

## CHAPTER 12

# Moral Evaluations in the Social Hierarchy: Esteem as an Independent Dimension of Social Evaluations of Inequality

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That stratification is a multidimensional phenomenon is a platitude often asserted but rarely scrutinized. While theoretical work and textbooks make some efforts in this direction, research in this field only occasionally does more than bow towards multi-dimensionality. For all practical purposes, occupation is the focal point of stratification research, although in recent studies industry and even firms are modestly making their presence felt (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Featherman and Hauser, 1978; Treiman, 1977; Jencks *et al.*, 1977; Baron and Bielby, 1980; Berg, 1981).

In this paper we develop one of the several dimensions of stratification often mentioned but hardly ever systematically pursued. Esteem is an important element in social inequality, related to but distinct from occupational, economic and political inequality. Its distinctive feature is the association with individuals, not with positions. We offer a systematic delineation of esteem and its relationship to other dimensions of social inequality. Finally, we argue that esteem is a concept eminently amenable to empirical investigation, and we outline possible research designs and a number of hypotheses such a research program might consider.

### 1. Esteem in Contemporary Empirical Research

The notion that social inequality has several distinct dimensions is not new. Max Weber's famous essay distinguishes between political,

social and economic inequalities (Weber, 1946). Mention of the variety of bases for social inequality can be found in Marx and Durkheim (Marx, 1963; Durkheim, 1964), and appear in many other early sociological writings.

Has the appreciation of these insights been lost in recent empirical research which focuses on occupational inequality exclusively. One has to conclude that while the multidimensional nature of social inequality is frequently *acknowledged* in current research, little work has been devoted to developing a deeper appreciation of these different aspects of inequality and even less has been done to incorporate different dimensions of inequality into research in this area.

Lipset and Zetterberg, for example, discuss Weber's three aspects of stratification at length in their theoretical writing of social mobility, but their empirical work focuses exclusively on occupational mobility (Lipset and Zetterberg, 1970; Lipset and Bendix, 1959). More recently, Hauser and Featherman acknowledge that occupational prestige does not necessarily imply relations of deference, acceptance and derogation in the society at large, and, more broadly, that occupational inequality is only one (albeit a central)-- aspect of social inequality (Hauser and Featherman, 1977:4-5). Hauser and Featherman argue persuasively that occupation is related to social status, economic resources and political power, and is therefore an appropriate place to *begin* the analysis of social inequality. Clearly, a recognition of the multidimensionality of inequality has not been entirely lost, although research has not been directed to other aspects of inequality with the vigor applied to occupational mobility.

While research has generally failed to attempt to capture the various dimensions of social inequality, esteem has been particularly neglected as a concern of researchers. One possible reason for this neglect is the focus on stratification as related to *positions* in society. Stratification theory is often viewed as a theory of (1) inequality in positions and (2) rules or systems for allocating persons to those positions (Davis and Moore, 1945; Wright, 1979). As we will argue below, esteem is an aspect of social inequality vested in the individual and consequently is ignored in the standard schematization of social stratification.

But there is a further reason for the relative neglect of esteem as an independent aspect of inequality. A tension underlying certain methodological disputes in mobility research is the conflict between evaluative and objective indicators of social position. Mobility studies have always exhibited a certain degree of uneasiness about evaluative,

or subjective, indicators of social class, since there are potential difficulties of inconsistent evaluations by different observers and variation in ratings over time. Occupational prestige, however, has been seen as an acceptable subjective measure because it behaved like an objective indicator of social standing; empirical findings suggest high levels of agreement between respondents and little variation in judgments across time, region and social class (Horan, 1978; Kraus, Schild and Hodge, 1978; Treiman, 1977; Hauser and Featherman, 1978; cf. Jacobs and Powell, 1981; Powell and Jacobs, 1983).

Prestige came to be viewed as expressing the subjective side of social inequality, and proponents emphasized the socio-economic (underpinning) of prestige for its more convenient properties in empirical research. Given the concerns about subjective indicators of social positions, research on social inequality did not pursue additional aspects of subjective inequality (Treiman, 1977, Coxon and Jones, 1978; Hodge, 1981).

