

# The Influence of Occupational Identity on Emotional Experience

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## Abstract

How does occupational identity shape emotional experience? Prior work has largely framed occupation and emotion either in terms of how differences in occupational status structure the experience of powerful, negative emotions or how cultural norms enforce types of acceptable emotional expression in workplaces. Complementing this work by using an identity-centered approach, this paper asks how being in one occupational identity versus another influences the emotions one is likely to experience in everyday life. I argue that one's occupational identity generates daily interaction sets with typical others, which create opportunities for identity maintenance and confirmation. Affect Control Theory predicts that when individuals confirm identities within an interaction, they will experience the characteristic emotion of the identity. Using data from the General Social Survey's 1996 emotions module, I find support for the hypothesis that individuals will report experiencing emotions that are closer in cultural meaning to the characteristic emotion of their occupational identity more often than emotions that are more different in cultural meaning. I additionally explore how this relationship depends on the social location of the individual. I find that this relationship is stronger for men, those with higher income, and more educational credentials.

## Keywords

emotion, occupational identity, status

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## Introduction

How does one's occupational identity influence which emotions an individual experiences in everyday life? Prior work has framed this question largely in terms of the relationships between the status structure and enforcement of emotion norms, particularly focusing on the feeling and expression of negative emotions (Collett & Lizardo, 2010; Hochschild, 1983; Kemper, 1978; Lively & Powell, 2006). This study takes an explicitly identity-centered approach to argue that occupational identity shapes emotional experience by influencing the social interactions within the work environment and their resulting emotions. I hypothesize that individuals report experiencing emotions that are closer in meaning to their occupational identity's characteristic emotion more frequently than emotions that are less similar in cultural meaning and explore for whom this relationship might be stronger.

Working adults spend much of their daily lives inside the work environment, embodying their occupational identity to different degrees throughout the interactions that unfold while carrying out tasks (Fine, 1996; Phelan & Kinsella, 2009). Occupational identities can be stratified based on their material rewards—the income earned and the education and network ties required to attain them. Occupational identities also differ in cultural meaning: namely, how good the occupation is, how powerful it is, and how active it is (Freeland & Hoey, 2018). These meanings shape the types of interactions one has with other individuals in daily life and structure typical others with whom one is likely to interact. For example, the social interactions involved in a lawyer's day are likely to involve interactions with clients, other lawyers, or judges, which narrows down the possible types of interactions to those that are expected to occur within such an institutional domain. These interactions, when they go well, may engender feelings of satisfaction; if they go poorly, they may evoke frustration or resentment. Identity theorists have long suggested that individuals largely strive to maintain their identities through interactions (Burke & Stets, 2009; Heise, 2007). Doing so with regard to occupational identity means meeting the societal expectations associated with your job's meaning.

Notably, the extent to which an occupational identity is maintained throughout daily interactions may not be constant across individuals. Some occupational identities may not be as salient to one's sense of self and thus less important to maintain in every interaction. Second, an individual may have less ability to maintain and control the definition of a situation when faced with an inconsistency from an interaction partner, leading to the disconfirmation of their identity. Third, some occupational identities may have broader sets of possible interaction partners and interactions, which lead to more opportunities for failed interactions. I argue that these mechanisms are influenced by the status of an individual, making the relationship between occupational identity and emotional experience stronger for those with higher status.

Taking a specifically Affect Control Theory approach, this paper tests the hypothesis that working adults are more likely to report feeling emotions that are close in meaning to the sentiment of their occupational identity's characteristic emotion, using data from

the 1996 wave of the General Social Survey (GSS). Further, this relationship will be stronger for individuals with higher income, more educational attainment, men, and middle-aged individuals.

## Background

### *Affect Control Theory*

Affect Control Theory (ACT) is a formal theory of social behavior that rests upon the fundamental principle that individuals act in ways to maintain cultural meaning. ACT advances that social concepts have affective meaning along three dimensions: Evaluation, corresponding to good/bad, Potency to powerful/weak, and Activity to active/inactive. ACT researchers have conducted studies in various cultures in which individuals rate concepts along those dimensions, resulting in estimates of the mean Evaluation, Potency, and Activity (EPA, hereafter) of identities, modifiers, and behaviors. For instance, the EPA value of Mother<sup>1</sup> in the most recent ACT dictionary is (3.05, 2.66, .76), meaning that in the U.S., Mothers are seen as very good, very powerful, and moderately active (Smith-Lovin et al., 2016).<sup>2</sup> These culturally agreed-upon locations within affective space for identities and behaviors are fundamental sentiments, the baseline cultural meaning of social terms.

ACT argues that individuals define situations in the form of an Actor doing a Behavior to an Object identity, and affectively react to that definition. The impressions of these elements of the situation shift due to how well the other aspects of the situation cohere with the cultural sentiment of each other event element (Heise & Smith-Lovin, 1981). The resulting EPA location of the three elements of a situation following an event are transient impressions. The affective control principle of the theory hinges on the difference between transient impressions and the fundamental sentiments for the elements of the situation. The deflection, or the sum of squared differences between the transient and fundamental EPA values of the actor, behavior, and object, is the indicator of cultural (dis)confirmation. As an indication of affective movement, deflection is considered an emotional sense of anxiety about the situation (Heise, 2007).

*Emotions in ACT.* ACT involves affect both broadly as cultural sentiments and as specifications of emotions that result as a consequence of events (MacKinnon, 1994). Just as identities exist in EPA space, so do words that indicate emotions such as Annoyed, which is bad, slightly weak, and slightly active (−2.08, −0.57, and .53). Emotions researchers have long grappled with the precise definition and measurement of emotions. In the following analysis, whenever emotion is referenced or predicted, I am referring to the affective meaning of the emotion that is captured by the EPA location of that emotion (Scholl, 2013).

