We investigated cultural differences in face perception among French, British and US American participants as they looked at high or low status targets.

Social status defined as an individual's relative rank (e.g., Fiske, 2010)

High status individuals - specifically their eyes - are more looked at and fixated for longer periods (Foulsham et al., 2010)

Cultures differ in the way they organize social hierarchies (e.g., Hofstede, 2001)

Aristocratic cultures (e.g., France) base social status on social class affiliation, whereas meritocratic cultures (e.g., the U.S. and the UK) base social status on individual merit and competence (Gobel & Kim, in prep)

Eye-gaze in primates is shaped by their environment, and in wild primates averting gaze signals submissiveness, whereas direct eye-contact signals superiority or even menace (e.g., Coss et al., 2002)

We found that targets’ social class background determines gaze patterns in aristocratic cultures, but targets’ competence determines gaze in meritocratic cultures

Status judgments and eye movements while watching clips of community members

37 French & 21 British undergraduate students

30sec long thin-slice video clips of 6 French & 6 British community members talking about topics unrelated to identity

Objective social class affiliation for each target was assessed (i.e., mother’s educational level)

Participants guessed targets’ social status along 4 items (i.e., wealth, social class, education, social status)

FACE-PERCEPTION IN ARISTOCRATIC AND MERITOCRATIC CULTURES


http://www.eyethink.org/culture

Eye movements in response to status signals

18 French and 18 U.S. students from the University College London

2 (Culture: FR vs. US) x 2 (Target LC and competent vs. UC and incompetent) between-subject design

Colour-primed were used to orthogonally manipulate targets’ class affiliation and competence

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