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If I Could Do It, So Can They: Among the Rich, Those With Humbler Origins are Less Sensitive to the Difficulties of the Poor

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Abstract
Americans venerate rags-to-riches stories. Here we show that people view those who *became* rich more positively than those *born* rich and expect the Became Rich to be more sympathetic toward social welfare (Studies 1a and b). However, we also find that these intuitions are misguided. Surveys of wealthy individuals (Studies 2a and b) reveal that, compared with the Born Rich, the Became Rich perceive improving one's socioeconomic conditions as less difficult, which, in turn, predicts less empathy for the poor, less perceived sacrifices by the poor, more internal attributions for poverty, and less support for redistribution. Corroborating this, imagining having experienced upward mobility (vs. beginning and staying at the top) causes people to view such mobility as less difficult, reducing empathy and support for those failing to move up (Study 3). These findings suggest that becoming rich may shift views about the poor in ways that run counter to common intuitions and cultural assumptions.

My parents were poor . . . So, I'm talking not from a white shoe background or from a privileged background. I'm talking [as] somebody who wore his skin down on his fingers trying to climb the ladder of success.
—Sheldon Adelson, American billionaire and casino magnate (Rosenberg, 2010)

In the United States, the successful and powerful endear themselves to the general public by boasting of their humble origins (e.g., Phillips & Lowery, 2020). The upwardly mobile burnish their image of being self-made and highlight their common origins with the common folk—communicating the sentiment: *Unlike other rich folks, I've been in your shoes and I understand your struggles.* Despite the prevalence of this cultural phenomenon, no empirical studies have investigated whether the general public indeed views self-made individuals (henceforth the *Became Rich*) to be more sympathetic toward those with lesser means than individuals who had been rich all along (henceforth the *Born Rich*). Nor have studies tested whether the Became Rich actually are more sensitive to the challenges of the poor than are the Born Rich. Here, we seek to answer both questions.

How Would People View the Became and Born Rich in America?

Do Americans vilify or venerate the rich? On the one hand, studies reveal that Americans have a long-standing tendency to view the rich with resentment (Piston, 2018), seeing them as competent but cold (Cuddy et al., 2007; Durante et al., 2017; Fiske et al., 2002). Other work reveals more mixed feelings: For example, Horwitz and Dovidio (2017) demonstrated that people implicitly (but not explicitly) liked the rich more than the middle class.

Attitudes toward the rich might be influenced by how the rich are deemed to have gained their wealth; a public survey showed that only 27% of respondents agreed with the statement that they admire the rich; however, this trend was reversed when people were asked if they admire the rich who earned their wealth—now, 88% of respondents

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said they did (Pew Research Center, 2012). Although there may be several reasons for this, such as perceptions of deservingness, one explanation may be that people may expect the Became Rich to be more in touch with, empathetic toward, and supportive of everyday people than the Born Rich. Indeed, people believe that those who shared a similar life experience to themselves would have a more favorable attitude toward them—that those who had been there would care more (Ruttan et al., 2015). These beliefs are, in fact, borne out by research. Studies of empathy document that compared to those with no similar prior experience, people who share a similar past experience show greater sympathy toward others who are currently facing a similar event (Batson et al., 1996; Hodges et al., 2010).

When it comes to views of the rich, people may have similar expectations. Compared to those who have lived their whole lives atop the socioeconomic ladder, those who experienced life on the lower rungs but have since climbed up may hold more favorable attitudes toward social welfare, including greater support for redistributive policies and more sympathy toward the poor. Political science research offers some support for this hypothesis. For example, upper-class members of Congress from working-class backgrounds may be more supportive of social welfare than upper-class members from upper-class families (Grumbach, 2015; though see Carnes & Sadin, 2015, for a different interpretation of these data). These findings indicate that people may believe that the Became Rich are more empathetic toward the less fortunate.

