

Social Stratification and Its Indices: A Critique¹

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Abstract

This paper examines the theoretical merits and the importance of social stratification. It re-conceptualizes social stratification based on the functionalist theory and works it into a more useful framework while avoiding confusion with Marx's notion of social class. The logic of this re-conceptualization lies in the response to the question of what a proper index for identifying social stratification should be. Our conclusion is that occupational prestige is the proper index for identifying social stratification. We confirm this by examining Iranian data and use our findings to critically review the commonly-used indices of social stratification.

Keywords

social stratification, social class, index of social stratification, social inequality, occupational prestige

Introduction

Social stratification, which is an aspect of social inequality, has persisted as an important social issue. It returned to sociological inquiry in the 1990s and has been rethought numerous times. Indeed, according to Miller (1991:327), “[n]early 30 of all research articles in major sociological journals [were] devoted to social stratification” in 1990. Social stratification is usually used as an independent and explanatory variable in empirical research. Yet, despite its

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theoretical and methodological merits, sociologists have not reached a consensus on its concept or measurement indices. Various indices are often used by scholars that do not necessarily provide an explicit theoretical conception. It is often not known to what social category these indices refer. Marsh (1986:144) writes “in order for it to have explanatory power, it is important that it is adequately theorized, otherwise circular explanations occur. For example, if Registrar-General’s classification is found to be related to some lifestyle variables, this can only be deemed an explanation if one can be sure that the class schema is not itself just a proxy for lifestyle groupings”. To show the importance of social stratification index, some argue that it is a critical concept for the whole discipline of sociology: “overcoming measurement shortcomings in the fundamental sociological concept of stratification calls for top scientific priority for the whole discipline (Haug, 1977:75)”.

In the following sections, first the importance of re-conceptualizing social stratification is highlighted by describing the concept based on the postulates of the functionalist theory. Its importance is further highlighted by examining its differential implications from Marx’s concept of *social class*. This re-conceptualization helps us understand social stratification in countries such as Iran, the case study in this index-reconstruction effort. It also helps us identify the universality of job-prestige structure regardless of geographical specificities.

Conceptualizing Social Stratification: A New Approach

Based on the functionalist approach to social stratification rooted in Davis and Moore’s (1945, 1953) functionalist theory, social stratification is thought to be a general feature of all complex societies (Nayebi 2002).⁴ The necessary function of social stratification, according to Davis and Moore, is to drive the qualified individuals in a direction where they fill important social positions. These (a series of duties for performing a social function) are specialized or authoritative positions whose functions are difficult to perform and to which access is limited. They require powerful motifs and significant material or nonmaterial (symbolic) rewards. Education or long periods of training are often necessary to hold these positions. Authoritative (formal, institutionalized power) positions are necessary in any society because their function is to coordinate and manage collective activities requiring high levels of skill and responsibility. Every society is therefore bound to consider a set of measures that motivates people to fill these positions and perform each position’s duties. This set of measures is crystallized in a systematic and unequal distribution of material or symbolic rewards. This is the basic function of social stratification. *Social stratification, systematic and unequal distribution of material or symbolic*

rewards among social positions, has a necessary function. Thus, no position should remain unfilled (*first proposition*), and all positions should be filled by competent applicants (*second proposition*). The unequal distribution of material or symbolic rewards takes place through societal ranking of social positions. The required expertise (education or skills) for performing the duties of a position as well as the required authority are the two factors that determine the ranking of the social position (*third proposition*). The first and second propositions explain social stratification, and the third one shows the mechanism necessary for social stratification to practically take place.

This conceptualization of social stratification leads us to believe that it is regarded as a continuum with an ideal type of open society in one end (in which everybody has equal opportunity to fill the social positions) and an ideal type of closed society in the other end (in which nobody can fill the positions). In contemporary open societies which are in the middle of this scale, institutions such as family and inheritance to some extent limit people's access to equal opportunity. Therefore, the second function of social stratification (meritocracy) doesn't completely take place. However, the first function of social stratification (encouragement mechanism to fill all social positions) always happens.