Researchers employing occupational prestige and socio-economic status scales have argued over the appropriate interpretation of these measures (Hauser and Featherman, 1977). The socio-economic status scale has become the standard for research that has come to be known as the "status attainment" school. Treiman (1977) and others have maintained that the relatively modest differences between prestige scales and socio economic status scales are of substantive interest and should be carefully examined by stratification research.

Hope (1982) has suggested that prestige includes moral dimensions somewhat independent of the socio-economic component emphasized by Featherman and Hauser. Hope has claimed that in the ranking of positions in the social order, a moral evaluation of the social utility of positions is included in addition to an estimate of the degree to which society rewards the incumbents of these positions. While Hope has avoided the tendency to economic reductionism in isolating an important aspect of the moral evaluation of occupational prestige, we believe there are even more significant moral judgments associated with individuals rather than positions.

## 2. Esteem as an Independent Dimension of Social Inequality

We define esteem as a measure of the moral worth of persons. This measure is expressed in judgments in which moral standards held

in common by members of a community are applied to individuals, independent of their occupational, economic, political or social place in the community. In the national community of the United States, standards of responsibility, industry, initiative, competency, decency and fairness are central in forming judgments of esteem that can be applied to anyone. We would expect other social objects, for example families, and other standards, such as loyalty, ritual piety, humility, etc., to be dominant in culturally different communities.

In associating esteem with persons, as opposed to prestige that inheres in positions, we depart from the often insightful work of Goode on the social control aspects of the prestige structure. Goode tends to use prestige and esteem interchangeably, and perhaps from the exchange theory perspective with which he works this is appropriate. For our purposes, however, we think it crucial to distinguish positional inequality from individual inequality.

We also depart from Goode in highlighting the multidimensional nature of judgments of esteem. Goode has emphasized the importance of performance as a central aspect of esteem, as has Kimberly in this volume. Creative research that has tested and extended Goode's work has focused on this particular aspect of esteem and located a context where performance was a salient concern (Erickson and Nosanchuk, 1984). Yet the judgments people make about the esteem of others do not solely rest on performance, but take many factors into account. In the work context, esteem judgments cut across what Offe (1977) has described as technical, regulatory and extra functional norms. In particular, we are claiming there is a dimension to judgments of esteem which reflects an evaluation of the moral worth of others, and this simply does not reduce to judgments of one's efficacy and the extent of one's social contribution.

Most Americans live in several communities at the same time--family, neighbourhood, work, friendship, religious and civic--and judgments of esteem are calibrated to reflect the quality specific to individuals' participation in each. The esteem in which one is held reflects a moral evaluation of one's past actions within a community and implies an expectation that a similar moral quality will obtain for one's future actions. It does not follow, however, that the esteem of an individual will be uniform for each of the communities of which that individual is a member. The high or low regard for a person in a work community may not be matched with the same degree of regard in the person's family. The demands that each of these communities makes on individuals are indefinite, and individuals often feel compelled to devote their best

efforts in one realm rather than another. But as there are varying demands from each community individuals may shift the allocation of their efforts. Thus the unequal distribution of efforts involves balancing the aspirations for esteem in different contexts.

Judgments of esteem are multi-dimensional in content as well as context, and are based on several moral standards. Perhaps that most general of these standards is an evaluation of the integrity of persons, of their fidelity to the commitments they have made. In modern democratic societies the integrity of individuals is stressed above all. Yet other moral qualities beyond integrity often serve as the basis for elevating the estimation of individuals. A spirit of public service, equal treatment of others, and initiative in business all serve to elicit the esteem of others.

The stratification of esteem serves to unite and separate persons morally as well as practically. A person held in high esteem will be well integrated into the community and able to exercise influence over others. But a person whose esteem has fallen, even when occupying a position of considerable authority, will be shunted to the moral periphery of the community and his or her authority will be followed only reluctantly, or mechanically. Indeed, when such a highly placed person's esteem falls low enough, steps will be taken, if necessary, to remove that person. The fate that befell ex-president Nixon when his moral credibility collapsed illustrates this general proposition.

Although separate from wealth, power, family or social position, esteem is intertwined with each. Who will do much business with a businessman who has a reputation for dishonesty, hire a worker considered unreliable, re-elect an official deemed irresponsible, seek the services of a physician believed dilatory, respect the member of a distinguished family regarded a wastrel?