Within ACT, the emotions equations suggest that emotions are the product of two elements: the deflection and the transient impression of the identity in question (Averett & Heise, 1987; MacKinnon, 1994; Smith-Lovin & Robinson, 2006). ACT defines

characteristic emotions as the emotion that occurs when the transient impressions match the fundamental sentiment for an identity. In other words, the characteristic emotion is the emotion resulting from the perfect confirmation of an identity (Robinson, 2014). For many (but not all) identities, the characteristic emotion will be close in EPA space to the fundamental sentiment of the identity.<sup>3</sup>

A theoretical debate to note is that ACT and Identity Control Theory diverge when it comes to predicting emotions resulting from confirmation and disconfirmation of identities through interactions. ACT predicts that individuals will feel the characteristic emotion of their identity when it has been perfectly confirmed through an interaction—depending on the identity in question, this characteristic emotion could range in EPA values. ACT makes no global prediction about the valence of emotion felt upon perfect confirmation of an identity (Smith-Lovin & Robinson, 2006). While there will be a lack of deflection, this is not interpreted as a positive emotion, but a feeling of normalcy in the interaction. On the other hand, Identity Control Theory predicts that confirmation of an identity always results in positive emotions and disconfirmation of an identity will always result in negative emotions and stress (Stets & Burke, 2014). I test ACT's predictions and discuss how the evidence contributes to the debate between the two theories of emotion and identity.

### *Occupational Identity and Emotion*

Adults who work full-time spend a considerable amount of their day-time hours within their occupational environment. Through embodying their corresponding occupational identity, individuals may strive to enact behaviors within interactions that will maintain the fundamental sentiment of their occupational identity. Because ACT predicts the precise profile of the characteristic emotion that someone would feel after perfectly confirming their occupational identity, we expect individuals to report feeling emotions that are similar in cultural meaning to the characteristic emotion of their occupational identity more often than those that are discrepant.

Moreover, the institutional frameworks that structure the types of interactions an individual will have while occupying their occupational identity provide them with interaction sets that should work to maintain that identity (Ridgeway, 2014). On average across these interactions, we would expect the emotion produced to be similar to the characteristic emotion. However, individuals do not spend every hour of their time at work in a social interaction. ACT can only predict emotions that result from social interactions. This is a limitation of the study, as there are emotions that result from non-interaction events during work time (e.g., a Doctor filling out paperwork causing boredom). I argue that many of the social interactions that take place in the workday do provide identity enactment opportunities. If institutional frameworks did not sustain identity maintaining interactions in this way, we would expect more volatility in the EPA ratings of identities and behaviors (Smith-Lovin, 2007). Given this, I hypothesize that individuals are likely to report experiencing emotions that are close in meaning to their occupational identity's characteristic emotion.

*H1:* The greater the distance between an individual's occupational identity's characteristic emotion and an emotion in EPA space, the less likely that individual is to report frequently feeling that emotion.

Because occupational identities tend to be fairly good, powerful and somewhat active, there are baseline expectations as to how likely certain emotions are to be experienced by employed individuals in general, regardless of occupational identity. For instance, Ashamed ( $-2.36$ ,  $-0.4$ ,  $-1.73$ ) is bad, not powerful or weak, and inactive. The average distance between Ashamed and characteristic emotions across all occupational identities used in this study is 32, which is large. Conversely, the average distance between a good, powerful, and active emotion such as Excited ( $2.69$ ,  $2.18$ , and  $2.24$ ) and occupational identity characteristic emotions is slightly above 4. Regardless of individual differences in distance, we expect that on average, employed individuals should report feeling excited more often than they do ashamed.

*H2:* The larger the average distance between an emotion and occupational identity characteristic emotions, the less often individuals will report feeling that emotion on average.

## Status

The relationship between the distance between an occupation's characteristic emotion and emotion in EPA space (occ-char-emotion-discrepancy hereafter) and propensity to frequently experience an emotion is dependent on how often the occupational identity is enacted and confirmed. A classic postulate of structural theories of identity is that individuals want to confirm their identities and accordingly structure and play out their interactions in order to do so (Burke & Stets, 2009; Smith-Lovin & Robinson, 2006). However, there are three main factors that affect the rate of confirmation of occupational identity: (a) the opportunity to perform it in social interactions; (b) the desire to perform it to uphold a self-concept; and (c) the interactional and environmental resources to maintain the occupational identity in uncertain or conflictual situations. I argue that each of these is affected by one's master statuses: class, gender, race, and age, as well as occupation-specific status: occupational prestige, such that it is both easier and more desirable for someone of higher status to confirm their occupational identity in everyday life.

First, in order to confirm an identity, you need the opportunity to perform it through interactions with others. The more opportunities to enact the identity, the more chances an individual has to confirm it. Theoretically, the probability of any one identity (out of all possible identities) being evoked in an interaction is a consequence of the situational demands, the identity's importance to self, and the role relationships with others involved in that interaction (Smith-Lovin, 2007; Walker & Lynn, 2013). Within identity research paradigms, scholars use the term salience to refer to that likelihood of an identity being enacted in a given situation (Brenner et al., 2014). One important factor

influencing the salience of an identity is whether you have ties with alters who evoke that identity consistently in interaction: your network commitment to the identity. Specifically, having a role-based other (alter with whom you share a role-identity) who is highly embedded in your personal network is associated with higher salience for that role identity (Walker & Lynn, 2013).

While there have been few studies that look specifically at status and occupational identity embeddedness, recent work has found that there is a relationship between master statuses and higher within ego-network size, density, and diversity, suggesting that a role-based other in a higher status individual's ego-network would be more highly embedded (Brashears et al., 2020, p. 372). Further, compared to men, women tend to have less dense and more family-populated personal networks (Lewis et al., 2008). Middle-aged individuals might have more role-based others in their network to influence the embodiment of the identity across situations, as one's career identity might be more important during middle age in comparison to much younger and older individuals.

