

# The Inner Level: how more equal societies reduce stress, restore sanity and improve wellbeing

#LSEinnerlevel

## **Kate Pickett**

Professor of Epidemiology in the Department of Health Sciences at the University of York, and the University's Research Champion for Justice and Equality

## **Richard Wilkinson**

Professor Emeritus of Social Epidemiology at the University of Nottingham Medical School, Honorary Professor at University College London and Visiting Professor at the University of York.

## **Chair: Beverley Skeggs**

A feminist sociologist and the Academic Director of the Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity based in the LSE International Inequalities Institute.

*Hosted by LSE International Inequalities Institute*

# How More Equal Societies Reduce Stress, Restore Sanity and Improve Wellbeing

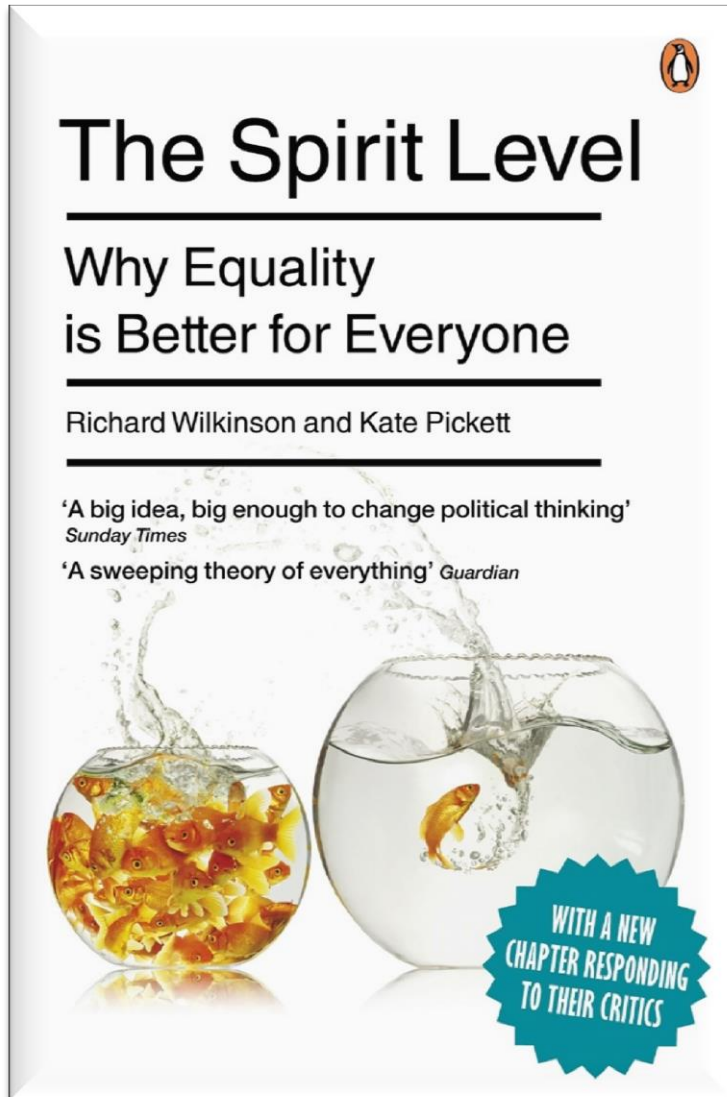




Photo by kind permission of Matt Stuart

# Mental Health Foundation Survey, UK 2018

**74% of adults (83% of 18-24 year-olds)  
felt so stressed they were overwhelmed or  
unable to cope sometime in the past year.**

**32% of adults (39% of 18-24 year-olds)  
had suicidal feelings as a result of stress.**

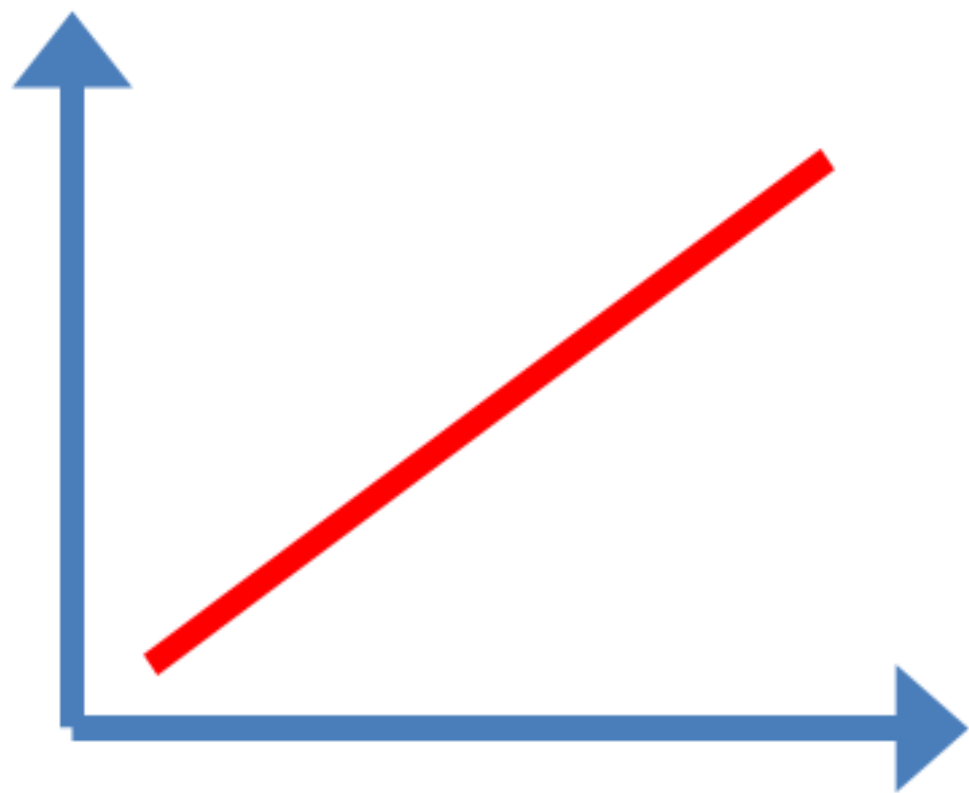
**16% of adults (29% of 18-24 year olds)  
had self-harmed as a result of stress.**

# Income Inequality

**The naïve view:** Inequality only matters if it creates poverty or if income differences seem unfair.

**A more accurate view:** Inequality brings out features of our evolved psychology to do with dominance and subordination, superiority and inferiority. That affects how we treat each other and feel about ourselves. Inequality increases status competition and status insecurity. It increases anxieties about self-worth, and intensifies worries about how we are seen and judged – whether as attractive or unattractive, interesting or boring etc...

