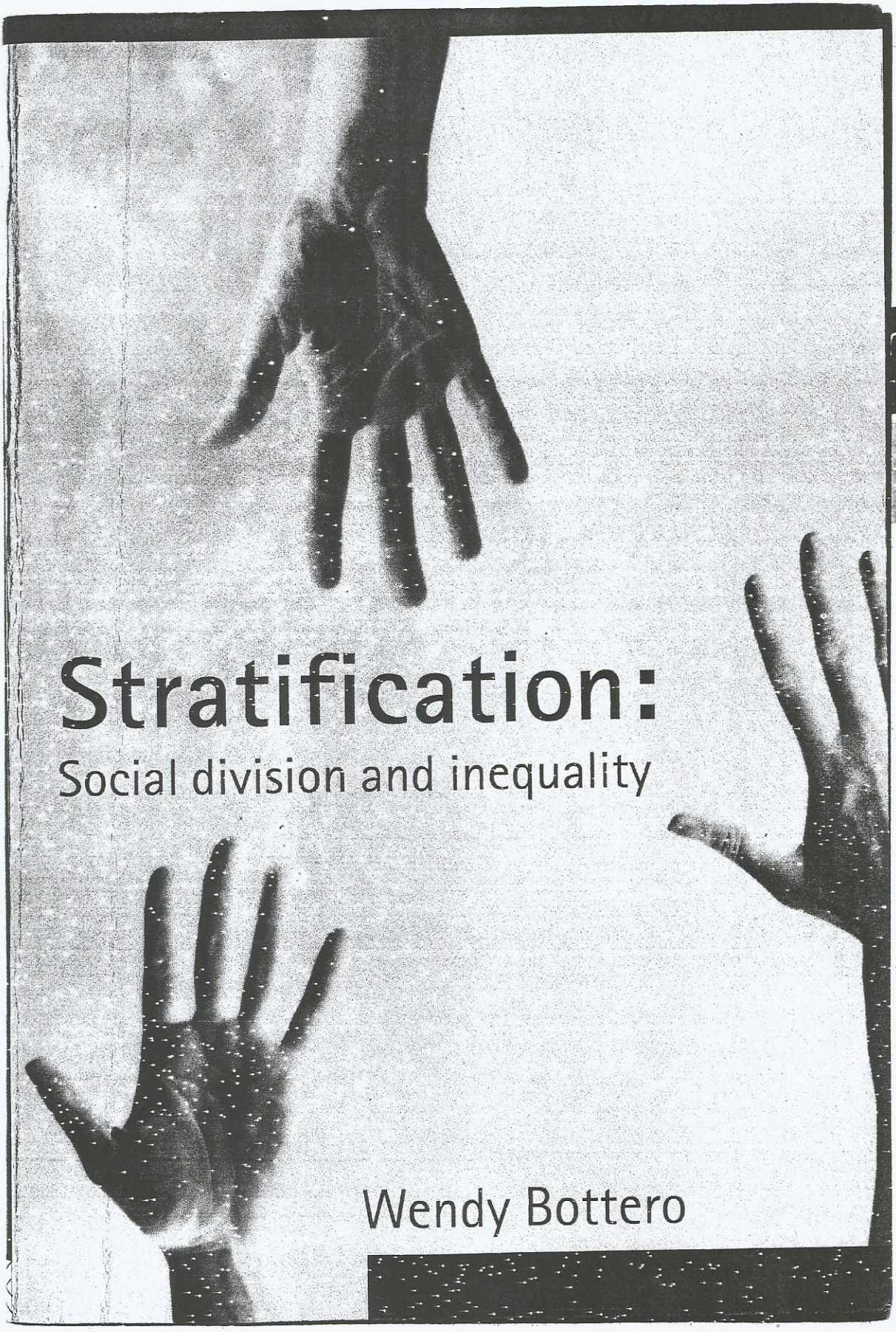

Stratification:

Social division and inequality

Wendy Bottero

5 Name, rank and number

Measuring stratification

This chapter looks at one strand in the modern stratification 'inheritance': the influential quantitative research tradition. In producing increasingly sophisticated measures of stratification, enabling the development of national and cross-national research programmes, these approaches have built an impressively detailed picture of how stratification affects individual prospects and collective fates. Because of this influence, stratification research has developed a reputation as an essentially quantitative discipline, wedded to structural models of social life, and adopting the most sophisticated statistical techniques. However, this reputation is not wholly positive, and quantitative approaches have been criticised for their increasingly narrow focus.

Following Marx and Weber, a *class tradition* in quantitative stratification research has looked to the market, and to production relations, as an arena of external, objective inequality. Researchers investigate the extent to which the (by implication) more ephemeral and subjective aspects of social behaviour relate to these enduring economic structures. The stratification ordering is pictured as being composed of discontinuous, class categories. The *status tradition*, influenced by normative functionalist accounts, presents stratification as a status structure, with overall social position derived from a mix of valued economic and cultural resources. This tradition pictures the stratification ordering as a finely graded status hierarchy with no sharp breaks or clearly defined groupings.

