



TO WILLIAM HAMILTON SEWELL

Scholar, teacher, and friend

Social Structure and Behavior

Essays in Honor of William Hamilton Sewell

EDITED BY

ROBERT M. HAUSER

*Department of Sociology
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Madison, Wisconsin*

DAVID MECHANIC

*Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, New Jersey*

ARCHIBALD O. HALLER

*Department of Rural Sociology
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Madison, Wisconsin*

TAISSA S. HAUSER

*Department of Sociology
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Madison, Wisconsin*



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Reflections on the Social Psychology of Status Attainment¹

ARCHIBALD O. HALLER

This chapter concerns the development of a social psychological theory of status attainment. It is not a review of literature, but touches only on material that, in the writer's opinion, has contributed directly to an understanding of the psychological mechanisms of status attainment.

Research labeled *status attainment* by one group or another has very nearly come to dominate stratification work in the United States. Much of it is considered to be social psychological, but there are many status attainment publications employing other conceptions. Among those that are clearly social psychological, much of the current work is not especially systematic—reporting that one previously unchecked variable or another has a detectable influence on status attainment. Much of the social psychological work that is more or less systematic is not directed toward building a theory of status attainment, but does so only incidently. A great deal of it is directed by policy considerations—exposing inequality, improving education, determining how much of the variation in education is due to genetic factors and how much to social heredity, determining the causes and some of the con-

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sequences of higher education, and so forth. Much of this work is enlightening; some of it has advanced our understanding of the social psychology of status attainment.

In this chapter, I have tried to focus only on those parts of the social psychological research on status attainment that can be readily seen to have made new and enduring contributions to the basic theory of status attainment, whether deliberately or not, and tried to explicate some of the social psychological thinking implicit in much of it. At least one writing that was clearly not intended to be social psychological has made an enormous contribution to this theory—the 1967 book by Blau and Duncan. It provided a framework and a research technology that helped to organize previous research and served as a stimulus to new work.

Sewell has been involved in most of the theoretical innovations since their beginning in the 1950s or earlier. Since the early 1970s, he and his closest collaborators, especially Robert M. Hauser, appear to have intensified work on structural models and the estimation of structural models. Their cooperation has resulted in considerable tightening of the methods of social psychological status attainment research, an area to which others, especially Duncan *et al.* (1972), have also made important contributions. It would appear that since about 1972, Sewell and Hauser have directed their attention to the study of educational attainment—determining how parental status is transmitted to education and determining to what extent education affects occupational status and income. This work appears to have deemphasized the work on the theory of status attainment while strengthening the analysis of causal lines, thus firming up the empirical base of existing theory and the inferences for educational policy that might be drawn from that base.

The focus of the present chapter, however, is rigorously restricted to research directed toward developing a general social-psychological theory of status attainment. Applications, policy directions, and estimation procedures are ignored. Also ignored are all nonpsychological aspects of status attainment except those status variables that are essential in order to understand the social psychological aspects themselves. This theory, I believe, is an indispensable part of the larger theory of social stratification. As such, it contributes to understanding some of the most compelling problems of our time—the hierarchical relations in society and how people are sorted into one level or another of these hierarchies. Of course, status attainment processes are not merely of contemporary interest. Throughout history, scholars have attempted to understand and explain people's upward and downward moves. Attempts at building an empirically valid social psychological theory of status attainment are the center of the contemporary wave of explanatory research on this ancient problem.

The social psychological theory of status attainment is a rather specialized

area of knowledge. All of its current expressions are at least partly fragmentary. Nonetheless, it is both coherent and comprehensive by current standards of social science theory. To a large extent, this is a consequence of its having emerged from two consistent theoretical traditions, one focused on social stratification and the other on social psychology.

The first of these theoretical traditions grew out of work on stratification begun early in this century, most notably by Pitirim Sorokin (1927). Its most precise current restatements are to be found in Svalastoga (1965), Duncan (1968), and Haller (1970). Briefly, this tradition holds that there are at least four classes of fundamental status variables, or *status content dimensions*. These classes describe differences in access to resources that individuals and groups sometimes employ in competitive struggles or distribute as rewards for performance in cooperative ventures. In Svalastoga's terms, these may be summed up as *political status* (influence, authority, coercion, power), *economic status* (income, earnings, real estate, stocks and bonds, accumulated goods, wealth, monetary status), *social status* (social honor, prestige, deference, fame), and *informational status* (educational attainment, skill, learning). Certain key status content variables have emerged over the years as special focuses of research attention. In the status attainment area, these are educational attainment, occupational prestige, and income. Respectively, these tap the content dimensions of informational status, social status, and economic status. So far, we have not learned how to measure any political variable well enough to use as an indicator of this uniquely important content dimension, though efforts to do this are under way.

Much of status attainment is also informed by an additional tradition, a form of social psychology based mostly on the work of G. H. Mead (1934) and partly on the thinking of Kurt Lewin (1939) and Fritz Heider (1958). To date, this version of status attainment has been applied to young people who are approaching the time when they will assume adult roles and thus take on statuses in their own right, rather than merely reflecting the statuses of their parents. The tradition has several essential elements: (a) Before assuming their eventual statuses, persons develop status-specific concepts of themselves and of other persons in their psychological environments; (b) this is tantamount to saying that there exists a status aspiration variable isomorphic to each status content variable; (c) thus it is reasonable to speak of hierarchical status aspirations for education, occupational status, income, and perhaps political influence; (d) knowingly or by default, each youth develops a characteristic level of aspiration for each such variable; (e) one's level of aspiration affects his or her level of attainment. The theory also holds that aspirations are formed in at least three ways. The first is imitation—adopting the statuses illustrated by models. The second is self-

reflection—adjusting aspirations to correspond with performances in status-related arenas of behavior. The third is probably most important—adopting the status expectations that one's definers hold for one. The theory also holds that, once aspirations are formed as status-specific conceptions of oneself, they are extremely resistant to change. Embedded in a mass of approximately consistent and mutually reinforcing cognitions, they come to have an inertia of their own and are expressed in corresponding behaviors. Constantly, if subtly, they are signalled by the person to oneself and others. They guide one's selection among status opportunities encountered and determine activities toward which one's energies will be directed.