As suggested earlier, social stratification has two dimensions: (a) systematic and unequal distribution of material rewards and (b) distribution of symbolic rewards. The material rewards mainly consist of cash income and in some instances, especially in the case of authoritative positions, dwellings, automobiles and so on. Symbolic rewards of social positions are embedded in their subjective rankings, that is, the prestige (respect) a society awards to these positions. The prestige of a social position in this sense is close to what Weber considers in his conception of status groupings. The concept of prestige in a Weberian sense also reflects social honor. Yet, our concept does not imply that people who fill the social positions constitute a group with an organized identity. Social prestige is attributed to social positions as opposed to individuals. Therefore, it differs from nonmaterial rewards such as medals and similar honors which are given to people for their special contributions or popularity. The prestige of a social position is distinctive from occupational aspiration which is affected by familiarity with various occupations and needs skill and individual talent.

Social prestige is distributed unequally among social positions. The positions have different social rankings. Thus, the social prestige of the positions is hierarchical. This hierarchy is only determined by specialty and authority of the social positions, because prestige is not scarce and its distribution is not limited. It may therefore be claimed that the hierarchy of social prestige is essentially stable at all times and in all places. This means that the prestige of a social position has structure. The prestige structure of the social positions is the

symbolic dimension of social stratification regardless of time and space dimensions.

Material reward, however, is scarce and distributed among social positions in accordance with their scarcity, especially according to the scarcity of specialists. Indeed, the distribution of material rewards is made available through a supply and demand mechanism. For example, allocation of income to medical experts depends on the extent of supply of physicians and the level of demand for their service. Therefore, the position of this occupation in terms of the distribution of rewards is rather unstable. The prestige of medical specialization, nonetheless, is stable in proportion to the rank of its specialty. However, the supply and demand mechanism itself makes material rewards of the social positions more or less propositional to the rate of their specialty in a long time span. Other factors such as the intervention of trade unions also affect the distribution of material rewards. Trade unions can make efforts to have limits on training new experts in the field in order to secure the members' interests. This effect is, however, limited by societal needs or expected standards of society for that specialty. Also, personal performance plays its role in distributing the material rewards. That is, one person may receive more reward because of his or her good performance while another may receive less reward because of his or her weak performance in a given social position. The material reward of the authoritative social positions fluctuates much less than the specialized social positions, because it depends on the frequency of institutes and collective activities and their size. However, as long as the selection of people for middle authoritative positions takes place based on their managerial skills, the distribution of material reward among them depends on the supply and demand of competent applicants. The material rewards of the high ranking authoritative social positions, nevertheless, vary in accordance with the political structure of a given society.

In short, material reward, unlike symbolic reward, is unstable to some extent, since it varies by both the supply of the qualified persons and their performance. High level specialists receive higher material reward than low level specialists. Yet, the instability of material reward, on the one hand, and the difficulty in the measurement of non-monetary and even cash material reward of social positions, on the other hand, makes it hard to determine the material reward structure of social stratification. Therefore, the social prestige structure is the only proper index for understanding social stratification. This is especially true because there must theoretically be a high level of correlation between symbolic and material rewards of social positions, since these two dimensions are objective and subjective aspects of a social phenomenon, social ranking of social positions. Empirical research also supports this claim. For instance, Miller (1991:332) indicates that in the United States the correlation between

income and prestige of occupations is very high ($r=0.85$). A lack of correspondence between these two dimensions weakens their theoretical merits as well as the functional and empirical existence of social stratification. This is while the necessary function of social stratification requires high correlation between the subjective and objective dimensions of this phenomenon.

Now that we have indicated the functionalist approach to conceptualizing social stratification, it should also be noted that our concept of social stratification is distinct from Marx's concept of social class. Marx's concept of social class is based on the individual's relation to the means of production. Marx (1982) views classes as actual or potential forces or social actors which have the capacity to change the society. Marx also considers a struggle to take place between classes as the major motor of historical transformation of societies. Social stratification has a necessary function for the survival of the society whereas Marx's social classes have a positive function in the transformation and development of the society. Based on this conceptual differentiation, two different approaches have shaped both of which analyze social inequality: (1) social class approach, and (2) social stratification approach. The social class approach tends to clarify the dynamics of social relations in the production process, highlighting the inherent conflict between social classes and class struggle which lead to social transformation. The social stratification analysis approach, in contrast, tends to indicate the stability and order of the society, emphasizing a structure of rewards distribution.

