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The Construct of ‘Social Climbing’: Is the Social Ladder a Community?

In the current discourses of belonging and citizenship, the concepts of reference and cultural groups, profession-bound, social and gender identities are frequently employed. Unsurprisingly, these categorizations are also used in combination: for example, Anglo, 35 year old neuro-surgeon from the Hamptons, a description which positively fulfils all status requirements of gender, race, occupation and habitat.

This research paper argues that there is a lack of analysis of a specific group that is relevant to such analysis: the social climbers. That is, individuals who desire to be both somewhere else and someone else. If we use the methodology of identity and belonging, I argue that the strength of their shared attributes constitutes a community.

For the purposes of furthering research in social status and status consumption, this paper seeks to expand the discussion to include the construct of the “social ladder” as a community which has its own value systems, beliefs and hierarchies. When an individual ascends a rung or step in this social ladder, the value systems and beliefs in the previous rung becomes secondary. New values and beliefs are learned, and thus, the race to ascend to a new rung begins again. It is important to note, however, that the desired ‘progression’ is never clear cut.

Drawing on the work of G.W.F. Hegel, Theodore Veblen, Jean Baudrillard and Pierre Bourdieu, as well as incorporating broad concepts of social status, “big fish in big pond” theory, I argue that this social ladder is important when researching theories of status consumption.