By contrast, another, earlier, research tradition – the *community studies* approach – combines the different elements found in other approaches, attempting to look at stratified relationships in their entirety; by directly investigating the status relations of whole communities. This approach maps stratification position in terms of economic position, lifestyle and cultural activities, and interaction and association; as measured by the overall status reputation that individuals have acquired on the basis of all these characteristics. The technique produces a map of the social hierarchy from the subjective perceptions of those located within it, and the approach is unusual in stratification research for the way in which it derives quantitative measures of class from qualitative methods of analysis. The stratification ordering is pictured as a hierarchy of distinct classes with differential lifestyles and interaction, but is also seen as consensually ordered. This approach looked at stratification 'in the round', drawing on the many ways in which social relationships are affected by

hierarchy to develop an overall measure of stratification arrangements. As we shall see, this ambitious approach was ultimately rooted in failure, in part because of the sheer difficulty of integrating these disparate elements into a single overall measure. Subsequent research has focused on developing specialised stratification measures which are more tightly defined. In the process, there has been a considerable narrowing of focus, and a shift to a much more quantitative form of analysis.

Lifestyle, association and reputation

The 'community studies' tradition, influential in American sociology from the 1920s–1950s, used anthropological accounts of small-town communities to explore stratification as expressed through face-to-face interaction, social cliques and 'styles of life'. Lloyd Warner's studies of 'Yankee City' (Warner *et al.* 1949; Warner and Lunt 1959a [1941], 1959b [1942]; Warner and Srole 1959 [1945]) are the best example of the approach. Warner used community rankings (devised from status evaluations) to develop a measure of 'social class' (although it can also be seen as a measure of social distance) expressed through the perceived limits on social interaction.

Warner noticed that people in a community 'evaluate the participation of those around them', ranking the status of the people with whom they interact. In 'Yankee City', informants continually referred to the reputation of their neighbours, and Warner saw that this could be translated into 'social class' rankings, creating a map of the status structure of the community. This approach sees stratification position resulting from a combination of economic and status factors, since: 'Money must be translated into socially approved behavior and possessions, and they in turn must be translated into intimate participation with, and acceptance by, members of a superior class' (Warner *et al.* 1949: 21). The approach stresses subjective perceptions of 'status' as they are reflected in interaction patterns and social cliques:

> it is not the objective position a person occupies on an income or occupation scale, for example, that is being ranked; it is the way that position is *evaluated* by the members of the society and the way in which the person occupying the position behaves in other ways as well, that is being ranked.
>
> (Kornhauser 1953: 227)

Community members were used to identify the 'social participation' and 'status reputation' of their fellows. In interviews, people referred to other members of the community in terms of 'inferior' and 'superior' economic positions, talked about whether others 'acted right' (in terms of styles of life), whether they belonged to the 'right families', or associated with the 'right kind of people', placing people above and below them in social cliques. As Table 5.1 shows these perceptions were used to aggregate a status structure of a limited number of social classes.

Warner's 'classes' have distinct styles of life, based on differences in occupation and income, but also different attitudes and values, expressed through different consumption patterns and tastes. Their class also shapes their social

participation, with differential association in family ties, clubs and cliques. And since the members of the same class share lifestyles and associate as intimate equals, this can be traced in the subjective evaluations that the members of a community make of each other.

> The 'right' kind of house, the 'right' neighborhood, the 'right' furniture, the proper behavior – all are symbols that can ultimately be translated into social acceptance by those who have sufficient money to aspire to higher levels than they presently enjoy. To belong to a particular level in the social-class system of America means that a family or individual has gained acceptance as an equal by those who belong in the class. The behavior in this class and the participation of those in it must be rated by the rest of the community as being at a particular place in the social scale.
>
> (Warner *et al.* 1949: 23)

Warner's approach combines all the key aspects of the stratification order identified by the classical authors: economic resources, lifestyle and consumption, interaction and association, and subjective perceptions of value. It uses the subjective experience of stratification to derive a measure of the objective, external stratification structure. However, there is a major question as to how successfully these disparate elements are integrated. Take the attempt to reconcile objective categories with subjective experience. Warner claimed that his six social classes were 'not categories invented by social scientists to help explain what they have to say; they are groups recognised by the people of the community as being higher or lower in the life of the city' (quoted in Kornhauser 1953: 227). The intention was to explore stratification in terms of how it is *meaningful* in the everyday lives of the people who experience it, and 'a central methodological assumption is that one builds up a picture of stratification inductively by examining the lives of ordinary members of society in the round', so it 'is grounded in how members of these communities understand their own activities' (Travers 1999: 7.3, 7.4).

Critics argue Warner's composite class structure lumps together quite different individual perceptions and criteria of ranking.

> For example, in the Jonesville study one panel member who was a professional man named the following categories during the course of the interviews: 'the society class' or 'the 400 class', 'the fringe of society', 'the upper-middle class', 'the working class', and the 'lulus'; another panel member who was a mill worker viewed the class hierarchy as being divided into three groups: a top group composed of powerful landowners, wealthy industrialists, and professional people, a second level of ordinary, poor people like himself, and a third group of people poorer than himself.
>
> (Kornhauser 1953: 229)

The implication is that Warner *imposed* a class structure on the rank evaluations he collected. Warner's method (aggregating subjective evaluations of rank) rests

Table 5.1 Warner's social classes (with a selection of the social evaluations used to compile the classes)