The above distinction however is not universally known, as Giddens (1983), for instance, defines social stratification as systematic inequality among different groupings, naming slavery, cast, serf and class as four basic systems of stratification. Yet, three among the latter, namely slavery, feudalism and capitalism are part of Marx's theoretical model. Others such as Haug and Sussman (1971), Stozman and Gaberg (1974), and especially Garb (1973) are against any intention to generalize social stratification to every type of social inequality, emphasizing the distinction of the two concepts and regarding the confusion with these two important theoretical conceptualizations as a serious weakness.

Weber sees the two concepts of status groups and social classes as distinct. Yet, he regards property as a determinant in the distribution of wealth similar to Marx. The difference, however, is that Weber adds the other two dimensions, that is, status group and parties to the above-mentioned economic dimension: "Classes, status groups, and parties are phenomena of distribution of power within a community (Weber 1982:61)". Indeed, Weber sees social inequality as an unequal distribution of power in these three dimensions. While he regards property as the main determinant within the economic dimension and of social classification, he deploys other important factors into his analysis: "Property"

and 'lack of property' are, therefore, the basic categories of all class situations... Within these categories, however, class situations are further differentiated (Weber 1982:61). Further, Weber states that "in principal, the various controls over consumer goods, means of production, classes, resources and skills each constitute a *particular* class situation (Weber 1982:69)". In his view, class is a collection of individuals who have the shared economic conditions and interests. "[C]lass situation' and 'class' refer only to the same (or similar) interests which an individual shares with others (Weber 1982:69). Indeed, he does not regard class as a group by stating that "in any case, a class does not in itself constitute a group (Weber 1982:63)". Weber sees a status group as a group which is based on social honor and prestige: "the way in which social honor is distributed in a community between typical groups participating in this distribution we call the 'status order'... in contrast to classes, status groups are normally groups. They are, however, often of an amorphous kind (Weber 1982:61)". Moreover, status groups usually have a distinctive "lifestyle" or subculture according to Weber: "status honor is normally expressed by the fact that above all else a specific *style of life* is expressed from all those who wish to belong to the circle (Weber 1982:65)", and "with some over-simplification, one might thus say that classes are stratified according to their relations to the production and acquisition of goods; whereas status groups are stratified according to the principles of their *consumption* of goods as represented by special style of life (Weber 1982:67)". Indeed, in Weber's view, while class membership represents the power of individual in the economic system, a status group expresses the power which takes its roots from the distributed honor in the status system. Therefore, class system and status system are two distinctive hierarchal systems which characterize the relative power of individuals and groups.

Having specified the distinctive conceptual features of social stratification and social classes, we can now deal with operationalization of the social stratification index. As mentioned before, the prestige structure of social positions which is the symbolic dimension of social stratification and has high correlation with its material dimension is an appropriate representative of social stratification. However, in contemporary societies, social positions are mainly materialized in an individual's occupation, because it has become a main mode of survival, constituting the base of human communications. Thus, occupations constitute the fundamental elements in the study of social stratification. On this Hodge, et al (1967:309) argue that "as major roles through which rewards are distributed and power exercised, occupations are central to any study of social stratification". A number of studies about the structure of social positions' prestige have also focused on occupational prestige (e.g., Trieman 1977). Similarly, we regard the structure of occupational prestige as the index of the

structure of social positions' prestige as well as the proper index of social stratification.

The question now is how the structure of occupational prestige may be determined. Determining the structure of occupational prestige requires measuring its public evaluation in any given society. Likert's five-portion and rank-ordered scale is usually used to do the job. In this sense, occupational prestige is an ordinal variable with five ranking portions (very high, high, middle, low and very low standing). Quantitative scales do not fit it, because such a measurement must be performed based on people's evaluation. A non-quantitative and ordinal scale is usually used for such an evaluation.

