

The Role of Group-Based Status in Job Satisfaction: Workplace Respect Matters More for the Stigmatized

P. J. Henry

Published online: 9 September 2011
© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2011

Abstract Respectful treatment may be more consequential for members of stigmatized groups because they are often excluded from society. The present study examined the consequences of respectful treatment in the workplace on job satisfaction for members of stigmatized groups. Among a nationally representative sample of American adults, members of stigmatized groups showed a stronger relationship between respectful treatment and job satisfaction compared to their non-stigmatized counterparts. However, they did not show a stronger relationship between their pay and job satisfaction. The results point to the special importance of respect for members of stigmatized group as a means of reassuring their belonging and value in society.

Keywords Stigma compensation · Job satisfaction · Respect · Interactional justice · Workplace

Disrespectful treatment in the workplace can lead to decreased job satisfaction, decreased trust in management, and decreased commitment to the organization (for a review, see Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Although respectful treatment is important to everyone, the weight of that importance may vary systematically across different groups. Specifically, members of stigmatized groups, such as ethnic minorities, women, the uneducated, etc., may be affected more by perceptions of respectful treatment compared to members of non-stigmatized groups.

Social stigmatization has pervasive consequences for basic psychological processes and motivations. Members of stigmatized groups face threats to the self due to their group membership, including prejudice and social exclusion (Crocker &

P. J. Henry (✉)
New York University – Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
e-mail: phenry1@depaul.edu

Major, 1989; Goffman, 1963; Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002; Smart Richman & Leary, 2009). Such experiences give rise to concerns about reestablishing one's social connections. For example, Blacks report greater race-related rejection sensitivity compared to higher-status Whites (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002), and lower-status ethnic minorities may chronically doubt the quality of their social connections and group belonging (Lovelace & Rosen, 1996; Walton & Cohen, 2007).

Respectful treatment is a means to reassure the stigmatized of their social connections, especially because gestures of respect communicate inclusion and value by other members of a group or society (see, e.g., the group-value model, Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, DeGoey, & Smith, 1996). Because of its implications for social inclusiveness, members of stigmatized groups are likely to have a greater preference for respect (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010), even when that respect incurs a financial loss or prevention of financial gain (Davis & Henry, 2009).

People who are especially concerned about being treated respectfully may be more sensitive to and impacted by that treatment. Although not about respectful treatment per se, prior research shows that people who care more about distributive justice are impacted more by the presence of distributive justice (Younts & Mueller, 2001). Using similar logic, the negative impact of disrespectful treatment should be stronger for those who care more about respectful treatment, in this case, the stigmatized. For example, in one study women were more likely than men to express anger and speak disparagingly to confederates who treated them disrespectfully or dismissively (by not allowing them access to materials needed to complete an important task; Mikolic, Parker, & Pruitt, 1997), and in a second study disrespectful and insulting treatment was associated with stronger intentions to aggress among those who were economically stigmatized (i.e., had lower socioeconomic status; Henry, 2009). However, neither study tested specifically the experienced feelings of disrespect; in the latter study especially, disrespect was inferred only from a hypothetical insult.

The present manuscript extends research on the consequences of respectful treatment for job satisfaction by examining the moderating role of membership in a stigmatized group. Job satisfaction has an important emotional or evaluative component (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Locke, 1968), and while respectful treatment predicts job satisfaction for people generally (Colquitt et al. 2001; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001), insofar as respectful treatment communicates information about social inclusion it is likely to be particularly valued by the stigmatized. Therefore, the main hypothesis is that respectful treatment in the workplace will be more strongly related to job satisfaction for members of stigmatized groups, compared to their non-stigmatized counterparts.

In addition, the moderating effect of group membership is not expected for the effect of job salary on satisfaction. While lower pay has a relationship with decreased job satisfaction (Judge, Piccolo, Podsakoff, Shaw, & Rich, 2010), there is nothing inherent to low pay that is directly psychologically threatening, at least not as clearly as being disrespected. Consequently, while it is expected that lower pay will be associated with lower job satisfaction for everyone, these consequences will not differ by stigmatized group membership.

Method

Data were drawn from the 2002 General Social Survey (GSS), a biennial survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago.¹ The 2002 GSS included a battery of items relevant to respectful treatment in the workplace.

Participants

The 2002 GSS was conducted among English-speaking participants across the United States who were randomly selected to be interviewed in person. Only those participants who indicated having a full-time or part-time job were selected for analysis, leaving a final sample size of 1,724. The median age of the respondents was 40 years old, ranging from 18 to 86 years of age. The participants included 1,356 White and 254 Black respondents, with 114 labeled as “Other.” Participant gender was broken down into 881 women and 843 men, and educational experience into 671 reporting no college experience and 1,052 reporting at least some college experience.