"I Did It, So Why Can't They?" How Prior Experience of Success Shapes Attitudes Toward Those Who Struggle Via Viewing the Task as Less Difficult

Although people may assume the Became Rich to have more sympathy for the poor, this may not be true. Previous research finds that having successfully completed a challenging task can lead to viewing the task as less difficult and more manageable (Feather, 1966), which reduces empathy toward others who are failing at the same task (Campbell et al., 2014; Ruttan et al., 2015). In one study, compared to those with no prior experience of unemployment, those who successfully overcame unemployment were more likely to downplay how difficult it was to do so, and thus make negative evaluations of a target who failed to overcome unemployment (Ruttan et al., 2015). Similarly, we expect that the experience of having improved their socioeconomic status (SES) among the Became Rich could lead them to perceive improving one's SES in society as less difficult than the Born Rich who have no such experience, which, in turn, will be associated with less sympathetic attitudes toward the poor, who may be seen as failing to better their lot.

Research on experienced social mobility further lends support to our hypotheses. In surveying postsocialist countries and western Europeans, those who had experienced upward social mobility reported greater support for income differences and were more likely to attribute poverty to internal factors (Gugushvili, 2016a, 2016b). Based on these findings—and contrary to what we believe people's expectations will be—we hypothesize that prior experience of successfully improving one's SES will drive the Became Rich to view upward social mobility as less difficult than the Born Rich. We expect these views to, in turn, be associated with less sympathetic attitudes toward the poor: including reduced empathy for the poor, more dispositional attributions for poverty, less beliefs that the poor are making sacrifices to improve their socioeconomic conditions, and lower support for wealth redistribution.

The Present Research

We conducted five preregistered studies. Studies 1a and b tested people's views of the two rich groups. Next, Studies 2a and b recruited wealthy individuals and examined whether the Became Rich perceived it less difficult to improve one's SES, and whether this, in turn, would predict sympathetic attitudes toward the poor. Study 3 investigated how a simulated experience of upward social mobility influenced attitudes toward others failing to improve their status. All the preregistrations, study materials, and datasets are available on our OSF (https://osf.io/jksnz/?view_only = 7ee55861805a411f9c38f22c519b35c3).

Study 1a

Study 1a tested whether people would view the Became Rich more positively and expect them to be more understanding and supportive of the poor, than the Born Rich.

Method

Participants. To detect a small effect size ($d = .20$) with 80% power and an α of .05 (two-tailed) for testing the difference between two dependent means, we would need 199 participants (Faul et al., 2007). We recruited participants via Prolific Academic, and after following our preregistered exclusion criteria, the final sample size was 289 ($M_{age} = 36.08$, $SD_{age} = 11.01$; Female = 41.9%, White = 73.4%).

Procedure and Measures. After consenting, participants read definitions of the Became and Born Rich (see OSF), and were asked about their perception of the two rich groups' attitudes toward the poor. Specifically, participants indicated which rich group they thought the following five statements are more applicable to: "More likely to believe that it is difficult to improve one's socioeconomic conditions in the United States"; "More likely to attribute
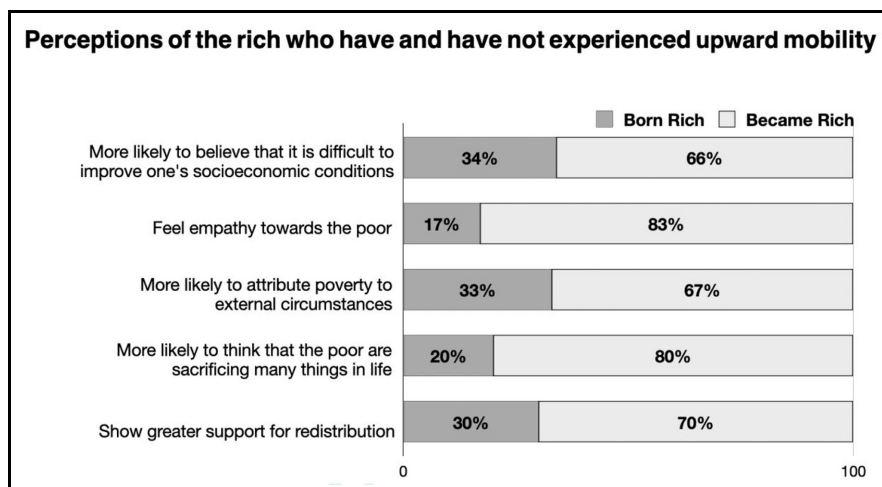
Figure 1. Proportion of Responses on the Two Rich Groups (n = 289).
Note. Proportions indicate the percentage of responses in which participants either chose the Became or Born Rich for the five statements. In all cases, Chi-square goodness-of-fit tests indicate that ratings for the Became Rich are significantly above 50%, $ps < .001$.

