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Subjective social distances to professions: Subjective class boundaries in the Czech Republic.

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The paper examines images of stratification in terms of interactional willingness. First, we introduce the method of subjective social distance elaborated by E. O. Laumann for studying social stratification. Second, we analyze data from the survey Social distance 2007 to reveal how respondents differentiate among 22 target occupations. On the whole, attitudes to the occupational stimuli form a common status-prestige continuum. Our research question stands for existence of subjective social class boundaries. We employ methods of multidimensional scaling and hierarchical cluster analysis to trim complexity of mutual proximity among target occupations while we control for respondents own social standing. The findings indicate existence of groupings that have roughly similar distance reactions among themselves but differ considerably from others. The groupings constitute a basic mental categorizing schema of occupations which characterize fundamental subjective class boundary between two classes of blue collar and whiter collar professions (manual vs. nonmanual work). Furthermore, we can identify four perceived groupings: high professionals, professional female dominated occupations, skilled manual and routine nonmanual workers and manual professions with low prestige. In general, these groupings on the basis of highly similar aggregate social-distance reactions might be interpreted as evidence for the existence of a subjectively experienced class structure in the Czech public.