Stigmatized Group Membership

The main predictor variable was membership in a stigmatized versus not-stigmatized group category. Three bases for stigmatization were evaluated: ethnicity (White vs. ethnic minority), sex (male vs. female), and education level (some college education vs. no college education). In American society, White, male, and educated individuals are thought to have higher status than their non-White, female, and non-college educated counterparts (see, e.g., Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Additionally, a summary variable compared White, male, educated participants ($n = 422$) with those who were a member of at least one stigmatized group, black or female or without college experience ($n = 1,302$).

Measures

Job Satisfaction

The key outcome was measured with responses to the item, “How satisfied would you say you are with your job?” The responses ranged from 4 = “very much satisfied” to 1 = “not at all satisfied.” Meta-analyses have shown that single-item measures of job satisfaction are reliable, valid, and acceptable for use in research (Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997).

¹ More information about the General Social Survey (as well as the data used here) is available from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the following web address: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/cocoon/ICPSR/SERIES/00028.xml> (see also Davis, Smith, & Marsden, 2002).

Table 1 Correlation matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. White vs. ethnic minority	–						
2. Sex	.06*	–					
3. Education	.08**	.02	–				
4. Stigmatized status	.26***	.61***	.48***	–			
5. Workplace respect	.03	.03	.08**	.04	–		
6. Actual pay	.11**	.23***	.24***	.27***	.00	–	
7. Job satisfaction	.09**	.01	.06*	.05	.48***	.12***	–

Note: Listwise $N = 1402$. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. Higher numbers indicate White, male, some college education, no stigma (White, male, and educated combined), more perceived workplace respect, more pay, and more job satisfaction

Pay

Respondents indicated their annual income, which was coded into a 23-point scale that ranged from 1 = “under \$1000” to 23 = “\$110,000 or over.”

Respectful Treatment in the Workplace

Four items measured the quality of interactions between the respondent and his or her supervisor or manager in the workplace, including respectful treatment. The four items included the following: “At the place I work, I am treated with respect,” with responses coded 4 = strongly agree, 3 = agree, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree; “My supervisor is helpful to me in getting the job done,” and “My supervisor is concerned about the welfare of those under him or her,”² with both coded 4 = very true, 3 = somewhat true, 2 = not too true, and 1 = not at all true; and “When you do your job well, are you likely to be praised by your supervisor or employer?” with responses recoded 4 = yes, 2.5 = maybe, and 1 = no (to conform to the 4-point scaling of the other items). These items were averaged to form the scale of respectful treatment, Cronbach’s alpha = .72.

Results

The Relationship of Pay and Respectful Treatment with Job Satisfaction

The correlation matrix in Table 1 shows a relationship between one’s satisfaction on the job and respectful treatment at the workplace ($r = .48$, $p < .001$), and with one’s pay ($r = .12$, $p < .001$), generalized across all participants. There was no relationship between pay and respectful treatment ($r = .00$).

² It is assumed that the participants are thinking about themselves when thinking of “those under” their supervisors. Consistent with this assumption, the item scales well with the other items that are more directly about the self, and the results do not change when the item is removed from the scale.

Group-Based Differences in Pay, Respectful Treatment, and Job Satisfaction

Although hypotheses concerning group-based differences (i.e., main effects) in pay, respectful treatment, and job satisfaction are not central to the theory here, some patterns are worth noting. First, each stigmatized group reported receiving less pay compared to their non-stigmatized counterparts, including ethnic minorities ($M = 13.2$, $SD = 4.8$) compared to Whites ($M = 14.8$, $SD = 5.2$; $t(1,400) = 4.1$, $p < .001$); women ($M = 13.3$, $SD = 5.2$) compared to men ($M = 15.6$, $SD = 5.1$; $t(1,500) = 8.8$, $p < .001$); and those with no college education ($M = 12.9$, $SD = 4.9$) compared to those with some college experience ($M = 15.4$, $SD = 5.2$; $t(1,500) = 9.3$, $p < .001$). As a reference point, a “13” indicates an income in the range of \$20,000 to \$22,499, and a “16” indicates an income in the range of \$30,000 to \$34,999.

Concerning the perception of respectful treatment in the workplace, there were no ethnicity or gender differences. However, those with no college experience reported less workplace respect ($M = 3.2$, $SD = 0.7$) compared to those with some college experience ($M = 3.3$, $SD = 0.6$; $t(1,500) = 2.9$, $p = .004$).

Concerning job satisfaction, ethnic minorities reported less job satisfaction ($M = 3.2$, $SD = 0.7$) compared to Whites ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 0.7$; $t(1,400) = 3.3$, $p = .001$), and those with no college experience reported less job satisfaction ($M = 3.3$, $SD = 0.8$) compared to those with some college experience ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 0.7$; $t(1,400) = 2.1$, $p = .038$). There were no sex differences in job satisfaction.

