

WHAT DO PEOPLE THINK OF YOU? - UNDERSTANDING CURRENT SOCIAL OPINIONS OF JOB ROLES AND SECTORS OF WORK - A PILOT STUDY

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BACKGROUND

The side-effect effect (SEE; Knobe, 2003) demonstrates that harmful side effects are viewed as more intentional than helpful ones. One explanation is that the observers utilise the moral valence of actions' unintended consequences to help them decide whether the side effects were intentionally caused. Research in this area often employs the use of vignettes to investigate the SEE. The format of the vignettes generally complies with the following structure:

"The [subordinate character] of [place of work] went to the [main character] and said, 'We are thinking of performing [action X]. It will have desired [result Y], but it will also have [result Z].'

The [main character] answered, 'I don't care at all about [result Z]. I just want [result Y]. Let's start [action X].'
They started [action X]. Sure enough, [result Y] happened but [result Z] happened also."

One of the overall aims of the current project is to investigate how instigators' characteristics modulate the SEE. The first stage is to explore the current social opinions of various job roles and sectors. Using these social opinions, the vignettes in future studies will be manipulated to investigate how the job role or the sector of work influences the judgements of intentionality.

METHOD

Undergraduate and Postgraduate Psychology students ($N=30$, $M_{age}=20$, Age range 18-29) from UoC took part in an online survey (Male:Female 1:4). The study was approved by the UoC Psychology Ethics Board [BK120118].

Participants were asked to rate a series of 32 randomised high- and low-ranking job roles (e.g. Vice Chancellor & Teaching Assistant). Participants rated nine personality characteristics of a person in that job role using a Likert scale of 1 - 5 (1. Not very..., to 5. Very...). The characteristics were: Powerful, Trustworthy, Dishonest, Ambitious, Reliable, Selfish, Intelligent, Skilful and Family oriented.

Participants then rated 8 sectors of work (Military, Education, Business, Charity, Media, Government, Health & Public Transport) on a Likert scale of 1 - 5 (1. Very negative, 3. Neutral, 5. Very positive).