This now leads us to another question, this time on public evaluation. We can define public evaluation as the consensus of adult individuals on the ranking of the prestige of various occupations. If all people have a clear idea about the expertise or authority attached to every occupation, then theoretically, all of them will rank the prestige of each occupation similarly. It can be expected that the people involved in evaluation to be familiar with all occupations in a simple community which has fewer occupations than a complex society. Such expectation, however, from people in the contemporary, complex societies which have a large number of occupations is futile. In such societies, it may be expected that people's level of familiarity with the expertise and authority of positions which are the manifestations of high or low specialization or authority, would be high. As a result, the degree of consensus on the rank of outstanding positions would also be high. Similarly, the level of consensus on other positions would be low.

Prestige Structure in Iran

The findings of our empirical research on the occupational prestige structure of Iran confirm the above claims. A survey of persons 15 years of age or older was conducted in Tehran in 2001 (1,400 subjects were selected in a multistage cluster sampling). The empirical (construct) validity of the main variable, occupational prestige, was found to be 0.93 and its reliability 0.86. Results indicate that there is a high level of consensus on occupational prestige of scientists, professors, physicians, and high level government officials. These occupations are highly specialized, and/or reflect highly authoritative positions. There is also a high level of consensus on manual and service jobs as positions that do not need specialization or authority.

When there is an absolute majority (50 percent or more) of adult people (usually a probability sample of them) who assign the same rank to a given position, this is considered to be an indicator of the presence of a consensus on the prestige of that position. In cases where there is not enough familiarity with the positions, it becomes difficult for people to rank the two neighboring ranks

(occupations) and a different strategy needs to be applied. We have, therefore, two criteria for identifying the level of public consensus; absolute and relative consensus. The first criterion refers to an *absolute consensus* and means an absolute majority of people in any given society assign a rank to that position. The second criterion refers to a *relative consensus* which means that the highest absolute majority of people in any given society assign their evaluations to two neighboring ranks that represent the highest majority.

Having categorized the rank of each occupation's position in such a way, we will theoretically have nine prestige strata as follows: (1) the first stratum involves the positions on which people have absolute consensus as very high standing; (2) the second stratum includes those positions on which people have relative consensus as being very high or high standing; (3) the third stratum involves the positions that on which an absolute consensus can be as being high standing; (4) the fourth stratum includes the positions on which a relative consensus is expressed as being high or middle standing; (5) the fifth stratum involves the positions on which an absolute consensus exists as being middle standing; (6) the sixth stratum involves the positions on which a relative consensus exists as being middle or low standing; (7) the seventh stratum includes those positions on which an absolute consensus can be identified as being low standing; (8) the eighth stratum involves the positions on which people have relative consensus as being low or very low standing; (9) and finally, the ninth prestige stratum includes the positions on which absolute consensus exists as very low standing.

If the above-mentioned nine strata include all positions, then, we will conclude that there is consensus on occupational prestige structure. By empirical findings we will support the assumption that there is a consensus on all positions, that is, there is an absolute consensus on the prestige of more than half of the surveyed occupations and there is also a relative consensus on the others. The absolute consensus on the prestige of occupations of the extreme ends of the strata is very high (see Table 1). That is, on average, almost three-fourths of respondents have unanimous agreement about the fact that the occupations of the ninth stratum are very low standing and two-thirds of them have consensus about the position of the occupations of the first stratum as very high standing. The relative consensus on the prestige of positions of the middle strata is very high as well (Table 1).

