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CONCEPTS AND MEASUREMENT OF PRESTIGE

Bernd Wegener

Department of Sociology, University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany

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Abstract

Reviewing the major stratification theories that involve prestige as a concept, this chapter suggests that these theories differ in that they base prestige on achievement, esteem, honor, or charisma. None of these theories is able to solve the problem of how theoretically to merge the idea of social closure with that of a hierarchy of positions. Empirically, research on prestige and prestige measurement has for some time been confronted with findings that demonstrate the inferior role of prestige in status attainment models. Dissensus in prestige judgments, regarding prestige of women in particular, is another recent concern. While the "dominant view" of prestige measurement, arguing for prestige consensus in society, is defended, emphasis is placed on studies that detect systematic interindividual variation of prestige judgments. The review concludes that empirically, prestige research has diversified and deals now with two different concept of prestige, one linked to the idea of a social hierarchy and the other to that of socially closed groups. A reconciliation of both views is wanting.

INTRODUCTION

In spite of the apparent success achieved in measuring prestige, several observers suggest that prestige is not a homogeneous phenomenon but that two types of prestige exist. For instance, Eisenstadt (1968:68) speaks of the "purely consummatory symbolic" side of prestige, as opposed to its structural

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ramifications; Tumin & Feldman (1970:433) see prestige as a reward continuum set apart from its "moral worth"; and Udy (1980:159) describes two stratification systems, one shaped by prestige as a "system of beliefs" and the other by a "system of activities." I believe, the continual problem of how prestige can be "structural" accounts for these divergent interpretations. Even if we are convinced that prestige is veridical, as a variable sociologists have little use for it so long as they are unable to demonstrate that this variable matters: either the social structure of inequality is a source for determining prestige judgments, or prestige judgments determine social structure. Neither of these has yet been demonstrated satisfactorily.

Since the late 1970s, the situation has become especially acute. Social mobility research has shifted away from the status attainment paradigm, which had dominated the field since Blau & Duncan (1967); this shift resulted in a restoration of the concept of class as an analytical tool (Wright 1985, Goldthorpe 1987). Unfortunately, however, prestige is not particularly relevant to class theory. What is more, even within the traditional status attainment domain, the position of prestige seems to have been eroded, a point illustrated by Featherman et al (1975, Featherman & Hauser 1976). In a series of studies they demonstrated convincingly that mobility transmits socioeconomic status rather than prestige. At the same time, the most central assumption justifying the use of prestige as a scale, namely, that it does not vary according to individual judgment, has been challenged by increasing numbers of studies demonstrating systematic prestige dissensus rather than consensus. An important source of differential prestige judgments seems to be gender. Gender differences in mobility have gained attention, calling for new theories of prestige and social inequality (Acker 1980). However, despite these new developments, much energy continues to go into conventional prestige assessments (e.g. Nakao & Treas 1990). Not all prestige researchers are impressed by the new results, which concentrate on the inferior role of prestige in status attainment models, the evident dissensus of prestige judgments, and the gender issue.

In this review, I concentrate on two problems. One is the relationship of theories of prestige and the use of prestige in mobility research. The other centers on whether this use is justified given the new approaches and results. I begin by outlining major prestige theories, then briefly sketch the dominant view of empirical prestige research, turning next to new methods and results. I conclude that, entering the 1990s, prestige research has diversified and deals now with two different concepts of prestige.

FOUR TYPES OF THEORIES OF PRESTIGE

While most theories of social stratification involve some notion of prestige, the theories differ in how prestige is conceptualized. One important distinction is between the prestige of a social position and the prestige of a social aggregate (as, for instance, a *Stand*). By and large, stratification theories that emphasize order in society (e.g. functionalist theories) conceive prestige as an attribute of individuals or of individual social positions that form a hierarchy. Stratification theories that emphasize conflict (e.g. Weber) think of prestige as designating social aggregates, or individuals within social aggregates, influenced by social closure processes.

Another distinction is that between the subjective and the objective: Is prestige the product of *subjective* evaluations or is it an *objective* and structural reality? As I try to show below, this difference constitutes a dilemma: prestige can be neither one in isolation. However, to construe prestige as both subjective and objective confronts us with Hobbes's utilitarian dilemma or, in Parsons' generalization, with the problem of action and order (Parsons 1937). In Parsons' metatheoretical framework, this problem is resolved by distinguishing between two categorically different types of orientations of social actions: normative and rational.

Inasmuch as it deals with social prestige, Parsons' theory is elaborated below. At this point, I use his conceptual distinctions to develop a scheme for evaluating different theories of prestige. This scheme emerges by cross-tabulating the two types of stratification theories with the two types of orientations of social actions these theories primarily consider. We then have *rational-order* theories of prestige, *rational-conflict* theories, *normative-conflict* theories, and *normative-order* theories. Table 1 lists basic examples of these four types of theories. I portray the theories by discussing some of their main defenders, in turn arguing that the theories have different foundations: they are based either on achievement, esteem, honor, or charisma.[1]

Rational-order theories of prestige assume that the individual is guided by the rational motive of maximizing returns, but that society is based on functional prerequisites that determine what rewards are appropriate for the fulfillment of certain essential duties. In their formulation of the functionalist theory of stratification, Davis & Moore (1945) straightforwardly claim that prestige is what we get for achievements that are in line with societal needs, and that prestige differences constitute the system of social inequality. Parsons' early statements on stratification theory (Parsons 1940, 1953) differ from this account only in that Parsons emphasizes the need for an integrated system of values in a society, thus making the extent to which individuals act

[1] Apart from these different meanings of prestige, a terminological problem persists. Some writers use "prestige" interchangeably with "status"; others are careful to distinguish prestige as a symbolic entity from objective descriptions of rank, as in socioeconomic status scales. To make the confusion complete, "prestige status" is also used. In this review, I try to maintain the distinction between prestige and status by reserving the status for objective differences in assets, while prestige involves a valuative element.