A second and similar component to identity salience is identity prominence; the extent to which an identity is important to oneself (Brenner et al., 2014). The extent to which an occupational identity is key to self-concept can affect the rate at which it is enacted, the desire that individuals have to confirm it effectively, and the likelihood that that identity is singly embodied in many interactions during the prior week. A new development in ACT, the ACT of Self, predicts that people choose to enact certain identities in order to maintain their self-sentiments (Boyle, 2017; Heise & MacKinnon, 2010). In this way, individuals who have less social status may have occupational identities that are lower in evaluation or potency than their self-sentiments, and thus not desire to confirm them throughout their interactions because it would be self-disconfirming. Conversely, those in credentialed occupations may find that their occupational identity is more important given the time and energy they put into achieving it. Further, an identity's prominence and salience may be related—as when an identity is important to you, it may become more likely that you either embed role-based others in your personal networks or enact those identities around non-role based others regularly because they are important to your self-concept (Brenner et al., 2014).

A third factor which may affect rates of confirmation is the extent to which an individual has the interactional resources to effectively enforce their definition of a situation against another's. These interactional resources can be material, cultural, and interpersonal. Features like dress, manners, scripts, and assertive personal style can be used to shape an interaction (Miles, 2014; Stets & Cast, 2007). We would expect that the ability to define situations and have interaction partners who cooperate to maintain one's definition of the situation is not equal across people, but rather a consequence of the status one holds in daily life.

This process can be automatic/unconscious or deliberative/intentional. For example, an ethnographic study about gender in the workplace includes an example in which two vice-presidents of a company (one a man and the other a woman) were discussing something in a hallway when a phone rang in one of the offices. The male VP instructed

the female VP to answer the phone and she did. Afterward she confronted him about treating her “like a secretary” (Martin, 2003, p. 346). In this case, the institution of gender served as an interactional resource that ultimately re-identified a woman into a gendered identity of “secretary” in the moment even though she was also a VP of the company. Versions of this scenario can occur to individuals of lower status, as in black male nurses who are mistaken for custodians or alternatively, when white men in female-gendered occupations are pushed into higher status and power identities within the workplace as exemplified in the concept of the “glass escalator” (Williams, 1992; 2013; Wingfield, 2009).

Along this vein, the literature on emotional labor and emotion rules or norms can contribute to the understanding of how cultural resources can affect the embodiment of occupational identities. For example, there are different consequences for the expression of extreme negative (or positive) emotions in the workplace for women of color (Harlow, 2003; Wingfield, 2009). Similarly, prior research has found that while male courtroom lawyers successfully embody the low evaluation, high potency identity of “litigator” and express the similarly valenced emotions that follow, women can be penalized for the same behavior and expression. Women paralegals are expected to manage the emotions of their superiors, assuming a nurturing/caring role and downplaying their own, while male paralegals do not (Pierce, 1995). Women may desire to simply embody their occupational identities in these situations—lawyer, paralegal—and express the typical emotions that result from that embodiment. Instead, they face backlash when others of more status expect them to embody gendered identities. Whether they enact multiple identities (woman and lawyer) or only one different one (caretaker), they are likely to have a less direct relationship between occupational identity and emotional experience.

A final factor that may affect the confirmation of identities is the environmental and material resources that shape one’s interactions. Individuals who have access to a front/back stage during work hours may have a stronger ability to control which interactions they have when, and what identities they are embodying at any given moment (Ekstrand & Damman, 2016; Goffman, 1959). Similarly, occupations have different degrees of institutionalization in interaction partners. Service workers are far more likely to have many interactions a day with unknown others, versus more professional jobs that may have more structured relationships with the same others. One’s interaction partners may also be more or less reliable in upholding one’s identity. Take, for example, kindergarten students versus university students as interaction partners for a kindergarten teacher and professor, respectively. This mechanism in particular may be more related to the status of an occupational identity itself rather than the status of an individual occupying the identity, though the two are often related (Valentino, 2020).

I have argued that these four factors: salience, prominence, interactional resources, and environmental resources are influenced by the status of an individual. While the data used in this analysis do not allow me to test whether these mechanisms are at play, I can test the overarching argument that status affects the strength of the relationship

between Occ-Char-Emo-Discrepancy (OCED) and likelihood of emotional experience. I hypothesize that income, education, gender, age, and occupational prestige each moderate the relationship between OCED and frequency of experiencing an emotion.

*H3:* The hypothesized negative relationship between OCED and frequent emotional experience will be stronger for

1. Individuals with higher income
2. Individuals with more than a high school degree
3. Men
4. Middle-aged individuals.
5. Individuals in higher prestige occupations

## Data

The data used in this analysis come from the 1996 wave of the General Social Survey (GSS), accessed via the `gssr` package in R (Healy, 2019). The GSS is a nationally representative survey that includes a core set of survey items and additional modules on specific topics. The sample includes respondents from the 1996 wave, which included a module of emotions, who worked full-time in the previous year. Those with missing values on the dependent and control variables were also removed from the sample, resulting in a total of 720 respondents for the primary analyses. The ACT Dictionary used for measurements of the cultural meaning of the occupational identities and emotion words in this analysis was the Full Surveyor Gender combined U.S. dictionary collected in 2015 (Smith-Lovin et al., 2016).

## Variables

### *Dependent Variables*

The emotions module included questions about how many days of the past seven the respondent experienced certain emotions. Of the emotion questions available, 16 are used in this analysis (because EPA ratings were available for them): Angry, Anxious, Ashamed, Calm, Contented, Excited, Fearful, Happy, Lonely, Mad (at), Outraged, Overjoyed, Proud, Restless, Sad, and Worried. The dependent variable is operationalized as a binary variable, with 1 indicating the respondent reporting experiencing the emotion 4 or more days in the past week, and 0 indicating 3 or fewer days. Two questions were double barreled, one asking both about being excited or interested and another feeling anxious and tense. Only the first emotion word in each case (excited, anxious) was used for generating OCED measures. Further information on the modeling choices for the dependent variable of emotional experience can be found in Supplemental Figures 2(a) and 3(a) a subsequent discussion in the supplemental appendix.