But various statuses are not attained all at once. Educational aspirations apparently influence educational attainment. A person's education is usually completed years before his or her occupational status hits its high mark. Educational attainment influences occupational attainment, which in turn, affects income. Occupational aspiration has an influence on occupational attainment that is independent of education and all other known antecedents. (We do not know yet whether income aspirations operate correspondingly on income; this should be tested.) More generally stated, aspirations for future statuses combine with present statuses to influence the attainment of other statuses, such as income, that will be attained during the middle and later years of the life cycle. In general, this theory combines concepts of social structure, of cognition, and of behavior. It sees the individual as active and future-oriented, with cognitions and behaviors that are tightly interwoven with those of others and geared into the social structures that human behavior creates and sustains.

Status Attainment Models

By *status attainment model*, I mean any set of concepts that purports to describe the status attainment processes of a definable set of a population at a given time and place, and that uses any set of status and antecedent variables that are amenable to systematic statistical and/or mathematical analysis. A complete status attainment model would have the following characteristics: (a) Its dependent variables would include valid and reliable measures of the most important content variables tapping each of the four basic status content dimensions; (b) certainly in principle and largely in practice, all of the valid and reliable variance in each of the dependent status variables would be attributable, in the statistical sense, to antecedent variables included within the model;² (c) included among the antecedent vari-

² By definition, a *complete* theory fully explains the behavior of the phenomena in its domain. This implies, at minimum, that a complete model of status attainment would provide

a theoretically plausible and empirically valid explanation of all (100%) of the reliable variance in each status variable describing the attainment levels of the population to which it is designed to apply. From the perspective of empirical sociology as we have known it, this is an extraordinarily demanding requirement: For the empirical explanation of any given status variable, it requires a set of superbly measured regressors and equally reliable and valid measures of the status variables themselves. It also requires that the conceptual domain of all status content dimensions be fully represented by status variables.

At least five different challenges have been made against the aim of complete theoretic and empirical explanation of the variance in the dependent status variables. Each seems reasonable, and may be meritorious in the special areas to which it applies. Each is debatable when attributed to the conceptual domain of theory of status attainment taken as a whole.

1. One position—I take it to be that of Blau and Duncan (1967)—holds that unexplained variance is to be expected when the research objective is to measure the effect of one's parents' occupational statuses on one's own while taking into account the status effects of one's own education and the status of one's first job. If the main attempt is to measure status inheritance, net of education, and first job, by definition it would be sufficient to explain only the transmitted portion of the variance, leaving the rest unexplained. If the main attempt is really to explain the combined effects of status origins, education, and first job, and nothing more, again by definition it would be sufficient to explain the portion attributable to these three. But the theory of status attainment asks not merely, "What is the effect of such-and-such variables on status?" It asks, "How can status differences be fully and intelligibly explained?" The answer to the latter question requires an explanation of all the status variance.

2. It is often held that for policy purposes the aim is not to explain variance, but to determine how a dependent variable (or set of them) will rise or fall if a certain independent variable is raised or lowered by a specified amount. True, but it can be argued that this is not the aim of scientific theory-building regarding status attainment, whose objective makes no policy assumptions at all. Its aim is to explain the causes of whatever status differences may be observed.

3. Sewell and Hauser (1980:89) recently observed that their purpose is to explain educational attainment and its consequences for occupational status and income. This is an unassailable objective, and they have carried it out superbly. It is not, however, an attempt to provide a complete explanation of status attainment, and unlike the latter does not call for a complete explanation of status variance.

In the same sentences in which they make the foregoing point, Sewell and Hauser appear to raise a different objection to using the explanation of variance as a criterion for the adequacy of a theory. "Accounting for variance, rather than explaining and interpreting social processes, appears to be the aim of many social researchers. . . ." There are at least two possible meanings of this.

4. One meaning would imply a fundamental opposition between accounting for variance and specifying an empirically valid theory of the processes determining the variations of a phenomenon. These two criteria of an empirically valid theory do not, however, stand in logical opposition to each other. Each is essential to a valid theory.

5. Another possible meaning of the quotation might hold that disentangling and measuring effects along the causal paths among antecedents is more important than explaining variance. But there is no logical necessity to juxtapose these as alternatives. A complete theory of status attainment would require a full explanation of the reliable variance in the dependent variables and in each of the endogenous antecedent variables. But even if this is impossible, researchers whose aim is to learn the inner workings of phenomena will try to come as close as they can.

ables would be a set of social psychological and performance variables plausibly explaining the causal linkages of dependent status variables to a set of initial independent variables.

Some believe that status attainment research has yielded one of the most successful attempts to construct an empirically verified sociological theory. But this should not blind us to the fact that a complete model of status attainment does not yet exist. The well known basic model of Blau and Duncan (1967) is sufficiently developed to serve well as reference against which to assess other models. But it is quite incomplete. It lacks indicators of wealth and power. The mechanisms it employs to explain the transmission of antecedent variables into dependent statuses or to identify other components of the attainment of status are quite limited. Its independent variables include only father's occupational and educational statuses. One might argue that the portion of the occupational effects of education that is not explained by origin status might be a measure of attainment by merit alone, and the unexplained occupational effects of first occupation to be a measure of "luck." But the result would still be a most fragmentary theory. Clearly it is mostly a model of status inheritance, and the truth is that, in today's world, status inheritance plays only a minor role in status attainment. The Otto-Haller (1979) data provide results that are not atypical, although the coefficients of determination (R^2) are perhaps a little low, partly because of the youth of the sample members (age 32), and partly because yearly fluctuations of income were not taken into account. Parental statuses have these effects on the three key status variables: education— $R^2 = .184$; occupation— $R^2 = .118$; and income— $R^2 = .059$. Finally, even after the Blau-Duncan intervening variables have been introduced, the resulting model explains half or less of the variance of its status dependent variables. So it is also incomplete in that it is not especially strong—despite the fact that in this very sense it is one of the more powerful schemas in sociology. Thus, the Blau-Duncan model is fragmentary for four reasons: It lacks indicators of perhaps the two most important status content dimensions; it has a primitive theory of the mechanisms of status attainment; it lacks effective initial variables; and it leaves a great deal of the variance in educational and occupational statuses unexplained. From time to time, variations on the Blau-Duncan model are offered that add one or two dependent variables (e.g., Featherman, 1971), or that improve previous analyses, such as in Kelley's (1973) use of reliability coefficients to correct Featherman's estimates of path coefficients. Indeed, in later models, income, an indicator of the wealth dimension, has been used quite regularly (e.g., Sewell and Hauser, 1975; Featherman and Hauser, 1978), both as an initial status variable and as a dependent status variable. But these and other additions have not improved it much.