Stigma Group Membership Moderates the Relationship Between Respectful Treatment and Job Satisfaction

Of central importance is the impact of respectful treatment on job satisfaction as moderated by stigmatized group membership. This relationship was expected to be stronger among participants who belong to a stigmatized group, whether it be ethnic minorities, women, or the non-college educated. Analyses followed the Aiken and West (1991) approach to testing interactions in multiple regression, whereby the respectful treatment scale was centered and multiplied separately by each of the dichotomous variables representing the three stigma dimensions (0 = ethnic minority, 1 = White; 0 = women, 1 = men; 0 = non-college educated, 1 = some college education; and the summary variable of 0 = ethnic minority or female or non-college educated participants, 1 = White, male, college-educated). A separate multiple regression analysis predicting job satisfaction was run for each stigma dimension (ethnicity, gender, and education) and for the summary stigma variable. Each regression controlled for the other dimensions of stigma, except for the summary stigma variable that was a function of all three stigma dimensions. Additionally, all regressions controlled for the participants' pay, given that ethnic minorities, women, and the non-college educated reported an average lower annual income compared to their non-stigmatized counterparts. Controlling for pay helped to ensure that the importance of respect in determining job satisfaction was not driven by strategies to increase one's income, which may be especially motivating to those who are less paid.

Table 2 Simple slopes of respectful treatment and actual pay in predicting job satisfaction, by group

	Respectful treatment <i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Actual pay <i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)
Whites	.49 (.03)	.014 (.005)
Ethnic minorities	.67 (.06)	.022 (.009)
Sig. of difference	$t = 2.54^*$	$t = 0.71$
Men	.47 (.04)	.014 (.006)
Women	.57 (.03)	.017 (.006)
Sig. of difference	$t = 2.09^*$	$t = 0.42$
College educated	.47 (.03)	.017 (.005)
Non-college educated	.60 (.03)	.012 (.006)
Sig. of difference	$t = 2.64^*$	$t = -0.62$
Non-stigmatized	.37 (.05)	.019 (.007)
Stigmatized	.57 (.03)	.015 (.005)
Sig. of difference	$t = 3.24^{**}$	$t = -0.45$

Note: All simple slopes are statistically significant at $p \leq .058$. Sig. of difference indicates the significance of the difference of the slopes, as given by the interaction term in the regression equation. For the t values, $^{**} p < .01$, $^* p < .05$. “Stigmatized” is the summary variable that includes ethnic minority or female or not college educated; “non-stigmatized” includes those who are White, male, and college-educated. Regressions involving the interactions with respectful treatment control for actual pay. See text for other controls

The focus of each analysis was the interaction between stigma and perceived respect in predicting job satisfaction. In all cases the interaction term was statistically significant. While all simple slopes for respect were statistically significant at $p < .05$, consistent with prior findings that respect impacts workplace satisfaction for everyone, there were clear differences in the magnitude of the slope by group. For each dimension of stigma, a stronger relationship was observed between respectful treatment in the workplace and job satisfaction for members of stigmatized groups (Table 2). The interaction was present for ethnic minority participants (controlling for education and sex), women (controlling for ethnicity and education), and those without college experience (controlling for ethnicity and sex). Finally, the summary stigma variable showed that the effect of respect was especially strong for participants who belong to one of these three stigmatized groups versus the White, male, and college-educated participants.

Stigma Group Membership Does Not Moderate the Relationship Between Pay and Job Satisfaction

Following the same analytic procedures, interaction terms were created with the centered pay variable and the measures of stigmatized group membership. Each regression controlled for the other dimensions of stigma, except, again, the summary stigma variable that was a function of all three stigma dimensions.

The results revealed, in contrast to the respect findings, that the pay one receives had the same impact on job satisfaction regardless of stigmatized group membership (Table 2). While all of the simple slopes were statistically significant at $p < .05$ (except the slope for those without college experience, which was marginally significant, $p = .058$), none of the interactions were statistically significant, showing that the simple slopes did not differ in magnitude across groups.

Discussion

Respectful treatment impacts job satisfaction differently for members of stigmatized groups compared to their non-stigmatized counterparts, a finding that consistently replicated across all dimensions of stigma studied here. Respectful treatment had a stronger impact on job satisfaction for ethnic minorities, women, and those without college education, compared to Whites, men, and the college educated, respectively. The pay that participants received in the workplace affected satisfaction for everyone, but stigmatized group membership did not moderate these effects.

These findings underline the special importance of perceived respectful treatment in the workplace for members of stigmatized groups, and provide further evidence that respect conveys information about social inclusion and value to the group or society (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, DeGoey, & Smith, 1996), which is of particular relevance for those who experience prejudice and social rejection. In contrast, workplace pay exerted the same impact on job satisfaction for everyone, and did not differ by group-based status, because pay does not serve a psychological, social-inclusion function and therefore does not have any special meaning for stigmatized group members beyond its general effect in determining job satisfaction.