**Problems**

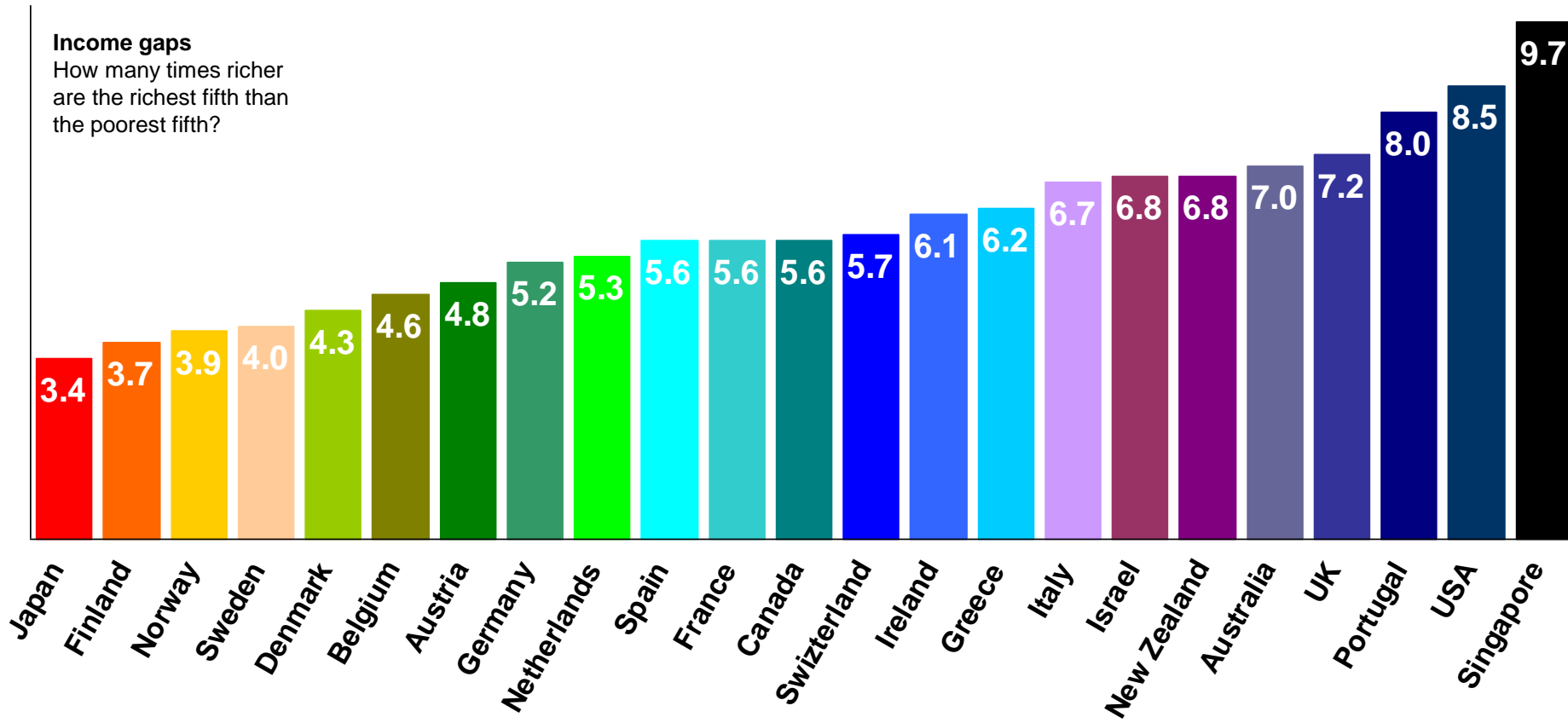


**Income  
inequality**



# Inequality...

## How much richer are the richest 20% in each country than the poorest 20%?



# Bigger income gaps lead to deteriorations in:-

## Social Relations

- School bullying
- Homicide
- Imprisonment
- Community life
- Trust

## Health

- Drug abuse
- Infant mortality
- Life expectancy
- Mental illness
- Obesity

## Human Capital

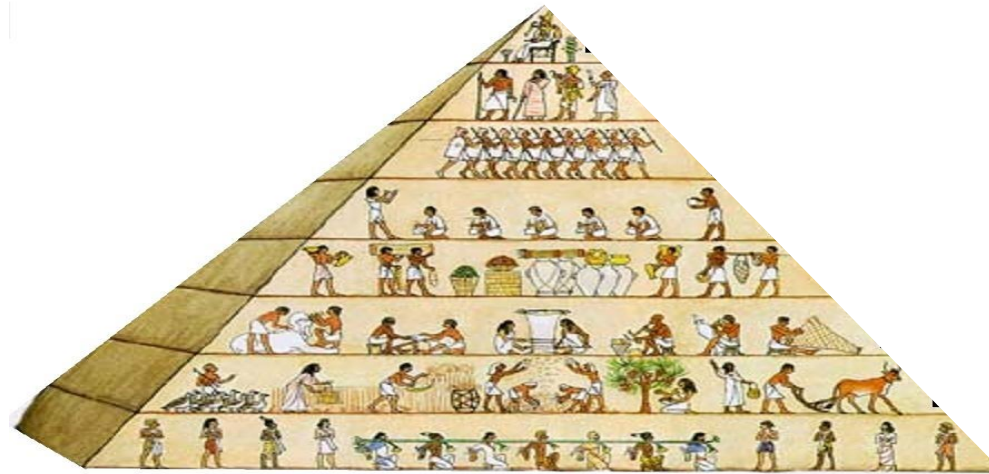
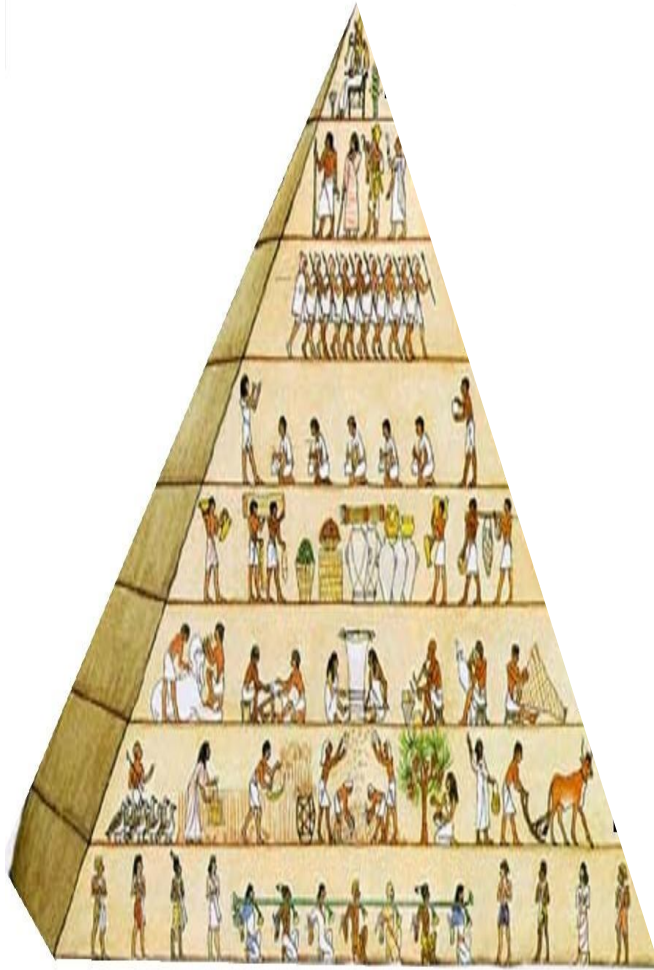
- Child wellbeing
- High school drop outs
- Math & literacy scores
- Social mobility
- Teenage births



**Robert Walker *et al.***  
**Poverty in global  
perspective**  
***Journal of Social Policy***  
**2013; 42, 215-233**