**Table 1.** Distances from Characteristic Emotion by Emotion Dependent Variable.

Emotion	Mean	Standard Deviation	E	P	A
Angry	17.924	4.108	−1.77	.57	1.80
Anxious	22.825	8.376	−1.69	−1.08	.58
Ashamed	31.584	8.072	−2.36	−.41	−1.73
Calm	13.357	3.977	2.88	1.93	−2.32
Contented	4.977	2.472	2.35	1.70	−.74
Excited	4.966	3.122	2.69	2.18	2.24
Fearful	30.407	9.013	−2.37	−1.04	−.71
Happy	6.155	4.508	3.44	2.93	.92
Lonely	43.931	10.719	−2.72	−1.29	−2.52
Mad	19.277	5.963	−1.77	−.17	1.14
Outraged	18.905	4.391	−1.71	.44	2.28
Overjoyed	7.168	4.461	3.10	2.71	2.43
Proud	2.757	2.657	2.17	2.28	1.15
Restless	17.589	7.004	−1.27	−.62	.78
Sad	38.000	10.642	−2.29	−1.44	−2.04
Worried	28.114	8.423	−2.35	−.90	−.18

*Note:* The summary statistics represented in this table were computed by taking the analytic sample and calculating the mean and standard deviation of the occ-char-emo-discrepancies for each emotional dependent variable.

### Independent Variables

The primary independent variable is OCED: the distance between the EPA of the characteristic emotion of each respondent's occupational identity and the EPA of each GSS emotions. To calculate this distance, occupations in the International Standard Classification of Occupations from 1988 (ISCO-88) were assigned a matching occupational identity using a crosswalk, which pairs an occupational code originally in the GSS with an identity from the ACT dictionary used in this analysis. The crosswalk used in this analysis is an expanded version of the one used in [Freeland and Hoey \(2018\)](#).<sup>4</sup> This resulted in a total of 107 occupational identities occupied by 720 respondents. The characteristic emotion for each occupational identity was calculated using Interact, an ACT program written by [Heise \(2007\)](#).<sup>5</sup>

The squared Euclidean distance between the EPA of each occupational identity's characteristic emotion and the EPA of each GSS emotion was calculated. Because the ACT equations that were used in this analysis were gendered, there is a slight difference between the calculation of a characteristic emotion for a woman versus a man. The characteristic emotion matching the gender of the respondent was used to calculate the OCED for each respondent-emotion observation. This distance was then z-transformed for the analysis to help with model convergence and model interpretability.

[Table 1](#) contains the mean and *SD* of the (unstandardized) occ-char-emo-discrepancies for each emotion across respondents in this analysis. The average distance

between occupational characteristic emotion and the emotion words in the GSS varies considerably, from 4.966 for excited to 43.931 for lonely. Similarly, some emotions have more variability across the occupational identities, with lonely and sad having the most (10.72 and 10.642, respectively) and contented and excited having the least variation (2.328 and 2.790, respectively).

The variables used to test the status moderation hypotheses are income, gender, education, age, and occupational prestige. Income corresponds to a respondent's family income, scaled to be consistent across waves and log-transformed in the following analysis (for how *realinc* in the GSS was computed: (Ligon, 1989)). I additionally z-transformed the logged income to have a mean of 0 and *SD* of 1 in order to help the models converge. Education level is a factor with five levels: less than high school, high school, junior college, bachelor's degree, and graduate school. The reference category is bachelor's degree. Male is a binary variable with a one indicating male and 0 as female, and age is a factor with three levels: 18–29, 30–44, and 45–64. Occupational prestige is a measure from the GSS assessing respondent perceptions of the social standing of different occupational identities. It ranged from 17 to 86 for the occupations used in this analysis. Occupational prestige was also z-transformed such that its mean is 0 and *SD* 1 for the following analyses. Race, measured as Black, White, or Other, was additionally included as a control variable. Descriptive statistics for the independent variables are shown in Table 2. While the GSS as a whole is representative, due to the reduction in respondents based on the criteria discussed above and since weights were not used, the sample is slightly more male than female and largely white.

## Analysis

For analysis, the data were re-structured into long format such that there were 16 observations per individual, one for each emotion count included in the GSS.<sup>6</sup> This resulted in a total of 11,521 observations per model.<sup>7</sup> The models were estimated by a multilevel logistic regression with random intercepts for each individual and fixed effects for each emotion using the *glmmTB* package in R (Brooks et al., 2017). Structuring the data in this way creates dependencies between observations but allows for the pooling across all emotional response variables into a single analysis to test the main hypotheses regardless of the specific emotion in question. Including the random intercepts for the individual and fixed effects for emotion then accounts for the grouped nature of the data and interdependent observations.

First, frequent emotional experience was regressed on the standardized measure of OCED, to test *H1* without controls. Next, model two includes income, education, and occupational prestige as an additional explanatory variables. Model three includes sex, race, and age as additional covariates, to test whether *H1* holds when accounting for these possible confounders. To test *H2*, the correlation between the fixed effects for the 16 emotions of model 1 and the average distance between occupational identity's characteristic emotion and the emotion was computed. The second set of models tests Hypothesis 3, A–E about possible interaction effects: specifically, whether the

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics for Independent Variables.

Characteristic	N = 720 <sup>a</sup>
Income	27,188 (17,038, 48,938)
Degree	
Less than High School	52 (7.2%)
High School	380 (53%)
Junior College	60 (8.3%)
Bachelor	150 (21%)
Graduate	78 (11%)
Sex	
Female	338 (47%)
Male	382 (53%)
Race	
White	580 (81%)
Black	103 (14%)
Other	37 (5.1%)
Age	
18–29	156 (22%)
30–44	320 (44%)
45–64	244 (34%)
Occupational Prestige	44 (34, 51)

<sup>a</sup>Median (IQR); n (%)  
Note. Data is from the GSS 1996 wave and the sample is individuals aged 18–64 who worked full-time in the prior year.

relationship between OCED and frequent emotional experience is stronger for those of higher status. For these, OCED was interacted with income, highest educational degree, sex, age, and occupational prestige in separate models. In each of these, OCED was also specified as a random slope, in accordance with recent research specifying that cross-level interactions should always include a random slope for the level 1 variable (Heisig & Schaeffer, 2019). Last, the interaction models were run again with subsets of the data corresponding to the three main emotion profiles: good, powerful, and somewhat active emotions (happy, overjoyed, calm, proud, and excited); bad, weak, inactive emotions (ashamed, lonely, fearful, worried, sad, and anxious), and bad, powerful, somewhat active emotions (angry, outraged, and mad) to determine whether the relationship holds for all types of emotions or only a subset.

