Error Revisited: The Meaning and Ramifications of Variance for Affect Control Theory

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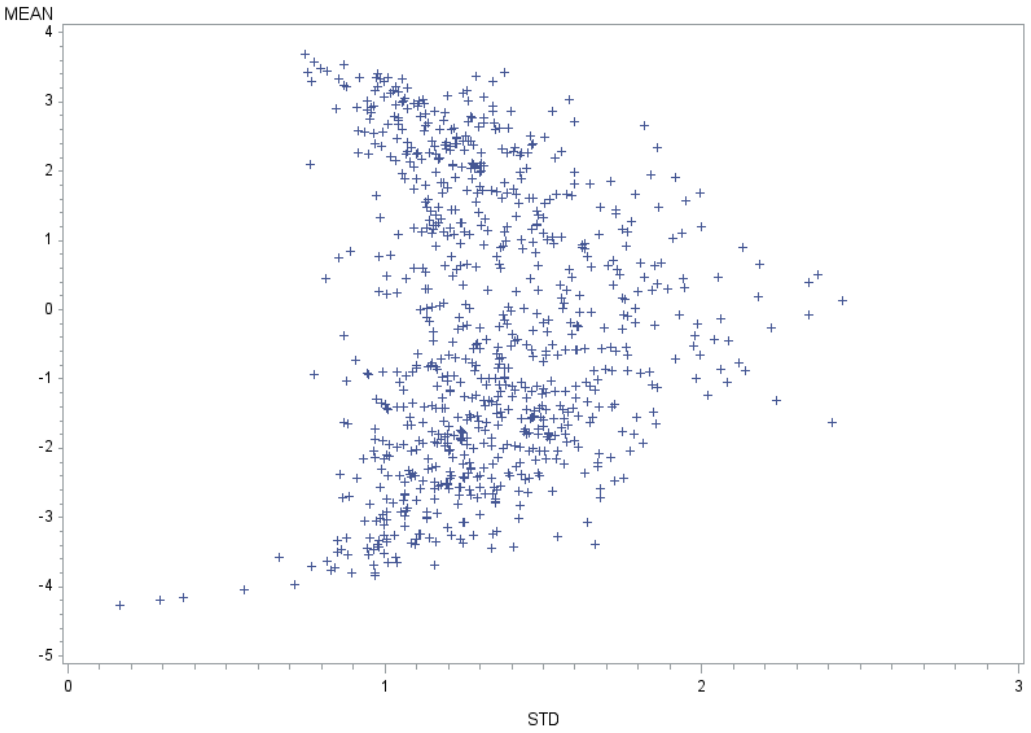
Abstract

Research based in the "culture as consensus" paradigm aims to discover and describe norms within a society by analyzing similarity, rather than difference, within and between cultures. Affect Control Theory represents one approach to this line of research that depends heavily on consensus in order to measure the "affective meaning" of identities, behaviors, and emotions in a given culture. Traditionally, the theory uses mean point-estimates collected from small groups of "cultural experts" to define affective meanings along three dimensions: evaluation, potency, and activity. Variation among respondents is considered measurement error attributed to respondents' insufficient cultural inculcation. Past research has examined the demographic covariates correlated with low cultural inculcation and divergence from peer-rated meanings. Research explains variation in concept ratings as the result of different enculturation processes attributed to a respondent's gender, race, education, and/or socioeconomic status. Moreover, such has been the focus on attaining similarity among responses and the *a priori* theoretical assumption of cultural expertise so ubiquitous, that variation in concept ratings has been considered little more than a data cleaning problem.

This research takes a different approach to address the phenomenon of variations in ratings. Rather than asking what attributes of a *respondent* correlate with divergence from mean ratings and thereby assuming insufficient cultural expertise, I ask what are the attributes of the *concept* that it would be rated differently by presumed cultural expert respondents. Rather than focus on the characteristics of *respondents*, this research focuses on the characteristics of *concepts* to explain variation in ratings.

Using recently collected large dictionary studies collected from both university students (the theoretically preferred respondents) and lay people (via Amazon Mechanical Turk), I show that up to 69% of neutral-evaluation concepts are estimated to be neutral by virtue of deviations greater than 1.5 std above and below the mean (See Figures 1 and 2 for an example). I also review methods for identifying hitherto unresolved sources of measurement error, including word difficulty and concept familiarity. ACT does not traditionally think of variation as inherent to a concept; consequently, there are only three theoretically asserted methods of differentiating and grouping concepts: Identity domains, gender, and *institutionality*. I test for variability in concept ratings along these dimensions as well as use grounded theory create additional concept groupings by analyzing the correlation between concepts' semantic meanings and respondents' sociodemographic characteristics.

University Student Evaluation Means by Standard Deviations



MTURK Evaluation means by Standard Deviations