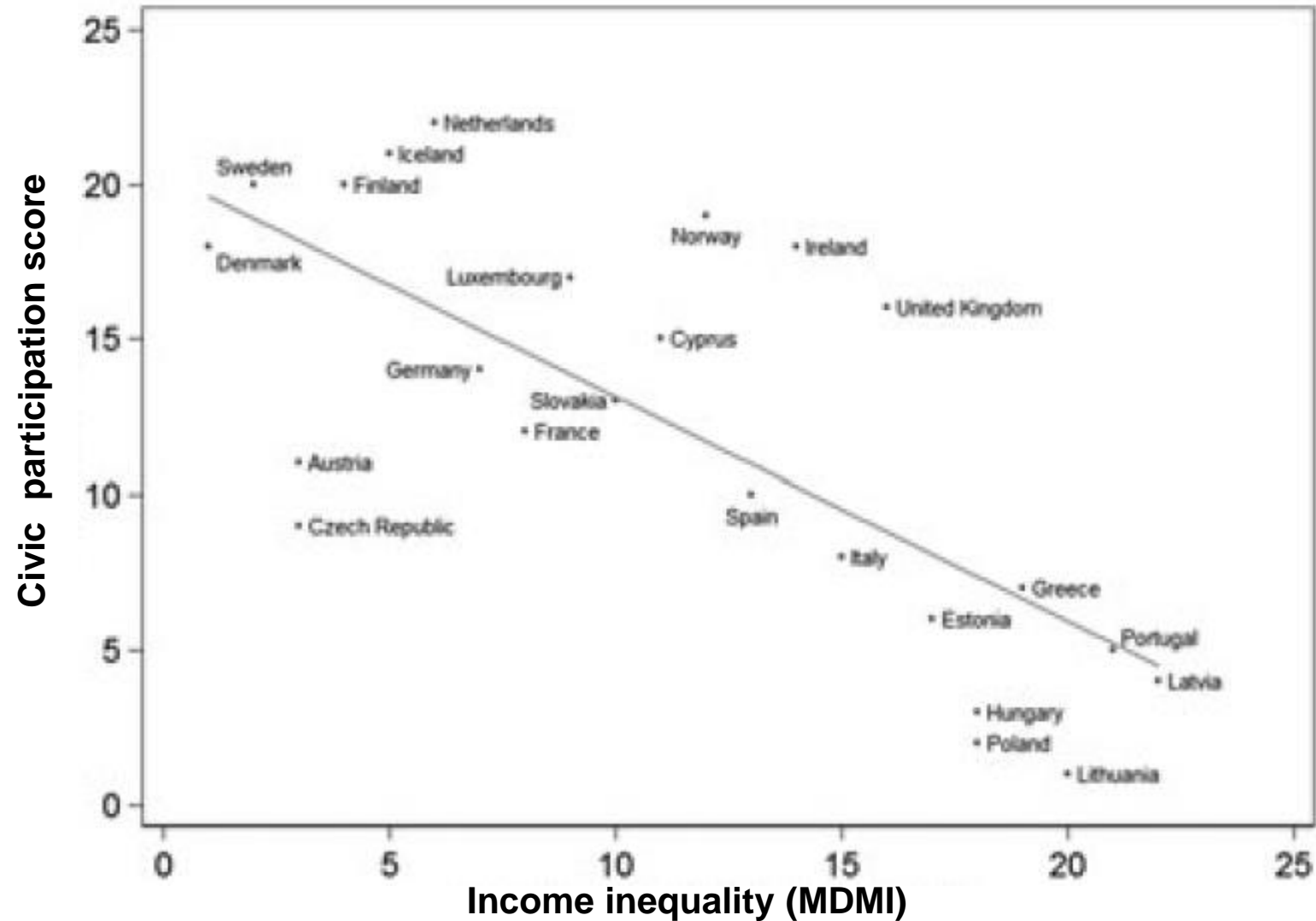


**Bigger material differences create bigger social distances and increase social status differentiation**





## Participation in local groups and voluntary organisations is lower in more unequal societies

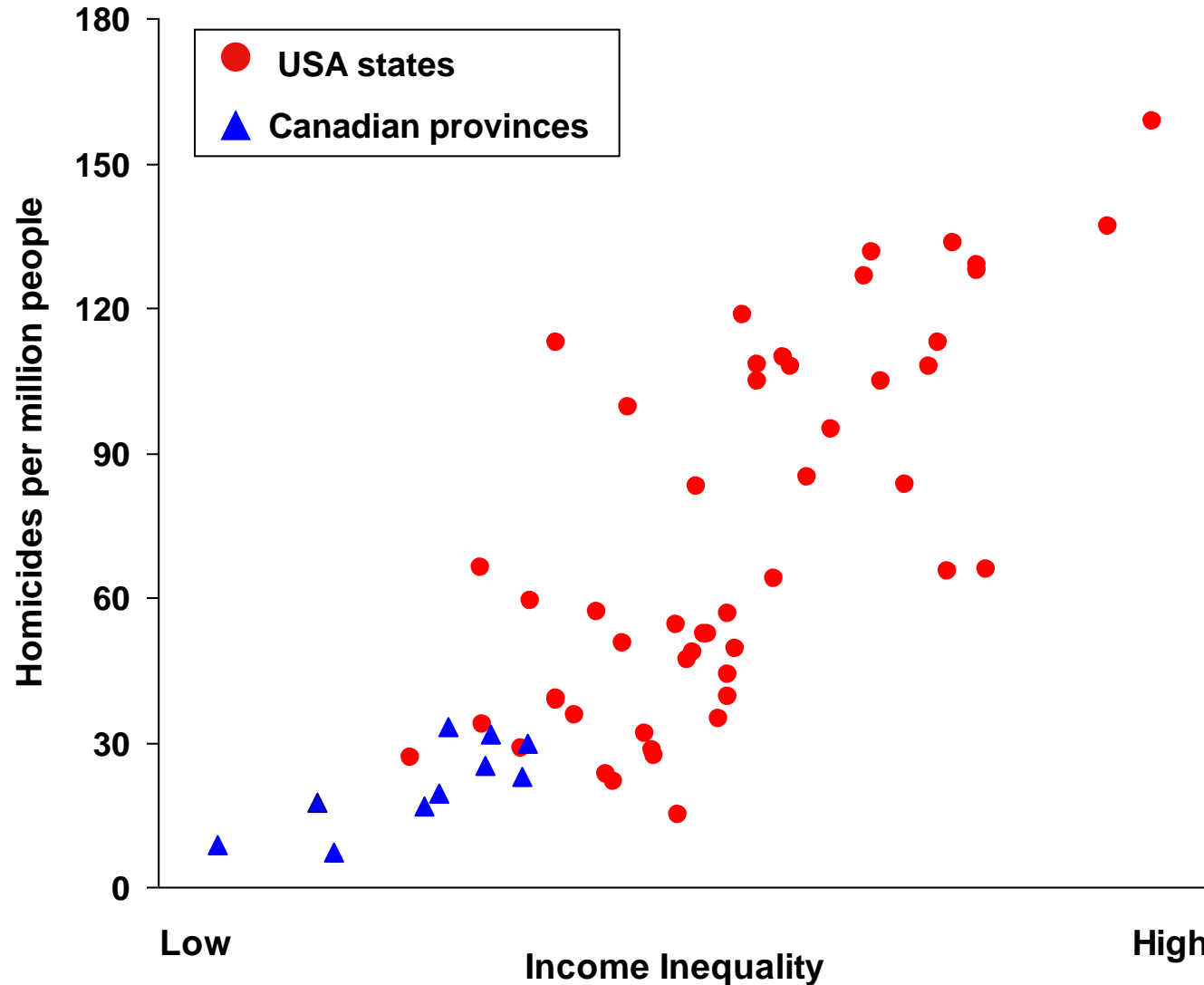


Lancee B, Van de Werfhorst HG. Income inequality and participation: A comparison of 24 European countries. *Social Science Research*. 2012; 41(5):1166-78.

# People in more unequal countries trust each other less



# Homicide rates are higher in more unequal US states and Canadian provinces



# Cuernavaca, Mexico



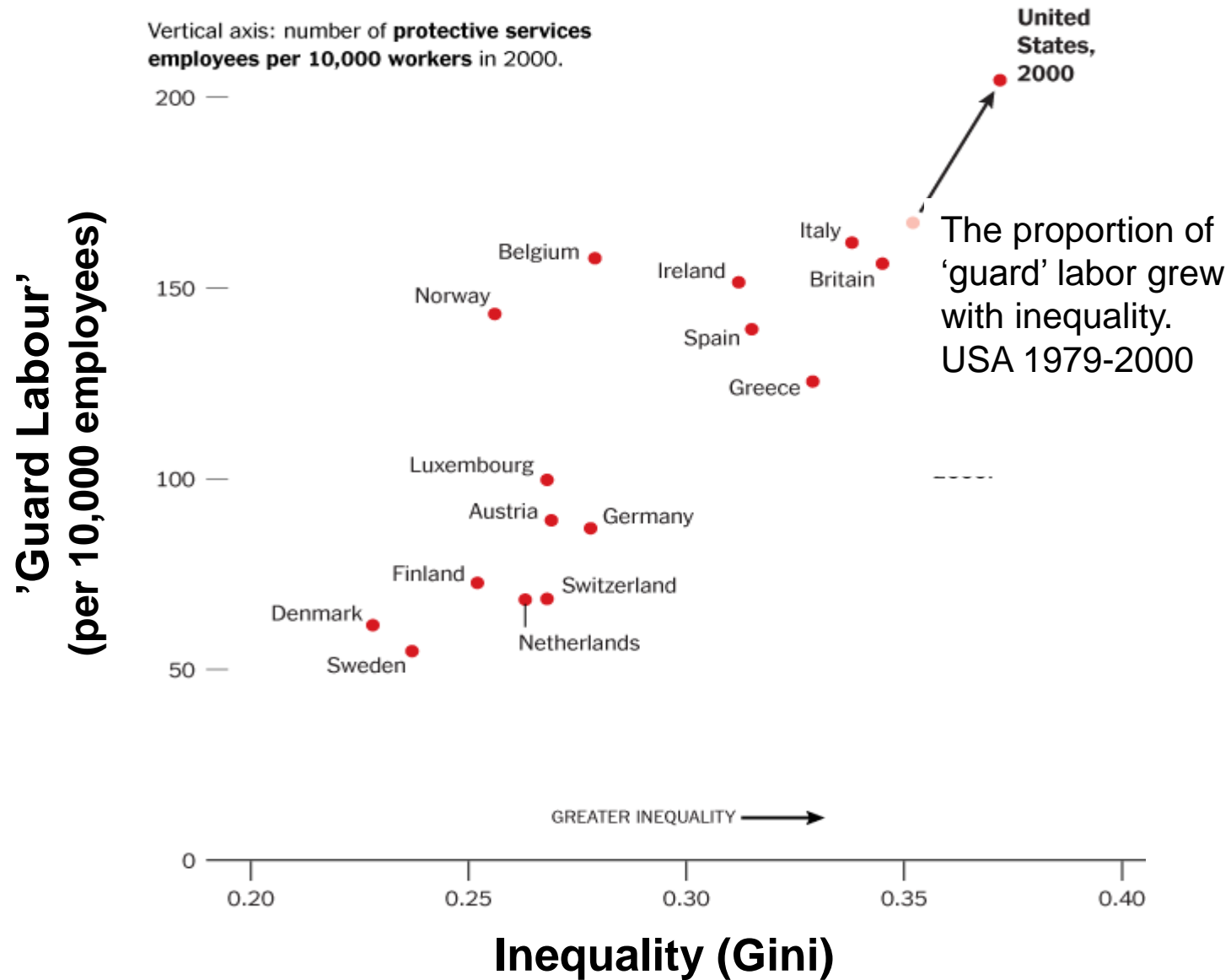


## 'Armed Response' - Pretoria, South Africa.





# More unequal societies need more “guard labor”





## The Jekyll & Hyde of Public Health?

- **Social status** (dominance hierarchies, pecking orders) are orderings based on power, coercion and privileged access to resources – regardless of the needs of others.
- **Friendship** in contrast, is based on reciprocity, mutuality, social obligations, sharing and a recognition of each other's needs.