In other words, a complete model would explain differential status attainment fully. It would use independent variables with values that would be measurable from before the time the individual's status attainment behaviors began, and intervening variables that would provide a theoretically consistent, plausible, and empirically complete explanation of the mechanisms by which a set of initial independent variables affect the status of the individual on each of the dependent variables at specifiable periods of the life cycle. Naturally, the independent variables would not have to be restricted to status variables, though they would doubtless be at least included.

Effective as the empirical research has been, the models tested so far still fall far short of the ideal, as can be seen by a comparison of the three available 7- to 15-year longitudinal studies (Otto and Haller, 1979). The total explanatory power of these ranges is as follows: education— $R^2 = .45-.62$; occupation— $R^2 = .42-.51$; income— $R^2 = .08-.12$.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF STATUS ATTAINMENT

Research on the psychology of status attainment has a long history, which was well-summarized by Spenner and Featherman (1978). They make it clear that two research traditions have been in competition—perhaps unwittingly—over the years. One is focused on the "need for achievement" (*n-ach*). The need for achievement is thought to be a deep and unconscious internal demand to perform excellently. The other tradition focuses on status aspirations or expectations. These are sectors of a status hierarchy external to the individual, which he or she comes to think of as appropriate, and which he or she more or less consciously attempts to enter or to help others to enter. Despite its promise, the *n-ach* theory has never been shown to have much effect on any status variable. The aspiration tradition has fared much better.

The most complete social psychological model of status attainment has been constructed by a number of researchers mostly located at the University of Wisconsin. This is called the *Wisconsin Model* (Haller and Portes, 1973). It is a theory of status attainment processes from adolescence into early maturity. In part, the development of status aspiration concepts and measures was worked out by Sewell *et al.* (1957), as were some of the hypotheses regarding the effects of origin statuses and mental ability on status aspirations. Indeed, some of Sewell's efforts may be traced back to his 1948 field work and even further back into the vocational psychology movement of the 1920s and 1930s. As a well-integrated and essentially contemporary position, the theory behind occupational aspirations and the theoretical relationships between this variable and several others (e.g., educational aspirations, educational attainment, and occupational attainment) was pre-

sented for the first time in Haller and Miller (1963 [1971]: 7-17, 30-33, 37-50). The concept of the *significant other*, which has come to be central to this research area, grew out of the work of G. H. Mead (1934), and, at a very general level, was first articulated by Sullivan (1940). The bases of its application to status attainment theory were implicit in work on the effects of parents' encouragement on aspirations (Kahl, 1953; Bordua, 1960; Sewell and Shah, 1965), and in work on the effects that peers' aspirations had on aspirations of the individual (Haller and Butterfield, 1960; Duncan *et al.*, 1968). Significant others' influence was made explicit in the status attainment literature for the first time by Haller and Sewell (1967). In its application to this thought system, it reached its fullest development to date around 1970 (Haller *et al.*, 1969; Haller and Woelfel, 1969; Haller and Woelfel, 1972; Woelfel and Haller, 1971).

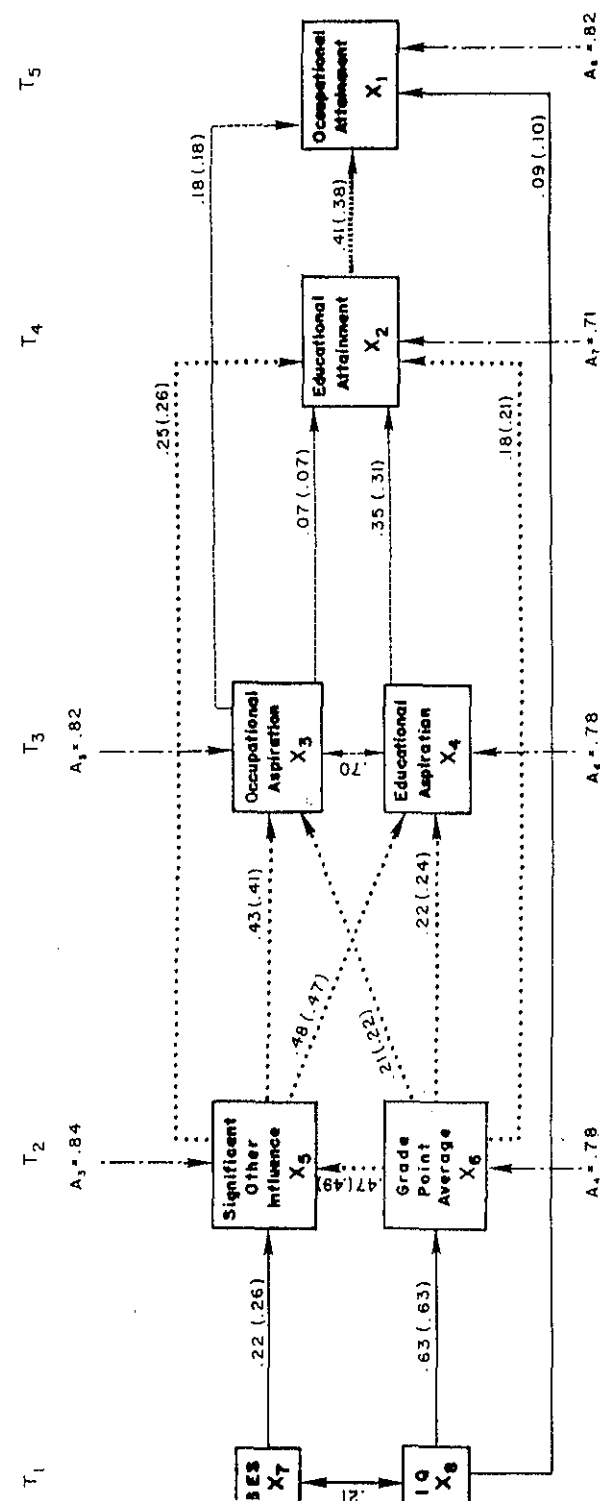
The main lines of the present social psychological model of status attainment were first worked out by Sewell *et al.* (1967, 1969) from two-wave cohort data collected by Little in 1957 and Sewell in 1964 (Sewell and Hauser 1980:60). Many essential concepts were present in the original 1967 paper—multiple statuses, multiple status aspiration variables, significant others' influence, academic performance, mental ability, and origin statuses. A reproduction of the earliest public version of the Wisconsin Model is presented in Figure 1.1.

