

The Role of Individuating Information in Coping with Systemic Inequality

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With the rapid development of the global economy, the predicament of resource disparity has escalated in recent decades. Social resources are concentrated within the affluent upper class, while the disadvantaged lower class possesses only a tiny portion of those resources. According to the World Inequality Lab (2022) report, the wealth gap between the resource rich and the resource poor has expanded on a global scale; the richest 10% owns 76% of wealth at purchasing power parity, whereas the wealth share of the poorest 50% amounts to merely 2% (Figure 1). Among East Asian countries, the richest 10% accounts for 69% of the total wealth share, leaving only 5% for the poorest 50% (Chancel et al., 2022).

Based on the amount of social resources, the divisions between the upper and lower classes are delineated along a social ladder that encompasses social issues of gender, race, poverty, and unequal opportunities for social mobility (Calnitsky, 2018; Rucker & Richeson, 2021; Salter et al., 2018). Resource disparities and unequal opportunities that are intrinsically embedded within social systems are referred to as systemic inequality (Arrow et al., 2018; Fraser, 1990; Pogge, 2001). Systemic inequality engenders detrimental consequences for all individuals. However, how can we cope with social division and inequality remains an open question.

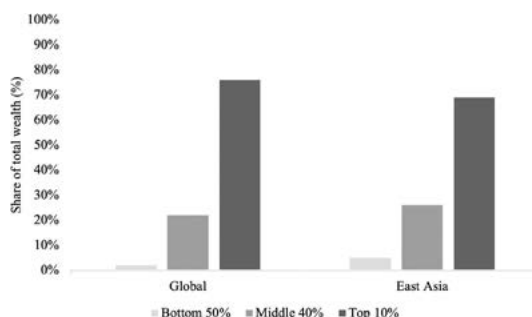
In this paper, we aim to investigate potential strategies

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Figure 1
Wealth inequality measured by Purchasing Power Parity in 2021



Note. From “World Inequality Report 2022,” by Chancel, L., Piketty, T., Saez, E., Zucman, G. et al., 2022, *World Inequality Lab*, <https://wir2022.wid.world/executive-summary/>.

for coping with systemic inequality. First, we scrutinize the detrimental aspects of systemic inequality, elucidating its impacts on individual lives and societal development, clarifying the necessity of mitigating inequality. Next, we discuss the origin of social class barriers and inequality rooted in the social system. Grounded in a sociological perspective, we enlighten the role of status homophily principle (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954), also known as “birds of a feather flock together,” in shaping people’s social preference in social partner selections. We posit that motivating the upper-class to transcend the social preference based on status homophily can be effective in removing the barriers between the upper and the lower class. Focusing on the status homophily, we further delve into the reason why people have a trend of connecting with similar others and exchange social resource with them, interpreting homophilous preference in light of interpersonal perceptions from a social psychological perspective. Previous psychological

research has revealed that both social category information and individuating information play a pivotal role in interpersonal perceptions. The presence of individuating information has been shown to reduce the stereotypical perceptions deriving from social category information. Built upon these findings, we argue that the presence of individuating information can potentially reshape the upper class's homophilous preference in social selection, which offers more opportunities for the qualified lower-class to cultivate social ties with the upper class and thereby realize a meritocratic upward social mobility. Finally, we aim to furnish an effective strategy for coping with systemic inequality through the utilization of individuating information. This approach, in turn, offers a pathway towards the cultivation of a meritocratic and equitable social system.

Detrimental Consequences of Inequality

Empirical studies have investigated the relationship between public health outcomes and social inequality (e.g., Lynch et al., 2004; Pickett & Wilkinson, 2015; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2006). Wilkinson and Pickett (2006) classified findings from 155 published peer reviewed paper across 30 nations and found that higher levels of inequality³⁾ are associated with poorer population health, including elevated rates of homicide and drug abuse. Recently, public health issues have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Liao & De Maio, 2021; Misir, 2021; Searight, 2023). Based on nine-month observational data from 22 OECD countries, Sepulveda and Brooker (2021) found that COVID-19 mortality rates were linked to a country's income inequality⁴⁾. Individuals living in poverty were more susceptible to higher risks from and increased exposure to COVID-19, which further entrenched them in poverty. This evidence underscores the imperative of reducing social inequality for the sake of addressing public health concerns.