Table 1: Average Percent of Consensus on Social Positions of Occupational Prestige Strata

Strata	Absolute Consensus	Relative Consensus
First stratum (very high standing)	63.9	
Second stratum (high or very high standing)		81.2
Third stratum (high standing)	53.1	
Forth stratum (high or medium standing)		75.3
Fifth (medium standing)	59.2	
Sixth stratum (low or medium standing)		74.1
Eighth stratum (low or very low standing)		74.2
Ninth stratum (very low standing)	73.8	

However, since our criterion of consensus on the prestige of a given occupation is 50 percent unanimity, there may be a question about whether or not disagreements of the minority with the majority are systematic. To answer this question, it should be noted that according to the third proposition put forth by the functionalist theory on social stratification, the determinants of social ranking of positions are mainly related to the level of specialization and authority that each position requires. Therefore, there are no factors that systematically affect the social ranking of the prestige of each position. The lack of complete consensus in the evaluation process can only be related to accidental factors, that is, mainly to a lack of familiarity with and knowledge of the reviewers about the level of specialization or authority that each position possesses. This means, none of the key social variables (sex, age, education, employment status, social stratification, etc.) in addition to the economic and cultural conditions of the society affect people's evaluation of the prestige of an occupation.

Table 2: Occupational Prestige Structure of Iran

Prestige Stratum	Kind of Occupation and Social Position	For Example
First stratum	very highly specialized,	scientists, university professors, special physician, presidency, the Supreme Court, minister
second stratum	authoritative highly specialized, authoritative,	architect, economist, author judge, leader of house, provincial governor religious authority
third stratum	religious specialized, authoritative,	psychologist, sociologist, physician, engineer ambassador, assistance of minister head of bank, newspaper responsible manager
fourth stratum	manager semi specialized, middle authoritative	engineering technician, nurse, midwife city council member, high union official, office manager school manager, armed force officer, district head director, musician, actor, painter, newspaper editor
fifth stratum	artist	primary, high school teacher
	teacher	large manufacture, large firm head, large merchant clergy
fifth stratum	big businessman	financial clerk, typist, secretary
	religious	small manufacture, small firm head, supermarket head, goldsmith, shopkeeper, restaurant owner
sixth stratum	clerical	turner, foreman, metal molder, tailor, blacksmith, mechanic, repairman, electrical fitter, TV repairman
	small businessman	bricklayer, motor vehicle driver
sixth stratum	skilled manual worker	factory worker, miner,
	semi skilled worker	nursemaid, canvasser, newsvendor, telephone operator
eighth stratum	unskilled worker	porter, cleaner, janitor, street vendor, shoe shiner
	service clerk	street exchange vendor
ninth stratum	service worker	coupon dealer, bibliomancy, money lender
ninth stratum	low service worker	

The empirical findings of our survey research confirm the above claim. For example, the very high specialized social positions (such as scientists, professors, etc.) and authoritative positions (president, ministers, etc.) are at the top of the occupational prestige structure of Iran. And the prestige of social positions decreases as the rate of their specialization or authority decreases, i.e., a trend that ends in a situation where occupations without specialization or authority such as manual and service jobs are evaluated to be at the bottom of the occupational prestige structure (see table 2).

It should also be noted that the occupational prestige structure does not have a close relation with major social variables such as sex, age, education, employment status, or social stratification. The ratios of correlation (eta square)

of major occupations with sex are below 0.01 (Table 3). The maximum relation occurs between sex and clergyman (*pishnamaz-e masjed*). Its ratio of correlation is 0.043 which is very low. The other variables have the similar ratio patterns. The ratios of correlation of major occupations with these variables are generally below 0.01 and there are very few occupations whose correlations with these variables score higher than 0.04. These occupations are generally among middle ranking occupations. The maximum correlation is only 0.068 which is quite low.

**Table 3: Percent of Ratio Correlations
Between Prestige of Occupations and Social Variables**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Below .010</i>	<i>.010 - .019</i>	<i>.020 - .029</i>	<i>.030 - .039</i>	<i>.040 - .068</i>
Sex	82	12	4	1	1
Age ¹	70	20	8	1	1
Education ²	70	22	4	4	0
Employment Status ³	31	45	18	4	2
Employment category ⁴	59	25	7	6	3
Employment division ⁵	64	15	13	3	7
Prestige stratum	27	25	19	17	12

1. Young (15-24), middle-aged (25-49), or old (50 or over).

2. Low (illiterate or primary), medium (middle or high school), or high (above high school).

3. Housekeeper, student (middle or high school), student (collage, university), employed, unemployed, or other (retired, having income without work, conscript).