1	The upper class	'The 400', 'The Top Class', 'The Fancy Crowd', 'Snobs', 'People who look down on everyone else in town', 'the silk stockings', 'The Mainstreeters'
2	The upper middle class	'Good, substantial people, but not in the top group', 'a notch or two below The Fancy Crowd', 'people who are working to get somewhere', 'above average, but not tops'
3	The lower middle class	'top of the common people', 'Baptists', 'people with nice families who don't rate', 'working people but respectable'
4	The upper lower class	'the little people', 'poor but hard working', 'poor but respectable', 'poor people but nothing the matter with them', 'the Mill people'
5	The lower lower class	'people who live like animals', 'people who live like pigs', 'chronic reliefers', 'tobacco roaders', 'lulus', 'the poor and unfortunate', 'the people back of the tannery', 'Hill-billies'

Source: Adapted from Warner *et al.* 1949: 66–71

on the assumption that perceptions of status straightforwardly *reflect* the stratification structure. However, this ignores the extent to which perceptions differ by social position. Yet Warner's own research found that perceptions of social structure systematically vary. Individuals at different levels of the hierarchy did not make rankings on the *same basis*, with upper-level groups using criteria of prestige and style of life to rank, whilst lower-level groups ranked on income, wealth and economic superiority (Davis *et al.* 1941).

> Why, it is asked, does Warner describe a large number of classes, when only the upper strata recognise that many? Why are six divisions more 'real' than the three or four that are recognised by the lower strata? Why has Warner adopted the view that class is based on style of life and social reputation when members of the lower-middle, upper-lower and lower-lower classes (the vast majority of the population) are said to base *their* rankings *solely* on money?
>
> (Kornhauser 1953: 249)

Critics suggest that the ranking Warner developed was skewed towards the views of elite groups, emphasising consensual status rather than the power nature of rankings (Pfautz and Duncan 1950). This raises questions about the extent to which quite different perceptions and evaluations can be used to derive a single rank ordering (and therefore the extent to which this ordering is subjectively grounded rather than objectively imposed).

Warner's synthetic approach also prevents any analysis of the independent role of power and economic resources, or the relative strength of different factors in determining social position (Mills 1942). The common criticism is that stratification position is reduced to reputation ranking, ignoring the independent influence of economic and power relations. Put simply, my stratification position may not just depend on how others view me, since my economic or strategic clout may allow me to achieve my aims regardless of my status reputation, whether others approve or not. By characterising social position as a prestige ordering, Warner tended to downplay these non-consensual, non-reputational aspects of stratification.

By equating 'class' with 'class-awareness' (Mills 1942: 41), Warner ignores those hidden or non-subjective aspects of stratification which can influence social participation without people's awareness of it. The stratification system extends beyond the limits of subjects' awareness, but Warner's method stops at actors' perceptions. This is built into the approach, since Warner's anthropological technique (using members' accounts to build up a picture of social structure) required a community 'where the social organisation had become firmly organised and the relations of the various members of the society exactly placed and known by the individuals who made up the group'; so Warner did not want to study a community 'where the ordinary daily relations of the inhabitants were in confusion or conflict' (Warner and Lunt 1959a [1941]: 39). This choice inevitably minimises conflict and disagreement in status evaluations, as well as the 'hidden' (or non-perceived) features of status reputation and stratified social interaction.

The community studies approach is based on status evaluations in a small community, where the inhabitants of different status positions are personally known to each other. Status rankings are not based on occupation *per se*, but on the *overall* reputation and associated lifestyle and group membership that individuals possess. However, such multi-dimensional rankings of prestige (which are strongly linked to actual interaction patterns) can only be produced in small-scale settings of considerable social stability. As soon as we want to look at more anonymous and fluid social settings, or to consider the national picture of social status, the limitation of the community studies approach becomes apparent.

In urban settings 'social relations stretch far beyond direct face-to-face encounters and status becomes an "attributional" rather than an interactional matter. . . . In the city, then, people acquire their status from their social positions, rather than directly from their personal actions' (Scott 1996: 118). This need to investigate more generalised or impersonal rankings resulted in a shift in focus towards the national setting (Grimes 1991: 21), and a change in how stratification was conceived and measured. Stratification position was still seen as multi-dimensional, but the emphasis changed from the mapping of status relations in concrete locations (status as played out in interaction cliques and styles of life) to a more narrowly focused attempt to rank national lists of occupations by abstract prestige evaluations or by objective socio-economic measures.

Status as prestige

Prestige scales derive from the notion that the stratification structure can be mapped by looking at the general reputation of occupational positions. However, this is not reputation as it emerges from interpersonal relations and lifestyle, but rather the reputation of occupational categories, considered in the abstract:

> the reputational approach attempts to derive a description of the stratification system from evaluations or perceptions of positions (usually occupations) within that system, made by a set of respondents. In most forms of the approach, each respondent is presented with a list of occupations, chosen for their spread through an assumed social structure, and is then asked to place them in order, or to rate them on a specified scale, say from poor to excellent. The ranking or rating is performed according to some principle which is regarded as a general feature of stratification – usually some variation on the theme of 'occupational prestige' or 'social standing'.
>
> (Stewart and Blackburn 1975: 486)

The resulting prestige scores (which average individual ratings) give rise to a finely graded hierarchy of occupations. Prestige measures assume that objective measures of stratification can be derived from the subjective perceptions of those at different levels. In support of this it is argued that there is apparently a high level of agreement in the population over the ranking of occupations:

> the educated and uneducated, the rich and poor, the urban and rural, the old and young, all on the average have the same perceptions of the prestige hierarchy. There is no systematic subgroup variation in the relative ratings of jobs.
>
> (Treiman 1994: 209)

This similarity has been taken as evidence of a consensus about the worth of occupations, supporting functionalist claims of shared values about social rewards. Prestige-ranking exercises are therefore treated as a 'moral referendum' (Parkin 1972) over the legitimacy of the stratification system. It is argued that occupations at the top of the hierarchy are ranked highly in public opinion because of their functional importance to society, and because they require the most training, and are highly rewarded:

> prestige must be viewed as a measure of moral worth, that is, of the extent to which an occupation embodies that which is valued by members of society. Since power and privilege are universally valued and since hierarchies of power and privilege are relatively invariant, prestige will also be relatively invariant.
>
> (Treiman 1994: 211)

Cross-national agreement over prestige rankings is taken as evidence that inequality reflects the functional 'needs' of all societies, and receives moral support from the population as a whole (Barber 1957).

However, such conclusions are contested. Critics argue there is more disagreement over occupational prestige than most studies admit, and that the level of agreement that does exist does not actually indicate any *support* for inequality. Important variations in the ranking of particular occupations tend to be minimised by the methods and statistical techniques of comparison in prestige studies (Pawson 1989). Critics suggest that this artificially increases the level of agreement in such studies:

> cross-national, cross-cultural agreement is artefactual, depending as it does upon the set of stereotype occupational names that survive cross-national and translational comparison, and upon the crudest method of aggregating rating scale measurements.
>
> (Coxon *et al.* 1986: 47)

There is, for example, in many countries a general agreement that skilled jobs should be ranked higher than unskilled jobs. But this general, very abstract, level of agreement tends to swamp the finer details that emerge of disagreement about the ranking of *specific* occupations (Coxon and Jones 1978: 40–41).

There is also controversy about what prestige scales are actually *measuring*. The proponents of prestige scales assume that the 'goodness' of occupations is seen in terms of 'fairness' or 'justice'; however, for critics, prestige ratings do not reflect any general agreement on the *worth* of different occupations, but rather simply assess the various objective attributes (skill, income, etc.) that make jobs more or less *advantaged* (Goldthorpe and Hope 1972). When someone rates a bank manager as having higher 'social standing' than a plumber, they are not necessarily indicating that they think a bank manager is more socially useful, or deserving of higher rewards, than a plumber. Instead they are simply recognising that bank managers are in fact better paid than plumbers. A respondent need not agree with this state of affairs (they may fundamentally disagree with it), since the prestige rating they give the job merely acknowledges its advantage. This is an important rebuttal of functionalist theories of value consensus about stratification. If prestige ratings are cognitive rather than evaluative, then the differential rankings of occupations they produce are statements of fact (based on the respondent's assessment of the general income, education and training associated with particular occupations) rather than any indication of moral approval for those rewards.

However, if prestige ratings are simply 'error prone estimates' (Featherman and Hauser 1976) of the objective socio-economic characteristics of jobs, it makes more sense to measure socio-economic position directly (Goldthorpe and Hope 1972). This is what subsequent research has done, representing a move from subjective to objective measures of stratification.

Socio-economic position and status attainment

Prestige scales (like Warner's 'evaluated participation' classes) map stratification through the subjective perceptions of the population. Critics argue such approaches rest on a fundamental mistake, the false assumption 'that a single structure pervades the social consciousness' (Coxon *et al.* 1986: 13).

> Sociologists have tried to talk about, and even to quantify, a whole linear continuum of occupational status, while the 'people in the street' have for most of their time been unconcerned with this 'big picture' [. . .] people on the street are most concerned with the myriad complexities of day-to-day discussion of relatively short orderings within small segments of a set of social roles.
>
> (Coxon *et al.* 1986: 40)

Whilst individuals may be concerned with distinctions and differences in the occupations that they encounter on a daily basis (at work, through friends and family), the differences between occupations that they rarely encounter, or simply hear about in the abstract, may not mean much to them. Just because respondents can rank occupations in a linear hierarchy at the prompting of sociologists does not mean this is terribly meaningful for them, and may not relate to how they usually think of the differences between occupations. The rankings may, therefore, be an artefact of the sociological exercise, rather than a deep-seated feature of the social consciousness.

Objective scales of stratification, by contrast, do not depend on perceptions of prestige or social standing. Instead, socio-economic status is conceptualised in terms of the objective conditions affecting the general lifestyle associated with holding a particular occupation. There is no direct measurement of occupational lifestyles; instead, education and income are taken as the best predictors of lifestyle, with some weighted combination of the average education and income level of an occupational group used to place the job in an overall gradational scale. Such methods represent an attempt to capture not simply the labour-market characteristics of occupations, but their wider socio-economic advantage.

Although derived in different ways, both socio-economic and prestige scales give an index of a multi-dimensional hierarchy, in which a social dimension is stressed in addition to economic inequality. They provide a synthetic occupational measure of overall social position, the result of many different factors. Both also provide a gradational picture of the stratification order, with the social system composed of many finely differentiated social strata. Prestige scales tend to be well correlated with socio-economic scales, share similar assumptions about the underlying nature of the stratification order, and are used in very similar types of analysis. In particular, both have been used in *status attainment* approaches to stratification.