Beyond public health, social inequality also impacts our social lives. High levels of social inequality contrib-

ute to elevated crime rates, diminished social trust, and reduced social welfare (Hsieh & Pugh, 1993; Nishi et al., 2015). Faced with resource disparities, individuals with fewer resources tend to engage in risky or even criminal behaviors in pursuit of better outcomes (De Courson & Nettle, 2021; Payne et al., 2017). People are less inclined to participate in civic and social life when confronted with high levels of national inequality (Lancee & Van de Werfhorst, 2012). Inequality also influences individuals' subjective well-being and happiness (Alesina et al., 2004; Buttrick et al., 2017; Cheung, 2015; Graafland & Lous, 2019; Oishi et al., 2011). A recent study revealed that inequality, manifested as concentrated disparities among individuals with lower and median incomes, negatively predicted subjective well-being among individuals with higher incomes (Tan et al., 2020).

Given these detrimental consequences brought about by resource disparities, it is imperative to narrow the gap between the resource rich and the resource poor (Haynie et al., 2021). However, despite people's willingness and efforts to combat social inequality, the elicitation of resources from the upper class to the lower class remains a formidable task, as structural barriers within the social stratification system are resistant to removal.

Upward Mobility Barriers Within Social Stratification

Disparities in resources across social classes impact societal economic development, public health, and the social lives of all individuals. Social mobility barriers are established along social class divisions, further reinforcing unequal distribution in resources and opportunities. For instance, Pulitzer Prize winner Daniel Golden (2007) sheds light on the "privileges of preference" and investigated the disproportionately unequal opportunities in college admissions at American universities. As Golden elucidated, wealthy families can afford private tutors to enhance their children's SAT scores, thereby securing admission to top-ranked universities, unlike those born in middle- and lower-class families. Wealthy parents may even make substantial donations to ensure their children's acceptance into prestigious institutions such as Ivy League universities. While efforts have been made by governments to combat corruption in college admissions, it is undeniable that children from privileged backgrounds have greater access to educational resources,

3) Income inequality was indexed as the ratio of the top 20% to the bottom 20% of incomes (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2006).

4) Country-level income inequality was measured by income Gini coefficient (Sepulveda & Brooker, 2021).

affording them better prospects in the college admissions process. Resource disparities, as sociologists have revealed, not only manifest in unequal opportunities during the college admissions process but also perpetuate across generations. Parental income significantly influences the lifelong earnings of their offspring (Duncan et al., 1998; Piketty, 2000). The intergenerational association between parental income, welfare, and their children's performance has been extensively documented (see Grawe, 2004; Irene, 2007).

In addition to intergenerational transmission of resource disparities, barriers also stem from institutional social structures, impeding upward social mobility. Similar to the “privileges of preference” in the American educational system, the Japanese educational system and labor market exhibit inherent structural barriers based on educational attainments and occupational privileges. In Japan, college admissions primarily rely on students' performance on entrance examinations, which determine individual merits in achieving upward social mobility. Known as *gakureki shakai*, educational attainment, such as the ranking of the college, plays a crucial role in shaping one's status in the labor market. For example, utilizing the 1995 Social Stratification Mobility National Survey (SSM), Ono (2004) revealed the effect of college quality on earnings, independent of individual abilities (e.g., GPA scores), in the Japanese labor market. Graduates from top-tier universities had access to better employment opportunities, while those graduating from lower-ranked universities encounter a dearth of employment prospects (Ono, 2004). This effect of college quality also influenced mobility within the Japanese labor market. Non-regular workers who had graduated from junior colleges struggled to enter the regular employment market and find stable jobs. Conversely, well-educated individuals were more likely to secure long-term regular employment with better salaries (Sato, 2010). Arita (2009) posited that in the Japanese labor market, extrinsic factors such as employment type contribute more to an individuals' remuneration than their abilities. Concerning the issue of non-regular employment, the well-known phenomenon of the “Lost Generation,” which occurred during the 1990s and 2000s in Japan, has revealed the harsh reality that institutional and systemic factors shape an individual's position on the social ladder, regardless of individual merits. In the 1990s, Japan's bubble economy