poverty to external circumstances (e.g., discrimination in hiring, a lack of fair opportunities)"; "More likely to think that the poor are sacrificing many things in life (e.g., personal life, sleep, time, immediate desires, etc.) to improve their socioeconomic conditions"; "Feel more empathy (i.e., feelings such as compassion, sympathy, worry) toward the poor"; "Show greater support for redistribution (e.g., the government should intervene economically to redistribute wealth from those who have more resources to those who have fewer resources, the wealthy should give more money to those who are worse off, etc.)."

We also explored whether people generally had more favorable views of the Became Rich than the Born Rich. Participants completed a person-perception measure that taps perceived morality, warmth, and competence (Goodwin, 2015), how much they like the Became (Born) rich, how trustworthy, and how deserving of their SES the two rich groups are, all on 7-point Likert-type scales (see OSF for details).[1]

Results and Discussion

As hypothesized, significantly more participants believed that the Became Rich would think it more difficult to improve one's SES in the United States, $\chi^2 (1, N = 289) = 29.9, p < .001$, feel greater empathy toward the poor, $\chi^2 (1, N = 289) = 123.6, p < .001$, attribute poverty to external circumstances, $\chi^2 (1, N = 289) = 32.6, p < .001$, believe that the poor are sacrificing many things in life to improve their socioeconomic conditions, $\chi2 (1, N = 289) = 105.9, p < .001$, and have greater support for redistribution, $\chi2 (1, N = 289) = 45.8, p < .001$ (Figure 1; see SI for details).

In addition, we found that people judged the Became Rich as more moral, warm, and competent than the Born Rich, liked the Became Rich more than the Born Rich, viewed them as more trustworthy, and more deserving of their socioeconomic conditions (see Table 1).

These findings indicate that people view the Became Rich more positively than the Born Rich, and expect them to be more sensitive to the difficulties of the poor. We posit that this pro-Became Rich bias is rooted in this group being perceived as, despite their current status, having experienced being lower in the socioeconomic hierarchy. However, an alternative explanation is that the Became Rich are viewed more positively simply because they are perceived as more hardworking (a venerated personality trait, Celniker et al., in press), irrespective of their class origins. Thus, we sought to replicate this study while equating how hardworking the two rich groups were perceived.

Study 1b

Study 1b tested whether people's perceptions of the two rich groups' attitudes found in Study 1a would hold even when equating how hardworking people perceive the Became or Born Rich target to be.

Method

Participants. To detect a small effect size ($d = 0.3$) with 80% power and an α of .05 (two-tailed) for testing independent samples t-test, we would need 352 participants. We recruited participants via Turkprime Panels, and after following our preregistered exclusion criteria, left with 447

Table 1. Results of Descriptive Statistics and Paired *t*-tests.

