



Brandeis University
Department of Psychology
Colloquium Talk
given by

Hazel Rose Markus, Ph.D.
Davis-Brack Professor in the Behavioral Sciences
Stanford University
entitled

Inequality, Social Class and Self

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Abstract: The U.S. is increasingly marked by inequality and divided along social class lines. The divide is evident in what we eat for dinner, how we parent, how we vote, and how long we live. In this talk I integrate many of the powerful and previously unexamined psychological consequences of social class, suggesting that societal rank has its influence on behavior through one's experience of self. In North American settings, those with higher rank (whether measured or manipulated) tend to experience themselves as independent selves—as separate from others, as expressing and promoting their own interests, choices and goals, and as influencing and controlling social interactions. Those with lower rank tend to experience themselves as interdependent selves—as connected with others, as responsive to the social situation and to others' goals, emotions and needs, and as adjusting and deferring to others in interaction. The more unequal we become and the more different our selves, the more societal dysfunction we will experience. Addressing inequality in health, education, and political engagement requires policies and practices that bridge these socioculturally shaped differences in self.