burst, resulting in a reduction in job opportunities for new graduates. Numerous new graduates lost regular employment opportunities and fell into poverty, leading to longstanding concerns regarding public welfare for decades.

The aforementioned evidence highlights the inherent disparities present in various social systems, resulting in a gap between wealthy and impoverished families, the emergence of segregation within the educational stratification system, and the formation of employment barriers between non-regular and regular employees in labor markets. These barriers lie beyond individual and personal determinants, making them difficult to remove from societal systems and yielding detrimental consequences for both societies and individuals. In the next section, we focus on the sociological perspective regarding the origins of social inequality and social class barriers. Subsequently, we discuss the limitations inherent in the sociological perspective while emphasizing the necessity of exploring avenues to resolve inequality from a social psychological standpoint.

The Sociological Perspective of Social Inequality

Social inequality has been conceptualized as the asymmetric allocation of resources and opportunities in human societies (Haynie et al., 2021; Mattison et al., 2016). Classical sociological theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding social stratification as the hierarchical arrangement of individuals and groups based on their access to social resources (Davis, 1942). This arrangement constitutes a system of institutionalized social inequality (Weber, 1968). Unlike the economic perspective, which primarily focuses on wealth and income as indicators of inequality, Weber (1968) emphasized the social relational aspects of inequality. Social stratification is defined by dimensions such as social class, status, and political power (Weber, 1968, 2009). Among these dimensions, Weber (1968) posited that class pertains to one's relationship to the labor market and production units, which in turn influences the distribution of wealth and opportunities. Status, on the other hand, is primarily determined by factors such as education and occupational prestige (Fujihara, 2020; Weber, 1968). The asymmetric distribution of social resources and opportunities may result in segregations in social interactions between

high-status and low-status individuals. High-status people are more likely to access greater resources and engage in social relationship with high-status counterparts, while low-status individuals have few opportunities to access greater resources.

Davis (1942; see also Davis & Moore, 1945) unveiled the determinants of an individual's position within the stratification system, with a particular focus on the impact of ascribed and achieved characteristics on social class. Ascription refers to assignments based on uncontrollable inborn factors such as gender, race, and kinship. Achievement, in contrast, pertains to individual merits and accomplishments (Davis & Moore, 1945). Ascription is considered a structural cause of inequality that is deeply embedded in cultural norms and institutionalized within social institutions (Amemiya et al., 2023; Haslanger, 2016; Hatzenbuehler, 2016). However, achievement is typically attributed to intrinsic factors, such as ability and effort (Cimpian & Salomon, 2014). Both ascription and achievement contribute to the mechanisms that generate aristocratic and meritocratic inequality.

Institutional Origins of Systemic Inequality

Aristocratic inequality is characterized by unequal distributions of social resources and opportunities stemming from inheritances. In India, for instance, a caste-based system determines an individual's social class, with people being divided into five castes: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras, and Dalits (Revankar, 1971). Each caste has norms that shape people's education, occupation, and even marriage. The Dalits, situated at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, face barriers accessing social resources (Patel, 2017). Recent research has revealed that inheritances contribute to the aggravation of wealth inequality (Nekoei & Seim, 2022; Salas-Rojo & Rodríguez, 2022).

