Working Man’s Blues: How Occupational Identity Shapes Emotional Experience

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**Abstract:** How does occupational identity shape emotional experience? Prior work has largely framed occupation and emotion in terms of occupational status differentials structuring the experience of powerful, negative emotions or cultural norms enforcing types of acceptable emotional expression. Complementing and building on this work by using an identity-centered approach informed by Affect Control Theory, this paper asks how being in one occupational identity versus another influences the emotions one is likely to experience in everyday life. Occupational identities generate daily interaction sets with typical others which create opportunities for identity maintenance and confirmation. When identities are confirmed, individuals feel emotions that are similar in cultural meaning to the identity. Analysis of the emotions module of the 1996 GSS finds support for the hypothesis that as emotions are further away in cultural meaning from the meaning of one’s occupational identity, they are less frequently reported as part of weekly experience. This relationship is stronger for those with more material resources, men, and older individuals, signifying that having interactional resources that aid in defining the situation allow those with more status and material resources to be more effective at maintaining their identity.

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