The Wisconsin Model treats occupational attainment early in the individual's career as its ultimate dependent variable, with education taken to be the penultimate variable. Educational and occupational aspirations are considered as the most immediate antecedents, significant others' educational influence as prior to this, with academic performance preceding both. Parents' socioeconomic status and individual mental ability are taken to be the starting point variables among adolescents. At the time of its appearance in 1967, and for sometime afterward (Sewell *et al.*, 1969; Sewell *et al.*, 1970), its authors appear to have seen it as an explanation for the influence of origin statuses on status attainments and nothing more. Only later (Haller and Portes, 1973), was it recognized explicitly that most of the effects of the aspirations and of significant others have as yet unknown sources having nothing to do with the statuses of the parents of the subjects. As of the time of this writing, it appears that this important lacuna remains unfilled by empirical data.

In any case, in the forms in which it has been tested, the current specifications of the Wisconsin Model of status attainment (Sewell and Hauser, 1972, 1975, 1980; Alexander *et al.*, 1975; Otto and Haller, 1979) hardly differ from those of the original 1967 version. Two or three variables have been added—income as a dependent status variable (Sewell and Hauser, 1972, 1975, 1980; Haller and Otto, 1979) and as a status origin variable (Sewell and Hauser, 1972, 1975), significant others' occupational expecta-

figure 1.1. The Earliest Form of the Wisconsin Social Psychological Model of Status Attainment (From Sewell, Haller, and Portes, 1967).

PATH ANALYSIS: A RESTRICTED MODEL OF RELATIONSHIPS AMONG VARIABLES



tions (Haller and Otto, 1979). Some (Sewell and Hauser, 1972, 1975) would shift mental ability from an exogenous variable to a status-dependent endogenous variable. Projections of career-long effects of status attainment antecedents on income have been adduced (Haller and Spennner, 1977), leading to somewhat more effective explanations of income differences. Here and there, better instruments have been used. Also, the statistical disaggregations of the effects of antecedents are much improved (Sewell and Hauser, 1975). Still, on the whole, the model has undergone remarkably little change in its tested versions.

A Hypothetical Generalization of the Wisconsin Model

In 1973, Haller and Portes published a rather more general model, which incorporated developments regarding variations in the structure of stratification systems as well as the previously described efforts to provide a social psychological explanation of the status attainment process. The 1973 model cannot yet be tested as a whole because no one has measured all of the variables that pertain to it. But I believe the Haller-Portes model is more than idle speculation. Some of its most important parts clarify our thinking on the social psychological position previously sketched. Parts were worked out using data previously published; these parts seem to agree with the predictions that can be drawn from the social psychological theory employed in the Wisconsin Model. Parts for which no data exist were based upon a rationale identical to that of the Wisconsin Model and are directly analogous to those parts for which data exist. Still other parts link status origins to the concepts of the significant other and the reference group.

STATUS VARIABLES: CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

Two contributions to the Haller-Portes view come from status analysis. The first contribution concerns the content dimensions of status, in other words, the sets of variables that describe hierarchically ordered differences among individuals (or small units, such as households) within bounded interaction networks—communities or societies—concerning wealth, power, prestige, and informational status. (In actual status attainment research operations, however, power has not been studied, and no one has yet tried to employ status variables that fully cover any of the other three dimensions of status.)

The second contribution taken from status analysis concerns *structural*, as opposed to *content*, dimensions of status (Haller, 1970), which describe differences among status systems of communities or societies over time and

place. We shall not discuss these dimensions of status much. (See Nachmias, 1977, for a start on applying them to status attainment research.) Two, though, are especially important—status dispersion and status crystallization. Status attainment models will doubtless work best when each status content variable has a large dispersion—that is, when inequality is great. Status crystallization is the degree of correlation among status content variables. Consider three instances: (a) In communities where the correlations among status content variables approach zero, separate causal models would be required to explain the attainment variation of each such variable, and each model would be relatively simple; (b) where crystallization is high, only one model would be needed, and it would be relatively simple. Status would be attained on different variables at different points in the life cycle, of course, but a person who attains a certain level of education, which is established first, would remain at the same relative level on each later status variable; (c) in the real world of moderate to high crystallization, status attainment models would be relatively complex.

In the long run, status attainment models are intended for use in systematic intersocietal comparisons. This will make it possible to determine the extent to which the structural dimensions of whole status systems do, in fact, control the way a general model applies to different status systems. If the theory is valid, their effect should be great indeed.

The social psychological concepts presented by Haller and Portes are taken or generalized from Woelfel and Haller (1971), Sewell *et al.* (1969), and Sewell *et al.* (1970). They assume that there are two kinds of significant others: definers, who communicate their status expectations to the individual, and models, who illustrate their statuses to him or her. The social psychological variables in this formulation consist of the status aspirations individuals hold for themselves, the expectation levels individuals' definers hold for them, and the status exemplifications their models present to them. Status aspirations are psychological variables because they describe variations of cognitive structures among persons. They are social psychological because they take their meaning from the socially defined status variables to which they correspond. By the same token, they are status isomorphs. Status expectations of definers share the two psychological properties of status aspirations—they are psychological variables in that they describe cognitive differences and are social psychological in that they are status isomorphs. They are also social psychological, constituting influences exerted on a person by his or her significant others. Status exemplifications are sociological, being objective statuses, and social psychological because they constitute social influence. But let us return to the internal structure of the model presented by Haller and Portes.