## **Companion**

**Spanish: Compañero;**

**French: Copain**

**from the Latin “Con” (with)**

**and “Pan” (bread)**

**- someone with whom you eat bread**

“Gifts make friends and  
friends make gifts”



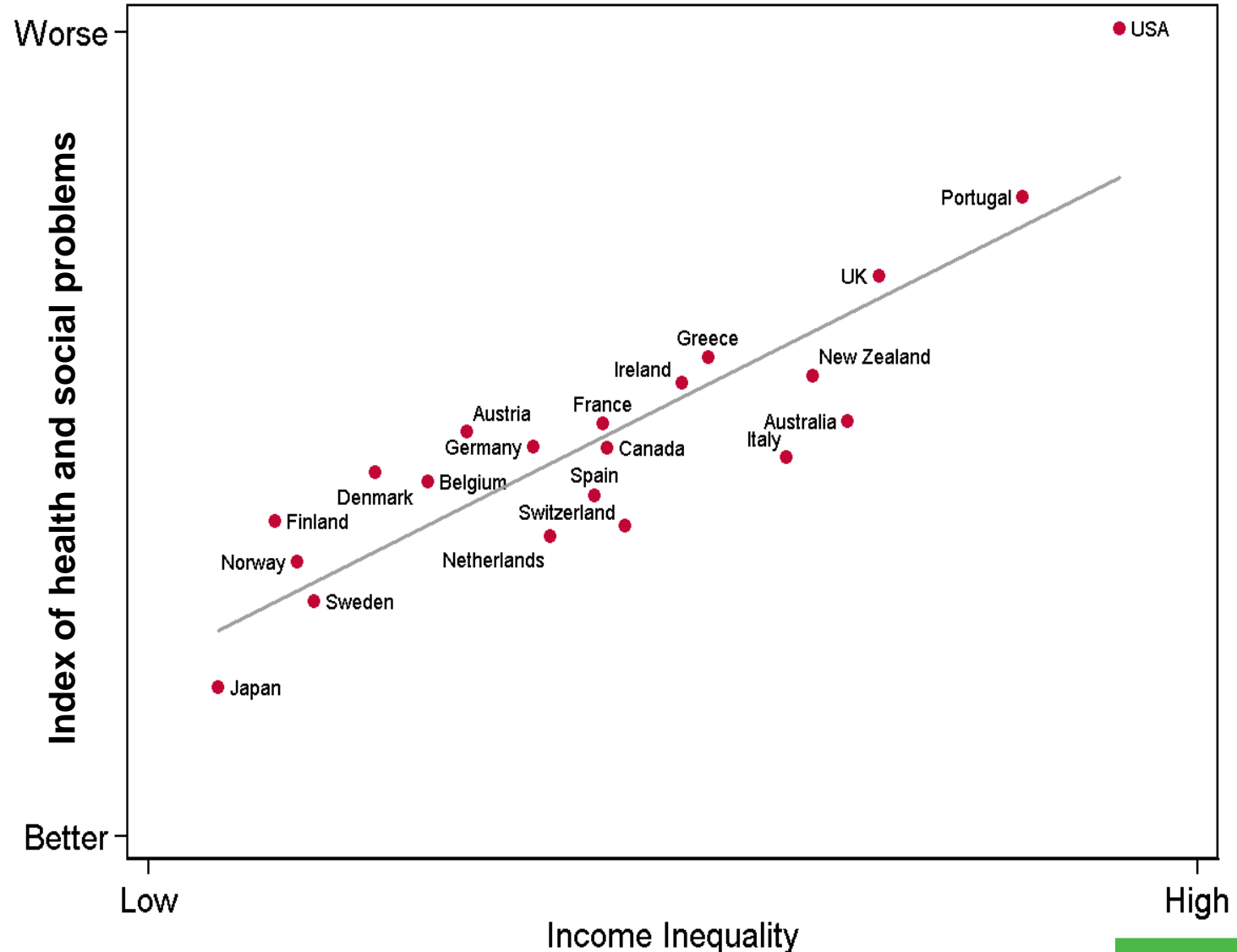
**Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (1974)**



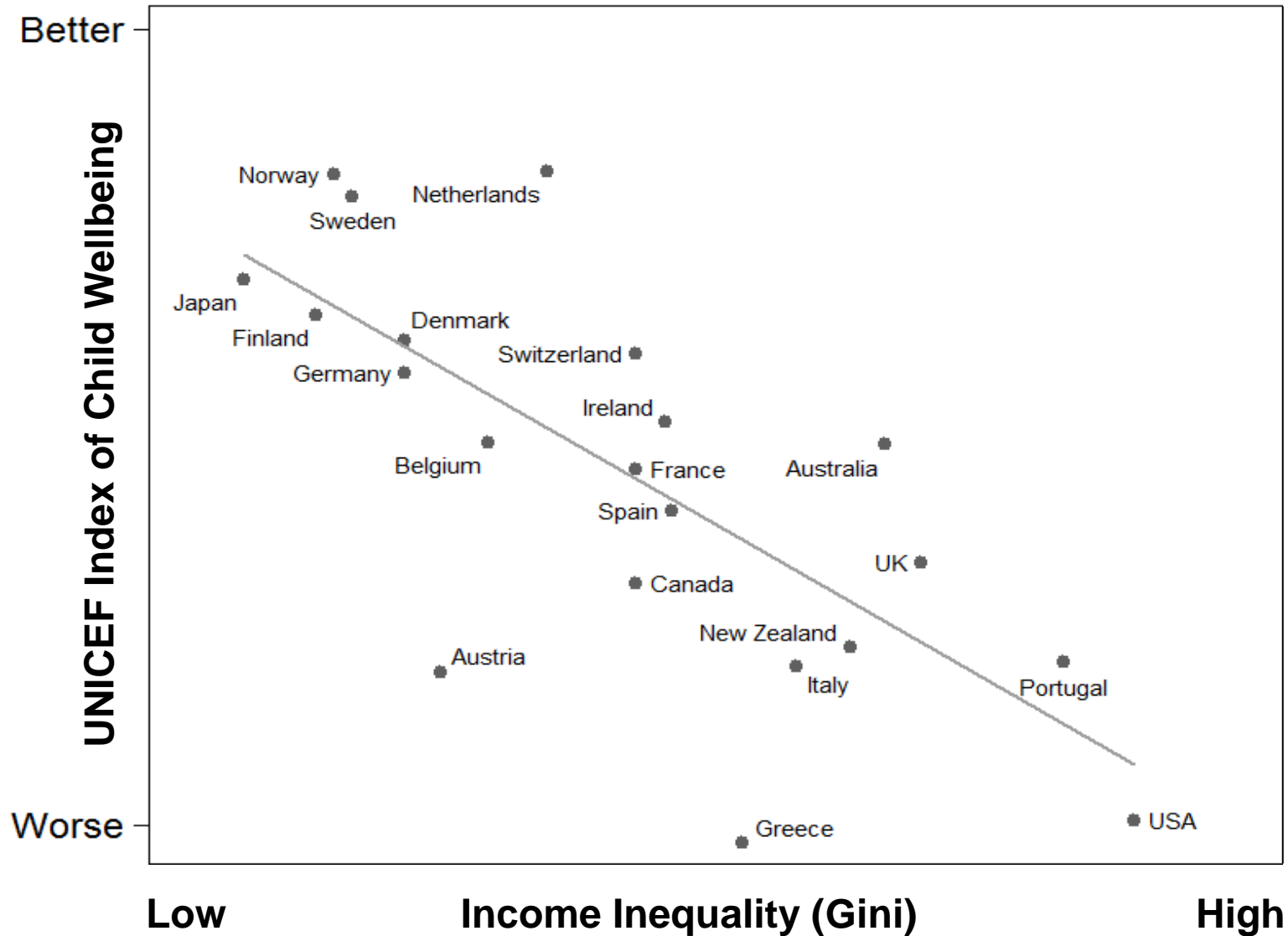
# Health and social problems are worse in more unequal countries

Index of:

- Life expectancy
- Math & Literacy
- Infant mortality
- Homicides
- Imprisonment
- Teenage births
- Trust
- Obesity
- Mental illness  
– incl. drug & alcohol  
addiction
- Social mobility