Table 1 Types of theories of prestige and selected examples.

Sources of stratification	Orientations of social action: Normative (subjective)	Orientations of social action: Rational (objective)
	Foundation of prestige: charisma	Foundation of prestige: achievement
Order (hierarchy)	Shils 1968, 1975 Eisenstadt 1968	Davis & Moore 1945 Parsons 1940, 1953
	Foundation of prestige: honor	Foundation of prestige: esteem
Conflict (social closure)	Weber 1972 Kluth 1957	Homans 1961 Blau 1964

in accordance with values the basis for prestige. Because in Parsons' view, the occupational system provides the paramount value system, prestige has the quality of an achievement variable,[2] much as in Davis & Moore's theory.

Rational-conflict theories are based on exchange theories (Homans 1961). In these theories, prestige is conceived as a commodity that can be exchanged in transactions like money (Coleman 1990:129–31). However, prestige is "produced" through processes of asymmetrical exchange, that is, whenever benefits received cannot be reciprocated (Blau 1964). There is, however, a difficulty: Within the exchange framework, what distinguishes prestige from power? As Wrong (1979:237–57) notes, power is tied to a zero-sum condition such that if A, who has a power position, loses that position to B, B gains what A has lost. Thus, the quantity of power is fixed (for an opposing view, see Parsons 1967). In contrast, it seems that prestige, to the extent that it is the product of exchange processes, is available in ample supply (Goode 1978:72–75). But this is only true inasmuch as prestige is based on individuals' appreciation and praise, or, as Davis (1946) has made the distinction, on esteem. From the writings of Homans (1961:1 26–29) in particular, it becomes clear that, from the social exchange perspective, prestige is a function of esteem, and that it is within groups that this form of prestige is a commodity to be exchanged.

Max Weber's conception of prestige is the prototype of normative-conflict theories. For Weber, prestige is an attribute of *Stände* (Weber 1972:534), what Parsons translated as *status groups* (Weber 1947). This choice of translation is unfortunate because "status" seems to imply gradation (Ossowski 1963). Weber nowhere indicates that prestige or social honor is an

[2]Rational-order theories have an important empirical ramification in that they predict only little interrater variation in prestige judgments—the system of rewards will only work if there is prestige consensus in a society.

entity that can vary in degree. Rather, in Weber's thinking, prestige is a quality shared by members of one and the same status group (to use Parsons' term nonetheless) in identifying with that status group. It is a concept more similar to Geiger's (1932) notion of mentalities associated with certain strata than it is to the idea of a positional grading scheme. Weber states explicitly that the distribution of social honor determines the "social order" of a society (Weber 1972:531). However, the order Weber has in mind is an order of closure, not of hierarchy. Prestige is not based on achievement, money, occupation, productive assets, or authority. As Kluth (1957:46) puts it, "the property from which prestige flows is, in its core, not comprehensible by others." Only those who exhibit specific consummatory attributes can understand what it means to be congenial with other members of a status group who are thus equipped with equal social honor (Weber 1972:538, Kluth 1957:45–48).

Shils' (1968) and Eisenstadt's (1968) theories are examples of *normative-order theories of prestige*. In contrast to Weber's conception, which defines prestige as an attribute pertaining to social aggregates, Shils tries to distinguish individuals by their prestige but, like Weber's and unlike the functionalists' view, on normative if not transcendent grounds. In Shils' eyes, the basis of prestige is the exhibition of charisma. By the *charisma* of an individual Shils means that "what is thought to be his connection with. . . some very central feature of man's existence and the cosmos in which he lives" (Shils 1975:258). At the same time, charisma is embodied in occupational roles, giving the greatest charisma to those occupations that are "in their functions closest to the centers" (Shils 1968:107). Based on this quality, individuals possess authority and are entitled to deference.[3] The rank order of charisma in a society is well-defined in Shils' view, whereas the actual distribution of positions of deference may well be obscured and not in line with the order of charisma. Deference positions are correlated with privileges that are not evaluated consensually within a society (pp. 121–23). This is why Shils calls the use of popular evaluations of prestige for deriving prestige scales "patently unsatisfactory" (p. 120).

The question then is, how can charisma have structural consequences? Shils' center/periphery metaphor is not particularly helpful. Eisenstadt here is more explicit. Eisenstadt distinguishes between symbolic and structural aspects of prestige. To make the symbolic part structural, Eisenstadt focuses on the institutional bases of prestige, identifying three requirements: membership status, group authority, and charisma. So far as it is based on these three sources, prestige manifests itself in the recognition of the right to participate

[3] In a similar vein, Simmel speaks of an element of superiority (*Superioritätsnuance*) which prestige confers (Simmel 1923:103–04). Hodge (1981:413) explicitly parallels prestige with Weber's definition of charismatic authority.

in groups. The symbolic element is transformed into the structural through the right, awarded by prestige, to participate. Thus, Eisenstadt's theory takes up an important ingredient of Weber. It differs from Weber's idea of honor, however, as Eisenstadt sees individuals but not social aggregates as differentiated by prestige.

The Problem of Social Closure and Hierarchy

Since the different types of prestige theories find their foundation in either achievement, esteem, honor, or charisma, the problem of prestige seems to be how these different aspects can be brought together. In more abstract terms, and in view of the two factors that led to the classification in Table 1, the problem of prestige has two facets. One is how theoretically to merge the idea of social closure with that of hierarchy; the second, how to reconcile the subjective element of prestige with its objective component. Beginning with the second part, I demonstrate briefly that the two problems have a common core, despite their differences.