Although these interactions show the special importance of perceived respectful treatment for members of stigmatized groups, it should not be forgotten that few people, including the non-stigmatized, would feel satisfied in a work environment where they are not treated respectfully. This expectation is clearly demonstrated by the uniformly strong simple slopes for all groups, including for the non-stigmatized. With such a powerful main effect, it is all the more remarkable that membership in a stigmatized group could magnify the impact of respect on job satisfaction.

One should not conclude that the experiences of stigma are exactly the same regardless of the source of that stigma, whether it is racism, sexism, or classism. Consistent with this idea, most research on stigma focuses on a particular dimension of stigma rather than considering any commonalities that might exist across dimensions of stigma. However, there is value in considering how the experience of stigma might involve similar mechanisms across stigma dimensions, or how experiences with prejudice and social rejection may have similar kinds of consequences despite the variability that exists across the qualitatively different dimensions of stigma. To quote Goffman (1963): “persons with different stigmas are in an appreciably similar situation and respond in an appreciably similar way” (p. 130). This study represents one more example of a search for commonalities in an effort to identify the broad, generalizable principles involved in stigma processes.

Acknowledgments I would like to thank John Jost, Mark Brandt, Irina Feygina, Suzanne Bell, and Jim Davis for their very helpful comments on previous versions of this manuscript.

References

- Aiken, L. S., & West, S. G. (1991). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bergsieker, H. B., Shelton, J. N., & Richeson, J. A. (2010). To be liked versus respected: Divergent goals in interracial interactions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 99*, 248–264.
- Brief, A. P., & Weiss, H. M. (2002). Organizational behavior: Affect in the workplace. *Annual Review of Psychology, 53*, 279–307.
- Cohen-Charash, Y., & Spector, P. E. (2001). The role of justice in organizations: A meta-analysis. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 86*, 278–321.
- Colquitt, J. A., Conlon, D. E., Wesson, M. J., Porter, C. O. L. H., & Ng, K. Y. (2001). Justice at the millennium: A meta-analytic review of 25 years of organizational justice research. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*, 425–445.
- Crocker, J., & Major, B. (1989). Social stigma and self-esteem: The self-protective properties of stigma. *Psychological Review, 96*, 608–630.
- Davis, J., & Henry, P. J. (2009, February). *Low status compensation theory and the justice preference scale*. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Tampa, FL.
- Davis, J. A., Smith, T. W., & Marsden, P. V. (2002). General social survey 2002, United States. [computer file]. Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Henry, P. J. (2009). Low-status compensation: A theory for understanding the role of status in cultures of honor. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 97*, 451–466.
- Judge, T. A., Piccolo, R. F., Podsakoff, N. P., Shaw, J. C., & Rich, B. L. (2010). The relationship between pay and job satisfaction: A meta-analysis of the literature. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 77*, 157–167.
- Lind, E. A., & Tyler, T. R. (1988). *The social psychology of procedural justice*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Locke, E. A. (1968). What is job satisfaction? *Organizational Behavior & Human Performance, 4*, 309–336.
- Lovelace, K., & Rosen, B. (1996). Differences in achieving person-organization fit among diverse groups of managers. *Journal of Management, 22*, 703–722.
- Major, B., Quinton, W. J., & McCoy, S. K. (2002). Antecedents and consequences of perceiving the self as a target of discrimination: Theoretical and empirical advances. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 34, pp. 251–330). New York: Academic Press.
- Mendoza-Denton, R., Downey, G., Purdie, V. J., Davis, A., & Pietrzak, J. (2002). Sensitivity to status-based rejection: Implications for African American students' college experience. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 83*, 896–918.
- Mikolic, J. M., Parker, J. C., & Pruitt, D. G. (1997). Escalation in response to persistent annoyance: Groups versus individuals and gender effects. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 72*, 151–163.
- Sidanius, J., & Pratto, F. (1999). *Social dominance: An intergroup theory of social hierarchy and oppression*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Smart Richman, L., & Leary, M. R. (2009). Reactions to discrimination, stigmatization, ostracism, and other forms of interpersonal rejection: A multimotive model. *Psychological Review, 116*, 365–383.
- Tyler, T. R., DeGoey, R., & Smith, H. (1996). Understanding why the justice of group procedures matters: A test of the psychological dynamics of the group-value model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70*, 913–930.
- Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2007). A question of belonging: Race, social fit, and achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*, 82–96.
- Wanous, J. P., Reichers, A. E., & Hudy, M. J. (1997). Overall job satisfaction: How good are single-item measures? *Journal of Applied Psychology, 82*, 247–252.
- Younts, C. W., & Mueller, C. W. (2001). Justice processes: Specifying the mediating role of perceptions of distributive justice. *American Sociological Review, 66*, 125–145.