**Results**

Table 3 shows the results from models 1–3: the models testing *H1*, the main effect of OCED on frequent emotional experience. Because the dependent variable is a count spanning all 16 emotions, the interpretation for the main effects that do not vary by

**Table 3.** Results from Models Testing Main Effects of Occ-Char-Emo-Discrepancy on Emotional Experience.

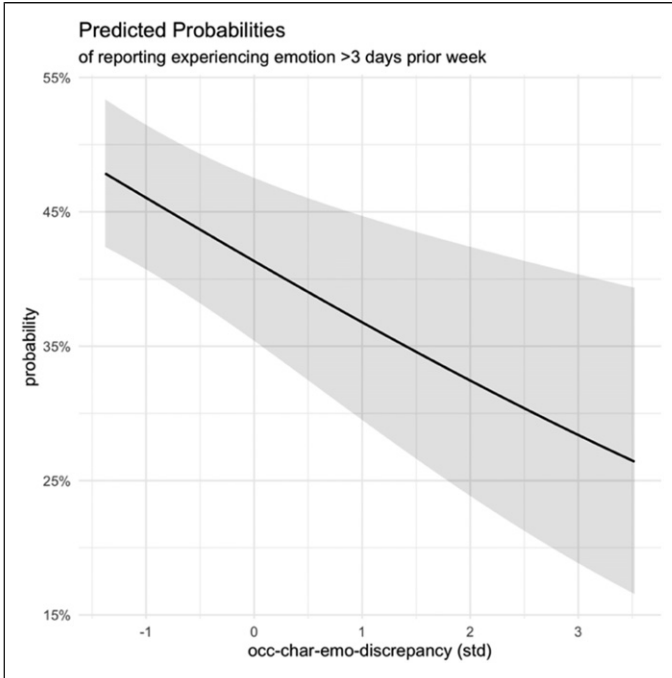
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Occ-Char-Emo-Discrepancy (OCED)	−.20**(.06)	−.19**(.06)	−.19**(.06)
Income (std)		−.08* (.04)	−.07 (.04)
Degree (ref. Bachelors)			
Less than High School		.39* (.18)	.42* (.18)
High School		.01 (.11)	.02 (.11)
Junior College		.06 (.16)	.06 (.16)
Graduate Degree		.15 (.15)	.16 (.15)
Sex (ref. Female)			
Male			−.03 (.08)
Race (ref. White)			
Black			−.07 (.11)
Other Race			−.16 (.18)
Age (ref.) 18–29			
30–44			−.08 (.10)
45–64			−.14 (.11)
Occupational Prestige (std)		.01 (.05)	.01 (.05)
Akaike Information Criterion (AIC)	10945.62	10945.44	10952.81
Log Likelihood	−5454.81	−5448.72	−5447.40
Num. obs.	11491	11491	11491
Num. groups: id	720	720	720
Var: id (Intercept)	.67	.65	.64

\*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ .

Note. Data is from the GSS 1996 wave and the sample is individuals aged 18–64 who worked full-time in the prior year.

observation is the probability of a respondent saying they feel an emotion on four or more days of the week, a baseline measure of emotionality. Across all four models, the effect of OCED is negative and significant. Even after adding control variables, the magnitude only decreases by .01. (The fixed effects of the emotions are not included in the tables in order to improve readability of the results. They are presented later in the results section).

For models 2 and 3, a respondent whose occupational identity’s characteristic emotion is one *SD* away in EPA space to an emotion has .82 the odds of reporting experiencing that emotion more than half the days in the prior week than someone whose characteristic emotion is at the mean level of OCED. This relationship is visualized in [Figure 1](#). The *x*-axis is the *z*-transformed distance from emotion variable, so 0 indicates being the average OCED, −1 is one *SD* below the mean, and 1 is one *SD* above the mean. While the main effect’s magnitude is fairly small, given the previous section on why the occupational identity may not be the most enacted and



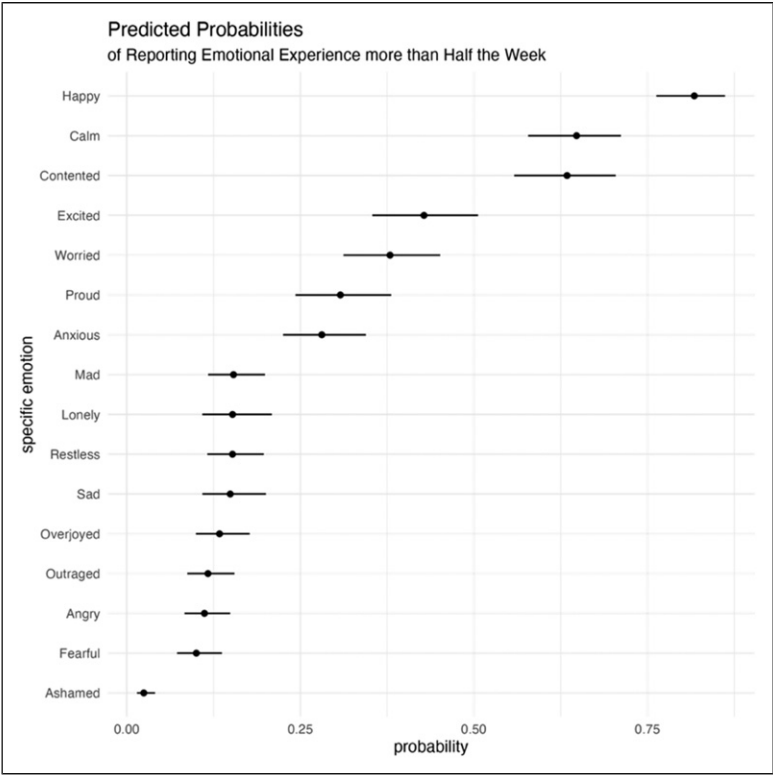
**Figure 1.** Depiction of main effect of occ-char-emo-discrepancy on emotional experience.

embodied identity across all respondents. This is a relatively conservative test of the argument.