In contrast, meritocratic inequality is linked to the attribution of individual merits and accomplishments in modern Western societies. The ideology of meritocracy emphasizes individual abilities and merit as the basis for rewards (Young, 1994). However, meritocratic beliefs often reinforce the existing social order and overlook the unequal distribution of opportunities among individuals from disadvantaged social groups (Friedman & Laurison, 2019). Consequently, extrinsic and structural factors contributing to meritocratic inequality have gained at-

tention in recent years in Western democratic societies (Markovits, 2019). The rich work hard to protect their social status, while the poor have limited opportunities to improve their social standing. Intergenerational upward social mobility has declined, trapping more individuals from lower classes in poverty due to inherent disparities in opportunities. In East Asian societies, the meritocratic ideology has long been influenced by Confucian hierarchical principles, where social inequality is more strongly influenced by societal institutions rather than individual merit. An individual's social background, including family, education, and occupation, carries more weight than their individual abilities (Zhang et al., 2020).

Taken together, regardless of whether systemic inequality has aristocratic or meritocratic origins, social resources and opportunities have long been segregated among different social classes. The key to mitigating systemic inequality lies in removing barriers across social classes, which can facilitate the fluidity of resources and opportunities. To address the cross-class segregation, we review the literature regarding how barriers are formed and maintained across various social classes.

Socioeconomic Homophily and Social Capital

New economic sociologists offer an interpretation of the exacerbation of inequality and the emergence of class segregation through a social network approach (Granovetter, 1985, 2005; Pena-López et al., 2021). Granovetter (1985) asserted that social relations and networks play a pivotal role in shaping individual behavior and outcomes. Embedded within various social structures, social contexts influence individuals' opportunities and access to different kinds of social resources and upward social mobility. Lin (1999) developed the idea of social embeddedness and defined social capital as the social resources embedded in social relations. Social capital, as an investment in social relations, contains individuals' expectations of cost and benefits through social resource exchange (Lin, 2002). People who have similar resources (e.g., wealth, status, or power) are more likely to connect with each other and engage in resource exchange.

As for social preferences in investing in social relationships, Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) first documented the homophilous preference in social relationship construction, known as the status homophily principle, positing

that people who possess a similar ascribed status (e.g., age, race, or gender) and achieved status (e.g., education or occupation) are more likely to connect with each other. The origin of status homophily can be attributed to common norms and value as well as similar structure location within social stratification (Kadushin, 2012). Status homophily also drives people's preference in resource exchange. Ibarra (1992) asserted that homophily can increase the predictability of another person's behavior, thereby fostering reciprocity and the formation of instrumental relationships. The resource rich have a tendency to utilize wealth categories as information to distinguish social partners, and they have an inclination to choose social partners with similar amounts of resources (Johnson & Smirnov, 2018). This finding suggests that, if the upper class needs to select potential interaction partners based only on their resources, it would be reasonable to nominate one who is relatively rich; thus, the upper class is often privileged in the allocation of resources.

Beyond these homophilous preference, it is notable that individuals' preferences and behaviors are shaped by their social and cultural environments. Bourdieu (1995) proposed the theory of habitus, positing that individuals acquire an internalized set of dispositions, beliefs, and practices through socialization processes under specific social contexts. Habitus serves as a structural system that guides individuals' perceptions and behaviors, and it highlights the intricate relationship between individuals and societal structures, which is also associated with the perpetuation of social inequalities. Given this habitus perspective, it is notable that social preferences and behavioral patterns among the upper and lower classes are distinguishable from each other.

The Interplay of the Sociological and Psychological Views

Sociologists have shed light on the social relational aspect of social stratification formation and presented ample evidence addressing the impacts of resource disparities—which are ingrained in societal structures and prevalent across diverse social classes—on societies and individuals. These theories can provide valuable insight for policymakers to adopt strategies to reduce social inequality. Nevertheless, systemic inequality remains pervasive in our daily lives, shaping individuals' thoughts

and behaviors. Although difficult, it is crucial to unveil how individuals' minds and social inequality shape each other.