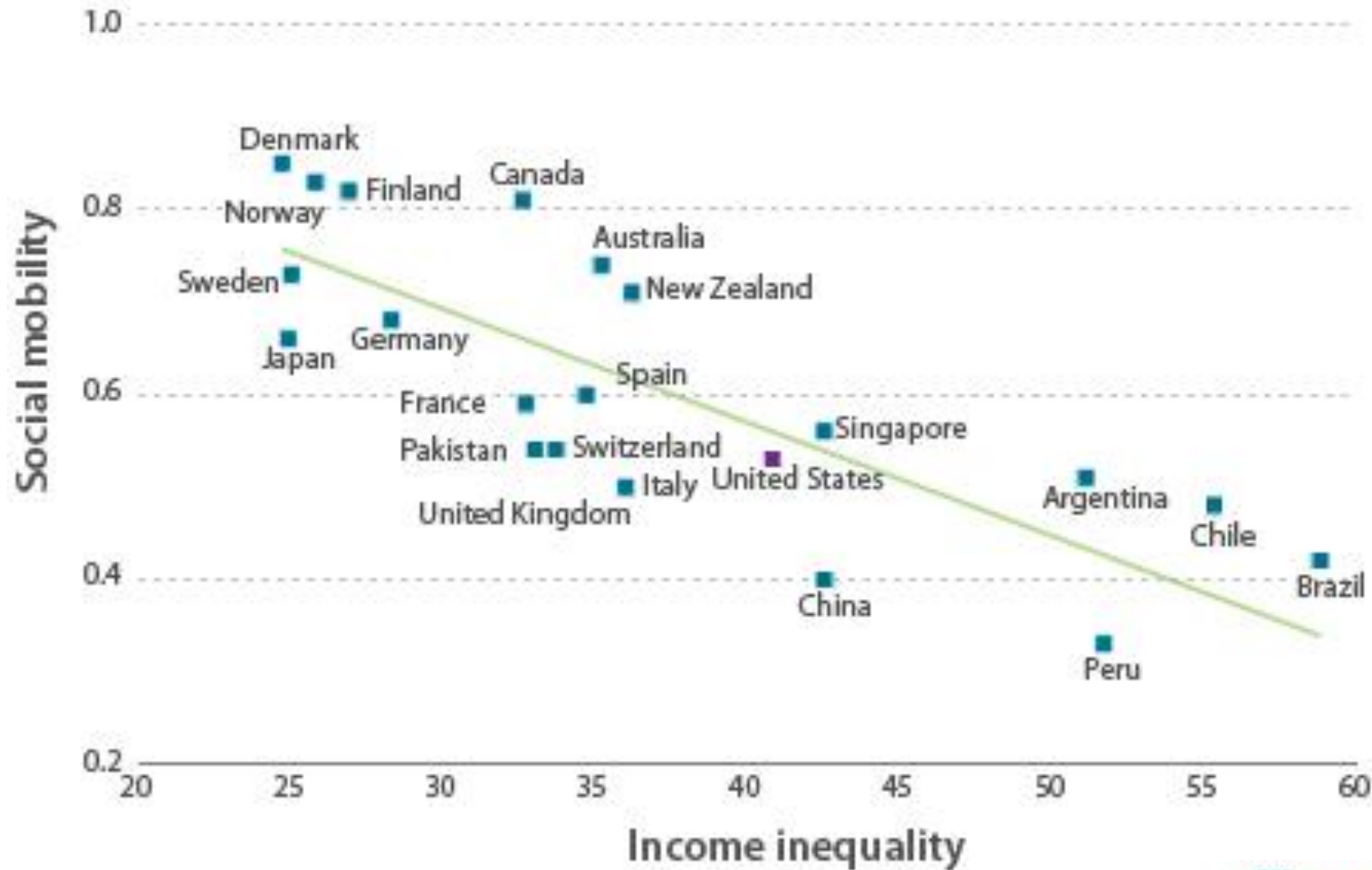


## Child Wellbeing is lower in more unequal countries



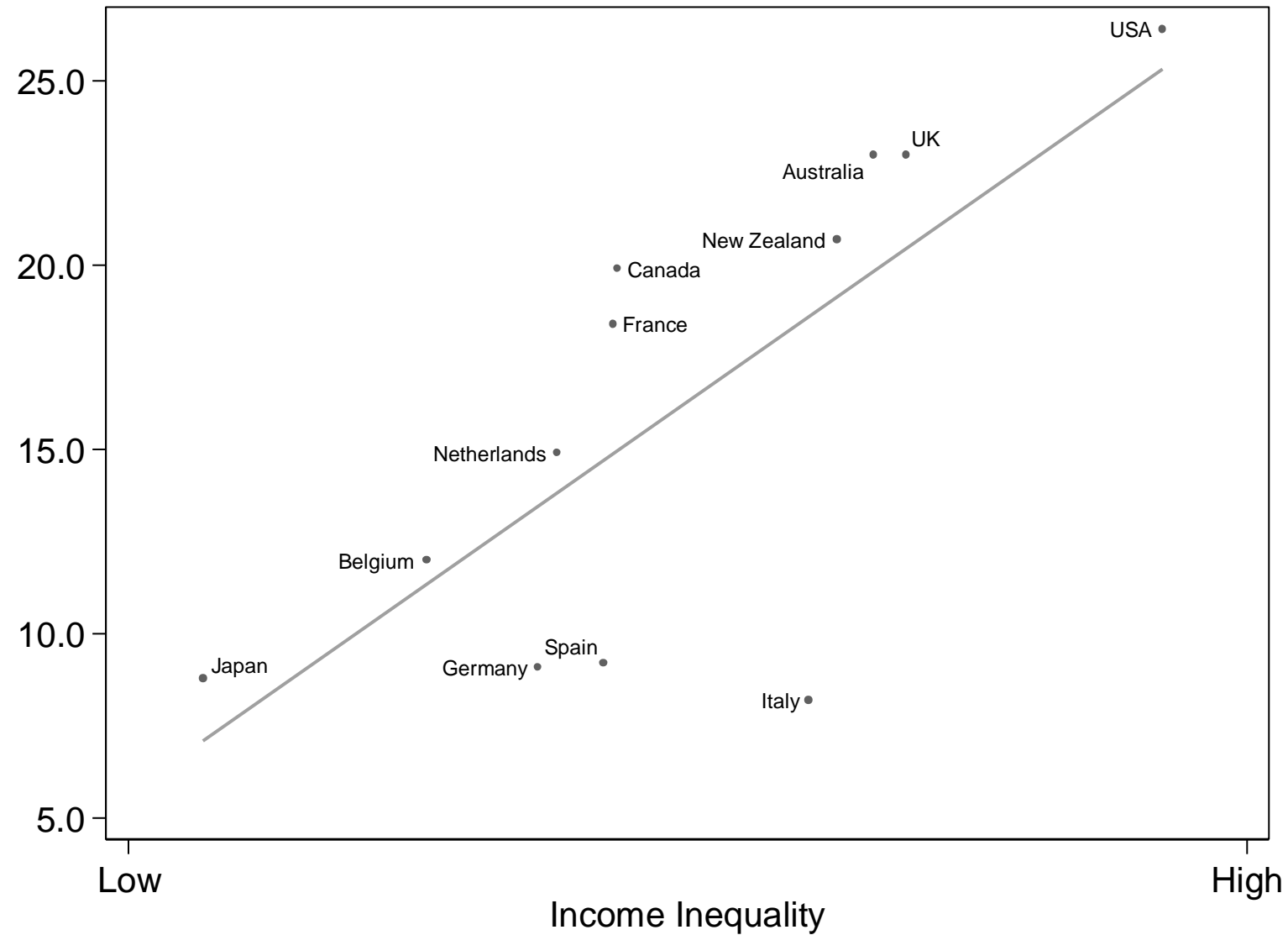


# Where income inequalities are larger, there is less social mobility

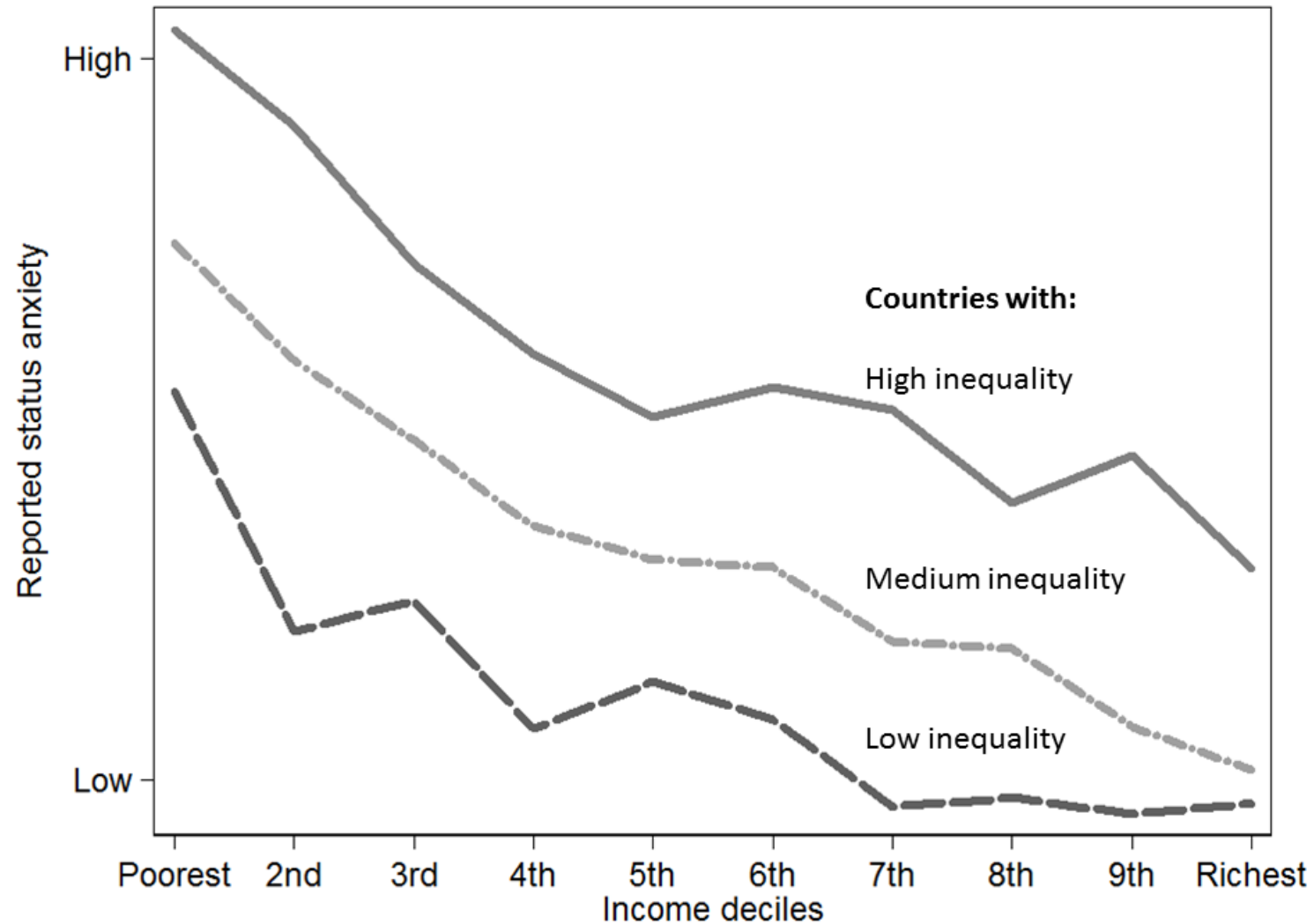


Data from Corak (2013), World Bank (2013)

# There is more mental illness in unequal societies

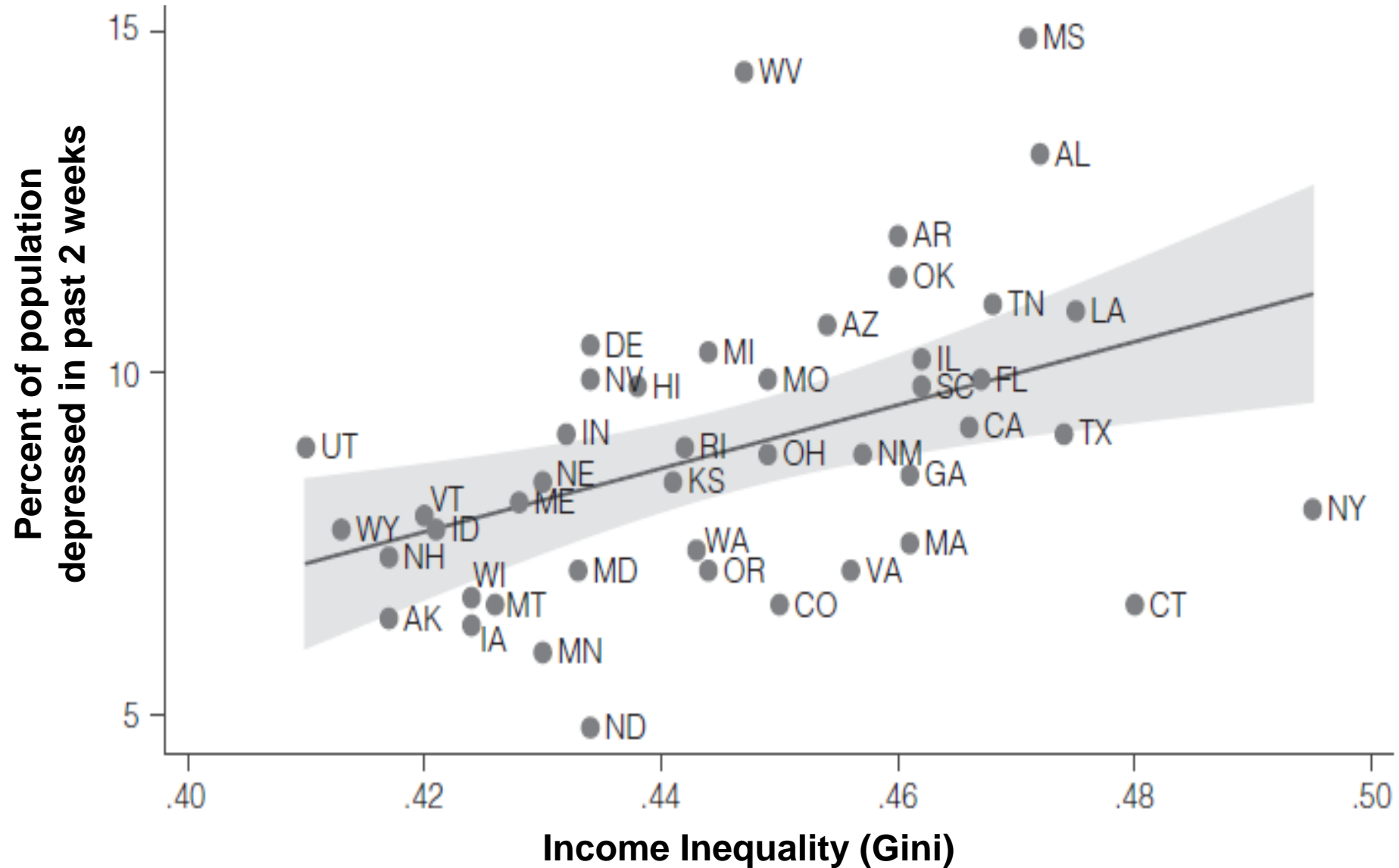


# Inequality increases anxieties about status, making people doubt their self-worth



