Socioeconomic factors predict responses to suffering. *Emotion, 12*, 449-459.

Stephens, N. M., & Townsend, S. S. M. (2013). Rank is not enough: Why we need a sociocultural perspective to understand social class. *Psychological Inquiry, 24*, 126-130.

Stephens, N. M., Townsend, S. S. M., & Dittmann, A. G. (2019). Social class disparities in higher education and professional workplaces: The role of cultural mismatch. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 28*, 67–73.

Tan, J. J., Kraus, M. W., Carpenter, N. C., & Adler, N. E. (2020). The association between objective and subjective socioeconomic status and subjective well-being: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 146*, 970.

Tracy, J. L., & Robins, R. W. (2007). The psychological structure of pride: A tale of two facets. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*, 506-525.

Twenge, J. M., & Campbell, W. K. (2002). Self-esteem and socioeconomic status: A meta-analytic review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *6*(1), 59–71.

Varnum, M. E. W., Blais, C., Hampton, R. S., & Brewer, G. A. (2015). Social class affects neural empathic responses. *Culture and Brain 3*, 122-130.

Weick, M., Couturier, D.-L., Vasiljevic, M., Ross, P., Clark, C. J., Crisp, R. J., Leite, A. C., Marcinko, A. J., Nguyen, T.-v., & Van de Vyer, J. (2022). Building bonds: A pre-registered secondary data analysis examining linear and curvilinear relations between socio-economic status and communal attitudes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 102.*

Weidman, A. C., Cheng, J. T., & Tracy, J. L. (2018). The psychological structure of humility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 114*, 153-178.

World Population Review. (2022). What percentage of American households make over 200k 2022? https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/what-percentage-of-american-households-make-over-200k

Yeates, K. O., & Taylor, H. G. (1997). Predicting premorbid neuropsychological functioning following pediatric traumatic brain injury. *Journal of Clinical and Experimental Neuropsychology, 19*, 825-837.

Yu, S., & Blader, S. L. (2020). Why does social class affect subjective well-being? The role of status and power. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 46*, 331-348.