Systemic inequality is inherent and intrinsic to a society, and people tend to overlook the inherent aspect of inequality as a social issue. Banaji (2021) used the fable of “this is water,” which describes how two fish swimming in the water have no idea what water is, to posit the challenges and paradoxes encountered by social scientists. One such paradox is that while plenty of evidence has revealed the detrimental consequences of systemic inequality, people often ignore and rarely combat this systemic inequality embedded in social structures (Banaji et al., 2021).

The ignorance of systemic inequality may stem from people's unconsciousness of the bias in their minds. Due to the subjective psychological experience of social inequality, biases may exist regarding how people perceive their own and other social classes and statuses, how they define the social groups around them, and their awareness of the social inequality they experience in daily life. People often insist that they hold no prejudices when confronted with social issues such as race, religion, gender, and poverty. However, subtle prejudices and biases persist despite their consciousness. Tackling these biases could be helpful for reducing social inequality in daily life. In line with this idea, Gobel and García (2023) suggested a socioecological perspective to study social inequality in human societies, highlighting the interplay between the societal level as the social environment of inequality and the individual level as the psychological experience of inequality. From a social psychological standpoint, it is possible to connect individuals' thoughts and behavioral patterns with social interactions in the context of inequality. Psychological science also provides insightful tools, such as psychological and behavioral experiments, to unveil human preferences and behavioral patterns under inequality, thereby contributing to mitigating inequality. Thus, this paper addresses individual minds under systemic inequality.

In the following section, we review the origins and perpetuation of systemic inequality through the lens of social psychology. First, we discuss how people perceive and uphold an unequal societal system. Second, narrowing our focus to the interpersonal level, we investigate why individuals with similar levels of resources tend to

associate with one another for social resource exchange, addressing the role of social category information and individuating information in interpersonal perceptions. Third, addressing inequality mitigation from an individual-level perspective, we move on to discussing how individuals select their social partners through person perceptions. Throughout these empirical findings, we propose the potential strategy for mitigating systemic inequality by modifying individuals' social preferences, emphasizing the crucial role of individuating information in modify homophilous social preferences.

Structural Barriers in Individual Minds

A Just World Belief and System Justification

As reviewed above, unequal distributions of social resources and opportunities have resulted in detrimental social consequences to human societies; however, social class disparities have always existed. This section explores the impact of the subjective experience of social inequality in shaping individuals' minds, especially how people justify social systems and perceive the social groups around them.

Social psychologists have provided insights in interpreting the self-perpetuation of social inequality and class divisions. Lerner and Simmons (1966) found that in an innocent victim experiment, people had a tendency to devalue and reject the victim when they were unable to stop the victim's suffering. This evidence supports the belief in a just world (BJW), which states that individuals have a need to believe in a just world in which "people get what they deserve and deserve what they acquire" (Lerner & Miller, 1978). On the basis of the BJW, Jost et al. (1994) proposed the system justification theory (SJT). According to the SJT, people have a motivation to justify and legitimate the status quo and tend to hold positive attitudes toward the social system for a sense of stability (Jost, 2019; Jost & Banaji, 1994). The SJT was initially rooted in American social systems, and it has recently been examined in other countries. For instance, a study from Japan did not find significant evidence supporting the status-legitimacy hypothesis among low-status social groups (Nakagoshi & Inamasu, 2023). Conversely, people with a lower subjective socioeconomic status (subjective SES) in China show a greater propensity to justify the social system, which positively supports the status-

legitimacy hypothesis (e.g., Li et al., 2020; Valdes et al., 2023).

Social Perceptions Toward the Resource Rich and Resource Poor

The just world hypothesis and SJT reveal people's motivations to legitimate and rationalize the status quo, even if the existing social system is harmful to them. Such a motivation is an example of an individual difference variable, which addresses individual-level perceptions of the social system. On the basis of these motivations, intergroup perception and interpersonal impression formation are also related to such beliefs. Kay and Jost (2003) revealed a complementary representation in impression formation toward the poor and rich. "Poor but happy" and "rich but miserable" are complementary stereotypes explaining why people have a tendency to justify the disadvantageous status quo. Perceived social structures create stereotypes of diverse social groups, which may further shape intergroup and interpersonal interactions. For instance, Fiske et al. (2002) posited the stereotype content model (SCM), in which stereotypes of social groups are divided into warmth-by-competence dimensions.