Status attainment approaches, the most influential strand in American stratification research during the 1960s–1970s, are strongly associated with the pre-eminence of Parsons's normative functionalism. These approaches to stratification

> view it as a finely graded hierarchy of positions, each with differing amounts of prestige or socioeconomic status. [. . .] These studies also contained at least an implicit belief in the legitimacy of the distribution of the various rewards that are attached to these positions, be they material or symbolic.
>
> (Grimes 1991: 128)

The best example of such research, Blau and Duncan's *The American Occupational Structure* (1967), measured the relative importance of the various factors affecting how well individuals fared in the status hierarchy. The study weighed up a range of factors affecting individual occupational success, ranging from so-called 'ascribed characteristics' (social background, measured by parental occupation and education) to 'achieved characteristics' (educational level), as well as 'career effects' (first job, indicating the entry level into the labour market). The conclusion of the study, a finding confirmed by others in the same tradition, was that individual success *was* affected by social background, but educational achievement played a greater role. They therefore argued that unequal social status in modern industrial societies was increasingly the result of differences in individual achievement rather than social background.

This approach generates essentially optimistic conclusions about the nature of stratification. The picture that emerges is of a highly stratified, but relatively open, society, where people broadly agree about the justice of the processes generating inequality. There are ample opportunities to move out of disadvantaged positions and few barriers to achievement. This chimes with normative functionalist theories about the functionalist 'needs' and integration of highly technical and complex modern societies.

These conclusions were attacked for giving a distorted, unduly positive account of stratification. In particular, status-attainment research was criticised for its individualistic assumptions: emphasising how individual characteristics affect success rather than investigating structural opportunities and constraints. Where structural factors do enter the analysis, they do so only as measured at the individual level (by parental social background, for example). But, of course, success is not just determined by our individual characteristics, but also by the overall range of opportunities that are available for us to succeed (or fail) within. No matter how bright you are, or how hard you work, your chances of success will always partly depend on how many high-level jobs there are in the labour market, and whether or not you get the opportunity to apply for them.

Class analysts argue that individualist assumptions are built into the methodology of the status-attainment approach, by seeing social position as the result of movement up (or down) a finely graded status hierarchy. The common objection is that this presents stratification as a fluid, open system, with little sense that there might be structural barriers to achievement: such as internal labour markets and job ladders, which provide greater opportunities for advancement in certain jobs than others; or more general factors, such as the overall expansion or contraction of different labour-market sectors (Goldthorpe *et al.* 1980; Sorenson 1994).

An increasingly widespread reaction against normative functionalism, by the 1970s, led to a revival of class and conflict theories. With the new prominence of class analysis, a different picture of stratification emerged: no longer a seamless open hierarchy, through which individuals moved freely, but rather a divided structure of unequal and opposing groups. For class theorists, structural inequalities generate conflicts of interest and social boundaries, and stratification rests on conflict, with groups competing for and monopolising unequal resources.

Resources and class

Class approaches emphasise economic relations as the basis of the stratification order, exploring how economic location translates into unequal life-chances and affects subjective perceptions and social groupings. Approaches vary in how they define 'economic location', but share a concern with how discontinuities in economic experience relate to social boundaries and conscious identity. Such approaches emphasise classes as discrete groups (potential and actual), emerging out of differential access to economic resources.

Class theorists rejected hierarchical status schemes for merely mapping the distribution of rewards, without indicating the underlying structures which give rise to that hierarchy. Gradational status schemes were seen as descriptive, whilst class schemes were 'theoretical' (Crompton 1996), because class schemes group occupations in terms of the theories of the market or production relations which are held to explain hierarchy and this explanatory framework is built more explicitly into the categories of class schemes.

The key difference is that status approaches measure overall social position ('status'), whereas class approaches stress the economic resources and relations that are seen to give rise to that social position (Sorenson 1994: 232). Class schemes do not rank according to the general lifestyle associated with an occupational position, but rather from the production and market situation of people in different class relationships. It is not how high (or low) we stand in some abstract and synthetic social scale, but rather how our specific class location places us in definite social relations (of control, subordination, or exploitation, for example) with others in different class locations.

Class analysis has always generated diverse frameworks. Rosemary Crompton distinguishes 'case-study' approaches from what she calls the 'employment-aggregate' method of analysis (Crompton 1996, 1998). Case-studies focus on class processes in particular workplace or community locales, and explore how workplace structures are interrelated with non-class 'contextual' factors, such as local status systems or the family life-cycle (Crompton 1996: 59). 'Employment-aggregate' approaches attempt to map the stratification order at a national and cross-national level, by grouping together occupations with similar labour-market and employment relations. Central to the employment-aggregate approach is the notion that classes have distinct life-chances, as a result of their different employment and ownership opportunities. In contrast to the more qualitative, contextual approach of case-studies, the 'employment-aggregate' approach uses

primarily quantitative survey methods, and has 'an empirical focus upon "class" (defined as employment) to the *exclusion* of other factors' (Crompton 1996: 59).