Redrawn from data kindly provided by Richard Layte: Layte R, Whelan C. Who feels inferior? A test of the status anxiety hypothesis of social inequalities in health. *European Sociological Review*. 2014;30:525-535

## Depression is more common in more unequal states



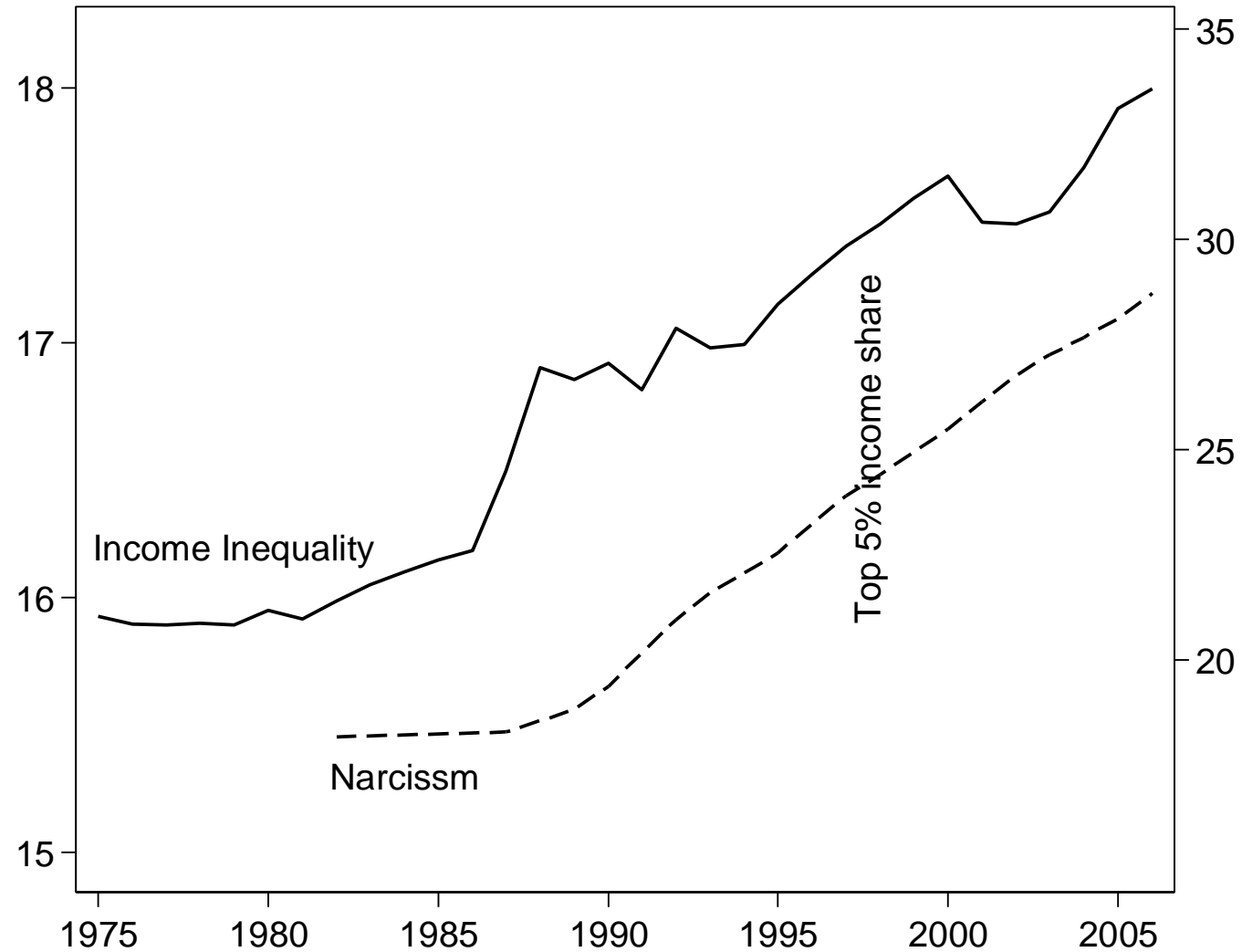
Messias E, Eaton WW, et al. . Economic grand rounds: Income inequality and depression across the United States: an ecological study." Psychiatric Services, 2011; 62(7): 710-2.