Apparently, interpreting prestige as a purely subjective phenomenon is of little sociological relevance. If judgments of prestige do not mirror objective social reality to some extent, we are left with only psychological effects—what Leopold (1916) termed *individual prestige*. Eliminating the subjective factor altogether, however, ruins the concept as well. Prestige must be conceptualized as a cognitive and valuative phenomenon if there is to be any point in distinguishing it from other stratification attributes like property or power. This Janus-headed quality of prestige finds a parallel in Parsons' (1937) analysis of the utilitarian dilemma. As Parsons writes:

> Either the active agency of the actor in the choice of ends is an independent factor in action, and the end element must be random; or the objectionable implication of the randomness of ends is denied, but then their independence disappears and they are assimilated to the conditions of the situation, that is to elements analyzable in terms of nonsubjective categories (p. 64).

Parsons' solution is to create the *unit act* in which the choice of ends is determined by norms. This line of reasoning is also illustrated in Parsons' stratification theory. In his early writings, Parsons assumes that the moral evaluation of social positions is guided by standards that reflect at the same time both "the actual system of effective superiority" and "the normative pattern of stratification" (Parsons 1940:843). But Parsons attributes some degree of "vagueness" to the way the coincidence of both aspects is met empirically. This vagueness results from the fact that an individual is evaluated morally along several dimensions: membership in a kinship unit, personal qualities, achievements, possessions, authority, and power. "The status of any given individual in the system of stratification in a society may be regarded as a resultant of the common valuations underlying the attribution of status to him in each of these six respects" (p. 48). In 1953, Parsons remodeled this idea in terms of his performance-sanction paradigm by matching the object of evaluation with its internalized image and roles with role expectations. The vagueness in the 1940 paper is now resolved by claiming that "the basic categories in terms of which we describe a system as a structure. . . are *the very same* as those in terms of which we describe the norms which regulate behavior or performance" (p. 393). Thus, value-standards "are classified in terms of the same dimensions or variables which differentiate units in the social system in a structural sense and which define the types of sanctioned performance of those units and hence the appropriate sanctions relative to those performances" (p. 398). From this vantage point, the only problem Parsons sees worth facing is how different functional evaluation standards—guided by problems of adaptation, goal attainment, integration, or pattern maintenance—are organized relative to each other in a given social system. In American society, he sees these standards ordered with the "adaptive" or "occupational" values forming the top of the hierarchy (p. 399). But underlying any such hierarchy is the theoretical decision to have the valuative and the structural side of the stratification system coincide in complete harmony. Thus in Parsons' stratification theory, the subjective and the objective are brought to match by fiat.

In his third major contribution to stratification theory, Parsons (1970) is more explicit in describing how the legitimation of the social order operates (Alexander 1983:231–76, Habermas 1981:420–44). By sketching his respective arguments, we can see how Parsons extends the arbitrary matching between the subjective and the objective sides of prestige into an equally arbitrary matching between the hierarchical and the social closure conceptions of prestige.

His main concern in 1970 is that "all societies institutionalize some balance between equality and inequality" (p. 19). Balancing means to make the factual rules of distribution compatible with the normative culture of a society. In modern societies, the normative culture places a premium on equality and egalitarian principles, but the distribution rules in different social subsystems are not generally aimed at generating equality. Therefore, compatibility of the empirical distribution rules with the normative culture is assured by institutions that make inequalities endurable to the individual. Prestige plays a role in this because "on the one hand, it asserts the basic importance of equality of membership status, but at the same time makes allowance for the inequalities which will result from achievement motives protected by equality of opportunity" (p. 68). Here, Parsons uses the concept of prestige as the institutional "code" of the generalized interchange medium of influence (Parsons 1967), corresponding to authority in the political context and property in the economic. The role of influence is to operate as a mechanism for integrating two levels: "that of collective solidarity. . . on the one hand and that of 'motivating' units, especially individuals," on the other (p. 48).

Where does prestige come from, and how is solidarity, rooted in equal membership status, compromised with "achievement motives?" The important point here is that Parsons bases prestige on consensus and that he locates the production of consensus in the communal and integrative subsystem of a society. However, consensus can only *justify* inequality; it cannot provide for its *legitimation*. Thus, the normative culture of a society results from a combination of two processes: The communal and integrational subsystem provides justification through consensus of individual beliefs; legitimation is provided by moral and fiduciary authority (Parsons & Platt 1973). The latter is given primacy by Parsons in that any result reached by consensus must be compatible with objective moral standards in order to be part of the normative culture. Thus, the order of social prestige justifies the stratification system through consensus because the principles of justification are legitimized by the "ultimate reality" on which moral authority rests.

The bottom line of these complex arguments is that Parsons, in his final contribution to stratification theory, wants to imply, first, that prestige serves a double function: Prestige is the expression of group solidarity, and it is a motivating agent for achievements. But both roles are in need of integration because group solidarity, based on equality of membership status, is not easily reconciled with the achievement motive's potential for inequality. The second implication of Parsons' theory, therefore, is that this integration is produced by a justifying consensus but that, due to its precarious nature, consensus is in need of backing from moral authority. "Only when this has worked out," Parsons writes, "can we speak of an acceptable *generalized* prestige status of a social unit" (Parsons 1970:68). But apart from coming close to having constructed a "holy" order of prestige (Wegener 1988:76), Parsons cannot but assure us that the blending of the two prestige components does indeed "work out."