Figure 1.2 presents a schematic diagram of four basic status content

Figure 1.2 Status Content Variates and Their Derivatives, For Use in Status Attainment Models.

Status Content Dimensions	Derivative Variates		
	Status Content Variables (Status origins, status destinations, models' statuses: in use or feasible) [S]	Psychological Isomorphs of Status Content Variables	
		Status Aspiration Variables ^{1/} (These are held by one for oneself; they guide one's status attainment behaviors) [A]	Status Expectation Variables ^{2/} (These are held by one's definers, those who "tell" one what his aspirations should be) [X]
Wealth [W]	Income or earnings: Reported annual income or earnings [WS]	Income Aspiration Level (NOT YET AVAILABLE) ¹ [WA]	Income Expectation Level ^a (NOT YET AVAILABLE) ^{1, h} [WX]
Power [P]	Political Influence (NOT YET AVAILABLE) ^a [PS]	Political Influence Aspiration Level (NOT YET AVAILABLE) ¹ [PA]	Political Influence Expectation Level (NOT YET AVAILABLE) ^{1, h} [PX]
Prestige [R]	Occupational Prestige: ^b (NORC ^c ratings, SEI ^d scores, SIOP ^e scores [RS]	Occupational Aspiration Level: NORC ^c , SEI ^d , SIOP ^e ratings of responses to open-ended questions; Occupational Aspiration Scale Scores ^f [RA]	Occupational Expectation Level: Occupational Expectation Elicitor ¹ [RX]
Informational Status [I]	Educational Status: Years of formal education successfully completed [IS]	Educational Aspiration Level: Responses to open-ended questions concerning hopes and plans for future educational attainments [IA]	Educational Expectation Level: Educational Expectation Elicitor ¹ [IX]

^{1/} Status aspirations are social psychological variables. They are psychological because they describe similarities and differences in the cognitive structures of persons. They are social psychological because each status aspiration variable takes its ordered structure from the consensually defined status hierarchy appropriate to it: the educational hierarchy, the occupational prestige hierarchy, etc.

^{2/} Status expectations are also social psychological variables. They are psychological because they are parts of persons' cognitive structures; in this case of the cognitive structures of those "significant others" who define a person's status orientations for him. They are social psychological for two reasons: first, they take their form from exactly the same consensually defined status hierarchies as do status aspirations; second, as expectations held by one person for another, they describe a kind of interpersonal relationship.

^a Preliminary Brazilian versions have been used by Haller and Saraiva (1972). Others are now being tested.

^b Techniques are also available for measuring personal esteem in small face-to-face communities, but because status attainment research is normally concerned with large scale (national, state, or regional) status systems, these are not presented here.

^c NORC (National Opinion Research Center) ratings: see Siegel (1971).

^d SEI (Socio-Economic Index) scores: see Duncan (1961) and Featherman and Hauser (1978).

^e SIOP (Standard International Occupational Prestige) scores: see Treiman (1977).

^f Preliminary United States versions are now being tested.

^g Haller and Miller (1972); Haller, Otto, Meier and Ohlendorf (1974).

^h Ways to determine the names of the individuals (definers) who tell one what is appropriate for him or her are being worked out at the University of Wisconsin.

¹ See Haller, Woelfel, and Fink (1969), Woelfel and Haller (1971), Haller and Woelfel (1972). These writings also present methods for eliciting the names of occupational and educational significant others.

variables, the ways they are measured, and the psychological variables that can be derived from them. In other words, the diagram illustrates the minimum set of objective content variables describing the status origins and status destinations of individuals or other small units. They are minimal because only one is presented for each content dimension, and there is every reason to believe that full coverage of the conceptual domain of any given content dimension may require several such variables. The diagram also illustrates the psychological isomorphs of each such variable—both the aspirations of individuals and the expectations their significant others hold for them. A closer look illustrates the point that some of the status dimensions that the general stratification literature holds to be most important are covered poorly or not at all. No one has yet published a valid, reliable, and feasible measure of power or political influence suitable for survey research among broad populations, not to mention its psychological isomorphs. Also, while a few attempts have been made to employ variables measuring the psychological isomorphs of income, it appears that no such instrument of demonstrated reliability and validity has yet been published for use among young people who have not yet taken regular jobs. It seems unlikely that adequate measures of such variables can be contrived except by devoting considerable research effort to doing so, more or less as was done for educational and occupational status variables and their psychological isomorphs during and before the 1950s and the 1960s. The success that status attainment researchers have achieved to date is due, among other things, to a large amount of careful research on the measurement of the key variables.

Most of the other seven variables are now routinely employed, although not all data sets include each of them. Of these, occupational status expectations of significant others are perhaps most frequently omitted. If the Haller–Portes model (1973) is more or less correct, each specific psychological status attainment model estimated to date has been misspecified because several key status variables and/or status isomorphs were simply missing from the data.

Today, occupational, and income statuses are regularly employed in status attainment research, both as origin and as destination statuses. Just as routinely, the social psychologically inclined (especially at Wisconsin through the years: Featherman, Fink, Gasson, Haller, Hauser, Meier, Ohlendorf, Otto, Portes, Sewell, Spennner, and Woelfel; see articles written by these researchers singly or in collaboration) have looked into the interrelations among the status expectations held by an individual's definers (or expectations that one *thinks* definers hold), the statuses one's role-models exemplify, and one's own status aspirations.

A NEW LOOK AT STATUS ORIGINS

As we have seen, one of the most surprising results of the status attainment research conducted to date has been the relatively small size of the effect of parents' statuses on those of their offspring. Another surprising result has been the comparatively large effect of status aspirations and significant others' (definers') expectations on attainment. Before these findings had been published and then confirmed in various replications and reanalyses, few sociologists would have expected parental status to be so weak or the psychological isomorphs of status to be so strong. One unexpected consequence of these findings is that the main social sources of significant others' influence have not yet been specified; neither have their effects been measured. The Haller–Portes paper may suggest a way to make sense out of all three anomalies. According to their view, parents' statuses may constitute only a small portion of the status origins that affect the individual. It predicts that the proper origin statuses are those of all one's significant others—that the mean score of a given status content variable, averaged over all of the individuals (significant others, both definers and models) who influence one's aspiration regarding that content variable, would constitute the proper status origin score for a person. Haller and Portes also predict that the net expectation levels of the individuals' definers will be determined by the mean statuses of all of their significant others. If this were to hold, then status origins (and mental ability and academic performance) would account for definers' status expectations, and they in turn for status aspirations. Attainment on each successive status content variable would be a consequence of one's level on the previously attained status content variables and of the individual's aspiration level regarding status content dimensions. This conjecture raises the possibility that psychological reference groups (significant others) rather than actual membership groups may be the units that transmit status. Naturally, even if this hypothesis gains empirical support, there is still ample room for the operation of nonpsychological factors (such as labor market experience, in the case of income), perhaps as mechanisms by which status origins are expressed in status or as variables that are partial determinants of the psychological mechanisms of status attainment.