People work hard to improve their position in the social hierarchy, and, as Harrison White has observed, "great amounts of thought and emotion are devoted to changes in status which seem minuscule in terms of over all social structure" (1970: 6). Yet individuals also work hard at improving and maintaining their esteem with associates even when they are not pursuing social mobility. To some extent, the pursuit of esteem within a particular social context represents a diversion of effort that might otherwise be directed at social mobility.

Esteem is not scarce, but it is not given away. Esteem is won, maintained, enhanced or lost. The possession of esteem is a ground for inclusion into a community; the loss of esteem is a ground for

exclusion. By comparison, prestige is scarce and allocated, because it is scarce, to those occupations or positions in a society that are emblematic of the society's chief cultural values. Prestige is thus hierarchical, whereas esteem reflects a center-periphery pattern.

The distinction between prestige and esteem can be cast as a comparison between structural and processual dimensions of social behavior. Prestige inheres in the structure of positions and tends to be stable over time (Rossi *et al.*, 1963). The changing prestige of positions is a gradual social development which provokes much public concern and comment.

While prestige inheres in the structure of social positions, esteem is won and maintained through the process of people interacting with each other. Esteem accumulates in the form of respect and admiration that have been gained by past behavior. Esteem is a reservoir of attitude and opinion of particular people in a social network regarding others in that network. Esteem can not be sold, exchanged, or for long conferred, whereas occupations, wealth, and some forms of power can be transferred. Prestige and esteem are thus independent coordinates of social behavior.

Yet there is a problem in contrasting structure and process in this way, for the interpersonal negotiation and exchange that constitute the foundation of esteem judgments may cumulate into a stable structure of relations. William Foot Whyte, in *Street Corner Society*, was sensitive to the esteem craved by the members of Doc's gang, and carefully elaborated the structure of social relations that emerged. We are claiming however, that while these relationships are structured in relatively stable ways, this is so only because of a continuing process of personal interaction. Esteem must be maintained by appropriate behavior on a daily basis: one's position of esteem rests on the personal acknowledgement of one's associates. While terms of employment not infrequently have implicit or explicit tenure provisions, one cannot arrange to have a durable position of esteem.

Esteem also cuts across the traditional universalistic-particularistic dichotomy. Esteem is universalistic in that it must be achieved and we further argue that there are broadly universalistic criteria used to make judgments of esteem. Yet esteem is fundamentally particularistic in that it is based on a history of associations with particular people. One cannot bring one's esteem along when one meets a group of strangers the way that one can bring the status of one's occupation. For although a person's reputation can be heralded by individuals who know the

persons and networks which pass along this information, the reputation nonetheless must be constantly affirmed.

This esteem is like love in many ways: it engages out sentiments, it is reciprocal but not transferable; it emerges from the personal qualities of individuals over the history of particular relationships; it is given freely and cannot be coerced. Esteem and love share a certain immediacy and also a sense of being deserved: typically one cannot simply decide to love someone or decide that someone is unworthy of esteem, rather events or actions must precipitate that change.

### 3. The Confusion of Esteem with Prestige and Authority

Esteem has not occupied a primary position even in the more qualitative studies of social inequality. This relative neglect may be due to the over-emphasis placed on occupational prestige as affecting attitudes toward the social order and even people's sense of self-worth.

This confusion may in part have to do with the connection of esteem to one's position in the status hierarchy. People in low-status occupations may find it difficult to win esteem from their social superiors. Years of diligence and determination on the part of subordinates may be hardly noticed, while a relatively simple gesture on the part of a prominent individual may produce an outpouring of esteem. Thus the recognition of estimable acts at different levels of the social hierarchy differs. The basis for judgments of esteem between individuals at different levels of the social hierarchy is likely to be related to the meaning and visibility of status in a particular social milieu. We suspect that such important connections between esteem and status have led sociologists to conflate esteem with prestige.

Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb's sensitive and insightful book, *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, emphasizes the importance of occupational prestige for individual's sense of self-worth and personal efficacy in the political realm. They argue that the social ranking (prestige) of the work an individual does is at the basis of judgments regarding the individual's self-esteem. Sennett and Cobb correctly identify a non-pecuniary element of the prestige hierarchy's distinctions of social class are distinctions of self-worth based on refinement, cultivation, and developing of one's abilities. Their sharp ear for the concerns, insecurities, passions, and aspirations of the working men and women they met with lends a great deal of credence to their insights.