Investigating socioeconomic discrimination in various social groups, the agency-beliefs-communion (ABC) model focuses on how people evaluate their groups and construct group similarities (Koch et al., 2020). The ABC model posits that people spontaneously construe group similarity from three dimensions: agency/socioeconomic success, beliefs (conservative vs. progressive), and communion. These three dimensions also relate to the warmth-by-competence dimension in SCM; status and competence reconcile agency, and communion relates to how people perceive others' warmth.

In the real world, social status (e.g., occupational and educational prestige) and resources (e.g., wealth) serve as social class signals, inducing cross-class prejudices and stereotypes (Connor et al., 2021). Perceived socioeconomic inequality influences the negative intertwinement of social class stereotypes with cross-class interactions (Durante & Fiske, 2017). For instance, the poor (low socioeconomic status) are generally perceived as parasitic (e.g., opportunistic and exploitative) and incompetent (Cuddy et al., 2008). People tend to spontaneously categorize themselves as relatively rich or poor in

comparison with others (Kraus et al., 2010, 2012). These social class stereotypes further affect people's judgments regarding social partner choices (Martin et al., 2019).

Allocating Attention to Individuating Information

The above research suggests that there is a fundamental stereotype regarding various social groups along with warmth and competence dimensions. Still, how this stereotypical knowledge is utilized in interpersonal interactions needs to be elucidated. When encountering potential social partners, how do people engage in the interpersonal information process and judge whether the potential social partner is capable or well-intentioned? Stereotypical information regarding the warmth dimension can be subjective and temporary. It is necessary to address the cognitive processes regarding perceived status and resource disparities, which are embedded in social structures and influence interpersonal perceptions.

Two types of information, social category information and individuating information, are the main information sources in person perceptions (Rubinstein et al., 2018). Social category information refers to the knowledge individuals possess regarding different social groups and the characteristics associated with those groups (e.g., race, ethnicity, and gender; Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social category information is associated with the cognitive processing of stereotypes (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981). Research has shown that social category information can shape individuals' person perceptions and further drive people's decision making regarding partner choice. Individuating information—which is the information related to one's personal characteristics, experiences, and behaviors other than their categorical group memberships (Kunda & Sherman-Williams, 1993)—also exert effects on person perceptions (Giorgashvili, 2021; Krueger & Rothbart, 1988; Navon et al., 2021). Classical social psychological theories have addressed the reliance on category-based information and individuating information in person perceptions. The dual process model of impression formation distinguishes the two cognitive processes, the automatic process and the controlled process, in interpersonal impression formation (Brewer, 1988). The automatic process refers to the spontaneous evaluation of others, which is mostly based on category-based information processing, while the controlled process involves more deliberate and conscious evaluation

of others that requires available individuating information. Category-based and individuating-based information are distinct from each other, with category-based information playing a significant role in person perception, whereas engaging in individuating information requires more deliberation and motivation.

Neuberg and Fiske (1987) proposed the continuum model (CM) of impression formation process, suggesting that people spontaneously form impressions by categorizing themselves and others into existing social categories (category-based process). As individualized contacts emerge, people then take into account more attributes of the target, despite their existing social categories. Recategorization (and decategorization) can occur during this piecemeal-based process (Dovidio et al., 1993). Decategorization emerges from cooperative contacts with outgroup members, and as a result of this, people evaluate these outgroups as heterogeneous and focus more on their personal aspects than on ingroup–outgroup boundaries (Ensari & Miller, 2001; Vasquez et al., 2007).