Substantively, this main effect means that people in occupational identities whose characteristic emotions are more culturally similar to negative, powerless emotions are more likely to report experiencing those emotions than people in occupational identities whose characteristic emotions are culturally discrepant from those emotions, and vice versa.

The main effect of income in Model 2 is negative and significant, although small. However, this effect does not remain significant after including demographic variables sex, race, and age in Model 3. For education, having less than a high school degree is associated with a higher probability of reporting experiencing an emotion more than half the days of the week in comparison to those with a bachelor's degree (the reference group) in both Models 2 and 3. There is no significant main effect of occupational prestige, sex, race, or age.

Figure 2 displays the main effect of different emotions on the probability of individuals reporting experiencing them on four or more days in the week. The correlation between the average difference between OCED and the main effect of each emotion is  $-.556$  for characteristic emotion differences for men and  $-.554$  for women.



**Figure 2.** Fixed effects of individual emotions on frequent emotional experience.

Both Pearson’s product-moment correlation tests were significant at the  $p < .05$  level. This supports *H2*, which argued that across all emotions and all occupations, there is a relationship between likelihood of reporting feeling them very often and how culturally unexpected they are for work identities in general. This also shows how ACT supports the differential baseline frequency in emotional experience—some emotions are more common because they are based on everyday identities.

Table 4 and Figure 3 depict the results from models testing hypotheses regarding interaction effects between the main independent variable and status variables: income, education, sex, age, and occupational prestige. In Model 4, the main effects of both income and OCED are negative and significant, as is the interaction effect between the two. The interaction effect thus suggests that the greater the income level, the stronger the negative relationship is between cultural discrepancy in emotion from one’s occupational identity’s characteristic emotion and the likelihood of frequently experiencing it. Figure 3(a) displays this effect by plotting the predicted probability of reporting experiencing an emotion more than half the days in the prior week against the

**Table 4.** Results from Models Testing Status Moderation of Occ-Char-Emo-Discrepancy on Frequent Emotional Experience.

	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Occ-Char-Emo-Discrepancy (OCED)	-.49*** (.10)	-.80*** (.15)	-.29* (.12)	-.45** (.16)	-.47*** (.11)
Income (std)	-.15** (.06)	-.09 (.05)	-.09 (.05)		-.09 (.05)
OCED*Income	-.17** (.06)				
Degree (ref. Bachelors)					
Less than High School	.41* (.20)	.61** (.22)	.40* (.20)	.41* (.20)	.41* (.20)
High School	-.04 (.13)	.16 (.14)	-.04 (.13)	-.04 (.13)	-.04 (.13)
Junior College	.00 (.18)	.05 (.21)	-.00 (.18)	-.00 (.18)	-.00 (.18)
Graduate Degree	.19 (.17)	.25 (.19)	.19 (.17)	.19 (.17)	.19 (.17)
OCED*Less than HS		.54* (.26)			
OCED*HS		.50** (.16)			
OCED*Junior College		.12 (.24)			
OCED*Graduate Degree		.15 (.21)			
Sex (ref. Female)					
Male	-.01 (.09)	-.01 (.09)	-.18(0.10)	.01 (.09)	-.01 (.09)
OCED*Male			-.45*** (.12)		
Race (ref. White)					
Black	-.06 (.13)	-.06 (.13)	-.06 (.13)	-.06 (.13)	-.06 (.13)
Other Race	-.16 (.20)	-.16 (.20)	-.16 (.20)	-.16 (.20)	-.16 (.20)
Age (ref. 18-29)					
30-44	-.12 (.12)	-.12 (.12)	-.12 (.12)	-.12 (.13)	-.12 (.12)
45-64	-.13 (.13)	-.13 (.13)	-.13 (.13)	-.21 (.14)	-.13 (.13)
OCED*30-44				0.02 (.16)	
OCED*45-64				-.21 (.17)	
Occ Prestige	-.03 (.06)	-.03 (.06)	-.03 (.06)	-.03 (.06)	-.08 (.06)
OCED*Prestige					-.12 (.06)

(continued)

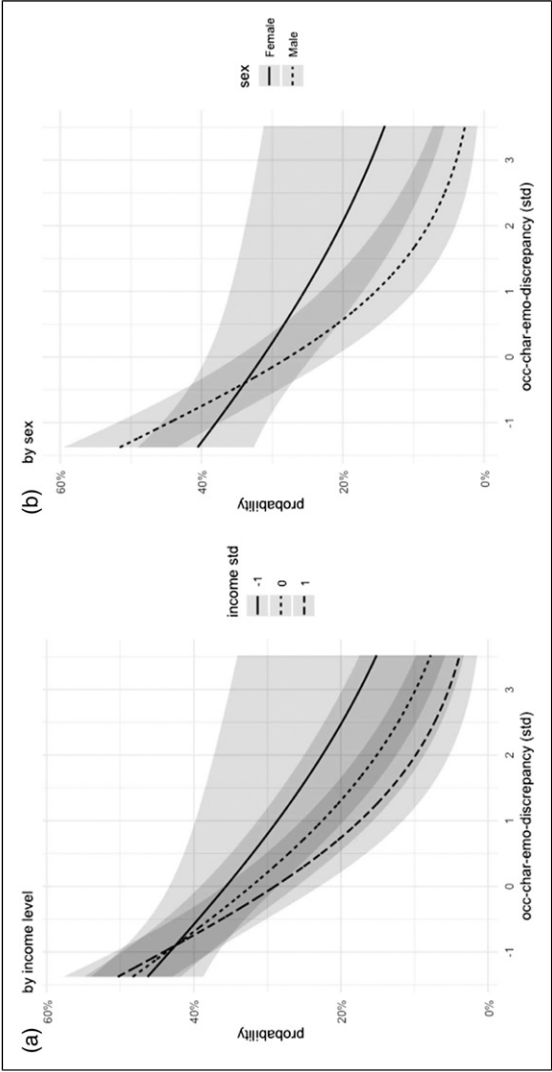
**Table 4.** (continued)