Yet Sennett and Cobb miss the dimension of esteem which we are highlighting by over-emphasizing occupation, prestige, and income in their analysis. They fasten on one aspect of social comparisons people make, those between people in different social strata. Yet within those groups people make endless distinctions concerning esteem which Sennett and Cobb do not explore. We maintain that Cobb overstates the case in suggesting that "Almost all the invidious comparisons people make of each other in American society pass through the medium of production" (1972: 267). Our argument is that moral judgment about how well people to what they do and how well they live their lives are also important in their evaluations of the work other people do and how society evaluates that work. The global social ranking attached to different positions in society should not obscure the world of moral distinctions people make among those who occupy the same positions.

The sociology of science is another context where the distinction between prestige and esteem is useful. Cole and Cole's provocative and controversial analysis of social stratification in science examines the efficacy of the reward structure of the scientific community. Their analysis examines potential effects of the quality of physicists' departments, which they term "location," on the recognition of physicists' publications. In this context, the term "location" is unfortunate, for it fails to connote the hierarchy of physics departments that Cole and Cole depict. While we all admit the prestige of being in a top ranked department, those who have attained such positions are not equally esteemed by their colleagues. The distinction between the prestige of departments and the esteem or recognition of individuals is the more appropriate and sociological grounded relationship to be examined.

#### 4. Esteem and Middle Class Virtues

The standards in the national community of the United States on which judgments of esteem are made are secularized versions of Protestant, more specifically Puritan, values. As numerous studies have shown, these values and standards are at the core of American culture (Weber, 1958; Miller, 1960; Berovitch, 1974). The strength with which these are held despite periodic alarms at their erosion, show no signs of abating. Indeed, the unconcealed contempt with which supposed recent departures from these standards is greeted--the moral condemnation in such phrases as "theme generation" or "yuppies" and the common epithets "lazy" and "wimp" are testimony to the

continuing importance of standards of industry, responsibility, initiative, competency, decency, fairness, and service in American life. These standards are invoked by Americans daily, practically hourly.

The characters held up to ridicule in the most popular TV shows--the dishonest and incompetent Frank Burns and the arrogant Charles Winchester, III, of *MASH*, the complacent bumbler and coward Tex Baxter of the "Mary Tyler Moore Show" -- are invariably foils, however cardboard, for the heroes, equally cardboard, who are presented to us as hard-working, reliable, capable and fair to the core. These shows are directed to a middle class audience, and the characters themselves are middle class figures. In recent popular depictions of the rich, J.R. Ewing of "Dallas" is exceeded in his villainy by his incompetent rival, Cliff Barnes. Their power and ruthlessness fascinate the public; there is undoubtedly a vicarious pleasure gained from these characters' violation of the rules we all agree upon. Yet their negative examples reinforce the moral bases of esteem we have delineated. For although J.R. may be rich and powerful, he fails to earn our esteem or the esteem of the other characters on the show: in this crucial way the rich are held to the same standards as everyone else (Lidz, 1984a; 1984b).

That such standards are not employed solely or even mainly by one socio-economic class is attested to from several sources. Louis Auchincloss's serious literary portraits of the rich and well born frequently play off the decayed, ineffectual members of the prominent family with their socially responsible, masterful and vigorous forebearers and contemporaries. Elijah Anderson's study, *A Place on the Corner*, reveals that even among an economically poor, ill-educated black segment of the population the conduct of an individual that garners respect from others, including others who are criminals and 'wineheads,' is the kind that fulfills the standards of esteem to which we have referred.

Tocqueville was among the first to chart the ubiquity of these modern standards of esteem in American life. He also sharply contrasted them to the aristocratic standards that were prominent at an earlier period in Western Europe: heroism, military valor, greatness, loyalty and service. Although the standards held by the majority of Americans had practically succeeded in leveling the earlier aristocratic values, vestiges of aristocratic values were, in Tocqueville's view, still to be found in American society, but transformed and weakened; they were expressed by the segments most proximate in origin to the English aristocracy, the Southern landed upper class. If we grant that the military is, or at least was, an excellent site for the fulfillment of aristocratic values, there is considerable evidence

in support of Tocqueville's view. A disproportionate share of American military officers, before the Civil War and even well after, has been continuous for two centuries, although its magnitude has declined considerably since the beginning of the 20th century (Janowitz, 1960).