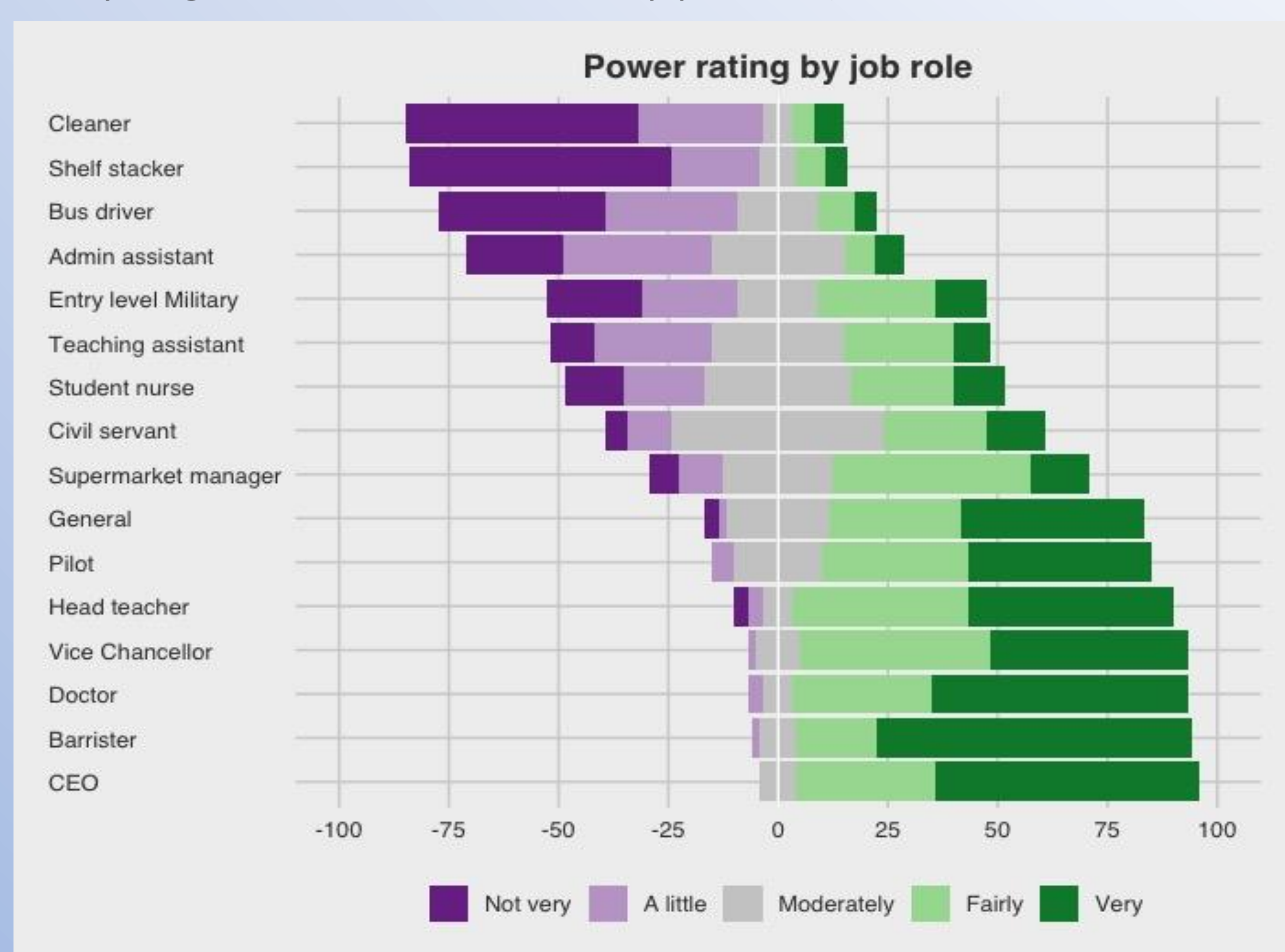


Figure 1. Ratings of 'Powerfulness' by Job role ($N=30$)

ANALYSIS / RESULTS

For reproducibility, the analysis was conducted in R (R Development Core Team, 2017). Data were downloaded and two negative characteristics recoded to positive. Means were calculated for each characteristic of each job role. Additionally, means were calculated for the sector ratings.

A pattern was observed in the descriptive statistics that the sample rated high-ranking job roles as having a higher degree of positive characteristics than low-ranking job roles. There are, however, some instances of high- and low-ranked matched jobs whom share similar ratings. For example, Doctors and Student nurses were both rated similarly for Honesty and being Family Orientated. Additionally, Vice Chancellors and Teaching Assistants were rating similarly for Reliability and Trustworthiness. Furthermore, there are some instances of large dichotomies such as level of Honesty between Newspaper Editors and Proof Readers and level of Powerfulness between a Supermarket Manager and a Shelf Stacker. One of the more prominent differences was seen within the ratings of power (see Figure 1).

The Health sector was rated as most positive ($M=4.57$), followed by Education ($M=4.30$), Charity ($M=4.30$), Business ($M=3.73$), Public Transport ($M=3.43$), Military ($M=3.40$), Media ($M=3.03$) and finally, Government ($M=2.93$).

An anonymised version of the full data set and the R analysis code is available via the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/w279r/>).

DISCUSSION

Results show that our sample rated the high-ranking positions as having a higher degree of positive characteristics than the low-ranking positions of the same sector. Furthermore, our sample rated the Health sector as the most positive and the Government as most negative.

The study provides us the ability to further investigate the SEE by manipulating vignettes to include specific job roles that bring a particular social opinion. This allows us to understand the salience of the characteristic when determining intentionality. There may be other characteristics or story-environment factors that contribute to the SEE, such as age, sex, ethnic background and level of expertise. Understanding the SEE and how people decide intentionality may have further implications for the jury decision process of rendering verdicts.

REFERENCES

- Knobe, J. (2003). Intentional action and side effects in ordinary language. *Analysis*, 63(3), 190-194. <http://doi.org/10.1093/analys/63.3.190>
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