4. Employer, independent, or salaried.

5. Private or governmental sector.

The suggested occupational prestige structure in this research is to a great extent similar to Treiman's Standard International Occupational Prestige Scale (Treiman 1977). The latter is a scale that Treiman introduces to represent the occupational prestige structure of all complex societies. We used it here to indicate that its correlation with our model is very high ($r=0.93$). Treiman examines a hypothesis on the similarity and the universality of occupational prestige structure of various societies. He examines research on occupational prestige conducted in nearly 60 countries throughout the world, from high industrialized countries such as United States to traditional peasant societies in Nigeria, Thailand, and India with different sampling designs (probability and no-probability). He concludes "prestige ordering of occupations will be fundamentally invariant in all complex societies, past and present (Treiman 1977:5)". Treiman constructs his standard scale based on this generalization. It can then be claimed that important social variables and economic-cultural

conditions of the society do not have a significant effect on people's evaluation of occupational prestige.

A Critical Review of Social Stratification Indices

Occupation, income, or education (or some combination of them) is usually used as the main component of social stratification indices in empirical research. However, such studies are not based on theoretical conceptualization of social stratification. As a result, they have some serious weaknesses that we attempt to address here. We limit our review to common indices of social stratification which, in Miller's (1991:327) opinion, are: *Duncan's Socioeconomic Index*, which is a combination of income, education and prestige; *Siegel's (NORC) Prestige Scores*; *Treiman's Standard International Occupational Prestige Scale*; *Nam-Powers Socioeconomic Status Scores* which is a combination of income, education and occupational rating; *Hollingshead's Two-Factor Index of Social Position* which is a combination of education and occupation; *Revised Occupational Rating Scale from Warner, Meeker and Ells's Index of Status Characteristics* which is a combination of resources of income, occupation, the type and region of residence; *Alba M. Edwards's Social-Economic Grouping of Occupation* which is a combination of income and education.

These indices could be critically reviewed by dividing them into the one-factor and the multiple-factor indices. One-factor indices are *Siegel's (NORC) Prestige Scores*, and *Treiman's Standard International Occupational Prestige Scale*—which are both indices of the occupational prestige and are some what similar to the index we used in conceptualizing the prestige structure. These two indices are used in accordance with people's evaluation of honor and of prestige of occupations. Their emphasis, however, is on the scores of occupational prestige and are based on the average prestige scores (ratings) for every occupation and don't necessarily represent a consensus on the prestige. Therefore, they are different from what we introduced in conceptualizing the prestige structure. We emphasized the methods that examine and measure a consensus on the social rating of each occupation. For example, if all the people in a given society give a medium rank to an occupation, its prestige score would be 60 given that the scores vary from 20 to 100 to ratings (very low standing=20, low standing=40, middle standing=60, high standing=80 and very high standing=100). Now consider that if one-fifth of the same people attribute a very high rank to a different occupation, and the same proportion rank the same occupation as high, one-fifth rank it as medium, one-fifth rank it as low and one-fifth rank it as very low, then the prestige score of the occupation under evaluation would be 60 $[(.20 \times 100) + (.20 \times 80) + (.20 \times 60) + (.20 \times 40) + (.20 \times 20)]$. Although the prestige scores of these two different occupations are