	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
AIC	10464.05	10464.91	10457.92	10471.10	10468.62
Log Likelihood	-5200.03	-5197.46	-5196.96	-5202.55	-5202.31
Num. obs.	11491	11491	11491	11491	11491
Num. groups: id	720	720	720	720	720
Var: id (Intercept)	1.01	1.00	1.01	1.01	1.01
Var: id dist_emotion	1.49	1.47	1.46	1.50	1.51

Note. Data is from the GSS 1996 wave and the sample is individuals aged 18–64 who worked full-time in the prior year.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ .





**Figure 3.** Depiction of interaction effects between occ-char-emo-discrepancy and probability of experiencing emotion more than half of the days in the prior week by (a) income level and (b) sex.

OCED for incomes that fall one *SD* below the mean ( $-1$ ), average income level ( $0$ ), and income one *SD* above the mean ( $1$ ), holding everything else constant. For individuals with higher income, the relationship between characteristic emotion discrepancy and reported emotional experience is stronger (e.g., the higher income curve is more steeply sloped than the lower income curves).

Model 5 includes an interaction between highest degree earned and OCED. Here there is a positive and significant main effect of having less than a high school degree, in comparison to a bachelors' degree, as in the previous models with no interaction effects. Interestingly, there is a significant interaction both between having less than a high school degree and distance from emotion and having a high school degree and the distance from emotion variable, suggesting that compared to individuals with bachelor's degrees, those with a high school degree or less have a weaker relationship between OCED and likelihood of reporting frequent experience of that emotion in the prior week.<sup>8</sup>

Model 6 includes an interaction between OCED and sex. For this model, the interaction is negative and significant, indicating that for men, the negative relationship between the OCED and likelihood of emotional experience is stronger than it is for women.<sup>9</sup> This interaction is depicted in [Figure 3\(b\)](#), with the sharper slope of predicted probabilities across OCED for men as compared to women.

Model 7 includes an interaction between age and OCED. This interaction is not significant, suggesting that there is no difference in the relationship between an individual's OCED across different age groups. Lastly, model 8 includes an interaction between occupational prestige and OCED. The interaction approaches significance, with a *p* value of (.0601). In general, this interaction is the expected direction, with individuals in higher prestige occupational identities having a possibly stronger relationship between OCED and reporting frequent emotional experience.

One possibility is that these results, which collapse across all of the emotions, are being driven primarily by a certain type of emotion. Out of all 16 emotions used in this analysis, they generally fit three overall profiles: good, powerful, and varyingly active emotions (happy, overjoyed, calm, proud, excited); bad, weak, and inactive emotions (ashamed, lonely, fearful, worried, sad, anxious); and bad, somewhat powerful, somewhat active emotions (angry, outraged, mad). Models 3–8 (the final main effect and every interaction effect model) were re-run with each subset of emotions to determine how the relationship between OCED and emotional experience might depend on the type of emotion in question. The entire results from this analysis can be found in the supplemental appendix in [Supplemental Tables 5A-7A](#). The main effect of OCED and reporting frequent emotional experience was not significant across any of the models on the subset of good, powerful emotions or bad, powerful emotions. Further, it was not consistently significant for the models re-run on the bad, weak emotions. It seems that the results presented earlier in this analysis were not being driven by a specific type of emotional experience, but rather across the entire span of emotions included in the GSS. It is likely that the core hypothesis (*H1*) is not significant in the subsets because collapsing the dependent variable to a specific location in EPA space

significantly reduces the variance in OCED. This is an indication that the major patterns in the results above are driven by the *contrasts* between the frequency with which high E high P, low E high P high A, and low E low P low A emotions are experienced (or reported), rather than by a pattern *within* one subset of emotions. This finding is consistent with ACT logic, which views emotions as EPA positions rather than some other psycho-physiological feature.

Other characteristics were related to subsets of the emotions. Specifically, men were more likely to report experiencing good, powerful emotions frequently in the prior week, and those with less than a high school degree were less likely to do so than those with a bachelor's degree. Men and those with a higher income were less likely to report frequent emotional experience of bad, weak emotions in the prior week while those with a high school degree or less were more likely to do so in comparison to those with a bachelor's degree.

In all, I find that evidence for the primary proposed relationship between OCED and emotional experience across models that include all 16 emotions. Further, this relationship was stronger for those with a higher income and men, and weaker for those with less education. Age is the only status variable that failed to have the predicted moderating pattern.

## Discussion

As individuals move through social interactions in their daily life, they embody, enact, and attempt to confirm their various social identities (Burke & Stets, 2009; Smith-Lovin & Robinson, 2006). One such identity is an occupational identity, the identity tied to one's job or career. Research on emotions at work has illuminated how inequalities in occupational status not only have material consequences in terms of more income and economic stability, but also social-psychological consequences of emotional experience and mental well-being. This analysis joins such literature in evaluating how the enactment and confirmation of occupational identities may systematically influence emotional experience.

Using an identity-centered approach informed by ACT, I argue that occupational identity influences emotional experience because when identities are confirmed across situations, ACT predicts that individuals will feel the characteristic emotion of that identity. However, an important piece of that argument is that individuals try to, want to, and are able to confirm their occupational identities. I explore different mechanisms as to why this might differ systematically across individuals of different status levels and find support for the main hypotheses and some but not all of the status moderators.