# More people exaggerate their self-importance...



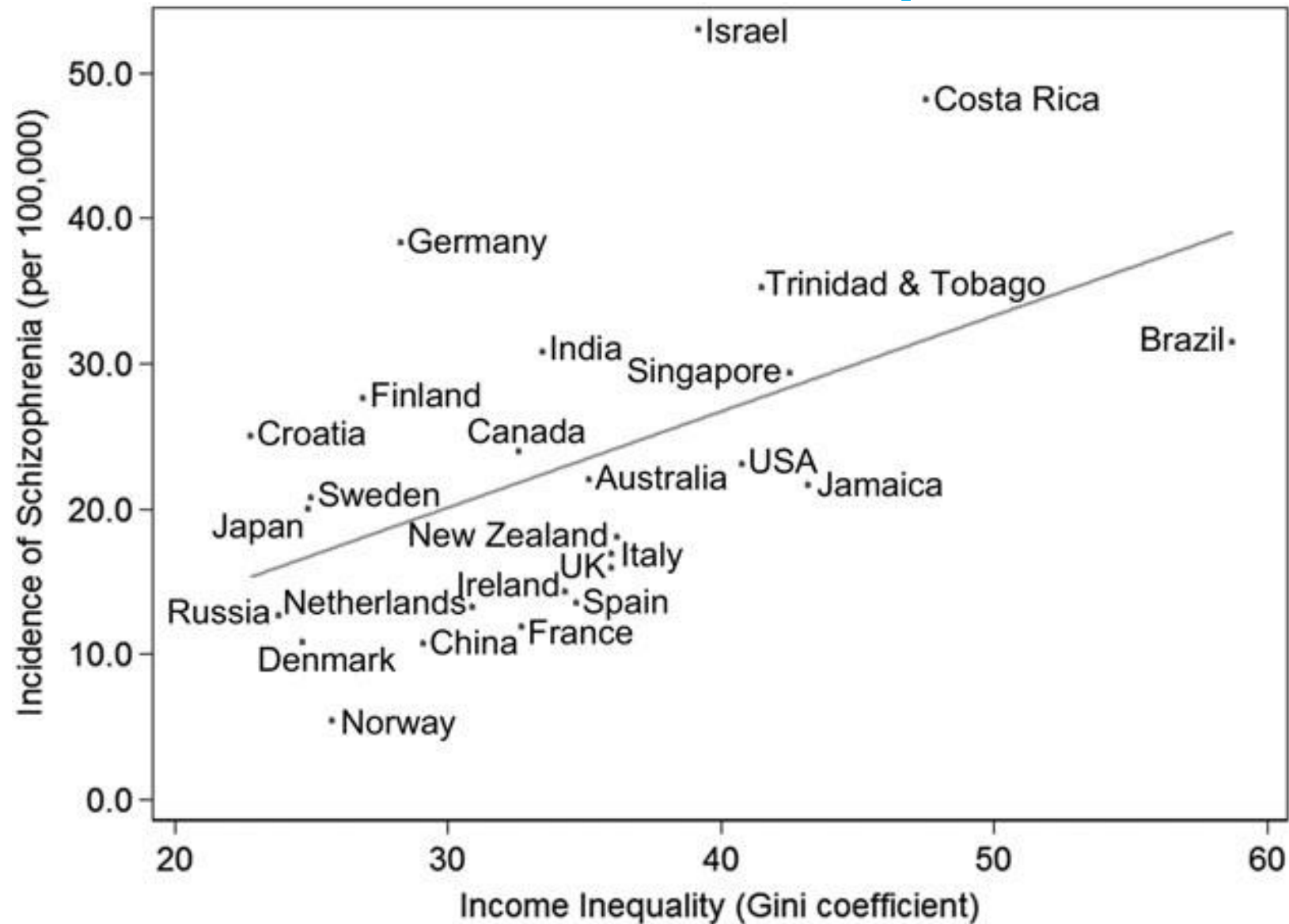
Redrawn from data kindly provided by Peter Kuppens and Steve Loughnan et al . Economic inequality is linked to biased self-perception. *Psychological science*. 2011;22(10):1254-1258.

....and become more narcissistic



College students' Narcissistic Personality Inventory scores over time reflect the rise in US income inequality

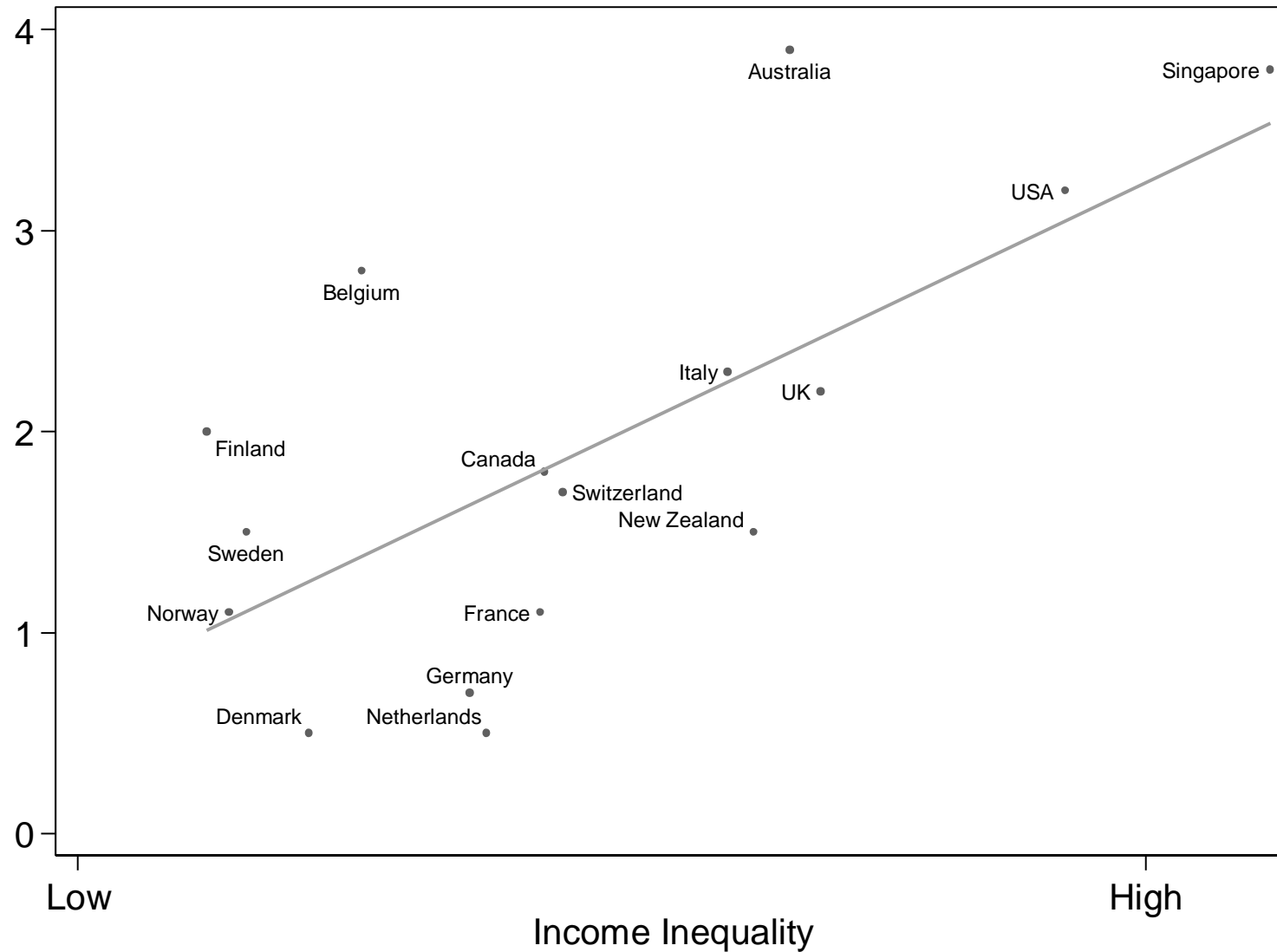
## ...there is more schizophrenia



Burns JK, et al.. Int J Soc Psychiatry, 2013; 60(2), 185–96.