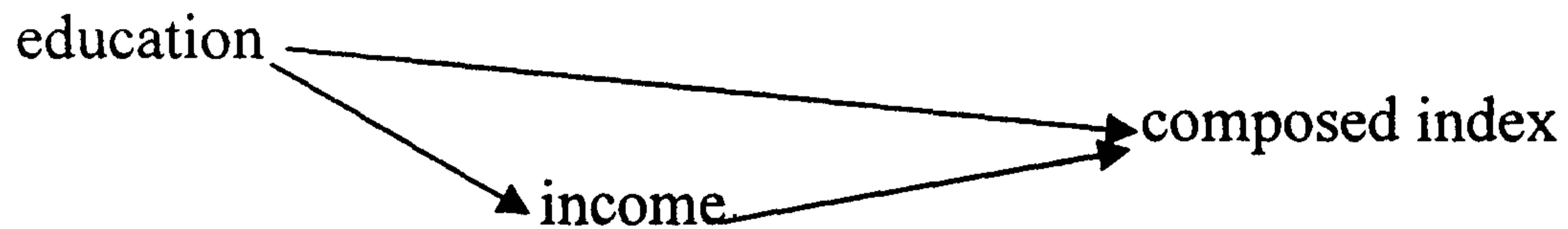
the same, the first occupation, with a complete consensus on its rank, can be categorized as a medium prestige, and the second occupation can only be categorized as having no prestige at all due to the fact that there is no consensus on its prestige. This indicates that these indices do not have a theoretical base and not a logical device for understanding social structure. It can, nevertheless, be said that because there is a consensus among people about the social origins of prestige of occupations (social positions), this consensus is mainly crystallized in the prestige scores. It should also be added that because these indices reflect only the average of prestige scores, they do not reflect Weber's theoretical conception of status groups as groups.

The simplest multiple factor indices consist of *Alba M. Edwards's Social-Economic Grouping of Occupation* and *Hollingshead's Two-Factor Index of Social Position*. Edwards's index is composed of income and education. Since income may have its origins in property, occupation, inheritance, etc., in itself, it cannot necessarily convey a theoretical conception, and does not represent a defined social category. Therefore, using it either as a component of a composed index or as an individual index of social stratification will only confuse such theoretical conceptions as social stratification and social class. If an attention is only paid to using the occupational income, it will still be difficult to measure it as an index of social stratification because it is dependent on various factors such as the supply and demand mechanism and performance of individuals. Moreover, the combination of income and education results in three problems. First, variables such as income and education are naturally heterogeneous. This is because "income" is a material reward of a social position, and reflects the material dimension of social stratification; "education" is the necessary precondition for acquiring formal skills and occupying a skill-based position. Therefore, these two heterogeneous variables may not be combined to represent status or prestige of an occupation. Second, there is a cause and effect relationship between these two variables, that is, "education" is one of the determinants, or perhaps the most important determinant, of *income*. Therefore, combining these two will result in a tautology. Indeed, if there were full correlation between income and education as the components of the composed index, then income would be the intervening variable between the education and composed index:

education \longrightarrow income \longrightarrow composed index

In this case, each of them (income and education) could individually reflect occupational ranking (stratification), and there will be no need to such a futile index that combines education and income. If there is no absolute relation

between income and education (which is the case), then income will be the partial intervening variable between the education and composed index:



Thus, the composed index will inflate to the extent that education starts to have an indirect effect on it. This point is evident in *Alba M. Edwards's Social-Economic Grouping of Occupations*. As in Table 4, there is a high correlation between the level of education and level of income of occupational groupings. That is why it is safe to say that each of them can be representative of another, and the combinations of them do not have any advantage. In any case, the composed index is not a useful index, because if there is a high correlation between its components, then using it would not have any more advantage than any of its components. And if there is no reasonable correlation between its components then it will be a composed index whose components have an arbitrarily weighting. In this sense, applying an arbitrary weighting to the components of the index becomes its main weakness.

The third and most important problem of this index is that it is not based on any theory. Therefore, it may not be considered as an indicator of any social category. For instance, the position of a university professor with medium income and high education (whose prestige is very high) is similar to that of an automobile salesman with high income and medium education (whose prestige is medium) by this index. The question is: Is there any similarity between the two occupations? Do they have the same social orientations, attitudes, or behaviors? Are they from the same social class or stratum? The answer is no. And the useful fact is that the lack of a theoretical conceptualization as addressed here results in the formation of a meaningless, barren and even misleading concept.