Compared to the 1940 and 1953 versions, in his later writings, Parsons presupposes that the subjective and the objective sides of prestige coincide; he does not, however, provide the structural processes that create this convergence. Parsons' final analysis teaches us that the problem of merging the subjective and the objective is really just another side of the problem of social closure and hierarchy. While Parsons sees equality of membership status in a collectivity as required for prestige consensus, the resulting prestige hierarchy characterizes individuals and individual social positions (Parsons 1970:50). Thus, like Weber, Parsons distinguishes two different concepts of inequality. Using Weber's term, prestige as "social honor" applies to social collectivities. Based on "achievement motives," however, prestige applies to individuals.

Processes of social closure are associated with the former, and a hierarchy of positions with the latter.

From this analysis of the prestige problem (notwithstanding that it cannot be solved by any of several prestige theories), it is evident that prestige research should deal not with one but with two concepts of prestige: with prestige as a hierarchy of positions and prestige as an attribute of socially closed groups.

PRESTIGE AS A HIERARCHY OF POSITIONS: THE DOMINANT VIEW

Empirical prestige research is guided almost completely by the first understanding of prestige, by prestige as a hierarchy of positions. This research follows "Edwards' paradigm" (Edwards 1938) in that it assumes that occupational positions are visible and open to everyone, and that they are ordered along a single value dimension.[4] Whereas Edwards used education and income for classifying occupations according to prestige, in the reputational approach survey respondents are asked for their judgments. The study in which North & Hatt (1947) developed their National Opinion Research Center (NORC) scale was the model for many others. The data of this study were reanalyzed by e.g. Hatt (1950) and Reiss (1961). Based on the 1960 Census of Population, several new surveys were conducted in the 1960s (using nine response categories instead of the original five) to update the original scale (Hodge et al 1966a, Siegel 1971). The resulting prestige scores were also mapped into the 1980 occupational codes (Stevens & Hoisington 1987). Finally, the 1989 General Social Survey of NORC included a replicated prestige module from which scores for 740 occupational categories (1980 census codes) were computed (Nakao et al 1990, Nakao & Treas 1990). Compared to the previous NORC scales, the new feature of this scale is that it is based on a random assignment of occupational titles. An "overlapping" design was used such that not all respondents rated all titles. As Nakao et al (1990) write: "The methods employed in the U.S. studies remain the primary standard against which all other inquiries are evaluated" (p. 3).[5]

[4]This was also Sorokin's (1927) understanding of "interoccupational" prestige. However, Sorokin also identified the two most prominent sources of prestige: the contribution occupational work makes to "the functions of social organization and control" and "the degree of intelligence necessary for its successful performance" (p. 101). While the first of these attributes preshadows functionalist reasoning in stratification, the latter seems to reflect the enthusiasm for IQ measurement in the 1920s (Fryer 1922), something only a few would share today (Gould 1981).

[5] Although the applied methodologies differ, reputational prestige scales similar in impact to those in the United States were constructed (to cite only the most recent) in Great Britain (Goldthorpe & Hope 1974), Israel (Kraus 1976, Kraus et al 1978), Italy (de Lillo & Schizzerotto 1985), the Netherlands (Sixma & Ultee 1984), Germany (Wegener 1985), Finland (Alestalo & Uusitalo 1980), Canada (Pineo & Porter 1967), Australia (Quine 1986, Jones 1989).

The prestige projects that focus on reputation rest on the conviction that it is important to know how occupational positions are perceived and ranked by the population. Given that goal, the discussion circles around a small number of problems. Among these are whether prestige judgments arise from a consensus, whether the results exhibit cross-cultural and temporal stability, and how valid the scales are.

Consensus, Structural Identity, and Stability

At the center of prestige research on reputation stands the question of whether the prestige judgments are independent of personal characteristics of the judges or whether there is systematic interindividual variation. Since the study of North & Hatt, great care has been taken to establish empirically that there is little or no variation in judgment. Usually this has been demonstrated with aggregate level data. The arrays of mean judgment scores of subpopulations have been computed and then intercorrelated. By this method North & Hatt found no serious effects of education, occupation, sex, age, income, region, and city size on prestige judgments. In this and in many other studies using the same method, mean profile correlations of $0.5 < R < 0.7$ were found (Hodge et al 1966a, Siegel 1971, Goldthorpe & Hope 1974, Treiman 1977:59–78, Nakao & Treas 1990). From this it was concluded that, by and large, prestige judgments do not vary with personal attributes of judges.

While it is amazing that only correlations of means were used [since means are likely to reduce variation and subsequently increase covariation (Nosanchuk 1972)], it is also noteworthy that the reported numbers quite often contradict the conclusions drawn. To cite an early example: Reiss (1961:190) writes, "The size of these correlations amply demonstrate that the prestige status of occupations in American society is viewed in virtually the same way by major subgroups of the society." He also reports that only 36 of the 88 occupational titles in the original NORC study were given identical rating categories by more than 50% of the respondents, and only 6% of the 88 titles were placed into identical categories by more than 60% (pp. 162–63). The difficulty is, of course, when results should be interpreted as evidence of consensus and when not (Guppy & Goyder 1984:711–12). What is really at stake here is the theories on which we can draw for explaining judgment variations when we find them. Attempts made with this goal in mind are presented below.

