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15 March 1980

A Status Attainment Research Program: 1956-1980

This review is written in the hope that it will provide a meaningful overview of a research program whose real and deep coherence might not be obvious to those who are not intimately associated with it. The program has no special agency whose name might identify it. Yet it has been in existence for a long time. Also, like much scientific research, its many parts are logically linked to other areas of research, and it often contributes to them. Its long duration and its complex external linkages may make it difficult to see its central focus.

The report attempts to present the 1) objectives of the program; 2) the theoretical and measurement research conducted to date, present research activities, and potential applications and spin-off effects; 3) possible future work; and 4) selected publications, together with the special topics to which they contribute.

OBJECTIVES

The over all aim of this research program on status attainment is to develop a sociological theory explaining how people come to occupy their positions in stratification systems. Its objective, that is, is to explain why some people become well educated while others remain poorly educated, why some obtain prestigious or influential jobs while others do not, why some are more successful economically while others are less so, why some become politically influential while others do not.

determined that two types of "significant-others" influence status aspirations--definers by communicating status expectations to the individual, models by exhibiting their statuses or their status aspirations to him. This work has been done on Wisconsin and Michigan samples of youth.

In the second of these, research conducted on Brazil's rapidly changing stratification system, together with work done by other research groups, has identified six key variables describing variations in the structure of stratification systems. Two of these variables, status dispersion and status crystallization, are now thought to have special importance in status attainment theory.

Regarding the third theoretic emphasis, by the mid-1950s, occupational and educational attainment had already been identified as key status variables. The program, working with data from various sources--in Wisconsin, Michigan, the United States, and Brazil--participated in incorporating individual income, occupational influence, and political influence into the set of status dependent variables.

As of 1980, the main elements have been worked out for a descriptive theory of the emergence of status orientations and their actuation--together with other factors, such as status origins, ability and in-school performance, and experience--in the status attainments of individuals. The central concepts of the theory concern: 1) four status variables (education, occupational prestige, income, and political influence); [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] 2) their psychological isomorphs (the status aspirations of individuals, the status expectations of definers, and status exemplifications of models--one of each of these for each of the four status variables) and the significant-other sets who influence each of the above. While the theory purports to be comprehensive, to date it has been tested most

The program has benefitted in several ways from research in Brazil. One set of such benefits pertains to earnings and occupational influence. A project in Sao Paulo showed how to think about and measure occupational influence levels, and contributed a bit to understanding regarding occupation experience and earnings. This was published in the mid-1970s. In another line of Brazilian work (noted above), a technique for measuring political influence was worked out. At present, as part of a larger project, Brazilian data are being used to experiment with various techniques for measuring the structural variables describing variations in stratification systems.

Current Research. Currently, the program is devoting considerable effort to an attempt to map variations in the Brazilian stratification system in relation to regional levels of socioeconomic development, using data on a quarter of a million individuals from a national probability sample. The quantitative analysis should be finished by September 1981 and the writing by February 1982. In a related effort, the program's researchers here and at the University of Sao Paulo are conducting a statistical description of the Brazilian poor.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

In general, patterns of stratification are enormously important in the everyday lives of individuals and in the crises of societies. People everywhere need to know how to visualize their own stratification systems and those of other nations and need to understand how to think systematically about them. The same is true of the status positions we come to occupy within such systems. Decision makers and ordinary citizens need such information to make wise choices for the nation and for themselves. Parents, teachers, counselors, and youth need objective information about status attainment processes in order to help young people make wise choices for their futures.

conduct sociological research for, their ministries. Indeed we estimate that a total of about one scientist-year has been devoted to this work in Brazil since 1965, not to mention the time spent by program personnel on Brazilian matters at Madison. Over the years, the major institutional collaborators have been the University of Sao Paulo and the Federal University of Pernambuco--the first Brazil's best University, and the second the Northeastern region's best. Others include the Census Service (IBGE), the Federal Universities of Paraiba, Ceará, and Brasília, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Labor. More recently, the program has begun collaboration with the Cacao Institute and the University Foundation of Santa Cruz in Bahia. It seems safe to say that the program and the Brazilian research sociologists with whom it collaborates, many of them trained at Wisconsin, are making a major contribution to the modernization of Brazil's sociological research system.

Spin-off in the area of attitudes and interpersonal influence. The research on significant-others has had some impact on other research areas where the social psychological structure of behavior is comparable in crucial ways to that of status attainment. One of the most important of these is the development by Woelfel and others of a much improved theory of mass persuasion, together with appropriate methods for applying it to influence public opinion.

#### POSSIBLE FUTURE WORK OF THE PROGRAM

Funding for the program has always been uncertain, depending upon (at least until recently) Hatch grants for some of its work in Wisconsin, upon small grants from the Graduate School for support in lean years or for funds to fill out an otherwise too-thin extra-mural budget, and upon extra-mural federal and foundation funds for its main work. It has also benefitted from

ment of the social psychological aspects of the current theory of status attainment, and it would seem advisable to continue this fruitful collaboration.

Political influence. The interaction of individual and institutional factors in the exercise of power needs considerably more research. If the situation permits, it would appear useful to conduct such studies by means of sociological analyses of political and economically influential voluntary organizations. For several reasons it would be useful to do the work on farmers' organizations.