Person perception	Became rich	Born rich	Paired *t*-test (two-tailed)			
	M (SD)	M (SD)	t(288)	p	95% CI	Cohen's d
Morality	5.43 (0.89)	3.92 (1.27)	20.13	<.001	[1.36, 1.66]	1.18
Warmth	4.99 (0.89)	4.35 (1.07)	10.81	<.001	[0.52, 0.76]	0.64
Competence	5.75 (0.88)	4.24 (1.18)	19.70	<.001	[1.36, 1.66]	1.16
Liking	4.98 (1.30)	3.60 (1.55)	14.28	<.001	[1.19, 1.57]	0.84
Trustworthiness	4.85 (1.25)	3.64 (1.50)	13.50	<.001	[1.03, 1.39]	0.79
Deservingness	5.63 (1.26)	3.63 (1.64)	18.86	<.001	[1.79, 2.21]	1.11

Note. N = 289. Mean ratings of person perception measures of the two rich groups, respectively. Scores range from 1 to 7. *SD* represents standard deviations. CI = confidence interval

participants (M_{age} = 40.71, SD_{age} = 12.12; Female = 50%, White = 77.4%).

Procedure and Measures. To avoid having judgments of one target influence the other, Study 1b switched to a between-subjects design, with participants randomly assigned to read about either a Became or Born Rich target. In both cases, the target had high socioeconomic status and "has been working very hard and has a great work ethic." The only difference between the two conditions was whether the target was identified as being from a working-class background (Became Rich) or higher-class background (Born Rich). Next, participants rated the target's views toward the five sociopolitical attitudes used in Study 1a (1 = *Not at all likely*, 7 = *Very likely*) and a manipulation-check (How hardworking do you think Rich A is? 1 = *Not at all hardworking*, 7 = *Very hardworking*).

Results and Discussion

Despite our attempt to experimentally equate the hard-workingness of the targets, participants viewed the Became Rich target (*M* = 6.24, *SD* = 1.09) as more hardworking than the Born Rich target (*M* = 5.57, *SD* = 1.36), *t*(445) = −5.74, *p* < .001. As this was unexpected, we had to deviate from our preregistered analyses and ran independent samples *t*-tests controlling for the perceived hardworkingness.[2]

With the exception of perceived difficulty of improving SES (p_{tukey} = .10), all dependent measures were rated significantly higher for the Became Rich target, after controlling for perceived hardworkingness: external attributions of poverty ($M[SE]$ = 3.11[0.11]$_{born}$ vs. 3.46[0.11]$_{became}$, *t*[444] = −2.15, p_{tukey} = .03, *d* = −0.21), empathy toward the poor ($M[SE]$ = 3.79[0.10]$_{born}$ vs. 4.67[0.10]$_{became}$, *t*[444] = −6.05, p_{tukey} < .001, *d* = −0.59), sacrifice of the poor ($M[SE]$ = 3.53[0.11]$_{born}$ vs. 4.35[0.11]$_{became}$, *t*[444] = −5.16, p_{tukey} < .001, *d* = −0.51), and support for redistribution ($M[SE]$ = 2.53[0.11]$_{born}$ vs. 3.27[0.11]$_{became}$, *t*[444] = −4.61, p_{tukey} < .001, *d* = −0.45).

These results are generally in line with Study 1a and suggest that regardless of how hardworking people perceive the two rich individuals to be, people still hold the beliefs that those who became rich would be more sympathetic toward the poor than those who were born rich. In the next study, we directly investigated whether this was the case in two surveys of wealthy people in the United States.

Studies 2a and b

Studies find that having succeeded on a task can lead people to perceive the task as less difficult, which reduces empathy toward those failing on that task (Ruttan et al., 2015). Following this work, we predicted that the Became Rich would perceive it less difficult to improve one's SES than the Born Rich. We further predicted that beliefs about the difficulty of upward social mobility would predict a variety of sympathetic attitudes toward the poor, including empathy for the poor, attributions for poverty, belief that the poor are sacrificing to improve their SES, and support for redistribution. To test this, we surveyed relatively wealthy individuals in the United States (Study 2a: participants' 2019 household pretax income over $80,000; Study 2b: more than US$142,501; see SI for full income distributions).