The Haller–Portes paper begins to make explicit an assumption that is implicit in previous papers: The causal relations among such variables as educational expectations, educational aspirations, and educational status have a theoretical as well as an empirical base, as do those of occupational expectations, occupational aspirations, and occupational status. This should also hold for income expectations, income aspirations, and income status, and for political influence expectations, aspirations, and attainments. If the theory is correct, expectations should precede aspirations, which in turn

should precede attained status. (Corresponding relations should hold for models' status exemplifications.) Moreover, for these sets on the whole, the empirical relations among well-measured variables within a set of sequential isomorphs should be greater than those between sets, except for otherwise conceptually similar variables. Let us spell this out.

Status Attainment and Social Psychological Proximity

Underlying much of the work on the psychology of status attainment are some social psychological principles of behavior that do not seem to have been well articulated. It may be premature to try to provide a definitive statement of them, although it is obvious that one or another of them also appears from time to time in other areas of social psychology. At different times, each has been rather clearly employed in the status attainment literature. Collectively, they might be called *proximity principles*. Rough as these principles are, they are presented here in the hope that they might help us to organize our thinking about the cognitive mechanisms of status attainment. In particular, as we learn to use them and improve them, they may help us generate testable hypotheses through conventional techniques of causal analysis. There appear to be at least three cases of proximity principles, called here *temporal*, *conceptual*, and *ends-means* proximity. Let us begin by discussing two of them.

Take three variables, X for status expectations, A for status aspiration, S for attained status. We assume that the main causal order is this: $X \rightarrow A \rightarrow S$; in temporal ordering: $X \rightarrow S > X \rightarrow A$ and $X \rightarrow S > A \rightarrow S$. In other words, the distance between X and S is greater than that between either S and A or A and S . *Ceteris paribus*, this predicts that the correlation between measures of X and A or A and S would be greater than correlations between X and S . Now take four more specific variables: IX for the mean informational (educational) (I) status expectation (X) level that definers hold for a person, RX for the mean occupational prestige (R) expectations (X) definers hold for him or her, IA for the educational (I) aspiration level (A) the person holds for himself or herself, and RA for the occupational (R) aspiration (A) level she or he holds. Cognitively, different aspects of education, such as IX and IA , are close to each other because they both treat education (I). Variables containing occupational prestige, such as RX and RA , are also close to each other. So too are the different aspirations a person may hold for himself or herself, IA and RA , or the different expectations others hold for him or her, IX and RX . Now, then, look at the whole set RX, RA, IX, IA . *Ceteris paribus*, four conceptual relationships are rather close and would yield relatively high correlations— RX by RA , RX by IX ,

RA by IA , and IX by IA . Each of these pairs shares a common element, the first pair an R , the second an X , the third an A , and the fourth an I . But by the same reasoning, the two remaining relationships would be rather more distant and would yield relatively low correlations— RX by IA and RA by IX . Here we have generated hypotheses based only on conceptual similarity. Unless we make additional assumptions, there are no other possibilities, since there are only six possible pairs of correlations among the four variables— RX, RA, IX , and IA .

In fact, additional assumptions can be made. We could take all three elements, X, A , and S , plus at least two status concepts such as R and I , and by combining the information from *two* types of proximity (temporal proximity and conceptual similarity) we could, *ceteris paribus*, generate even more precise predictions about the order of relative magnitude of the correlations among variables. The reasoning is this: if $X \rightarrow A \rightarrow S$, then in psychological distance, as we have seen, $X \rightarrow S > X \rightarrow A$. Now combine these with R and I :

$$\begin{aligned} RX &\rightarrow RA \rightarrow RS, \\ IX &\rightarrow IA \rightarrow IS. \end{aligned}$$

Since likes are closer than unlikes: RX by IX is closer than RX by IA or IX by RA , etc. In correlational terms: $r_{RX,IX} > r_{RA,IX}$; $r_{RX,RA} > r_{RX,RS}$; $r_{RX,IX} > r_{RX,IA}$; etc.

Over the years, we have observed the patterns of these correlations. For illustrative purposes, the most useful cases can be seen in relationships among the various expectation and aspiration variables employed in studies in which all are measured with reliable instruments. The independent status variables are less useful because their influences are not merely cognitive; they sometimes provide material resources, too. As a dependent variable, occupational status is less useful for a different reason. The theory not only says that $RX \rightarrow RA \rightarrow RS$, but also that occupational attainment is influenced by educational attainment: $IS \rightarrow RS$. So the comparison of effects involving the dependent status variables is made less clear because the status attainment theory predicts that one status variable (education) affects another (occupation):

$$\begin{aligned} IX &\rightarrow IA \longrightarrow IS \searrow \\ RX &\rightarrow RA \longrightarrow RS \end{aligned}$$

The point is that some sets of variables in the social psychological theory of status attainment are, for theoretical reasons, more appropriate than others for testing hypotheses concerning the effects of differences in proximity. We have gone back to our earlier work to identify existing data that would provide the most adequate tests of the hypothesis that the cognitively

more proximal variables are more highly associated with each other than cognitively more distal variables. We have drawn upon multiple regression coefficients for this purpose, concentrating on relations among educational and occupational expectations of significant others for the person and the corresponding aspiration variables of the person. Because there were only two dependent variables, aspirations, these data do not permit an assessment of the partial regressions when the expectations variables are dependent. These data, collected in West Bend, Wisconsin, are presented in Tables 9 and 10 of Haller and Woelfel (1969:422-423). In that study, all the key variables are conceptually clear and were measured quite well. The partial regression coefficients pertaining to the hypothesis are all statistically significant, at $\beta = .42, .29, .52$, and $.41$. Except for one theoretically trivial case, in which significant $\beta = .21$, all the others are nonsignificant; they average $\beta = .05$, disregarding signs. Essentially comparable findings were obtained in another (unpublished) project carried out in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin. Even data that provide less satisfactory tests tend to be consistent with the hypothesis. We have checked the pertinent 1957-1972 longitudinal data from the Lenawee County, Michigan project, and where the variables are conceptually and technically most adequate, their relationships also appear to be consistent with the hypotheses. The theoretical and empirical reasons for believing that the general idea of social psychological proximity has a place in the psychology of status attainment seems sufficiently well established to warrant the development of research designed to use it systematically. In general, variables that are social psychologically proximal should be more highly related than those that are distal.

