

**THE CONTENT DIMENSIONS OF STATUS:  
THEORY AND RESEARCH NEEDS**

by

**Archibald O. Haller  
University of Wisconsin  
Madison, Wisconsin  
United States of America**

**4th World Congress of Rural Sociology**

**Torun, Poland  
August 9-13, 1976**

Some of the most interesting and far-reaching questions concerning relationships among people and communities may be answered only after researchers have determined how to describe and compare the stratification systems of communities at different times and places. Concepts which yield measureable variables describing such systems are imperative if we are to render tractable such questions of internal and comparative dynamics of communities as: Is Country X becoming more or less unequal? Are rural and urban stratification systems converging or diverging? Within Country Y, are today's processes of individual status attainment the same regarding monetary status as they are for prestige status? Is stratification in Country Z so unimportant, or conversely, so rigid, as to make class conflict unlikely? Are there specifiable combinations of variables describing stratification systems which are inherently unstable in that they predispose members of the community to take actions which would change the states of the variables?

**Concepts.** Space will not permit our presenting a complete set of stratification concepts here (see Haller and Saraiva, 1977). A minimal set must begin by specifying the classes of units and of the dimensions describing them. One distinction is between two classes of units of analysis. The larger of these includes all members of the other in specifiable relationship to each other. We call it the community or "large unit." The narrower we call the "particulate unit" or "small unit." By community we mean a collectivity of small units which participate in a finite network of social relationships. By particulate unit we mean the interacting subunits which compose the community. In stratification research the community is often coterminous with the nation-state, at least as often, with a town or a town and its hinterland. Most often the particulate units are either households, nuclear families, or adult individuals. Other types of communities and particulate units are possible (Haller and Saraiva, 1972, 1977) but there is no need to go into them here.

Another basic distinction is between content dimensions and structural dimensions of status. These two classes of dimensions have been clearly recognized at least since the first appearance of Sorokin's *Social Mobility* (1927) came out, they have only recently been named (Haller, 1970). Content dimensions are the classes of variables by which particulate units are ordered within the community. Exactly what these are at a certain time within any particular community maybe is an empirical question, one upon which we shall shortly consider at length. But at a general level many generations of thinkers have already determined for us the classes of content variables to which we must look. Svalastoga (1965) provides the broadest, most encompassing of such lists, although even it may not perfectly cover certain concepts, such as power, which others believe important. He holds that there are four of our content dimensions of status. These are economic status, political status, social status, and informational status. While this may not be the best possible set of content dimensions, it does a good job of encompassing those specified by others. Weber (Gerth and Mills, 1940, Parsons, 1947) holds that class, party, and status groups are the three key stratification concepts. Note that by transforming these from categories of people to dimensions we have three of Svalastoga's four content dimensions: classes are social categories with differing economic statuses, parties are contending political groups varying in political power, and status groups which vary in "social honor" or prestige. Again, note Marx.

His basic explicit distinction is between social categories who do or do not control the means of production (see Ossowski, 1973, pp. 69-80). Implicitly, these two categories differ in wealth, or economic status, and power, something akin to political status. As Marx saw it, most of the time power is concentrated in the hands of the wealthy. Yet occasionally situations arise in which the poor can become sufficiently powerful to contest the rich. So, to him power and wealth are analytically distinct concepts - or so he implied. Sorokin (1927) also had a system of three dimensions, each conceived as a dimension of stratification: economic, political, and occupational. At least the first two are clearly hierarchical, and Sorokin thought the third to be also, although unlike modern students of occupational prestige (Hodge, Treiman, Rossi, 1966), he had some difficulty in ordering occupations into a consistent hierarchy. Lenski (1966) recently attempted to make a new synthesis of stratification concepts. His content dimensions are three: privilege, power, and prestige. His concept of privilege seems to be a combination of economic status and a special case of social status, legally defined special rights and duties. His concept of power is the same as that of Weber and is thus close, but not identical, to Svalastoga's. So, on the whole, Svalastoga's basic categories of variables appear to cover the range of hierarchical variables the key theorists of the past century or so have thought important. We will return to these in a moment.