There are, of course, other sites amenable to the expression of aristocratic values. Service and loyalty, the "stewardship" of the community or nation, have often been projected by members of the American WASP upper class as their duty (Baltzell, 1964). The American diplomatic corps has long been staffed by members drawn largely from the upper-class. A similar, if perhaps not so extreme, pattern of disproportionate upper class leadership obtains in political and civic organizations across the nation, not merely in the south (Baltzell, 1955; 1964; Verba and Nie; 1972).

However distinctive in ancestry, social position, attitude and style the American upper class may be, it is our contention that none of its member is exempted from the modern standards of esteem. Local or national stewardship or service of some kind may truly be salient life objectives for members of the upper class (or any class), but when that stewardship is ineffectual or the service wavering, it will be, indeed has been, dismissed. Thus the standards of the majority, as Tocqueville put it, so often referred to since his time as the morality of the middle class, apply uniformly in American society to each person, the high and the low alike. This is one respect in which the society is not merely an aggregate nor a society of classes, but a coherent entity, a national community.

Tocqueville's emphasis on the egalitarianism of American life, necessary in his view for a democracy, continues to ring a responsive chord for American readers, yet the contemporary sociological research tradition has no easy link to this insight. American is not much more equal than many other industrial societies in income distribution, after-tax distribution of income and social welfare, occupational structure or the rate of social mobility. Then in what way is American egalitarianism expressed? We propose that America is more equalitarian in its judgments of esteem than are other western democracies, and that expanding the scope of our stratification research to encompass esteem will enable us to reincorporate Tocqueville's insights into the mainstream of stratification research. We see in Tocqueville's characterization of egalitarian America a society inafraid to apply harsh moral condemnation to people in diverse social classes, to hold each one accountable to the same standards. This is an important dimensions of social equality in which America

far exceeds its European counterparts, if commentaries to this effect are to be believed (Barzini, 1965; Dahrendorf, 1967; Duroselle *et al.*, 1963).

Although egalitarianism is deeply rooted in the ideals of the country, not all behavior on a daily basis conforms to this ideal. Difficulties arise when prestige or status distinctions threaten to outweigh the individual distinctions of esteem we have delineated. There are times when the only thing people can see is status, and esteem distinctions become attenuated or flattened completely. Hierarchical social inequality may thus be a stumbling block for esteem evaluations. Class favoritism and class resentment have a telescoping effect. They elevate or lower the group and exclude the individual. From the point of view of class antagonism, what is important is one's class membership, not one's personal qualities. In a sense, the essential feature of stereotyping attitudes, whether racist, sexist, or classist, is to impute the characteristic of the group to the individual and to ignore the estimable qualities of the individual.

Much social commentary and sociological analysis attest to the tendency to deny individual variation among other social groups. Thus William Foote Whyte's "corner boys" resented the "college boys" and refused to make distinctions between them based on their relative merits. The college boys returned this treatment, holding all but Doc in a kind of contempt. In Studs Terkel's sensitive book *Working* (1972), a factory utility man categorically had "no respect" for the foremen and managers of the automobile company for which he worked. LeMasters' "blue-collar aristocrats" expressed a thinly veiled contempt for welfare "chiselers" (LeMasters, 1975).

Yet class antagonism does not completely preclude interclass judgments of esteem. The willingness to accord an individual his due is a tendency even the most hard-boiled class defender will sometimes accede to. Tamara Hareven's mill workers deeply respected the dedication and industriousness of Hermann Straw, the plant manager, but his son Parker was unable to gain the respect of the factory hands. And the parking lot attendant in Studs Terkel's *Working* admitted to fine-grained distinctions about the courteousness and respectfulness of the people whose cars he parked. In everyday settings people continuously make judgments of esteem of others at their own social class level as well as those who are socially distant. Thus a doctor will occasionally notice the dedication of a nurse's aide or a janitor; a janitor will acknowledge that not all doctors are egocentric and arrogant. The "regulars" as

Jelly's bar as Anderson's study distinguished among the more or less reliable and loyal "hoodlums" with whom they shared their space, even as they tried to keep their distance from them. Astute social observers have documented the attribution of esteem we are describing without making the theoretical distinctions we have delineated.