These ideas enter research in many ways, perhaps most frequently in the form of unwritten hypotheses such as these: (a) Educational aspiration will be more highly predictive of educational attainment than will another aspiration variable or any variable that comes into being earlier than educational aspiration; (b) occupational aspiration will be more highly predictive of occupational attainment than will any other aspiration variable or any variable that emerges before occupational aspirations; (c) educational expectations of significant others will be more highly predictive of educational aspirations than will any other expectation variable. The same applies to occupational expectations and occupational aspirations.

As previously indicated, there appear to be at least three distinct forms of proximity principles. Each is related to postulates long accepted in social psychology. The first is that which people define as real is real in its consequences, to paraphrase W. I. Thomas. In somewhat more recent terms, people act upon the attributions they construct (cf. Heider, 1958), including the cognitions they define as related. The second form of proximity principles

is that those shared cognitions that define entities and events emerge through symbolic interaction. This is the way that consensuses concerning the nature of individual objects and the relations among them develop.

Again, three general forms of proximity appear to recur regularly in status attainment research. We labeled them temporal proximity, conceptual proximity, and means-ends proximity. The first and second of these have already been touched upon and, thus, need little further discussion. The first holds that variables describing temporally more proximal events will be more highly related than those describing temporally more distal events. The second, conceptual proximity, holds that variables describing concepts that are more nearly isomorphic will be more highly related than will variables describing less isomorphic concepts. (Note that this could apply to relations among variables constructed from concepts bearing purely logical relations, such as generality and particularity.)

We have not yet looked at the third. First presented in a preliminary form by Haller and Miller (1963 [1971]:30 ff.), it holds that variables conceived to have closer ends-means relationships to each other will be more highly correlated than variables conceived to have more distant ends-means relationships, or none at all. This has four applications. First, when people believe one class of behaviors or states (a set of *means behaviors* or *means states*) is necessary to the accomplishment of another class of behaviors (*ends behaviors* or *ends states*), variables describing the different levels of each set of the respective behaviors (or states) will be correlated with each other. In other words, variables describing ends behaviors (or ends states) will be correlated with behaviors describing means behaviors (or means states). Second, the cognitive variables describing anticipated ends behaviors (or ends states) will be correlated with the cognitive variables describing anticipated means behaviors (or means states). In other words, variables describing peoples' aspirations for ends states will be correlated with variables describing their aspirations for means states. Still more concretely, educational aspirations (or expectations) will be correlated with occupational aspirations (or expectations). Third, variables describing anticipated ends behaviors (or states) will be correlated with variables describing overt means behaviors (or states). In concrete status attainment research terms, occupational aspirations will affect educational attainment. Finally, variables describing anticipated means states will be correlated with variables describing ends behaviors (or states). Educational aspirations will affect occupational attainment.

Actually, in status attainment research operations, any or all of the three basic forms of the cognitive proximity principle may apply to any pair of variables. In other words, variables stand in varying degrees of temporal

proximity, conceptual proximity, and ends-means proximity. Some pairs of variables involve only one of the types of cognitive proximity principles, some involve two, some involve all three.

This reasoning suggests a whole series of fairly general hypotheses that would seem to follow logically. We offer them tentatively because they have not yet been thoroughly checked. A pair of variables that are relatively close to each other by *one* of the criteria of proximity will be more highly correlated with each other than will a pair that are distal on the criterion. A pair of variables that share *two* criteria of proximity will be more highly correlated than variables that are proximal on one criterion and distal on another, and the latter will be more highly correlated than will variables that are distal on two criteria and proximal on none. Similarly, a pair of variables that are proximal on three criteria will be more highly correlated than those that are proximal on two and distal on one. In turn, these will be more highly correlated than variables that are proximal on one and distal on two. The latter, of course, will be more highly correlated than those which are distal on three and proximal on none.³

Models of Status Inheritance and Status Attainment

It seems self-evident that models of status attainment would be at least as general and complex as those of status inheritance, if not more so. To date, status attainment research seems to have focused mostly on status inheritance. Yet even the existing status inheritance models are incomplete in several ways. None have included measures drawn from the power dimension of status and none have seriously attempted to cover the entire range of variables implied by each of the four general status content dimensions, or even attempted to find out what their four factor structures would look like. The available models appear to be models of the degree to which educational and occupational prestige, and sometimes income statuses, are transmitted from parent to offspring.

A complete status attainment model that would not involve psychological variables might be at least imaginable. Indeed, one could argue that Wilson and Portes (1975) and Yuchtman and Samuel (1975) may be trying to move in that direction. If so, I doubt that the move will be successful. The individual's conception of his or her ability, as well as status aspirations,

³ These hypotheses are subject to the condition that all other things are equal. In addition, the various criteria of proximity may, in reality, be differently weighted. This would require modifying the application of hypotheses to conform to the weights. Finally, some of the criteria may have several subclasses, such as partially overlapping or multiple logical categories. Where this holds, other modifications would have to be made.

could be dropped from a given model (though I doubt that the evidence warrants doing so) without its being any less psychological. To shift to the status allocation decisions made by impersonal evaluators would not necessarily imply abandoning psychological mechanisms. It might merely shift to a new set of powerful significant others, the *gatekeepers*, whose expectations might override those of significant others in less influential positions. This is, I believe, the thrust of Wilson and Portes and Yuchtman and Samuel. If so, then it seems safe to say that they have not proposed a nonpsychological model.