Recent research has found that revealing individuating information, such as GPA score, can significantly modify White participants' evaluations of Black students and thus reduce racial bias (Rubinstein et al., 2018). Additionally, in a resource exchange system, it has been well-documented that individuating information regarding cooperativeness shapes social preferences in social selection (Melamed et al., 2018; Rand et al., 2011) and drives people's preferences in terms of rewards and punishments (Hauser et al., 2021). These findings suggest the possibility that exposure to individuating information can mitigate the impact exerted by social category information and modify individuals' preferences and behaviors in cross-class interactions.

Cross-Class Interactions Under Systemic Inequality

The presence of individuating information may alter interpersonal perceptions, specifically in cross-class interactions. In the following section, we review the literature pertaining to social partner selection and resource exchange in cross-class interactions, aiming to explain whether individuating information has impacts on modifying people's behavioral strategies under inequality.

Choosing Whom to Interact With

Past research has revealed that people are more likely to form social ties with the resource rich compared to the resource poor (see Johnson & Smirnov, 2018; Raihani & Barclay, 2016). Potential social partners' ability to confer benefits and willingness to exchange resources serve as two essential cues in partner choice (Barclay, 2013). Individuating information influences people's perceptions of other individuals' abilities (to confer benefits) and willingness (to exchange resources). When deciding in whom to invest social resources, people prefer to select competitive upper classes in order to earn more benefits (Hackel et al., 2015; Raihani & Barclay, 2016). Meanwhile, the poor show strong implicit evaluative preference toward rich people (Rudman et al., 2002). Recent literature on social selection theory has indicated that aspiration serves as an essential mechanism for explaining people's tendency to connect with high-status targets (Snijders & Lomi, 2019). Compared with the rich, the poor, being driven by aspiration, may show a stronger willingness to cooperate with the rich. Furthermore, as aforementioned, neither cross-class segregation nor wealth homophily always holds true. People tend to show a greater preference for others with a relatively low ability to confer benefits but who are willing to help others over those with a relatively high ability who are ungenerous (Dhaliwal et al., 2022). These findings imply that the rich-poor resource boundary in real society is not universally impermeable. Willingness to exchange resources may play a more influential role when choosing social partners.

Behavior Strategies in Cross-Class Interactions

Social category information and individuating information exert notable effects on interpersonal perceptions, which may further shape individuals' behavioral patterns in interpersonal interactions. Concerning strategies adopted in cross-class interactions, empirical research has shed light on the status homophily principle (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954) and ingroup favoritism (see Balliet et al., 2014 for review), revealing a category-based preference among individuals with shared categorical group memberships.

Social identity theory (SIT) provides insightful interpretations on this category-based preference. SIT posits that people tend to establish their social identities

through the cognitive categorization of social groups and similarity or homogeneity between themselves and other group members (Tajfel et al., 1971; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Past research has shown that ingroup favoritism, which is the tendency to favor others with shared group identities, indicates that a similarity in social identities shapes people's preferences for allocating resources (Tajfel et al., 1971). In terms of social categorization under inequality, the social identity perspective posits that people incline to categorize "us" versus "them" based on similarity in wealth (Jetten et al., 2017). Situated in a highly unequal social system, people are likely to describe themselves and others using wealth-related words (Peters et al., 2022). These findings suggest that the social categorization process occurs when people are exposed to disparities. Exposed to resource disparities, the relatively rich are likely to share more resources with other ingroup (rich) members than with outgroup (poor) members (Martinangeli & Martinsson, 2020).

Meanwhile, the nature of ingroup favoritism can be interpreted as a consequence of cooperative interactions with others pursuing mutual benefits, stemming from a cooperativeness-based preference in which individuating information plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' behavioral patterns. This view is theorized from the perspective of the bounded generalized reciprocity (BGR) (Yamagishi et al., 1999), which argues that mutual outcome interdependence, rather than mere category commonalities, triggers resource sharing with other members. In other words, a group boundary only emerges when people decide whether to cooperate with others through the expectation of mutual cooperation (Yamagishi & Kiyonari, 2000). In line with this argument, people embedded in dynamic social networks in a repeated PDG tended to selectively form social ties with partners who had good reputations (Rand et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2012). These findings suggest that cooperativeness-based preferences can override group boundaries and promote resource exchange among cooperators regardless of their social categories.