Study 2a Method

Participants. We used Turkprime Panels and collected U.S. participants who were 25 or older, whose 2019 household pretax income was more than US$80,000, and who responded that their current social class is "upper-middle class" or "upper class." To have 80% power to detect a partial mediation with a small effect size from our conditions to the mediator and a medium effect size for our mediator to the dependent variables, we would require 427 participants (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). After following the preregistered exclusion criteria, the final sample was 479 participants (M_{age} = 47.32, SD_{age} = 13.68; Female = 63.7%, White = 90.3%, household income more than US$100,000 = 84.2%).

Procedure and Measures. Participants completed a series of measures regarding their sociopolitical attitudes. Specifically, our five key variables included difficulty in improving one's SES ("In the United States, it is difficult to improve one's socioeconomic conditions," 5-point scale; adapted from Ruttan et al., 2015), empathy toward the poor (adapted from Kogut & Ritov, 2005), external attributions of poverty (Cozzarelli et al., 2001), sacrifice of the poor ("To what degree do you feel that the poor in the United States sacrifice many things in life [e.g., personal life, sleep, time, immediate desires, etc.] to improve their socioeconomic conditions"; 0 = Do not sacrifice much in life, 100 = Sacrifice a lot in life), and support for redistribution (Petersen et al., 2013).

We grouped participants into the two rich groups based on their past social class. People who indicated that their past social class was lower class, lower-middle-class, or middle class were grouped into the "Became Rich," and those who chose upper-middle class or upper class were grouped into the "Born Rich."

Study 2a Results and Discussion

As hypothesized, the Became Rich perceived it less difficult to improve one's SES ($M = 2.85$, $SE = .10$) than the Born Rich ($M = 3.30$, $SE = .12$), controlling for race, gender, and age, $t(471) = 3.86$, $p_{tukey} < .001$, $d = 0.39$. The indirect effects of the rich groups on our dependent variables via perceived difficulty were significant, respectively: empathy toward the poor (indirect effect = -0.16, $SE = 0.05$, 95% confidence interval, CI: $[-0.25, -0.07]$), external attributions of poverty (indirect effect = -0.18, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI $[-0.29, -0.09]$), perceived sacrifice of the poor (indirect effect = -4.19, $SE = 1.15$, 95% CI $[-6.45, -1.93]$), and support for redistribution (indirect effect = -0.27, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI $[-0.41, -0.13]$), controlling for race, gender, and age (see SI for details). Contrary to people's expectations as documented in Studies 1a and b, these results indicate that the Became Rich thought it easier for people to improve their SES. These perceptions in turn predicted reduced sympathetic attitudes toward the poor.

To ensure that our sample consists of those who have relatively high SES, we employed objective income and subjective social class identification as demographic screeners. Ultimately, the median participant in Study 2a had a household income in the US$100,000 to US$150,000 range. Although this range approximately falls within the fourth quintile of the income distribution in the United States ($86,488 to $142,501; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020), not everyone would consider this especially "wealthy" (Elkins, 2019). As a result, in our next study, we sought to replicate Study 2a with a sample of participants who all fell within the top quintile of the U.S. income spectrum.

Study 2b Method

Participants and Procedure. We used the Qualtrics Panels to target those whose 2019 pretax household income belongs to the top quintile of the household income distribution in the United States (more than US$142,501; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Given that it was a direct replication, we aimed for a similar sample size as Study 2a, but Qualtrics Panels slightly oversampled, making the final sample size 553. Using the new income screener enabled us to recruit very wealthy individuals, with all 553 participants ($M_{age} = 47.35$, $SD_{age} = 13.50$; Female = 36.9%, White = 88.5%) reporting 2019 household income greater than US$142,500, and 20.5% of our sample actually belonging to the top 5% of the household income distribution (more than $270,002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Except for the household income restrictions, we used the same demographic screeners and study procedures as Study 2a (see OSF).