While we do not need to devote much space then here, structural dimensions (Haller, 1970) are variables which describe states of the content dimensions or of their component status variables. There are at least six of these: 1) central tendency, the average absolute status level of a community (small units) participating in the stratification system of a community; 2) dispersion or as Duncan (1960) calls it, "degree of inequality" - the variability of the statuses of small units in the stratification systems of a community; 3) skewness, a statistical property describing the elongation and concentration of the distribution of the statuses of the small units; 4) stratigraphy, the statistical modes describing the points of status concentration of the small units; 5) flux, or "circulation mobility," the degree to which the statuses of small units are uncorrelated at two different points in time, and 6) crystallization - or as Duncan calls it, "rigidity of inequality" - the degree to which various status content dimensions or variables are intercorrelated. Structural dimensions are by definition operative in any community in which there is some reliable status content variance among the small units. The fact, if not the form, of stratification or status differences seems to be universal among human communities. The sixth, crystallization, has a characteristic which is worth noting. The form of crystallization of a community's status system is really the same as the factor structure of its content dimensions or variables.

Status content variables. In view of the volume of material which has been written on the content dimensions of status, one would think that there would be a great deal of hard evidence concerning them. The fact is that there is practically none. Despite the fact that considerable agreement exists, at least at an implicit level, as to the appropriate small units and as to the range of content dimensions, we do not yet have a single instance of a community whose status hierarchy (or hierarchies) have been fully mapped. Such a full description would require a determination of the factor structure of the correlations among the variables comprising each of the content dimensions, together with a measurement of the state of each structural dimension. These measurements

would have to be taken on a sample of appropriate small units (households, for nuclear families, or adult individuals) so selected as to permit generalization to a definable community. This would presume the existence of an exhaustive list of the variables which comprise each of the content dimensions.

Duncan (1960) provides the only relatively comprehensive list of variables to be included in such a study (although he says it "has been found unsatisfactory" for reasons he did not specify.) Evidently he started with Svalastoga's four categories, then divided three of them into two parts, leaving a total of seven. Then he indicated a set of more specific content variables for each of the seven. (These were divided into "stock" and "flow," a distinction probably not required for status mapping.) With various modifications and qualifications, Figure 1 presents the substance of Duncan's list. For all its difficulties, it provides the only such list whose specific variables may be considered at least to sample each of the main four status content dimensions. While it too is almost surely incomplete, it is much more detailed than anything else in the literature. So it may serve as a basis by which to determine the extent to which previous factor analytic studies have drawn upon status content variables which span the range of status content dimensions proposed by stratification theorists. It will be noted in Figure 1 that these are called "hypothetical content dimensions." In point of fact, there is no way to tell which if any of these are separable content dimensions in even one community until factor analyses of appropriate status content variables have been conducted. Moreover there is no way to tell which dimensions are everywhere the most important - if indeed any are - unless and until repeated instances of such factor analyses show that the same batteries of items tend to have high loadings on the same empirically separable factors.

Factor analyses of status content variables. We have found six publications presenting factor analyses of many items purporting to measure the status of small units within a larger community. We classified the items of each of these according to Duncan's list as presented in Figure 1. All but one (Gough, 1971) are based upon samples of small units of more or less well defined communities. All communities but one (Haller and Saralva, 1972, 1977) were in the United States.

The earliest data were taken in Berkeley, California (Atherton, 1962). The small units were 242 families into which a child was born during 1928 and part of 1929. Twenty status measures were taken on each family. The next was taken in Poughkeepsie, Massachusetts in 1941 (Knüpfer, 1946). This publication is not readily available and the details are sketchy: we know about it because it was partially described by Atherton (1962). Apparently 15 status indicators were measured. The next was done in 1953 by Kahl and Davis (1955). Data were taken on 219 men in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Eighteen status indicators were measured. In the most ambitious of such projects, data were taken on random household samples 322, 376, 686, 375, 306, and 298 men in each of six cities in Arizona and Indiana in 1966 and 1967 (Artiz, et al., 1971). Seventeen status variables were measured. The next study, by Harrison G. Gough (1971), is quite different from the previous ones. In it data were taken from high school students in haphazard samples of 19 schools in various states. For the most part the 22 items he included are indicators of the status of the youth's family. The data collection period is not reported. It was probably in the 1960s certainly after 1950. For our purposes there are really two

data sets: 1,379 youth (sample A) whose status items were intercorrelated and subjected to cluster analysis, and 762 (sample B) for whom the status clusters were intercorrelated. The last of these studies was done by Haller and Saraiva (1972, 1977) in 1967, using data on heads of a randomly selected sample of 468 households in an isolated and fragmented rural community in Brazil. Eight status variables were measured, selected so that at least one was available to tap each of Svalastoga's four status content dimensions. Actually four indexes were employed for economic status and two were used for social status; the two other dimensions, political status and informational status, were each represented by one. Only seven, however, were factor analyzed.