# Addictive behaviour increases: e.g., gambling





**WE BUY THINGS WE DON'T NEED  
WITH MONEY WE DON'T HAVE  
TO IMPRESS PEOPLE WE DON'T LIKE.**





LOUIS VUITTON

MAISON FONDÉE EN 1854  
PARIS

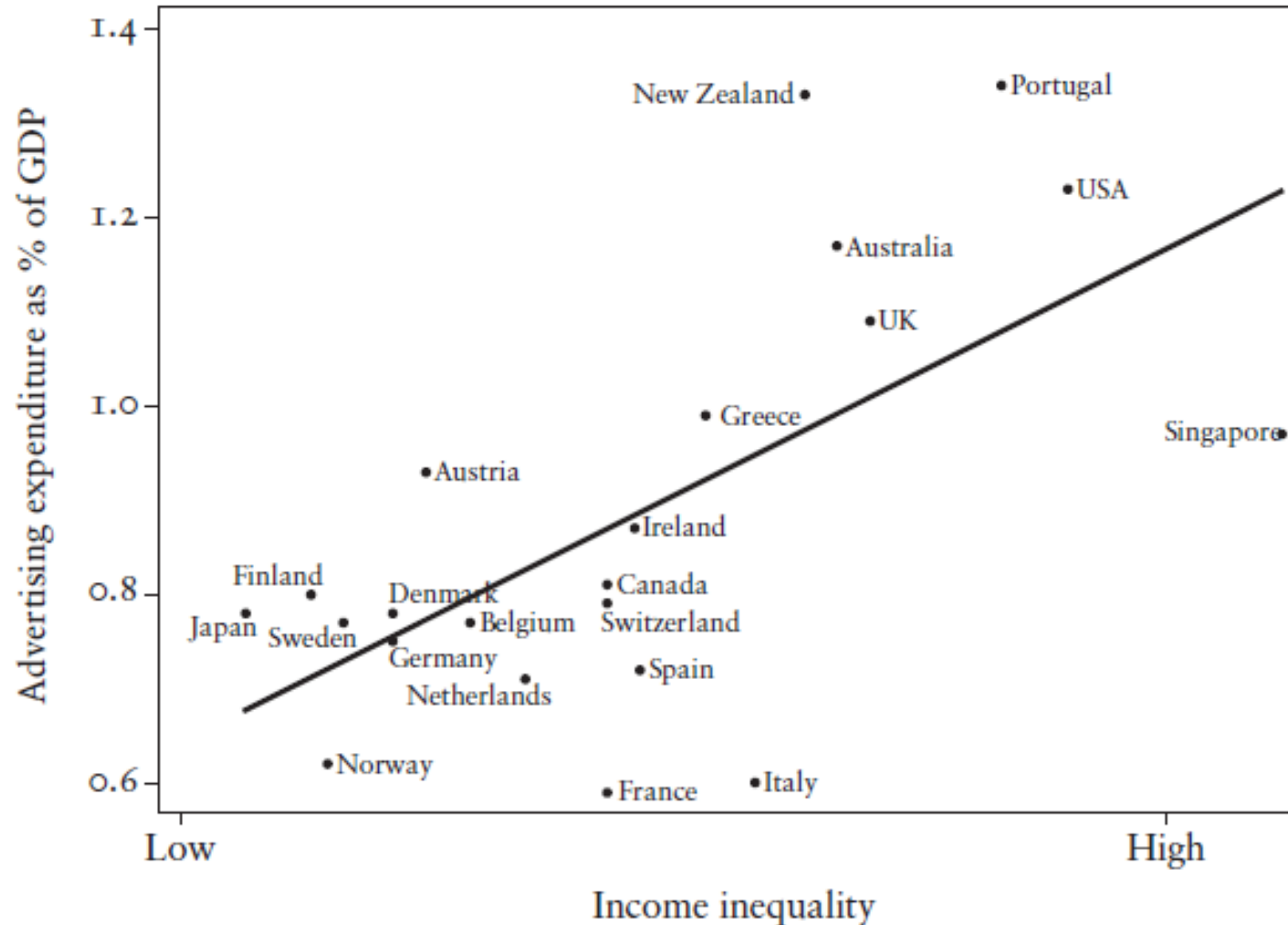


CHANEL

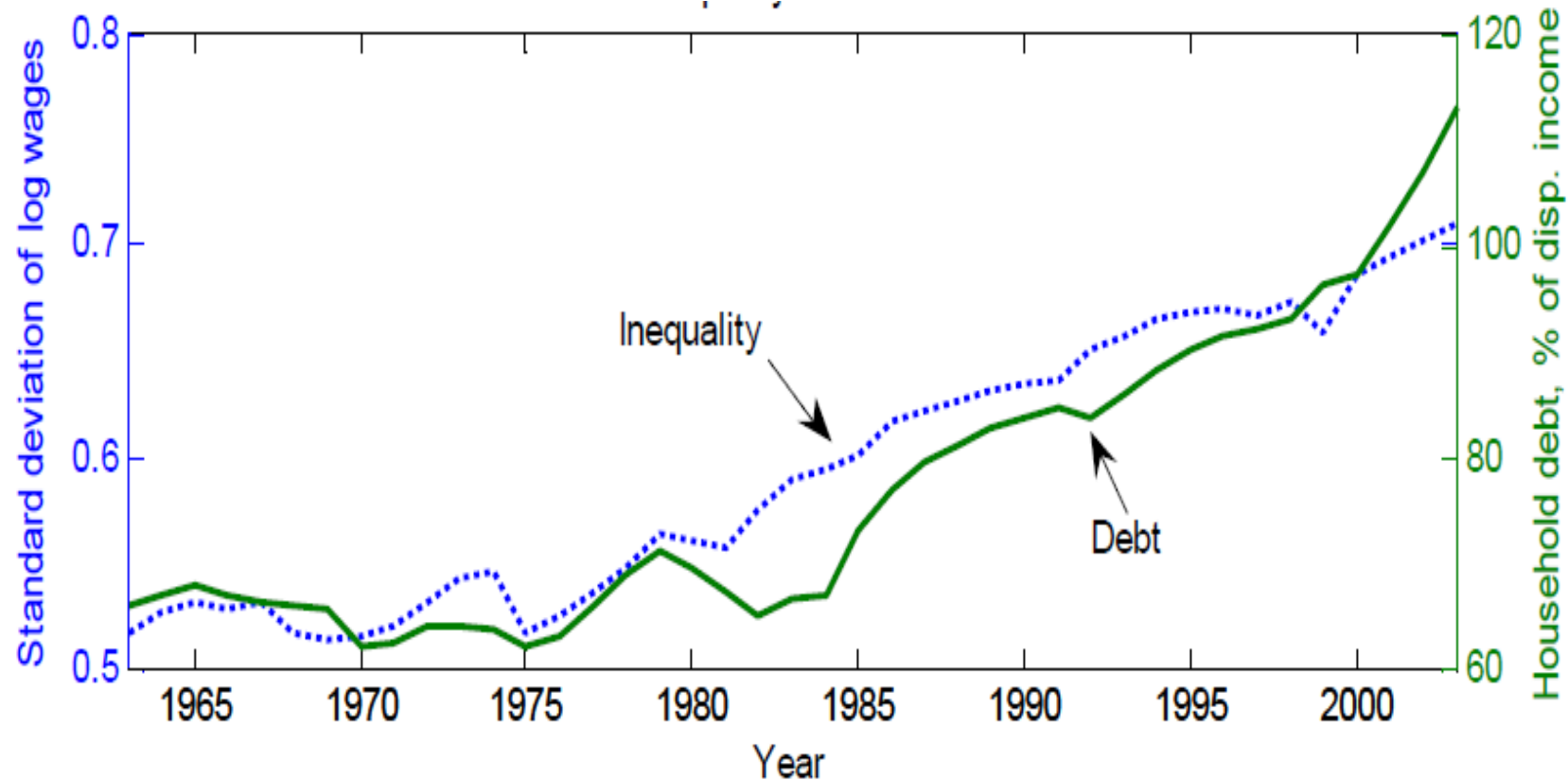
GUCCI

BROWN THOMAS

# There is more advertising in more unequal countries



# Household Debt and Income Inequality USA



Iacoviello M. Household Debt and Income Inequality, 1963–2003. *Journal of Money, Credit and Banking* 2008;40(5):929-65.

# The Effects of Income inequality

## EVIDENCE OF CAUSALITY

Pickett KE, Wilkinson RG. Income inequality and health: a causal review. *Social Science & Medicine* 2015;128: 316-26

## THEORY & PSYCHOSOCIAL PROCESSES

Wilkinson RG, Pickett KE. The enemy between us: The psychological and social costs of inequality. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 2017; 47, 11-24. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2275>



# The Inner Level: how more equal societies reduce stress, restore sanity and improve wellbeing

#LSEinnerlevel

## **Kate Pickett**

Professor of Epidemiology in the Department of Health Sciences at the University of York, and the University's Research Champion for Justice and Equality

## **Richard Wilkinson**

Professor Emeritus of Social Epidemiology at the University of Nottingham Medical School, Honorary Professor at University College London and Visiting Professor at the University of York.

## **Chair: Beverley Skeggs**

A feminist sociologist and the Academic Director of the Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity based in the LSE International Inequalities Institute.

*Hosted by LSE International Inequalities Institute*



THE LONDON SCHOOL  
OF ECONOMICS AND  
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■



International  
Inequalities Institute