While the data at hand cannot evaluate the actual situations being experienced by respondents, because it only captures self-reports of emotional experience, I hope that the results from the status moderation hypotheses presented in this paper provide some evidence that contributes to literatures on how status and material resources affect control of interactions, confirmation of identities, and positive emotional experiences. Future work that can better distinguish among mechanisms and types of resources at

play in social interactions could look towards whether and/or how different types of resources, such as Structuration theory's allocative versus authoritative resources affect identity confirmation and emotional experience (Giddens, 1986). I found that both allocative (income) and authoritative (education level) influenced the main effect of OCED on emotional experience, but I was unable to test them against each other.

Theoretically, this paper supports ACT's emotion predictions and adds some evidence to the ongoing debate between Identity Control Theory and ACT's diverging predictions on emotional experience. Identity Control Theory suggests that individuals should report feeling good emotions anytime they feel an identity has been confirmed, regardless of the identity's meaning while ACT predicts that individuals will feel emotions that result in an identity's transient impression being equal to its fundamental sentiment, something that can vary in valence, power, and activity, depending on the identity in question. An example of these diverging predictions would be in the case that an individual fulfills an identity that is devalued and weak—ICT predicts that an individual would feel good because an identity has been confirmed and ACT predicts that the individual feels a bad, weak emotion, such as shame (Burke, 1991; Wisecup et al., 2006). Given that the evidence here supports a valence-neutral hypothesis about emotional experience—not that individuals will not feel bad emotions, but rather that emotions that are similar in cultural meaning to one's occupational identity are more likely to be felt—these largely support ACT's model of emotional experience.

### *Limitations*

There are several limitations of the research design. First, the operationalization of the dependent variable as self-reports means it is difficult to tease apart whether the dependent variable is accurately measuring an emotion experienced versus those that the respondent feels comfortable reporting having experienced. Respondents could either be recalling their actual experiences or embodying different identities while recalling experiences that influence the emotions they report. It could be the case that individuals actually do experience fewer emotions that are more culturally discrepant from their occupational identity and it may also be the case that during the reporting process, individuals in higher status social positions are more likely to prioritize the time spent in their occupational identities when reviewing the past week's emotional experience, which would also lead to these findings.

Further, I cannot directly evaluate the mechanisms that I suggest are important in the status moderation hypotheses, as I have no measures of actual social interaction, an occupational identity's importance to the individual, or connections to role-based others. There could be other explanations for the patterns I see; for example, that people in higher status social and occupational positions are more reluctant to self-report emotions that are discrepant from their occupational identity or self-sentiments. In future research that collects new data or conducts an experiment, these mechanisms could be explicitly tested to build upon these initial findings to see if these mechanisms are at play and which seem to matter the most.

Additionally, the variables for race and gender are not exhaustive, as those who were not White or Black were lumped into a third “Other” category. In addition, the sample includes a relatively small number of non-white respondents. As a result, there was not enough power to test whether the main effect was moderated by race, which is a consequential master status in the U.S., leaving the overarching status argument not fully tested. Similarly, there was not enough power to include tests of intersectional effects—how might the relationship between occupational identity and corresponding emotional experience look for Black versus white women, or disabled Black men versus able bodied Black men? Further, due to model complexity, it was difficult to test what happens at intersections between social status positions and occupational prestige: for example, how being a man (high status) in a predominantly female-gendered occupational identity (low occupational prestige) might have a different relationship between OCED than being a man in a high occupational prestige identity. This may be especially interesting for future research to explore, given past work on the glass escalator.

Lastly, only 107 occupational identities were included in this analysis, and they were matched via a crosswalk that tied similar, but not exactly the same, identities to GSS occupational codes. Further work that gets EPA measurements of all of the GSS occupational codes would be helpful in ensuring that these results apply across the occupational spectrum, even when relatively small differences between occupational identity meaning is included, for example, the difference between physician’s assistant and nurse practitioner.

## **Conclusion**

In this analysis, I evaluate how occupational identity is related to emotional experience in the lives of adults who work full-time jobs. Using the ACT and the GSS emotions module, I propose an identity-based mechanism for daily emotional experience. Specifically, since ACT predicts that upon identity confirmation, individuals feel that identity’s characteristic emotion, I predict that individuals will more often report frequently feeling emotions that are close in cultural meaning to their occupational identity’s characteristic emotion than those that are more culturally discrepant. However, individuals occupy many identities daily, and those identities are more or less salient, prominent, and supported by one’s cultural environment, making the rate of occupational identity confirmation across all individuals in the sample uncertain. I posit that this rate is patterned by social status, and find that men, those with higher income, and those with more education do have a stronger relationship between OCED and frequent emotional experience.

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### Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

### Notes

1. Following ACT tradition, all references to measured identities, behaviors, and emotions are capitalized.
2. All EPA measurements referenced in this paper come from this dictionary.
3. [Supplemental Appendix Table 1\(a\)](#) contains the characteristic emotions for occupational identities included in this analysis and [Supplemental Appendix Figure 1\(a\)](#) displays the distribution of differences between characteristic emotion and fundamental sentiment.
4. [Supplemental Tables 2\(a\) and 3\(a\)](#) in the Appendix shows the expansions to the crosswalk from [Freeland and Hoey \(2018\)](#) and the occupational codes without corresponding identities.
5. The version of Interact used was downloaded on February 20, 2020 and a copy of the program is saved for reproducibility.
6. A complete replication package is available at [https://github.com/ekmaloney/occ\\_emotions](https://github.com/ekmaloney/occ_emotions)
7. This number is not exactly 16\*720 because there are some individuals who did not respond to every emotion question. Specifically, 694 respondents answered all 16 emotion questions, 24 answered 15/16, one respondent answered 14/16, and one respondent answered 13/16.
8. An illustration of the interaction between occ-emo-char-discrepancy and highest degree earned is in the [Supplemental Appendix as Figure 4\(a\)](#)
9. Supplementary analysis confirms that even after controlling for the number of children, this relationship remains negative and significant. Results for this model are displayed in [Supplemental Table 4\(a\)](#) in the appendix.

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