Results. With one exception, each of the specific status content variables in Duncan's list is amenable to direct measurements taken on the small unit itself - a person, a household, or a nuclear family - or in the case of the last two instances, on an adult member of the household or family whose status determines that of the whole units. The exception is occupational prestige (implied but not stated). In this case, the individual is attributed the prestige of his occupation. But in no other case does his list imply indirect measurements such as the mean rental value of houses in the census tract where the small unit lives, or the "community's view" of the desirability of the neighborhood where the small unit resides, etc. Furthermore, practically all of his measures are obviously intended to be objective. In principle, most are amenable to valid and reliable scoring based on readily communicated rules of observation and comparison by various observers. Most admit of no subjective definitions either on the part of the informant of the small unit or on the part of the observer who records each status datum. That does not mean they are all necessarily easy to measure. Of the 46 specific status content variables in Figure 1, almost half (19) appear to be extremely difficult to measure. (These are identified). Possibly the majority of the remainder have never yet been subjected to precise measurement.

There is no way that the true content dimensions - actual factor structures of variables measuring aspects of the hypothetical content dimensions - can be determined for a given community at a point in time unless valid and reliable measures of each of the status variables tapping each hypothetical status content dimensions are taken at that time. Without repeated studies of this sort, it is impossible to tell what the basic status content dimensions are. Without these we can only join the ranks of the speculative sociologists and guess. With them, we may be able to learn what the similarities and differences in status content dimensions are across communities and through time.

In Figure 2 we use Duncan's seven-fold system as the base against which to determine the hypothetical status content dimensions whose specific status content variables have been measured in each of the six studies. Because we do not see (for our purposes) any fundamental difference between his "stock" and "flow" classes we have combined them in the figure. Several preliminary observations should be made. First, we have indicated that a hypothetical status dimension was employed ("yes," in the figure) in a data-set if at least one status content variable from the corresponding sector of Duncan's list was employed. The figure says nothing about whether all such variables from Duncan's list were employed. In fact, of the 46 status content variables mentioned by him, only eleven were used in all the six studies put together.

Next, about one-third of the specific 'status' indexes used in the six studies are not on Duncan's list at all. These include a variety of so-called 'general status' indexes, as well as self-ratings and the interviewer's subjective ratings of the house or neighborhood quality. Many are indirect measures taken on the neighborhood. One, number of children, was not a status variable at all. The only indirect measures among them which are on Duncan's list are those indicating occupational prestige. Finally, three specific status content variables appear in almost all five of the data-sets. These are family income, the occupational prestige of the head of the household, and the educational attainment of the latter.

Abbreviated as it is, Figure 2 shows the outcome. None of these studies included specific status variables from all seven of Duncan's areas. Only one of them, Haller and Saraiva (1972, 1977) even included variables from each of Svalastoga's more abstract list of four hypothetical content dimensions. It included variables from five of Duncan's seven. Knupfer (1946) seems to have sampled four of Duncan's dimensions. Each of the others taps but three of his seven. The specific variables from the Duncan list (see Figure 1) for which each data-set had at least one measure taken directly on the small unit itself are these: Atherton (1963)-income, possessions, education; Knupfer (1946)-income, possessions, participation, education; Kahl and Davis (1955)-income, prestige (occupational), educational attainment; Artz, Curtis, Fairbank, and Jackson (1971)-income, prestige (occupational), education; Gough (1971)-possessions, leisure, participation, education, and training; Haller and Saraiva (1972, 1977)-property (land), income, level of living, consumption (food), influence (in the political system), prestige (occupational and intra-community), and educational attainment. We see, then, that individually these data-sets included measures of only a few of the nearly 50 possibilities listed by Duncan. Atherton, Kahl and Davis, and Artz et al. included but three each, despite the fact that in each many variables were factor analyzed (Atherton, 10; Kahl and Davis, 18; and Artz et al., 17.) Two data-sets, Knupfer's and Gough's, included measures appropriate to four of Duncan's detailed list. These, too, were from much larger sets of hypothetical status variables (Knupfer, 15; and Gough, 22). In one, Haller and Saraiva, seven were included, and these constituted the whole sample of status variables measured by them (except for community prestige, which was omitted by them for technical reasons).