Study 2b Results and Discussion

Study 2b's sample, although wealthier, were in line with Study 2a results (Figure 2): Compared with the Born Rich ($M = 3.13$, $SE = .11$), the Became Rich ($M = 2.86$, $SE = .10$) thought it less difficult to improve one's socioeconomic conditions, controlling for age, race, and gender, $t(544) = 2.34$, $p_{tukey} = .02$, $d = 0.22$. Again, the indirect effects of the two rich groups through perceived difficulty on empathy toward the poor (indirect effect = -0.09, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI $[-0.19, -0.02]$), external attributions of poverty (indirect effect = -0.10, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI $[-0.18, -0.02]$), sacrifice of the poor (indirect effect = -1.50, $SE = 0.69$, 95% CI $[-3.01, -0.28]$), and support for redistribution (indirect effect = -0.10, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI $[-0.18, -0.02]$) were all significant.[3]

Together, Studies 2a and b show that, compared with those who were born rich, those who had become rich in their own lifetimes were more likely to downplay the difficulty of advancing one's socioeconomic conditions—tendencies that were in turn associated with reduced sympathetic attitudes toward the poor.[4]

Study 3

In Study 3, we sought to provide initial causal evidence for this phenomenon: We tested if the prior experience of successful upward mobility leads people to view upward mobility as less difficult to achieve, which reduces egalitarian values toward those who struggle.

We simulated the experience of social mobility in the context of a hypothetical organizational setting that meaningfully approximates the mobility experiences of the two rich groups. Because of the stereotypes revealed in Studies 1a and b about the two rich groups' sociopolitical attitudes,
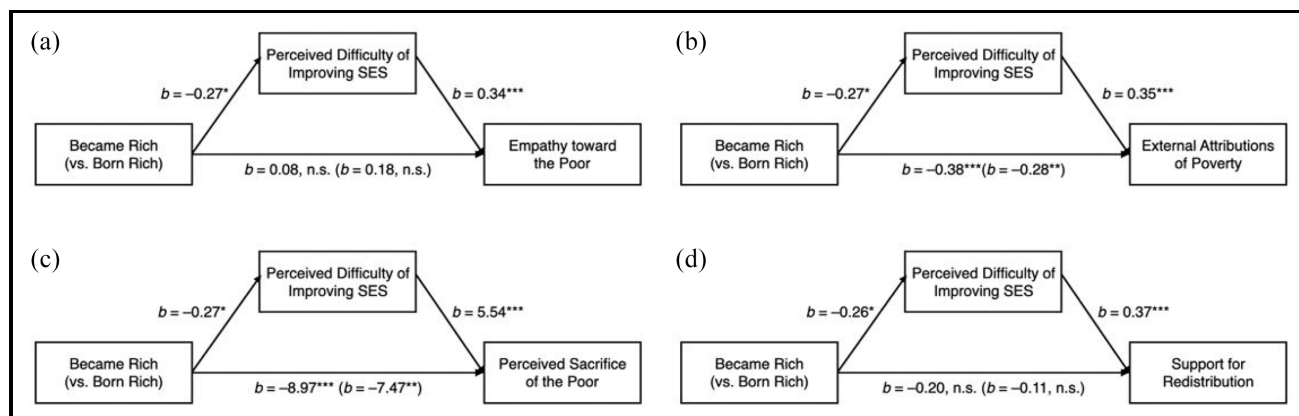
Figure 2. Mediation models for (a) empathy toward the poor, (b) external attributions of poverty, (c) perceived sacrifice of the poor, and (d) support for redistribution using the sample of participants who belong to the top household income quintile in the U.S. (Study 2b).
Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients for the indirect effect of the two rich groups on the dependent measures via perceived difficulty of improving SES, controlling for age, race, and gender. For each model, on the center path, the coefficient inside the parentheses indicates direct effect, and the coefficient outside the parentheses shows total effect.
$*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.$

we avoided asking people to imagine themselves being a Became or Born Rich in the United States, lest we simply tap their lay intuitions about how these two rich groups are. Instead, to more cleanly test our proposed psychological mechanism, we turned to a domain highly relevant to upward social mobility: one's professional trajectory. By simulating the social mobility experience within an organization, we predicted that simply imagining the experience of having achieved upward mobility (vs. starting at the top and staying there) would make participants deem it easier to improve one's position within a company and, in turn, endorse less egalitarian values toward others struggling in that company.

