

# Interpersonal interactions in an unequal world

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## Summary

This dissertation investigates how inequality and unfairness impact our decisions when interacting directly or indirectly with others. **Chapter 2** explores individuals' perceptions of unequal distributions of opportunities and shows that the source of inequality in opportunity has an important effect on individuals' judgments of fairness, rendering some inequalities in chances more unacceptable than others. Moreover, the fairness of inequality in opportunity is directly related to how much control individuals have over the opportunities they receive. This result points to the fact that individual responsibility is an important factor when judging the fairness of inequality of opportunity. Interestingly, however, the positive correlation between fairness and control is not found when opportunities are unevenly allocated due to luck. When luck is the source generating unequal opportunities, it is considered to allow little control, but to be fair, whereas previous literature has reported it to be unfair when it leads to unequal outcomes. This suggests the existence of some inconsistencies when evaluating the source of inequality of opportunity and outcome.

**Chapter 3** investigates whether individuals rectify inequality in opportunity by redistributing outcomes. Results show that opportunities influence how individuals think of redistributing outcomes, such that the more opportunities one has, the less they are willing to redistribute outcomes. In addition, while both involved and non-involved individuals seem to perceive differences in fairness and control between varied sources of inequality of opportunity, this assessment does not necessarily translate into different redistribution patterns. Results suggest that individuals might not see redistribution of outcomes as a legitimate compensation for inequality in opportunity.

**Chapter 4** demonstrates that perceptions of high economic mobility by low-income consumers lead to higher willingness to engage in consumption of goods that convey status to others. This effect is not present when income can be directly observed, suggesting that low-income consumers use status consumption to signal their socioeconomic status when economic mobility is considered to be high. Finally, we find that while the effect of perceived economic mobility on conspicuous consumption is not affected by perceptions of inequality, it is underlined by the legitimization of inequality. Perceptions of high economic mobility lead individuals to consider unequal outcomes as fair for being the result of one's hard work and effort. In this context, observers are likely to consider ownership of status goods as a reliable sign of one's position in the socioeconomic ladder, which ultimately encourages low-income consumers to display status by consuming such goods.

Finally, **chapter 5** explores the neurobiological bases of individuals' reactions to fair-

ness and unfairness. Results indicate that the prefrontal cortex influence reciprocation of fairness and unfairness differently. While the right dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (R dlPFC) and medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) are broadly involved in overriding self-centered processing to facilitate the retaliation of unfairness, these same brain regions are crucial to inhibit both selfishness and reciprocity motivations when deciding how to reward fairness.