We assume that the Duncan list of specific status content variables provides a reasonable coverage of the more fundamental hypothetical status content dimensions, whether they are his own seven, or Salalastoga's more inclusive four, or the various sets of three proposed by Lenski, Weber, and Sorokin, or the one (or two) proposed by Marx. Beyond doubt, it is an appropriate base for determining whether any of those more inclusive hypothetical content dimensions is empirically verifiable. But it is extremely unlikely that factor analyses of the set of indicators in the available data-sets, which include so few of Duncan's long list, would be capable of describing the actual status content dimensions of any of the communities. In each case, the variables which were intercorrelated and factor analyzed were concentrated on but a few of the many status content variables in the Duncan list. Given the differences among the six data-sets in status variable coverage, in time, and in place, it would be surprising if any of them were in agreement with each other, and quite unlikely that they would agree with the content dimensions proposed by the theorists. As a matter of fact the factor analyses do show

some similarities here and there. Atherton (1962) shows that her dataset and those of Knupper (1946) and Kahl and Davis (1953), each contains two centroid factors correlated at about  $\pm .72$ . In all three, the first of these is loaded with occupational status and education, and the second with the area of residence. While these are in agreement with each other, they obviously have little to do with the hypothetical dimensions proposed by the theorists. The others are even less comparable. Artz, et al. (1971) find little factor similarity among their six cities, and none seem very close to any of the foregoing. Gough (1971) finds four factors, which he names "social status," "ownership," "civic involvement," and "aesthetic involvement." The content of these seems quite different from that of any of the others. Clearly neither the Artz et al. nor the Gough analyses yields factors which resemble those predicted by any of the theorists. The Brazilian study dataset, of Haller and Saraiva, when factor analyzed, yields a one-factor solution in which all the seven status content variables factor analyzed by them participate. Perhaps because it is so heavily loaded with economic indicators - four of the seven - this factor looks like something that might have been predicted from Marxian class theory. That is, status is unitary and heavily loaded with economic standing. Except in revolutionary situations, when the poor obtain power, Marx would have predicted this, I believe.

The clear conclusion of this comparison of theories of status content dimensions with the empirical evidence on the factor analyses of status content variables is that we simply do not know what the actual status content dimensions are for any of the communities studied. The various studies lead to conclusions which are often different from each other and almost always different from those postulated by any theorist. The dataset with most complete coverage of status content variables (Haller and Saraiva) is also the one that comes closest to agreeing with a theoretical position. But even this apparent similarity is untrustworthy because of the small, biased sample of status content variables it includes.

Conclusion. So we do not yet know, even for one community at one point in time, what the actual status content dimensions are. Comparative research on the causes and consequences of status stratification, on the relation between status and class consciousness, and on status attainment processes is thus severely hampered. We shall not make much more progress in understanding stratification until, through factor analyses of appropriate status content variables, we are able to map the status content dimensions of various local and national communities.

The necessary research will be difficult. There are differences among nations regarding structures of political influence, criteria of social honor, legal definitions of status, and possibly other status variables. This poses severe problems of comparability regarding not only the operational indicators but even the status content variables themselves. Then, too, the size and costs of research projects will be large indeed, if we are to measure all the variables on Duncan's (1968) list on a representative sample of even one large community. These problems will be compounded by the actual state of the structural dimensions of status (Haller, 1970) in a certain community at a certain time. In particular, there is every reason to believe that the crystallization of status systems varies over time. Likewise the level of status dispersion (or "degree of inequality" as Duncan [1960] calls it) surely varies over time and among status variables within a given community. Variations in status dispersion will affect the correlations among status indicators.

Nonetheless this work must be undertaken soon. We can no longer afford to pretend that we know what are the fundamental status content dimensions and more specific status content indicators. As more and more research on stratification is published it becomes ever clearer that many of our disagreements over differences in research findings, or even ideology, are due to differences in our untested - but testable - assumptions about the basic content dimensions of status stratification. We now have the concepts and methods by which to determine, within and among national and lower-level communities, which hypothetical status content dimensions are basic and which are not. This research should be started in various countries as soon as possible. Rural sociologists should conduct much of the work so as to make certain that status variables appropriate to rural life are included, and so as to determine the similarities and differences in status content dimensions among rural communities within nations, between rural and urban communities within nations, and between rural communities of different nations.

## REFERENCES

Artz, Rita D., Richard F. Curtis, Dianne Timbers Fairbank, Elton F. Jackson

- 1971 "Community rank stratification: a factor analysis." *American Sociological Review* 36 (December):985-1002.

Atherton, Karyl R.

- 1962 "A comparison of solutions obtained in factor analyses of socio-economic variables." *Psychological Reports* 11:259-273.

Davis, Kingsley and Wilbert E. Moore

- 1945 "Some principles of social stratification." *American Sociological Review* 10 (April):242-249.