Method

Participants. For the same reasoning as in Studies 2a and b, we aimed to recruit a sample size of 450 to 500. Following our preregistered exclusion criteria, the final sample was 492 participants recruited via Turkprime Panels (M_{age} = 40.4, SD_{age} = 11.8; Female = 44.1%, White = 71.6%).

Procedure and Measures. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: upward mobility or stationary high. In both conditions, we asked participants to imagine that 15 years ago, right after graduating from university, they started working at a big family-owned company. The company is being run by a CEO who began their work as a low-level employee at the company, implying that upward mobility is possible in both conditions. In the stationary high condition, participants were told that the company belongs to their family, and as such, they were hired as a Senior Vice President from the start and

have held that position since. On the contrary, those in the upward mobility condition were instructed to imagine having begun as an ordinary employee but made their way up to Senior Vice President during the past years. Participants were then asked to evaluate Pat, an unsuccessful employee who started working at the company around the same time but remained in the same low position despite their years there (see SI for full vignettes).

After reading the vignette, participants responded to a manipulation check ("Over the past years, to what extent do you feel that you have experienced upward mobility in the company?" 1 = *Did not experience upward mobility*, 7 = *A great deal of upward mobility*) and the key dependent variables that were adapted to parallel the measures used in Studies 2a–b: difficulty of improving one's position in the company, empathy toward Pat, external attributions for Pat's poor performance, support for redistribution in the company (all measured on 7-point Likert-type scales), and Pat's perceived sacrifice (measured on a 0–100 scale; all materials in OSF).

Results and Discussion

Confirming the manipulation, participants reported experiencing greater upward mobility in the upward mobility (M = 6.53, SD = 0.82) than in the stationary high condition, M = 3.62, SD = 2.27, $t(490) = -18.84$, $p < .001$, $d = -1.70$. As predicted, participants in the upward mobility (M = 3.17, SD = 1.57) thought it less difficult to improve one's position in the company than those in the stationary high condition, M = 4.89, SD = 1.50, $t(490) = 12.42$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.12$. Moreover, perceived difficulty significantly mediated the relation between the condition and the dependent variables: empathy toward Pat (indirect effect

= −0.52, SE = 0.09, 95% CI [−0.71, −0.36]), external attributions for Pat's poor performance (indirect effect = −0.80, SE = 0.11, 95% CI [−1.03, −0.60]), perceived sacrifice of Pat (indirect effect = −11.36, SE = 1.57, 95% CI [−14.37, −8.39]), and support for redistribution (indirect effect = −0.84, SE = 0.11, 95% CI [−1.08, −0.64]; details in SI).

These findings provide initial causal evidence that having experienced upward mobility may lead people to downplay the difficulty of achieving upward mobility, which in turn renders them less sympathetic toward those currently struggling. One note of caution in interpreting these results is that our conditions may have differed not only in how people view the struggling target but also in terms of how meritocratic the organizations themselves appeared to be—despite our efforts to make both appear equally mobile. This in turn could have affected people's comfort in, for example, redistributing to struggling workers (Benabou & Tirole, 2006)—a limitation that future studies should seek to address.

General Discussion

Across five preregistered studies, we found that people expect the Became Rich to hold more sympathetic attitudes toward the poor than the Born Rich (Studies 1a and b). However, our subsequent studies showed these intuitions to be misguided. In reality, the Became Rich thought it less difficult to improve one's socioeconomic conditions than the Born Rich, views that were negatively linked to redistribution support and various sympathetic attitudes toward the poor (Studies 2a and b). Corroborating this, those induced to feel that they had moved up within an organization (vs. having a stationary high position) thought it less difficult to improve one's position in the company, which in turn predicted reduced sympathetic attitudes toward others struggling to move up (Study 3). Contrary to lay expectations, people who have successfully achieved upward social mobility may, in fact, be less sensitive to the plight of the poor than those born into privilege.