Table 4: Mean of Education and Income of Alba M. Edwards's Socioeconomic Grouping of Occupations

Occupational Group	Men Mean School Years Completed 25 Years and Over (1970) ^a	Mean Earnings 25 -64 Years (1969) ^b	Women Mean School Years Completed 25 Years and Over (1970) ^a	Mean Earnings 25 -64 Years (1969) ^b
Professional, technical, and kindred workers	16.5	\$16007	16.1	\$6366
Managers and administrative workers, except farm	12.9	13733	12.5	6430
Sales workers	12.8	11537	12.2	3290
Clerical and kindred workers	12.5	8461	12.5	4605
Craftsmen, foremen, and kindred workers	11.8	8749	11.8	5048
Operatives and kindred workers	10.7	7376	10.3	3810
Laborers, except farm and mine	9.3	6089	10.8	3466

a. 1970 U.S. Census of Population, *Educational Attainment*, PC (2)-5B (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, March 1973), Table 11, 213-14.

b. 1970 U.S. Census of Population, *Earnings by Occupation and Education*, PC (2)-8B (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, January 1973), Tables 1 and 7.

Source: Miller, C. Delbert, 1991, *Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement*, 5th ed., Sage, California, p. 364.

The next two-factor index is *Hollingshead's Two-Factor Index of Social Position* which is composed of education and occupation. Hollingshead divides occupations into seven strata by their position in terms of authority, skills and value of the involved capital. He also divides education into seven categories and combines them by giving a weight of seven to occupational ranking and a weight of four to educational ranking. This index, in addition to deploying an arbitrary factor to rank the occupations, confuses social stratification with class. Moreover, it has more or less the same problems as those of *Alba M. Edwards's Social-Economic Grouping of Occupations*. First, occupational ranking is not a homogenous process with that of the educational ranking which is a condition for acquiring an occupation. Second, there is a cause and effect relationship between them and, as a result, their combination causes recount and inflection of the index. Third, it is not a representative of any social category.

The other multiple-factor indices which are composed of more than two factors have also the same problems as those of the two-factor indices. *Duncan's Socioeconomic Index*, for example, is the most widely used index of social stratification in Miller's opinion. It also uses a combination of income,

education, and prestige. Income and prestige, however, are heterogeneous, since the former is the objective dimension of social ranking of the social positions (occupations), whereas the latter is its subjective dimension. Also, the income factor is a material reward, whereas the education factor is a symbolic reward. Further, their combination causes recount and tautology because of high correlation between them. Their combination with education has the same problems as we addressed earlier in criticizing Edward's two-factor index.

Nam-Powers Socioeconomic Status Scores which is a multiple-factors index is also based on a combination of income, education and occupational rankings. This index has the same problems as those of combining the income-factor with education-factor, and/or the same problems as those of combining the occupational rankings with education-factor as mentioned earlier.

Finally, *Revised Occupational Rating Scale from Warner, Meeker and Ells's Index of Status Characteristics* is also a multiple-factors index composed of four factors including resources of income, occupation, type and region of residence. This index problems associates with other indices mentioned above. For example, it confuses social stratification with social class in evaluating the source of income. Also, there is usually a high correlation between type and region of residence as both are factors whose stance in the evaluation is mainly determined by income. Therefore, this index also leads the researcher to a situation of multi-count of the values and tautology.

Concluding Remarks

The commonly-used indices of social stratification which are created by combining factors such as income, education, occupational ranking, prestige, etc., or are based on an arbitrary combination of these factors, have serious weaknesses. For example combining a number of plausibly heterogeneous factors which cannot consequently be added to one another to make a new index; or combining a number of factors among which a cause and effect relationship exists results in recount and tautology. The latter combination results in a situation where the criterion of a social stratification is confused with that of a social class—two distinctive social inequality systems. Most of the commonly-used indices make a distinction between individuals rather than identifying social categories. Therefore, they do not consider most of the known social categories. All these weaknesses result from a lack of theoretical conceptualization. As such, the indices are not proper representatives of social stratification, which is based on a systematic unequal distribution of material or symbolic rewards among social positions.

Sighting a number of shortcomings with the existing indices, in this paper, we have instead used the structure of occupational prestige that is based on a

relatively stable hierarchy of prestige (honor) of social positions (occupations) on which people have consensus. This is a proper representative of material dimension of social stratification, as there is a high correlation between these two dimensions. Therefore, it is a proper representative of social stratification. Further, it can be used as a standard index which is based on a given theoretical conceptualization, proven to have a high degree of validity and reliability as a means of measurement.

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