'Employment-aggregate' class schemes came to prominence in the 1970s. One, developed by Wright, uses neo-Marxist categories and groups labour-market positions on the basis of their differing relations of exploitation (Wright 1985, 1997). Another, neo-Weberian scheme, developed by Goldthorpe and colleagues, distinguishes jobs in terms of their employment relations (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992: 37; Goldthorpe *et al.* 1980). Despite theoretical differences, in practical terms the schemes are similar. Both aim to identify the extent to which class resources (as measured by grouping together occupations with similar property or labour-market conditions) affect the life-chances and social relations of the people who fall into those categories. The second approach (the Nuffield or CASMIN scheme) is discussed here.

Since the 1970s, class analysis has been increasingly identified with 'employment-aggregate' approaches (Crompton 1998; Savage 2000; Scott 2001). This is partly because they generate national measures of the class structure, which can be used by other (non-class) researchers employing 'class' as a variable. However, these theoretically based measures of class have also given rise to extensive and ambitious programmes of research, in which cross-national teams of researchers, using increasingly sophisticated methods of statistical analysis, have mapped out how class location affects social behaviour. The coordinated and cumulative nature of these programmes has had a greater impact than the more piecemeal approach of case-studies.

The Nuffield 'employment-aggregate' approach

The Nuffield approach maps the stratification order by looking at the objective aggregate employment relations of different jobs. As Table 5.2 shows occupations are grouped by their employment status relations: distinguishing employers, the self-employed and employees. There are big differences between employees, however, so the scheme divides this group by the nature of their contract with their employer. A 'labour' contract of employment (which might apply to a factory worker or a shop assistant) involves the straightforward exchange of labour for money, under direct supervision, with wages calculated on a piece or time basis. By contrast, some workers (such as professionals or managers) have a 'service' relationship with their employer, and are rewarded not only for the work done, but also have additional perks such as employment security, pension rights, and career opportunities. Employees in a service relationship can exercise autonomy and discretion, have delegated authority, and dispense their expertise *on behalf* of their employers, who trust them to make decisions for the good of the organisation. Other workers sit somewhere between these two models, and therefore have an 'intermediate' position. Clerical and lower-grade technical workers, for example, may exercise some supervisory functions, but they also work alongside rank-and-file manual workers and share some of their conditions of employment.

Underlying this careful separation of occupations with different employment relations is the idea that how we make a living (and the economic resources and opportunities that this brings) fundamentally affects our life-chances. This unites the Marxist emphasis on economic structure with the Weberian emphasis on the multiple influences on social behaviour, by investigating the *extent* to which economic class position influences life-chances, identity and action. The Nuffield research programme has shown that inequalities of income and wealth affect almost every aspect of our lives. To take just a few examples, your class location is related to: your life expectancy and chances of serious illness, how you are likely to vote, your chances of falling victim to crime, and your prospects of educational success. In addition, the impact of class location continues into the next generation, affecting, for example, the likelihood of your children being born underweight or dying young, and patterning their chances of educational or occupational success.

This last question – the extent to which economic class is an *enduring* structure of inequality – has been central to the Nuffield approach, with research focusing on the extent to which class advantage or disadvantage is passed on from one generation to the next. The standard method of analysis, the social mobility table, explores how the class position of parents relates to that of their children. This concern with social mobility is different from the status-attainment approach, since the emphasis is not on the determinants of *individual* success, but rather on how mobility flows *between* economic classes affect the formation of social groupings with 'demographic' continuity of personnel over time. There are two questions explored here: (i) what is the long-term attachment to particular economic positions? (ii) how does this attachment affect the formation of distinct class *groups* with clear-cut boundaries, and different class beliefs, cultural practices, or political activity?

The Nuffield occupational ordering 'closely resembles that of conventional hierarchical schemes reflecting prestige and/or lifestyle' (Crompton 1998: 66), but Goldthorpe insists his scheme is not hierarchical, because it reflects the employment *relations* of classes. He argues that categories with distinct employment relations are not necessarily 'higher' or 'lower' on some synthetic social scale (Goldthorpe *et al.* 1987: 43). This claim has been treated with some scepticism, since there are strong hierarchical elements within the Nuffield class scheme (Marsh 1986; Prandy 1990). The significant point, however, is that the class approach makes a rigid conceptual and methodological separation of the economic and status aspects of stratification.

Class analysts are critical of status scales because, as composite measures, they group occupations with very different employment circumstances at the same general status 'level'. This confounds the effects of social and economic factors in stratification processes, preventing the independent consideration of the *varying* impact of different employment conditions on life-chances. For example, whilst small shopkeepers and skilled technicians may have broadly the same overall social 'status', their access to market and property resources is quite different. This has an impact on intergenerational mobility patterns in such jobs, for example, with the sons of small shopkeepers being much more likely to inherit the same occupation as their fathers than the sons of technicians.