In the face of the moral or psychic injuries that are sometimes the consequence of group or class antagonisms, the esteem given by the members of one group or class to the members of another is a socially healing, cohesive force. To esteem someone in this context is to overcome a distance, to see oneself joined with that person in a common moral bond.

We further propose, again following Tocqueville, that an important presumption of modern democracies is that all persons may be measured by the same standards of esteem. No one, as Americans often remind themselves, is above the law. There is thus a spirit of social integrity among individuals in which each is held morally accountable to common standards. Whether or not this principle governs behavior on a daily basis, it is an important element in the language of modern politics and is a standard which can be appealed to in a wide variety of circumstances.

To summarize, esteem distinctions are a lively focus of everyday moral evaluations. They are a particularly potent source of evaluative judgments among associates in work, community and social settings. Esteem is a most crucial element of social evaluation for those sharing social rankings, but also applies to others more distant in the social hierarchy. Esteem is rooted in personal behavior, and represents a moral evaluation of each known member of one's community, family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, based on patterns of behavior over time.

## 5. Implications for Status Inconsistency Theory

A substantial body of research has produced weak and ambiguous support for the status inconsistency hypothesis (the papers in this volume, Stryker and Macke, 1978). While this negative conclusion may be due to inadequate measurement and flawed statistical tests, we offer an alternative explanation. The attribution of esteem may confound the predictions made by inconsistency theorists. Three lines of reasoning suggest that such attributions may explain the weakness of status inconsistency effects.

First, people may seek esteem to compensate for the distress at receiving inadequate rewards in other aspects of their lives. By focussing simply on stratification measures such as income and occupation, inconsistency theories have over-simplified the motivations of individuals in contemporary societies. By failing to recognize the substantial range of esteem accorded to those in similar positions in the social hierarchy, inconsistency theory ignores a genuine source of life satisfaction for many people. The pursuit of esteem may be a safety value for those who are unable to translate education into occupational rewards or occupational prestige into income.

This argument has two important additional implications for inconsistency theory. The first is that there may be variety of compensations people pursue to alleviate the psychological distress of inconsistency. Esteem is the example we have stressed, and appropriately so, for esteem can be pursued in a variety of contexts. Similar reasoning could be applied to other social rewards which are not highly correlated with income or occupation.

Second, extending this reasoning to its logical conclusion, we suggest that the more dimensions of social rewards one considers, the less intuitive power the inconsistency model has. If there are only three salient dimensions to social inequality--income, education and occupation--then inconsistencies in these statuses should have a great deal of effect. But if there are many more kinds of rewards that people strive for, and if some of those rewards are far from perfectly correlated with income and occupation, then the singular importance of each social reward may be diminished. The individual can choose to focus on a particular set of rewards while ignoring others. Consequently, one cannot predict that a single inconsistency will result in a specified outcome. We suggest that the weakness of inconsistency theory is due in part to its simplistic conceptualization of social rewards. The more seriously one takes the notion of the multi-dimensionality of social rewards, the less compelling the logic of status inconsistency becomes. We offer esteem as one of the neglected dimensions of social inequality which may serve to mitigate the stress posited by inconsistency theories.

## 6. A Research Program

One of the obstacles, we suspect, which may impede work in the area of esteem is the difficulty in studying esteem empirically. National surveys ask individuals to indicate their occupations and the number of

years they went to school; asking respondents to indicate whether they are held in high or low esteem hardly seems a viable option. Empirically minded readers may conclude that, however interesting and important the issues we have raised may be, they are nonetheless incapable of being effectively formulated into an appropriate research agenda. We believe that certain aspects of these issues are amenable to empirical research, and that the creative combination of several different research approaches can begin to produce a genuinely multi-dimensional view of social inequality.

One approach to the study of esteem borrows heavily from the strategies pursued in research on occupational prestige. The original research on prestige asked respondents to indicate their ratings of the social standing of different occupations on a scale of 1 to 5 or 1 to 9 (Hodge, Siegel and Rossi, 1963). After a lengthy involvement in this line of inquiry, Peter Rossi and his colleagues made a substantial advance in research techniques introducing the vignette approach to measuring prestige judgments (Rossi *et al.*, 1974). Respondents were given brief descriptions of the social situation of families, including the occupation and education of wife and husband. Respondents rated the social standing of the families on the basis of the various attributes included in the vignettes. One could thus determine the importance of the factors listed by statistically estimating their relative influence on the prestige judgments respondents offered.