Gough, Harrison G.

- 1971 "A cluster analysis of home index status items." *Psychological Reports* 28:923-929.

Haller, Archibald O.

- 1971 "Changes in the structure of status systems." *Rural Sociology* 35 (December):469-487.

Haller, Archibald O. and Helcio Ulhoa Saraiva

- 1972 "Status measurement and the variable discrimination hypothesis in an isolated Brazilian region." *Rural Sociology* 37 (September):325-351

Haller, Archibald O. and Helcio Ulhoa Saraiva

- (1977) *The Variable Discrimination Hypothesis in Stratification*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schenkman Publishing Company.

Hodge, Robert V., Donald J. Treiman, and Peter H. Rossi

- 1966 "A comparative study of occupational prestige." Pp. 309-321 in Reinhard Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipset, *Class, Status, and Power*. New York: The Free Press.

Kahl, Joseph A. and James A. Davis

- 1955 "A comparison of indexes of socio-economic status." *American Sociological Review* 20 (June):317-325.

Knupfer, G.

- 1946 Indexes of Socio-economic Status: A Study of Some Problems of Measurement. New York: Author.

Lenski, Gerhardt

- 1966 Power and Privilege. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Ossowski, Stanislaw

- 1963 Class Structure in the Social Consciousness. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe.

Sorokin, Pitrim

- 1927 Social Mobility. New York: Harper and Brothers.

Svalastoga, Kaare

- 1965 Social Differentiation. New York: David McKay.

Weber, Max

- 1946 "Class, status, and party." Pp. 180-195 in Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, New York: Oxford University Press.

Weber, Max

- 1947 "Social stratification and class structure." Pp. 424-429 in Talcott Parsons, ed., Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization. New York: The Free Press.

Figure 1. Duncan's List of Hypothetical Status  
Content Dimensions and Variables<sup>a)</sup>

Hypothetical Content Dimensions ("Conventional Rubric")	Status Content Variables ("Stock or State Concept") ("Flow or Incidence Conce	
Economic status <sup>b)</sup>		
Production	Wealth Assets Property	Income
Consumption	Level of Living	Expenditures
Leisure	Possessions	Consumption <sup>c)</sup>
Political status <sup>b)</sup>		
Political status	Power <sup>c)</sup> Authority	Influence Decision-making <sup>c)</sup>
Civic Status	Legal status Freedom	Exercise rights, <sup>c)</sup> choice, participation Experience punishment, <sup>c)</sup> deprivation, <sup>c)</sup> sanctions
Social status <sup>b)</sup>		
Cultural status	Style of life <sup>c)</sup> Status symbols Manners Language	Psychic income <sup>c)</sup> Satisfaction Utility <sup>c)</sup> Diversion <sup>c)</sup>
Social status	Prestige Honor Reputation, fame Esteem	Deference Recognition, <sup>c)</sup> awards Concern, <sup>c)</sup> care, <sup>c)</sup> love <sup>c)</sup> Moral evaluation <sup>c)</sup>
Informational status <sup>b)</sup>	Education Knowledge <sup>c)</sup> Skill	Schooling <sup>c)</sup> Training
Composite status (summation of 1-7)	Welfare	Life chances

<sup>a)</sup> The order has been rearranged.

<sup>b)</sup> Svalastoga's (1965) content dimensions.

<sup>c)</sup> These items would appear to be especially difficult to conceptualize or to form as measureable and uniquely specifiable status variables.

Figure 2. Hypothetical Content Dimensions of Status Variables Employed in Six Data-Sets

Hypothetical Status Content Dimensions (From Figure 1)	Data-Set					
	A 1930	N 1941	K 1953	Z 1967	G 1960s?	H 1967
Economic Status <sup>a]</sup>						
Production <sup>b]</sup>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	---	Yes
Consumption <sup>b]</sup>	Yes	Yes	---	---	Yes	Yes
Political Status <sup>a]</sup>						
Political Status <sup>b]</sup>	---	---	---	---	---	Yes
Civic Status <sup>b]</sup>	---	Yes	---	---	Yes	---
Social Status <sup>a]</sup>						
Cultural Status <sup>b]</sup>	---	---	---	---	---	---
Social Status <sup>b]</sup>	---	---	Yes	Yes	---	Yes
International Status <sup>a]</sup>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

A: Atherton (1962)

N: Knupfer (1946)

K: Kahl and Davis (1955)

Z: Artz, Curtis, Fairbank, and Jackson (1971)

G: Gough (1971)

H: Haller and Saraiva (1972, 1977)