But with that possible exception, the most nearly complete available models containing plausible, if partial, explanations of the mechanisms of status inheritance and status attainment are those that explicitly draw upon individuals' status aspirations and their significant others' status expectations, and that, at least implicitly, draw upon the principle of cognitive proximity. For the most part, these are the various representations of the Wisconsin Model (notably Sewell *et al.*, 1967, 1969; Sewell *et al.*, 1970; Haller and Portes, 1973; Sewell and Hauser, 1975; Alexander *et al.*, 1975; Otto and Haller, 1979.)

Status attainment models must of necessity be at least as comprehensive as the types of status inheritance models for which estimates are now available. This is for two reasons. First, even if they were merely descriptive, they would be more ambitious than status inheritance models, for their aim is to provide a complete explanation of the attainment of status. Status inheritance models are intended only to account for the portion of status variability that a cohort obtains from its forebears—apparently a small part of the total, at least in the United States. Second, status attainment models would be intended to provide empirically defensible and theoretically plausible explanations of all the status variability. Today's status inheritance models do not go far beyond measuring the amount of the status inheritance—only as far as assessing the impact of different status variables on each other.

In attempting to explain status attainment, the psychological models thus invoke hypotheses concerning more variables than do the corresponding status inheritance models. Yet the models to which data have been applied are also fragmentary. First, like the empirical status inheritance models, they do not provide a complete coverage of the exogenous status variables and the dependent status variables. They draw upon precisely the same single indicators—education, occupational prestige, and income or earnings—of unmapped but potentially multivariate status dimensions as do the existing status inheritance models. Again, like the latter, none have yet included any indicators of power. Second, it is almost certain that nonstatus exogenous determinants greatly influence status attainment, or, if status

variables are in fact the only exogenous variables, researchers have not yet learned how to conceptualize them so as to make use of this fact. To repeat, relatively little of the variance in dependent status variables—probably no more than 25–35%—can apparently be explained by parental status variables. Apparently, only Haller and Portes (1973) have suggested that a new look at status origin statuses might show that status attainment is really a special kind of status inheritance. They wonder whether, in modern society, it might be more useful to think of origin statuses as being lodged in all the significant others one has, rather than conceiving origin statuses as located in parents alone. Their thinking is consistent with a widely held sociological tradition that locates the origin of one's identities, beliefs, and attitudes in one's reference groups (Merton, 1957; Hyman and Singer, 1968). However, this hypothesis has not been tested.

Necessary Research

The foregoing makes it seem plausible that a simple but powerful theory of cognitive interaction in individual behavior underlies the social psychological aspects of status attainment research. It would seem to be a rather straightforward exercise to spell the theory out in the form of specific hypotheses. Most of this theory has grown out of the wave of status attainment research that began in the late 1950s and drew upon ideas already under discussion at that time. In other words, the social psychological concepts of today's empirical research on status attainment are largely those of 15 to 25 years ago. This should not be surprising; the social psychological concepts were mostly built into the original data sets of the time. These data sets, with additional information on adult statuses, are precisely the ones we are using today. Yet the research of the last 20 years has yielded a set of concepts that are more orderly and very likely more powerful than their forerunners.

It is time to initiate a new wave of theoretical research on the social psychology of status attainment explicitly designed to test and exploit the conceptual innovations of the past two decades. One line of research should employ new longitudinal data first collected on youth who would then be followed throughout their lives. The measures of already existing social psychological variables discussed in this chapter and of those as yet untried, should be included in the new data sets. Another line of research, also longitudinal, should explore the emergence of status orientations among young children. Next to nothing is known in this area. This line would focus on the development of status aspirations, the selection of status models, and the coalescing of sets of definers and the formation of the status ex-

pectations they hold for the young person. Needless to say, this work should be merged with results stemming from other lines of thought, such as class analysis, human capital theory, and labor market analysis.

Another line of social psychological research on status attainment that should be initiated concerns the emergence of status orientations in children and youths and the mechanisms by which these processes occur—the coalescence of the person's set of definers for each status content variable, the crystallization of definers' status expectations and of the person's aspiration levels, the selection of status models, the timing of the emergence of orientations for education, occupational status, income and assets, and political influence. We know very little about these processes. Yet at least some of the variables are well established by adolescence and clearly have strong effects on later attainments. Our understanding of status attainment processes will remain incomplete until we learn how status orientations come into being.

Over the years, considerable progress has been made in our understanding of the social psychological mechanisms of status attainment. Substantial progress has been made in the empirical testing of many of the main hypotheses. Still, some of the potentially most fruitful hypotheses have grown out of the current wave of research and remain untested. We need to learn how the key interactive and cognitive variables come into being. Thus, a great deal of research on the social psychology of status attainment remains to be done. It would seem to be time to begin.

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2

Family Background and Ability Group Assignments

DONNA EDER

The relationship between socioeconomic background and educational and occupational attainment is a central issue for sociologists. Much of our current understanding of this relationship stems from the work of William Sewell and his associates. While their earlier work demonstrated that family background does have a significant effect on attainment controlling for differences in ability, later studies have begun to identify some of the mechanisms by which this effect occurs (Sewell *et al.*, 1969; Sewell *et al.*, 1970; Sewell, 1971; Sewell and Hauser, 1974; Hauser *et al.*, 1976).

In one study, school performance and curriculum placement (college preparatory versus noncollege tracks) were found to be important intervening variables in the causal relationship between socioeconomic background and educational attainment (Hauser *et al.*, 1976). Both of these variables were significantly influenced by family background. However, of the two variables, curriculum placement was found to be "absolutely and relatively more dependent on socioeconomic background and less dependent on mental ability" (Hauser *et al.*, 1976:334). These variables, in turn, had a significant effect on encouragement by significant others, students' college plans, and students' occupational aspirations. Also, Rosenbaum (1976) found that curriculum track placement influenced students' friendships, attitudes toward school, and likelihood of attending college.

Other studies have also found an independent effect of socioeconomic background on curriculum placement in high schools (Schafer and Olexa, 1971; Alexander and Eckland, 1975; Alexander and McDill, 1976). An in-