Besides demonstrating consensus, aggregate prestige scales are widely thought to exhibit an extraordinary cross-cultural identity. Inkeles & Rossi (1956, Inkeles 1960) were among the first to show that occupational prestige scales of different countries are highly correlated. Comparing six industrialized societies they found a mean correlation of .91 (based on 7–30 common occupational titles). Inkeles & Rossi's conclusion was that societies are structurally similar, and that cultural differences have no effects on prestige judgments (also Tiryakian 1958, Thomas 1962, Haller et al 1972, Hansen & Converse 1976). This thesis was further supported by a study by Hodge et al (1966a) comparing 23 societies, which included industrially less developed countries. The mean correlation of prestige scales was reported as .83. Other cross-cultural studies leading to basically the same results are those by Haller & Lewis (1966), Armer (1969), Marsh (1971), and e. g. Yogev (1980).

The most comprehensive attempt to demonstrate intersocietal correlations of occupational prestige was ventured by Treiman (1977) who compared 55 countries. His study stands out because it is based on the *International Standard Classification of Occupations* (ISCO 1968). Supported by high intercorrelations among the national scales, he proposed a now widely used International Prestige Scale.[6] Building on Shils' prestige theory of charisma, Treiman justifies his scale thus: "Since occupations are differentiated with respect to power, they will in turn be differentiated with respect to privilege and prestige. Thus. . . these attributes of occupations will be highly correlated across societies" (Treiman 1976:289). Treiman also argues that prestige has similar characteristics across the borders of capitalist and socialist societies. (Inkeles & Rossi 1956 make a similar argument, as do Hodge et al 1966a and Marsh 1971). However, Hodge et al (1985) found differences for specific groups of occupations in eastern and western countries. Sawinski & Domanski (1991 a,b) document changes in the prestige of some occupations in Poland due to the ongoing process of political transformation in that country.

To assume the structural identity of societies means that prestige hierarchies should also be stable across historical periods and time. In spite of the methodological problems encountered in matching modern with historical occupational titles and in finding measures that are equivalent, some attempts have been made to confirm the temporal stability of occupational hierarchies. Hodge et al (1966b) report a correlation of .989 between the 1947 and 1963 NORC prestige scales. They also compare these scales to results of Smith (1943) and Counts (1925) and conclude that no substantial changes in occupational prestige in the United States have occurred since 1925. A similar conclusion is drawn by Plata (1975), who analyzed rank order prestige scales from five American studies over a period of 49 years. Fossum & Moore (1975) add to this comparison a 1968 prestige assessment with students as subjects. Tyree & Smith (1977) compared income data for 42 occupations over a period of 180 years, confirming a prediction by Duncan (1968) who

[6] Treiman's scale as well as other comparative scales based on the ISCO 1968 classification are presently faced with the problem that in 1988 the International Labour Office in Geneva issued a new classification.

inferred from short time comparisons that correlations over 180 years should not fall below .724. Treiman (1976) analyzed wealth and income data over six historical periods, beginning with fifteenth century Florence; and Burrage & Corry (1981) studied order of precedence records of the city of London from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. They found basically little change.

What Do Prestige Scales Measure?

Attempts to establish the empirical validity of prestige scales have been made by using either subjective or objective approaches. In one of the subjective approaches to occupational rating, subjects are asked directly why they rated the occupations the way they did and what their primary focus was. Alternatively, subjects have to rate the occupations repeatedly on different dimensions, besides "social standing," e.g. "value to society," "power," "skill," "degree of autonomy." Generally, direct questioning did not elicit clearly dominant attributes that people associate with prestige. This convinced Goldthorpe & Hope (1974), for instance, that prestige evaluations do not really measure prestige but rather some overall "desirability" of occupations (p. 12; also Hauser & Featherman 1977:5). Similarly, the multiple rating studies found that most "material" aspects of occupations are highly correlated with prestige (Garbin & Bates 1966, Burschtyn 1968, Goldthorpe & Hope 1974, Coxon & Jones 1978, Wegener 1983). Of the individual capabilities perceived as required of occupational incumbents, "ability" and "effort" both correlate strongly ($R = .95$) with prestige rankings, according to Villimez (1974). Adler & Kraus (1985) find that "skills and knowledge" are the required capabilities that predict individual judgments of prestige best.

A third subjective, though indirect, method uses judgments of the similarity of occupations, applying multidimensional scaling and individual difference scaling procedures (Burschtyn 1968, Grasmick 1976, Kraus et al 1978, Seligson 1978, Beck et al 1979, Stewart et al 1980). Multidimensional scaling methods usually yield a general hierarchical dimension of occupations, but the approach has also been criticized for neglecting other meaningful occupational dimensions (Coxon 1971, Coxon & Jones 1978, Saltiel 1990). A somewhat related method, but one involving actual behavior, is to look at interaction matrices. The frequencies with which people interact in friendship relations or, for instance, in marital choice is in this case taken as an expression of similarities of status. Behind this idea stands the social-psychological theorizing on interpersonal attraction (Heider 1958). Examples are Laumann (1966), Pappi (1976), and Mayer (1977). In Mayer's work, the frequencies with which men of certain status levels marry women with fathers of certain status levels were put to a smallest space analysis; this process yielded basically a two-dimensional configuration. As in other studies of this type, the dimension capturing the largest proportion of variation is considered to represent "social status."

Another procedure involves the correlation of aggregate prestige scales with external attributes of occupations. The impressive results here are that standard prestige scores are closely associated with mean education and income levels of the occupations. Together they explain 83% of the variation of the NORC prestige scale, according to Duncan (1961). This has led Duncan to "predict" the prestige of occupations for which there were no direct prestige scores (or census codes) in the 1947 NORC scale from mean education and income levels. The result of Duncan's work was the often used socioeconomic index (SEI). This index has undergone several revisions since 1961. Hauser & Featherman (1977, Appendix B) tried to adapt Duncan's scale which had been based on the 1950 census classification, to the 1970 classifications without reestimating these scores. Stevens & Featherman (1981) provide that reestimation (based on Siegel's 1971 prestige scores). Featherman & Stevens (1982) revise these scores again, and Stevens & Cho (1985) adjust them to the 1980 census occupational classification scheme.