Farmers' voluntary organizations appear to offer a particularly promising context for research on this problem: because they function at all levels of government, from the grass-roots to the White House; because at least some maintain what appears to be a completely democratic decision-making system, while dealing with extremely complex policy matters; because they are at the center of a set of collateral marketing and purchasing organizations; because they and their collateral organizations reach out to a complicated environment of economic and political organizations at all levels; and because they deal with matters of considerable local, state, national, and international concern.

The light that such studies would throw upon political status attainment processes is not the only reason for doing this. They would be of great practical utility in their own right.

Funds for this line of research would presumably come from both intra- and extra-mural sources.

Socioeconomic studies of Brazil. The excellent and deep working relations the program has with Brazilian sociologists and their institutions will probably continue for the foreseeable future. These remain strong in the

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

The program's most significant contributions to the research literature, probably no more than 25 percent of the program's total writings, are listed below. Each single piece is put into a category with the others which are devoted to the same set of research problems.

### 1. Explicating and measuring occupational status aspirations.

Archibald O. Haller and Irwin W. Miller

1963 The Occupational Aspiration Scale. Michigan AES Bulletin [also 288. East Lansing. Reprinted by Schenkman Publishing 1971] Company (1971).

Archibald O. Haller, Luther B. Otto, Robert F. Meier, and George W. Ohlendorf

1974 "Level of occupational aspiration: an empirical analysis." American Sociological Review 39 (February): 113-121.

These publications are the primary sources regarding the sociological view of the special concept of levels of occupational aspiration.

### 2. Determining how friends influence each others' aspirations.

Archibald O. Haller and Charles E. Butterworth

1960 "Peer influences on levels of occupational and educational aspiration." Social Forces 38 (March):289-295.

Otis Dudley Duncan, Archibald O. Haller, and Alejandro Portes

1968 "Peer influences on aspirations: a reinterpretation." American Journal of Sociology 74 (September):119-137. (Reprinted.)

The first of these articles delineates and provides the earliest serious test of the hypothesis that peer friends influence each others' aspirations. The second provides several alternative specifications of the hypothesis and employs the data-set of the first to compare them. In so doing, it introduces complex multivariate structural equation analyses to sociology. (The structural equations were worked out by Duncan).

5. Devising and explicating concepts and methods for the analysis of variations among stratification systems.

Archibald O. Haller

1970 "Changes in the structure of status systems." Rural Sociology 35 (December):469-487.

This article builds upon writings of others to provide a comprehensive statement of concepts for describing structural variations in stratification systems.

6. Specifying economic and power hierarchies in status attainment.

• Jose Pastore, Archibald O. Haller, and Hernando Gomez-Buendia  
1975 "Determinants of wage differentials in Sao Paulo's specialized industrial labor force." Industrial Relations 14 (October):345-357.

Jose Pastore, Archibald O. Haller, and Hernando Gomez-Buendia  
1977 "Training, position, and experience in the wage rates of specialized personnel in Sao Paulo's manufacturing firms." Pp. 158-169 in Subbiah Kannappan, ed., Studies of Urban Labour Market Behaviour in Developing Areas. Geneva: International Labour Organization.

Archibald O. Haller and Kenneth I. Spenner

1977 "Occupational income differentiation in status attainment." Rural Sociology 42 (Winter):517-535.

Education and occupational status are the main content variables of contemporary stratification research. Wealth and power are those of the classical speculative literature. These articles are attempts to employ modern methods to measure the classical variables.

7. General advances in the social psychological theory of status attainment.

William H. Sewell, Archibald O. Haller, and Alejandro Portes  
1969 "The educational and early occupational attainment process." American Sociological Review 34 (February): 82-92. (Reprinted.)

William H. Sewell, Archibald O. Haller, and George W. Ohlendorf  
1970 "The educational and occupational attainment process: replication and revision." American Sociological Review 35 (December):1014-1027.

Archibald O. Haller and Alejandro Portes

1973 "Status attainment processes." Sociology of Education 46 (Winter):51-91.

Note on Priorities. There are two ways of looking at priorities, what is most important and what is most feasible.

It could be argued that all four of the above areas are important. Yet they are readily ordered in terms of the program's main long term objectives--to contribute to understanding status attainment processes. First would come the work on the social psychology of status attainment, with the longitudinal studies coming first of all and the studies of the development of status orientations following it. This would incorporate work on political influence and income. Second would come the work on power: the study of the structure of farmers' voluntary organizations. Both of the above would make direct contributions to status attainment theory. Third would come the work in Brazil. It can be used to further status attainment theory, as it has in the past, but it could easily go in other directions. Last would come the work on social attitudes and mass persuasion.

The criterion of feasibility is much harder to assess, but in any case it would appear to order the possibilities differently. The problem is that while each appears to be feasible, at least superficially, one never knows until the search for funds begins. First, the work in Brazil would probably be the easiest to continue, though this is not at all certain. Its feasibility is contingent upon the continued interest of Brazilians and on the degree of interest the University maintains in Brazil's socioeconomic system. Second, the work on social attitudes and mass persuasion would not be difficult or expensive to develop. If the College were to become interested, research in this area might be set in motion without too much trouble. Third and fourth, it is not possible at this point to compare the feasibility of the new research on power with new research on the social psychology of status attainment. Each would be costly and each would take a long time to bring to fruition, especially the longitudinal work on status attainment. Actually, though each would require