Table 5.2 The Nuffield class scheme

Classes	*Collapsed seven-class scheme*	*Employment relations*	*Collapsed three-class scheme*
I + II	*Service class* 1. large proprietors, professionals, administrators, and managers 2. higher-grade technicians, supervisors of non-manual workers	Employer or service relationship	Service class
IIIa + b	*Routine non-manual workers* 3. routine non-manual workers in administration and commerce 4. sales personnel, other rank-and-file service workers	Intermediate	Intermediate class
IVa + b	*Petty bourgeoisie* 5. small proprietors and artisans with employees 6. small proprietors and artisans without employees	Employer or self-employed	
IVc	*Farmers* 7. farmers and smallholders and other self-employed workers in primary production	Employer or self-employed	
V + VI	*Skilled workers* 8. lower-grade technicians, supervisors of manual workers 9. skilled manual workers	Intermediate or labour contract	
VIIa	*Non-skilled workers* 10. semi- and unskilled manual workers	Labour contract	Working class
VIIb	*Agricultural labourers* 11. agricultural and other workers in primary production	Labour contract	

Source: Adapted from Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992, Table 2.1, pp. 38–9

A more limited project

The Nuffield programme is justly famous for its methodological sophistication and conceptual rigour yet, ironically, it is this very caution and precision which has come under attack. For the Nuffield approach:

> the empirical investigation of the 'class structure' – as they see it – requires the systematic exclusion of other aspects contributing to stratification processes. In their efforts to achieve this objective, it is true that the Nuffield

> programme has become highly attenuated. It must be stressed, however, that this has come about as a process of the conscious development of the programme, and not through accident or oversight. This has resulted in strengths – a rigorous standard of empirical proof – as well as weaknesses – a progressive narrowing of focus.
>
> (Crompton 1996: 64)

Since the 1980s, class analysis has come under increasing attack amid claims of the 'death of class'. This reflects arguments that *economic* relations have become increasingly less important in shaping people's social and cultural destinies. Yet those who defend the continuing importance of class processes suggest that the narrowing focus of 'employment-aggregate' approaches is also a problem. From within class theory it is suggested that the 'minimalist' nature (Devine 1998) of employment-aggregate analysis has led to an 'attenuation' of aims (Morris and Scott 1996), resulting in class analysis being seen as an 'increasingly arcane and technical specialism' (Savage 2000: 149).

Critics of 'employment-aggregate' class analysis have made three main points: (1) that class analysis has sidelined issues of cultural identity and the subjective meaning of class location; (2) that too great a priority has been given to economic relations in explanations of stratification, downplaying the importance of status, gender and ethnicity; (3) that the economic cannot be rigidly demarcated as an independent factor determining stratification position, since it is inextricably intertwined with social and cultural factors. These charges all relate to problems with the conceptual separation class analysis makes between, on the one hand, economic relations as underlying causal structures and, on the other hand, subjective and cultural identity as causal 'effects'. Nuffield researchers have always argued that this rigid distinction is necessary in order to establish a clear causal model for empirical analysis. Critics see it as unduly restrictive.

Take the question of subjective meaning. The Nuffield approach deliberately first defines class in terms of 'objective', external criteria and only then explores subjective meanings as a class 'effect'. Social mobility is defined from the 'outside', with no reference to whether or not people themselves believe they have changed location. But the *experience* of mobility (or inequality) depends in large part on how we *perceive* that experience. Critics question whether it makes sense to relegate subjective meaning to such a secondary role, since 'to talk about subjectivity as only an "effect" – a dependent variable – is to ignore the way in which subjective processes are tied up with the strategies and actions which produce mobility itself' (Savage 1997: 317). In other words, there is a fundamental question over whether class analysis adequately addresses the relation between stratification as an *external and objective* set of relations, and actors' *perceptions* of that structure.

The Nuffield approach has been accused of defining 'class' minimally in terms of employment relations, effectively abandoning any notion of classes as 'collectivities of people who share identities and practices' (Devine 1998: 23). Claims about the 'death of class' have dwelt on the failure of class consciousness

and action to emerge, yet in defending class analysis, Nuffield researchers have only emphasised the enduring nature of patterned inequalities in life-chances, and have said very little about issues of class consciousness or identity. Cultural identity and subjective meaning are apparently no longer a 'core' aspect of the class project.

Research on social stratification has become increasingly focused on social mobility, 'and technical questions of defining class schema and allocating individuals to class categories' (Scott 2001: 129). As a result:

> there [is] little concern with using the concept of class to explain social divisions and processes of social exclusion. In the mainstream of class analysis, class became, to all intents and purposes, an empirical indicator of occupational position that – all too often – failed to yield the predictive power expected of it.
>
> (Scott 2001: 129)

Critics suggest that what is required is a 'closer investigation of interests and identities' (Crompton and Scott 2000: 5) to give issues of status, culture and identity a more prominent place within class analysis.

A related argument is that other forms of social division and identity – such as gender and ethnicity – have been ignored by class analysis, which has tended to see economic relations as more central. Proponents of the Nuffield approach protest that there is 'no assumption of the pre-eminence of class' in class analysis, since its aim lies in 'examining the importance of class (relative to that of other factors) in shaping life chances and patterns of social action' (Goldthorpe and Marshall 1992: 385). That is, there is no necessary reason why other forms of social division, such as gender or ethnicity, should not be incorporated into class accounts. This is slightly disingenuous, however, since class analysis has placed employment relations at the heart of its explanatory framework, and – historically – has devoted much less attention to other sources of hierarchy.

