

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

John Goyder, *The Prestige Squeeze: Occupational Prestige in Canada since 1965*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009, 236 pp. \$34.95 paper (978-0-7735-3611-1), \$85.00 hardcover (978-0-7735-3582-4)

The problem John Goyder depicts in *The Prestige Squeeze* has a long tradition in sociology, going back to Pareto, Sorokin, Marx, and Weber: changes in the ranking of occupations and how they come about. With such a lot of historical baggage, new hypotheses are few and far between. Goyder offers some solid and forthright ones, befitting the current state of affairs in this field: 1. education and income are highly connected to prestige, and gender, skills, occupational presentation, and characteristics of the rater influence occupational prestige rankings; 2. higher income inequality disperses prestige ratings (while individualization caps upper echelons); 3. postmodernism has a negative impact on consensus in ratings.

Although the historic review contains an excellent discussion on the relationship between gender and prestige in North America, most of the merits of Goyder's research report rest on his brilliant fieldwork and data collection. For professionals in the field of data collection there are some interesting lessons to be learned from his intricate comparison of data collection methods and outcomes. For example, in terms of response rates, the undisputed top data collection method — with a remarkable 82% response — was a postal introduction letter coupled with a CATI, showing that people like to understand the goals of the research to which they are contributing. Face-to-face interviews had the lowest response rate (45.7%), and cold-call CATIs were almost as bad (56%).

The hidden jewels of this book are Goyder's discussions on prestige rankings and contingencies in how they are generated in public opinion, as shown by comparisons between 1965 and 2005. Bounced to the bottom of the scale are Catholic priests (place 118 out of 124) because of recent scandals. Changes in the position of the child caregiver (with a score of 65, up 29 points from the survey in 1965) may be connected to an aging society. Why telemarketers are ranked at the bottom of the scale goes without saying — only people on social assistance are ranked below. Some of the findings make good "party talk": elementary teachers, butchers, and electricians apparently enjoyed an amazing boost in

public ranking, whereas Members of the House of Commons and Senate lost a disproportionate amount of prestige. As much as it may get people talking about concepts of occupational prestige and social inequality, a more focused discussion on how rankings might be immunized against fads and fashions might have proven more helpful to the cause. Possibly, two snapshots in time are insufficient to build a solid foundation for ranking occupational prestige in postindustrial societies. After all, for decades sociologists have worked on improving the reliability of occupational scores and their national and international harmonization.

A comprehensive study on the ranking of occupations in our diversified, Taylorized, and highly specialized economy remains quite an undertaking, despite all the ground covered so far. In table 4.4 (p. 128), the qualitative approach is merged with a number of multivariate models, where time, income, and education are regressed onto the prestige scores in 1965, 2005, and the difference between them. With adjusted R-squares between 70% and 85% the models have an excellent fit. Not surprisingly, education has the largest explanatory power for occupational prestige. At this point, differences between today's rankings and those of 1965 are carefully depicted. But instead of pointing out all the modest differences between his findings and the usual generalizations in socioeconomic status fieldwork, Goyder would have been fully entitled to celebrate his excellent fieldwork and the robustness of his data. The conclusion of chapter four is more or less an acknowledgement of already well-established findings in occupational prestige research — and this is good news! We need not worry that “[raters] are not speaking with one voice...” (p. 135). Rather, we need more data and research like Goyder's to establish reliable prestige scores, in smaller increments of time.

Goyder's discussion of the purpose of harmonizing occupational prestige to carry out international comparisons covers the current state of affairs but regrettably omits to place his own data into the same context. It in no way invalidates his brilliant analysis on the effect of modern and postmodern values for the outcomes of SES research. Particularly valuable is his examination of “true prestige scores” (p. 187). He takes an explicit nonfunctionalist stance, while not completely abandoning structuralist arguments. It makes for an interesting and passionate debate on the meaning of current shifts of focus from skills, authority, capital, power, and privilege to a more science and technology based occupational prestige score. Yet, the extrapolation of cross-sectional findings into future societies has to be hedged with some caveats as most of the current developments are connected to the increasing digitization and ensuing rationalization of information delivery and storage.

As Professor Goyder points out, other shifts happen on a meso-level: at times, within-group occupational prestige can be more differentiating than is apparent at a macro-level. For example, rather crude elitism can exist amongst university professors or investment bankers in order to hedge some of the decision-making risks in the job. In *The Prestige Squeeze* he makes us realize that there is more to occupational prestige than function and structure. On a daily basis, occupational prestige is negotiated, enforced, and acts as a lubricant for job efficiency and social interaction. People are seemingly uncomfortable without a hierarchy. Thus, sociologists can trust people's "taste for rankings" and Professor Goyder's study makes a strong case for remaining alert to current shifts in prestige rankings due to continued human ingenuity and modernization.

Wilfrid Laurier University

Sylvia E. Peacock

Sylvia E. Peacock studies the influence of modernization and new technologies on social inequality and socioeconomic status in international comparisons. Currently she is analyzing the effects of different Welfare State regimes on educational outcomes. Recent publications include articles on "The Historical Influence of Computer Use at Work on Income in the late Twentieth Century" (2008, *Social Science Computer Review*) and a work on "Senior Citizens and Young Technologies: Reasons for Senior Citizens' Non-Access and Access of the Internet in a European Comparative Perspective" (2007, *European Journal of Aging*). speacock@uoguelph.ca