A final, objective validation method is to insert the prestige variable into status attainment models to test how well the scale measures the latent occupational constructs, compared to other measures, and whether inclusion of prestige increases the fit of such models. While it is clear that this approach can validate prestige only relative to social mobility processes, some controversy was created as to whether prestige or socioeconomic status is the superior measure in that context. Featherman et al (1975) argue forcefully that SEI scales are superior in terms of factor loadings and explanatory power. The amount of explained variance for the current occupation of US men, using education, first job, and origin as predictors, is $R^2 = .439$ when Duncan's SEI is used, but it is only .361 when Siegel's prestige scale is applied for the occupational variables, and .294 with Treiman's scale (Featherman & Hauser 1976). Similarly, when the three measures are compared directly in structural equation models, the socioeconomic status scale yields smaller error variances than do the prestige measures. In line with this, Treas & Tyree (1979) conclude from their study that "the socioeconomic index is superior to prestige scaling for the purpose of status attainment research" (p. 219). Featherman et al (1975, Hauser & Featherman 1977) demonstrate this fact also in comparing US with Australian mobility data. Moreover, in a recent paper using Blau & Duncan's (1967) data, Caston (1989) found that intergenerational mobility models cannot be improved by adding prestige and other occupational characteristics such as skill level, earnings, or work place autonomy to the models.

Featherman et al (1975:358) conclude that prestige is "a fallible index of occupational status" and that, with reference to occupational mobility, socioeconomic status is the more valid index. However, in a recent study, Kerckhoff et al (1989) have shown that in Britain prestige generates different results than it does in the United States. In comparing male occupational attainment in both countries, the authors used separate models in which occupational level is measured with common and indigenous prestige and socioeconomic status scales. Their major finding is that, measured by SEI scales, the models produce very similar results in both societies, but when measured by both common and indigenous prestige scales, a stronger relative effect of origin on occupation is detected in the Great Britain data. They conclude that each measure taps different aspects of the social mobility process, and that the societies differ in the transmission of prestige but not of socioeconomic status. Related results are also reported by Wegener (1985), showing with German data that the direct effects of education on mobility outcomes are significantly stronger in terms of prestige than in terms of socioeconomic status. While Kerckhoff et al (1989:1 73) venture "that the British intergenerational mobility process is more sensitive to public definitions of the general desirability of occupations," Wegener attributes the differences of the prestige and status effects to the educational system which, in Germany, puts more emphasis on conveying traditional values for occupational choice than on socioeconomic status gains. But educational credentialism, which is particularly strong in Germany (Müller et al 1990), may also play a role in this.

PRESTIGE AS SOCIAL CLOSURE: NEW METHODS AND RESULTS

Dissensus

An increasing number of studies analyze prestige judgments on an individual level, thus breaking with the research paradigm of the dominant view. Hyman (1953) was among the first to point to individual differences in "status awareness." Analyzing the original North & Hatt data, Hatt (1950) concluded that it was unjustified to speak of a unique prestige continuum, but that different subpopulations had different scales. Hatt tried to base this finding on *situs* categorizations of occupations, what Sorokin (1927:107–08) labeled "intraoccupational stratification" (Benoit-Smullyan 1944, Morris & Murphy 1959, Pavalko 1971, More & Suchner 1976, Villimez & Silver 1977). Also, it was early observed that judges tend to display "occupational egoism," giving more favorable prestige ratings to the occupations they themselves have or that are similar to their own (North & Hatt 1947, Blau 1957, Gerstl & Cohen 1964, Pavalko 1971, Goyder & Pineo 1977, Coxon & Jones 1978:53–55). Stehr (1974) demonstrated that prestige ratings of professional occupations judged by professionals differed depending on the position of the judges within that subpopulation. Beck et al (1979) illustrate the same effect for apprentice positions as judged by apprentices.

The discussion gained new life when Balkwell et al (1980, 1982, Bates et al

1986) tried to corroborate the consensus theses using 18 occupational titles to be rated and university students as judges. Their analysis is based on correlations among individual prestige scales, the average correlation being .745. From this the authors conclude that there is ample individual level consensus in prestige ratings. This finding is challenged by a series of papers by Guppy (1982, Guppy & Goyder 1984). Drawing on the findings of Kraus et al (1978), Goldthorpe & Hope (1974), and Jencks et al (1972), authors who have reported much lower mean interrater correlations (from .42 to .48), Guppy argues that prestige consensus is distributed unevenly in a society. Members of the upper strata have more firm and consistent views of the social world, making prestige consensus more likely in these groups than in lower strata. Data of three of the NORC prestige studies confirmed this assumption. Guppy & Goyder (1984) found decisive effects of education, occupation and race on the agreement on prestige judgments, and they conclude that "a social structural factor should be identified" for explaining variations in prestige ratings (p. 721). In a follow-up paper Guppy (1984) extends his finding to a comparison between Canada and the United States. However, Hodge et al (1982: 1194–95) argue that characteristics of judges never explain more than 25% of the variance in prestige ratings and that variability within status groups is substantial.