We suggest that the extension of the vignette approach to issues of personal esteem could provide an important first step in bringing empirical data to bear on this topic. One could draw up a series of vignettes which include various attributes of individuals which may be relevant to ratings of their esteem. We have hypothesized that the middle-class virtues of reliability, sobriety, honesty, modesty, industry and the like are essential elements of personal esteem for individuals in all social classes. We empirically test this hypothesis by introducing these and other attributes in a rotating manner into vignettes describing individuals in a range of social-class positions. The importance of different factors could be examined just as researchers have examined the influence of a variety of factors on the attribution of social prestige.

A second avenue of research might draw on the sociometric research tradition which has examined the networks between individuals in small groups (Doreian, 1982; Erickson and Nosanchuk, 1983). The sociometric avenue has a natural connection to esteem, since esteem is essentially an evaluation of individuals, not positions. This research has typically

emphasized the ties between individuals: relations are summarized as liking or disliking. This research approach could be applied to esteem by altering the content of questions asked of others. Rather than like vs. dislike, the esteem of each member of the group could be rated by each other member. Further, each of the attributes which may contribute to esteem could also be rated by each member. The degree of interpersonal consistency in esteem evaluations could consequently be measured, along with the factors which contribute to individual's judgments of esteem in actual interpersonal contexts.

A third avenue of research is to delve into individuals' motivations regarding prestige and esteem. This approach would involve personal interviews more along the lines of Sennett and Cobb, Rubin (1976), and Anderson. If we are right that prestige and esteem are independent dimensions of inequality, and that individuals pursue higher rankings in both types of social hierarchies, then it should be the case that individuals make tradeoffs in their efforts to achieve these different goals. The single-minded pursuit of personal advancement in one community may come at the cost of lowered personal esteem in another. Conscious choices between the two may be common features of individual's decisions about the way they lead their lives. By framing questions in such a way as to distinguish esteem as an independent aspect of social rewards, traditional interviewing techniques can shed a great deal of light on relative importance placed on esteem by people throughout the social hierarchy.

This paper has attempted to clarify the significance of an aspect of social life which is vital to its coordination. The esteem that individuals give and get is a central feature of their experience of social life, and an important element in their psychological response to inequality. In outlining procedures by which this phenomenon can be empirically investigated, we propose to bring this "subjective" element into the center of stratification research.

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## Section V

# Empirical Studies and Applications

**Change and Strain in Social Hierarchies :  
Theory and Method in the Study of Status Inconsistency**

*Edited by*

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**Dedicated to the Memory of  
Robert William Hodge (1937-1989)  
Friend and Scholar**

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## Preface

The present volume is the product of papers presented at the Working Conference "New Differentiations of Status Structures? On the Viability of the Concept of Status Inconsistency in Contemporary Society", sponsored by the Research Committee on Social Stratification of the International Sociological Association and held at the University of Duisburg, F.R.G. May 7-9, 1985.

The current versions of these papers have been revised in the light of discussions at the conference and of suggestions made by the editors. We are grateful to the contributors for their cooperation in making this volume possible and for their attention to our requests for revision and reorganization of their initial papers. In some cases revisions have been quite substantial, so that the papers would fit into the themes highlighted in this collection. We are also indebted to the many participants in the conference whose excellent papers are not included here because of the themes and issues we have chosen to emphasize in the present volume. However, the materials in this volume and our understanding of its subject matter have benefitted from their comments and ideas. The full proceedings of the conference have been separately published under the title *Status Inconsistency in Modern Societies* (ed. by Hermann Strasser and Robert W. Hodge. Duisburg, F.R.G.: Sozialwissenschaftliche Kooperative, 1986, 631 pp.).

Unfortunately, the idea of status inconsistency has in recent years often been identified with statistical studies on the individual level of the behavioral patterns and attitudes of people whose relative rank positions on two or more status hierarchies are at variance with one another. Their statistical inquiries, by and large, have not found much which could not also be premised on a simple knowledge of the individual's position in the several status hierarchies. The congruity or incongruity of status hierarchies per se does not appear to have a great deal of explanatory power in investigating such individual traits and behaviors as psycho-somatic symptoms, prejudice, job satisfaction, happiness, social participation, and political beliefs. The Duisburg conference on status