The current study has several limitations that call for future investigation. First, we cannot definitively draw the conclusion that it is the experience of upward mobility itself that causes shifts in perceptions of difficulty. Although Study 3 is supportive of the possibility, experiencing upward mobility in the workplace may not be the same as experiencing upward mobility in real life—the latter may involve longer time periods and multiple pathways (e.g., own effort, personal connections, luck, and marriage). It will be important to more directly test our findings in future studies by using, for instance, longitudinal approaches to confirm the effect of experienced upward mobility on attitudes toward social welfare. Second, although we targeted rich individuals in the United States, online survey samples do not typically include multimillionaires and billionaires. Revisiting our findings among the super wealthy would be

an important next step, given the sociopolitical influence they wield. Third, our methods included information-sparse descriptions of our targets, but in reality, people are identified with specific races and genders (Hester & Gray, 2020). Our results may vary as a function of whether the race or gender, alongside class, of the target is made salient as well as the demographics of the perceivers (Craig & Richeson, 2014). Finally, there could be factors—beyond perceived hard work—that may influence how people view wealthy individuals. For instance, positive perceptions of wealthy targets may be attenuated when wealth is perceived as less deserved, for example via means perceived to be due to luck or unethicality.

The current study has certain methodological limitations. For example, we used several single-item self-report measures to capture our core constructs, and it will be important to extend our findings using more multifaceted and behavioral measures (e.g., Piff, Wiwad et al., 2020). Furthermore, it is important to note that our samples were exclusively made up of Americans. Given the uniquely powerful place that mobility plays in the ethos of the American Dream (Kluegel & Smith, 2017), there is reason to believe that the effects found in our studies may be weaker in other countries. Future studies can explore how universal or culturally contingent our effects are.

Our findings can contribute to the literature in several ways. Prior work finds that social mobility beliefs influence various political and economic attitudes (e.g., redistribution and economic inequality; Alesina et al., 2018; Shariff et al., 2016). However, little is known about how individuals' own social mobility experience can impact their worldviews (Gugushvili, 2016b)—a question made all the more imperative, given the prevalence of social mobility in many modern societies (World Economic Forum, 2020). Here we show that in the United States, for those who are rich, having experienced upward mobility can lead to viewing upward mobility as less difficult, which in turn, shapes attitudes toward those struggling in society. Future studies should extend these results by exploring how other types of mobility experiences (e.g., downward, no mobility) influence people's beliefs about the social realm.

Previous research has shown a disconnect between people's perceptions and socioeconomic realities (e.g., the level of income inequality and chances for upward social mobility; Davidai & Gilovich, 2015; Norton & Ariely, 2011). Here we show that people may also view individuals who have become rich as more sympathetic than they actually are. It will be important to explore the social and political ramifications of these misperceptions. For example, are the Became Rich viewed as being more charitable, favored more for political office, or forgiven more for their transgressions?

Finally, there is emerging literature on how SES shapes beliefs, attitudes, and emotions (Piff et al., 2018), and how people view various SES groups in society (Fiske et al., 2002; Wu et al., 2018). However, much of this work conceptualizes SES as relatively static over the life course. Our

work contributes to a growing call in the field to conceptualize SES as dynamic and changing (see Côté et al., 2021). Movements up or down the socioeconomic hierarchy shape attitudes in ways that simple assessments of current class will miss. Ultimately, people's social views are not only shaped by their current class position but also by the confluence of life forces that led them there.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material is available in the online version of the article.

Notes

1. Hypotheses and analyses regarding the person perception measure were preregistered as exploratory.
2. Results remain substantially similar whether we control for perceived hardworkingness or not.
3. All results of Studies 2a and b remain substantially identical whether the covariates (age, race, gender) are included or not. In addition, we tested whether race and gender moderate the pattern of findings (see SI).
4. We also conducted an exploratory study that takes into account the effects of social class origin, social class destination, and upward social mobility (see SI).

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