> Goldthorpe has restricted the remit of his theory to the mobilisation of economic resources (itself narrowly defined in terms of income) and the importance of cultural and social resources in the reproduction of advantage has been dropped from view.
>
> (Devine 1998: 24)

Goldthorpe has argued that 'class concepts must be as sharply defined as is operationally feasible, in order to avoid any confounding of class with other factors of possible relevance' (Goldthorpe and Marshall 1992: 385). In practice, this means that the class structure is defined quite *independently* of the education, status, prestige, lifestyle, gender or ethnic composition of occupations, even though these factors are acknowledged to affect an occupation's overall position in the stratification order. Increasingly, however, theorists have questioned whether this conceptual separation is desirable, or even feasible. Instead it has been argued

that class can only be understood through its complex inter-relationships with 'status' factors, which also entails rethinking the *methods* of class analysis:

> Class is a complicated mixture of the material, the discursive, psychological predispositions and sociological dispositions that quantitative work on class location and class identity cannot hope to capture. . . . Now what is required are British based ethnographic examination of how class is 'lived' in gendered and raced ways to complement the macro versions that have monopolised our ways of envisaging social class for far too long.
>
> (Reay 1998a: 272)

Crompton, for example, advocates '*social* class analysis which, rather than seeking to distance themselves from the status concept, are premised upon the interrelationship of the "economic" and the "social"' (1998: 119). So class analysis needs to concern itself with the processes of class *formation* (in which prestige, association and lifestyle, and status claims are entwined with economic class) as well as the investigation of class *effects*. As Chapter 8 shows, however, this entails rejecting the analytical model in which economic class structure *gives rise to* status (or cultural) differences.

Conclusion

Despite their varying principles of construction, the socio-economic, prestige and class approaches have essentially the same understanding of the stratification order, which is conceived as an external structure of positions. The common element in all these approaches is to first establish a stratification structure (whether it be a prestige, socio-economic or class ordering) and then measure the extent to which social relations are affected by position within it. The method straightforwardly derives from the classical legacy on stratification, in dividing structure from action, the economic from the social, and investigating the influence of the former on the latter.

This, of course, is the opposite of the method used by the community studies approach to stratification. Rather than establishing a structure of positions and then looking at the nature of social relations within it, Warner reverses this procedure, looking at how different valued resources (social, cultural and economic) combine within practical social relations to create ranked social groupings. Warner makes no division between the economic and the social aspects of stratification, and does not see cultural lifestyle as an effect of structure, but rather as a means by which stratification position is constituted. That is, the *combination* of lifestyle, reputation, and economic resources within interaction patterns is used to identify the stratification ordering. However, Warner is also influenced by functionalism, so his emphasis on social interaction patterns is filtered by a reliance on subjective prestige evaluations of these patterns. As we have seen, this emphasis on the prestige aspect of stratification undermines Warner's approach.

Following Warner, and with the shift to a national focus, attempts to map

stratification abandoned the notion of looking at actual status relations. Instead, mapping exercises have looked only at perceptions of the social standing of occupational titles considered in the abstract, or else have turned to the objective socio-economic characteristics of jobs. Both have produced scales of occupations quite independent of the actual social relationships of the people in the jobs. These 'conventional' approaches to stratification, whilst tightly defined, have also become very narrowly focused, as the measurement of stratification position has become centred on selected aspects of the occupational structure. There is no direct measurement of lifestyle, and status in its associational sense has dropped from the picture. These aspects of hierarchical social experience are now studied as effects of stratification position. So lifestyle and association, which in the community studies approach were used to identify the stratification order, are reduced to causal effects of a stratification structure defined in broad labour-market terms. Stratification in such approaches has increasingly been characterised as an external structure, independent of individual perceptions of it, and measured in terms of objective labour-market characteristics.

What is striking is how the wheel has again turned. Conventional approaches to stratification have been increasingly criticised for their prioritisation of labour-market relations (effectively sidelining social divisions such as gender and ethnicity), and for concentrating on the effects of stratification on life-chances and broad social trends, whilst downplaying issues of subjective consciousness, social identity and cultural lifestyles. Indeed, as we have seen, critics of conventional class theory have called for a rethink of the conventional division between the economic and the social, structure and action. All this takes us back to the principles in Warner's approach to stratification. Whilst the community studies tradition has not been revived, later chapters explore alternative approaches to stratification which embody many of Warner's principles, and focus on stratification as a process of cultural and interaction differentiation.

The first part of this book has argued that the classical theoretical foundations of stratification created an ambiguous and divided inheritance, creating an unravelling legacy of problems for later writers. Because stratification has increasingly emerged as a discipline focused on the structural, economic sphere, it has had difficulty accounting for symbolic, 'social' divisions (such as issues of race and ethnicity, gender, and cultural identity). The second part of the book, 'Deconstructions', now turns to look at these divisions, and explores recent claims that stratification analysis is outdated and increasingly irrelevant. In some recent accounts, the areas under-explored by conventional stratification analysis (gender, race and ethnicity, the cultural and the subjective) have come to overshadow economic inequalities; and – for some – these areas of social life are increasingly disconnected from economic or class constraints. Chapters 6 and 7 explore the emergence of these claims, in response to problems of theorising race and gender within the 'structural' and 'economic' models of conventional stratification theory. Race, ethnicity and gender have increasingly been seen as divisions which undermine economic class identities and groupings, and call into question conventional structural theories of identity. These chapters look at how

the emphasis on newer social divisions has undermined the very idea of structural forces or cohesive social groups, giving rise to a new emphasis on fragmentation and fluidity in social arrangements. Chapter 8 critically explores how such arguments have been used to deconstruct the very idea of 'stratification' (as the impact of ordered, enduring inequalities on individual lives), with the claim that material inequality no longer shapes our social identities as it once did. For some writers, the 'decline' of class is part of a general fragmentation and individualisation of social life.