Future Direction

The main purpose of this review is to offer possible effective strategies for reducing systemic inequality. The focus is on paying attention to individuating infor-

mation to overcome status homophily when choosing social partners and sharing resources. In this paper, the effect of individuating information is conceptualized as exposure to the information regarding a potential social partner's characteristics, experience, or behavior, which are technically independent of social categorical group affiliations. Finally, we clarify future directions for coping with systemic inequality.

The Role of Individuating Information in Reshaping Individual Behavioral Strategies

Previous research has shown the effect of individuating information on combatting cross-class stereotypical perceptions, likely derived from social category information. Whereas most research has focused on social categories related to ascription and inheritance characteristics (e.g., race and gender), little is known about whether individuating information can override the influence of social category information regarding an individual's changeable socioeconomic backgrounds. Future studies should address the permeable social group boundaries with changeable social category information and investigate the effect of individuating information on combatting systemic inequality.

There still remains an open question whether the modification of individuals' behavioral patterns triggered by individuating information is mediated by the reduction of stereotypical perceptions. Additionally, individual differences, such as generalized trust (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994), risk preference (Holt & Laury, 2002), and the ability to suppress intuitive decision-making (Frederick, 2005), may also shape people's behavioral patterns under inequality. Future research is expected to fill this gap by examining the mediating mechanisms underlying social preference and behavioral modification with the presence of individuating information.

Unveiling the Behavioral Patterns of Different Social Classes

Social prestige and resources are two key factors determining an individual's position in the social stratification system. These determinants often lead people to categorize others as "us" or "them." Driven by category-based preference, people tend to select similar others as social partners. For one thing, the upper class has been allocated the majority of social resources, and it would

be beneficial to society if the upper class actively shared its resources and opportunities with the lower class instead of their upper-class counterparts. Accordingly, in this review, we argue that the key to removing the barrier between the "haves" and "have nots" lies in inducing the upper class to overcome status homophily and proactively share their resources with the favorable lower class. Such endeavors can result in increasing collective welfare in a social system.

Although there is a general trend that the lower class connects with lower-class counterparts in partner selection, some might prefer to establish social connections with those from the upper class. Nonetheless, cultural and normative standards substantially differ between the upper and lower classes (Kadushin & Jones, 1992; Payne et al., 2017; Piff et al., 2010), which underscores the importance of distinguishing the behavioral patterns exhibited by these two social groups. Future research should explore separated effective strategies for the upper and the lower classes to encourage people from diverse social strata to override status homophily and foster a more meritocratic approach to select social partners.

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ABSTRACT

The role of individuating information in coping with systemic inequality

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In this paper, we reviewed research about social selection and interpersonal perceptions in cross-class interactions, aiming to suggest potential strategies for combatting systemic inequality. We focused on the role of individuating information in interpersonal perceptions, especially its impacts on cross-class social selection and resource exchange. In the first part, we introduced how systemic inequality has emerged and maintained for decades. Overcoming status homophily may play an essential role in reducing inequality. We then reviewed empirical literature probing for interpersonal perceptions under inequality. Although social category information in interpersonal perceptions is associated with an individual's homophilous preference, individuating information could reduce stereotypical perceptions derived from social category information. Grounded in these findings, we assume that cooperativeness-based preference in the presence of individuating information can facilitate meritocratic social selections in cross-class interactions. In conclusion, future studies should clarify effective strategies for coping with systemic inequality tailored for the upper and lower classes. A mediating mechanism between the individuating information effect and the reduction of inequality is expected to be discussed in future research.

Key words: individuating information, interpersonal perception, resource exchange, systemic inequality