

The Structure of Deference: Modeling Occupational Status Using Affect Control Theory

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Weber ([1958]:187) defined status as a form of symbolic social power based on a “positive or negative, social estimation of honor.” While it can rest on class situations, it “normally stands in sharp opposition to the pretensions of sheer property,” implying that it is a multidimensional construct reflecting both class power and cultural esteem. Occupational prestige scores, the predominant method of operationalizing occupational status, has been criticized for reflecting class situation (education and income) not cultural perceptions of an occupation’s esteem, goodness, and service to others. Newer paradigms employing either institutional or Neo-Marxist frameworks shifted the theoretical focus almost exclusively to the class component, conceptualizing status as either the symbolic reflection of the class order (Bourdieu 1984) or a signal of market quality (Podolny & Lynn 2013). We contend that these unidimensional approaches are inadequate for capturing the multidimensional structure of status and the emphasis on the class component is particular problematic because the cultural esteem component remains the primary component of the occupational status order despite the inability of prestige scores to adequately operationalize it.

To support our position, we develop and test a new multidimensional operationalization of occupational status that we call deference scores based on three universal dimensions of cultural meaning (evaluation, potency, and activity). Rooted in theoretical assertions that status can best be conceptualized as a network of deference relationships based on cultural beliefs, we use BayesACT to map this deference network by computing the likelihood that one occupation would “defer to” another for all possible combinations of over 300 occupational identities. Data come from the newly collected ACT dictionary, the General Social Survey, and Harris opinion polls.

Testing for construct validity, we find that deference scores significantly predicts the order of prestige found in public opinion polls while traditional prestige scores do not. And that in line with theoretical assertions, regressing the three affective dimensions on deference scores finds they are primarily determined by the evaluation dimension reflecting cultural perceptions of goodness and esteem with a standardized β coefficient of .76 with potency and activity having smaller yet still significant effects ($\beta=.20$, $\beta=.19$ respectively). To demonstrate criterion validity, using a series of binary logistic regression models, we find deference scores significantly predicts importantly workplace outcomes including attachment, general happiness, and importance of performing meaningful work net of controls. And for two outcomes, job satisfaction and feeling respect at work, deference scores had greater effects than either education or income.

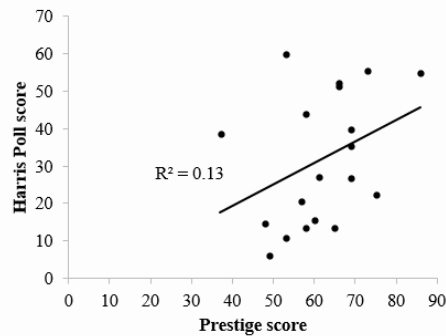


Figure 1. Prestige and Harris Poll score

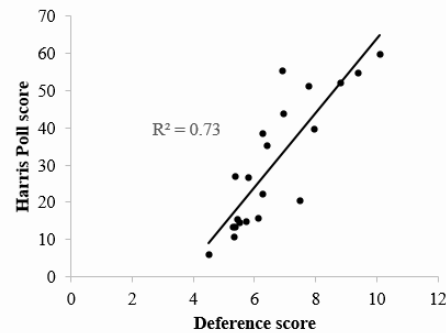


Figure 2. Deference and Harris Poll score

Table 1: Linear Regression Predicting Prestige Scores and Deference Scores

	Model 1	Model 2
	Prestige score	Deference score
	Beta (t)	Beta (t)
Evaluation	.12 (2.15) *	.76 (17.0) ***
Potency	.72 (13.1) ***	.20 (4.44) ***
Activity	-.30 (-5.50) ***	.19 (4.26) ***
R ²	.58	.71
N	186	186

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2. Logistic Regression Models Predicting Workplace Attachment, Job Satisfaction, General Happiness, Meaningful Work, and Respect at Work

	Attachment	Job Satisfaction	Happiness	Meaningful Work	Respect
	Odds ratio (SE)	Odds ratio (SE)	Odds ratio (SE)	Odds ratio (SE)	Odds ratio (SE)
Deference	1.07 (0.025) **	1.21 (0.018) ***	1.09 (0.018) ***	1.18 (0.045) ***	1.17 (0.036) ***
Education	1.17 (0.027) ***	1.04 (0.020) *	1.10 (0.021) ***	1.83 (0.054) ***	1.08 (0.040) *
Income	0.86 (0.029) ***	1.15 (0.020) ***	1.15 (0.021) ***	0.96 (0.048)	1.06 (0.039)
Age	0.98 (0.002) ***	1.02 (0.001) ***	1.01 (0.001) ***	1.02 (0.003) ***	1.02 (0.003) ***
Female	0.72 (0.049) ***	1.05 (0.036)	1.06 (0.038)	1.39 (0.086) ***	1.08 (0.073)
Black	0.93 (0.070)	0.65 (0.053) ***	0.68 (0.058) ***	0.32 (0.144) ***	1.00 (0.103)
Other	1.30 (0.090) **	0.78 (0.064) ***	0.84 (0.068) *	0.42 (0.171) ***	0.96 (0.120)
-2LL	11,102.4	19,453.4	18,510.2	3,462.6	4,798.0
-2LL	11,162.5	19,677.4	18,656.8	3,672.4	4,837.1
N	8,891	14,146	14,588	2,706	3,557

Note: Standardized values for deference scores, education, and income measures were used in all models.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$