Another issue of systematic variation of prestige judgments centers on occupation and gender. The importance to mobility research is obvious. If no common prestige scale is appropriate for both men and women, then mobility research on women is flawed if it uses male measures for female prestige. A number of studies have sought to compare the mobility of men and women (Chase 1975, Treiman & Terrell 1975, McClendon 1976, Featherman & Hauser 1976, Wolf & Rosenfeld 1978, Treas & Tyree 1979, Rosenfeld 1979, Marini 1980, Sewell et al 1980, Roos 1981, Boyd & McRoberts 1982); most have concluded that the patterns of mobility of men and women do not greatly diverge. These studies were based on the assumption that all individuals in the same occupational position have the same social standing or prestige. Indeed, England (1979) found that the percentage of women in an occupation makes no significant difference in the prestige of occupations, and Bose & Rossi (1983) conclude from their study of college and household samples that occupation is the major determinant of prestige. The percent female and female incumbency do have a statistically significant effect on the prestige judgments, but this effect contributes only 1 to 2.5% to the variance in incumbent prestige scores (p. 329).

However, evidence is accumulating that judgments of prestige typically distinguish between positions and incumbents of positions, especially with regard to sex. Nilson (1976), for example, had the prestige of males and females rated in 17 occupations. The incumbents who violated the role expectation of an occupation with respect to sex were accorded lower social standing than those who conformed, especially men in female-typed occupations. Nilson also reports that male respondents were more likely to differentiate between the prestige of men and women in sex-typed occupations. Similarly, Guppy & Siltanen (1977) found that both men and women in sex-atypical occupations were accorded lower prestige than were the sex-typical incumbents. In a number of papers, Powell & Jacobs (1983, 1984a,b, Jacobs & Powell 1985) demonstrated, first, that there was less agreement regarding the prestige of female incumbents than of male incumbents, and second, that differences in the judgments of male and female incumbents depended on the sex compositions of the occupations. In particular, women received higher prestige ratings than men in traditionally female occupations; and men were judged higher than women if they were in occupations typically held by men. These effects seem to be less strong for women in high status positions (Hawkins & Pingree 1978, Crino et al 1983). Powell & Jacobs, however, conclude that the "sex penalty" is strong for both men and women in sex-atypical occupations, and that the occupational prestige hierarchy is really two hierarchies, each a sex-typical prestige hierarchy (Powell & Jacobs 1984b:187–88). Fox & Suschnigg (1989:358) take these results as evidence that prestige scales should be banned from stratification research comparing men and women and that income and power differences should be studied instead. Indeed, as McLaughlin (1978) demonstrates, the use of prestige may lead to misspecifications when the earnings of men and women are compared. These authors, however, fail to discuss the consequences of sex-typed prestige perceptions for occupational choice, accessibility of positions, and social closure. It is likely that sex-typed prestige perceptions keep men as well as women from entering sex-atypical occupations.

It seems that a reciprocal process applies to nonemployed women as housewives who, according to most studies, receive relatively high prestige scores (Bose 1973, Nilson 1978, Dworkin 1981, Schooler et al 1984), though judgments are dependent on the gender role norms held by the observers (Beeghley & Cochran 1988). An interesting interpretation of housewife prestige is proposed by Tyree & Hicks (1988). Looking at the differences in Bose's (1985) data in standard deviations of prestige given to male and female incumbents, these authors conclude that "women's ascribed sexual status acts as a sort of master status" (p. 1035) and, because fewer fixed stereotypes are attached to what women do, prestige judgments of female incumbents must be seen as "real nonattitudes" (p .1036; Converse 1964) that do not map prestige at all. Housewifery in particular, is a social position not possessing prestige but only "master status."

Psychophysical Scaling

In terms of measurement, one of the most exciting recent developments is the application of psychophysical scaling methods to prestige research. Except in experimental studies (Skvoretz et al 1974, Marshall & Gorman 1975, Grasmick 1976, Abbott & Kenkel 1988), the measurement problem is a much neglected issue in empirical prestige research. Modeled after the NORC procedures, most studies use conventional category rating methods with five or nine response categories, summing the weighted raw scores such that each rated occupation receives a value from 0 to 100. With nine categories supplied, the value of the jth occupation is

$$P_j = \sum_{i=1}^{9} (12.5)(i - 1) X_{ji}$$

where X_{ji} is the proportion of ratings received by the jth occupation with rating i. This transformation assumes that the measurement yields interval scale quality, an assumption hardly in line with anything we know from measurement research (see Gifi 1990:81–149 for the multivariate requirements necessary for this type of aggregation). Also, as is true of all category rating tasks, this method reduces interindividual variation to the number of categories respondents can choose from, so that extreme judgments cannot be assessed. These disadvantages have led to the use of magnitude estimation techniques, imported from psychophysics (Stevens 1975), for measuring prestige. Magnitude estimation differs from rating methods in that no response categories are provided for the respondent to select from. Instead, the subject is instructed to choose numbers for the stimuli of a series such that the ratios of the numbers correspond to the ratios of the subjective magnitude of the stimuli. Since magnitude estimations demand the mapping of subjective ratios into ratios of numbers, it seems natural to assume that magnitude estimation scales are ratio scales. The relevant measurement structures (Krantz 1972) in scaling of occupational prestige were tested by Orth (1982) and Wegener (1983, Orth & Wegener 1983). In addition, magnitude estimation with numbers can be supplemented by using other extensive modalities for responses, for instance, drawing lines of different lengths to represent ratios of stimulus intensities. Since the relations of both judgment modalities to a physical stimulus continuum are known to be power functions, the replicate measurement (indirect cross-modality matching or ICMM) should yield a power relation of the two series of responses. If for individual subjects,

$$A = k\, B_i^{\frac{\beta}{\alpha}}$$

results, with A_i and B_i responses for stimuli i in modalities A and B, and α and β known from sensory psychophysics, the individual judgments are consistent with the scale assumptions made (Lodge 1981, Wegener 1982).

