

# The more you have, the more you want?

September 17 2019, by Jo Hickman

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People of a higher social class have a greater desire for wealth and status, a University of Queensland study has found.

Researchers from UQ's School of Psychology are investigating who is more likely to desire wealth and [status](#); those who are well-off, or those who are not.

Project lead Zhechen Wang said the results show wealthier individuals are more likely to want more wealth and higher status despite needing it less than those who do not have it.

"That suggests economic inequality should not only be attributed to the inadequate aspirations of lower class individuals to seek wealth and status, but also to the insatiable desire among the rich to amass more," Mr Wang said.

Co-authored by Professor Jolanda Jetten and Dr. Nik Steffens, the project showed those with wealth define themselves by their possessions and experienced greater identity threat when at risk of losing it.

"This means in times of economic crisis and turmoil, wealthy individuals could be at risk of losing not only their money, power and status, but also their identity and sense of self," Professor Jetten said.

The project is the first to provide a direct examination of the extent to which social class affects people's desire for wealth and status by investigating the motivations of both the "haves" and the "have-nots."

More than 175,000 people took part in the study, which used online

survey methods and experimental paradigms requiring participants to rate statements such as "One of my life goals is to be a rich person' and "I want to have high status in society."

Professor Jetten said social class, annual income and education were surveyed, with objective social class proving a strong predictor of desired wealth and status.

"There is a self-reinforcing cycle of social class whereby the wealthy—because they define themselves by wealth and status—seek to achieve more [wealth](#) and status, which maintains the status quo or enhances [economic inequality](#)," Professor Jetten said.

"Our findings highlight that the upper class is more geared towards material rewards and position than those lower in [social class](#)."

**More information:** Zhechen Wang et al. The more you have, the more you want? Higher social class predicts a greater desire for wealth and status, *European Journal of Social Psychology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.2620](#)

Provided by University of Queensland

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