Using numbers and lines as response modes, psychophysical scaling of prestige was applied in large scale surveys by Wegener (1985, 1988), examining ICMM consistency using only the consistent cases for further analyses. Coleman & Rainwater (1979) and Perman (1984) have applied only numerical magnitude estimation for prestige measurement. Wegener & Kirschner (1981) introduced a model for relating individual category ratings of prestige with magnitude prestige scales.

Psychophysical measurement of prestige does not confine judges to using only the response categories provided by a response scale. Forming ratios, individual relations of low to high prestige occupations of 1: 100 and more can easily be encountered in a magnitude task. An example is given in Figure 1 (adapted from Wegener 1990:74–75). Both panels of the figure refer to magnitude judgments of prestige (using numbers and lines) from roughly 4000 respondents surveyed in two cross-sectional probability samples representative for Germany. Fifty different occupational titles [from the *International Standard Classification of Occupations* (ISCO 1968)] were scaled. In the left panel, the mean magnitude prestige ranges (that is the ratios of the highest to the lowest prestige value given to any occupation by individuals) are plotted against the socioeconomic status of the judges. As can be seen, discrimination in terms of judgment range varies with status. Discrimination is low for low status judges and high for high status judges.

Based on these measurements, interindividual differences in prestige judgments can also be expressed in terms of the scale values themselves. If the mean magnitude prestige values for the 10 highest and for the 10 lowest judged occupations are plotted against the status of the judges, the right panel of Figure 1 results. As this panel shows, the higher status respondents tend to give higher prestige judgments to the 10 highest occupations and lower prestige judgments to the 10 lowest occupations, whereas low status respondents give higher judgments to the lowest and lower judgments to the highest occupations. This can be summarized simply: Low status observers tend to level the social grading continuum; high status observers tend to polarize it. Using conventional rating methods, Lewis (1964) and Alexander (1972) earlier found that lower status persons discriminate less than higher status persons.

Given the status dependency of prestige perceptions, it is easy to understand why other studies have found higher interrater prestige correlations for higher status respondents than for lower status respondents. The polarization of judgments in the higher strata is likely to increase correlations, whereas leveling the continuum will decrease correlations (when the respec-

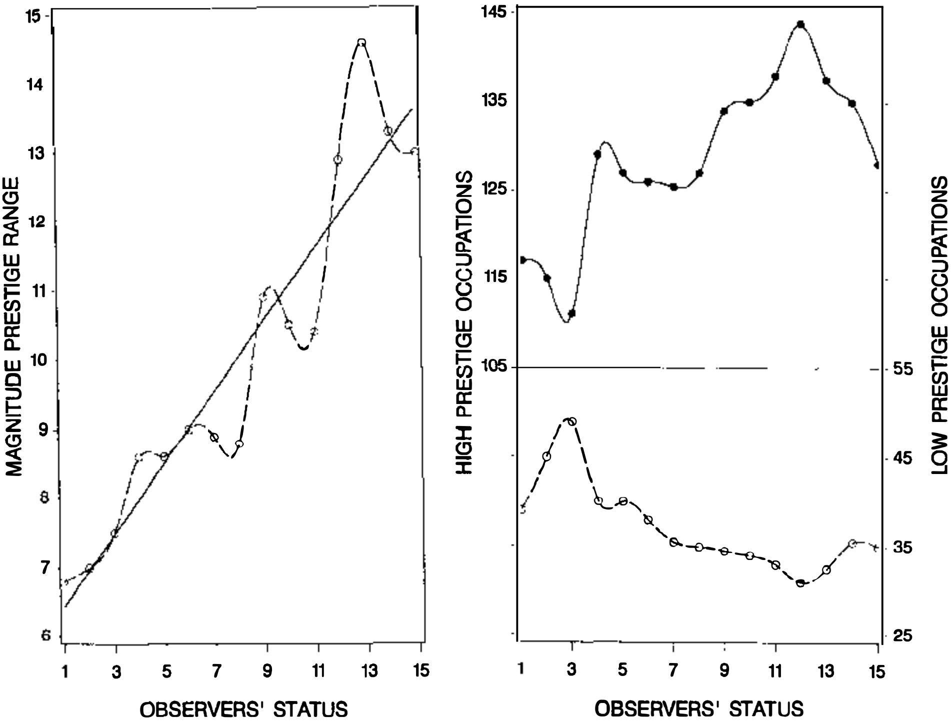

Figure 1 *Left panel:* Prestige discrimination range by observers' status. *Right panel:* Mean magnitude prestige scores for upper and lower 10 occupations by observers' status (solid: upper 10 occupations; dashed: lower 10). (Adapted from Wegener 1990:74–75).

tive coefficients of variation are not exceedingly different in both cases). This seems to be a less demanding explanation than the assumption that lower status group members lack knowledge and intelligence, as Hodge et al (1982:1195, Hodge & Rossi 1978) propose.

A Social Perception Theory of Dissensus

Perception theory can explain why judges on the upper end of the social ladder polarize the prestige continuum and why judges positioned toward the lower end level it. The perceptual processes relevant here are end-anchoring and directionality of ordering. End-anchoring describes the process by which, in making order judgments, subjects are guided by the end points of the order continuum. They anchor their judgments at the top and bottom end points

(Helson 1964). However, the top and the bottom anchors have asymmetrical effects depending on the direction in which stimuli are ordered by the judge. In this respect, the theory of end-anchoring makes the following assertions (De Soto & Albrecht 1968):

(*a*) The bottom anchor in an ordering is more stable than the top anchor. In fact, the bottom anchor has the tendency to draw the top anchor down, thus shortening the range of judgments.
(*b*) If the ordering is made along a dimension on which the individual is aware of being located, the position the individual has on that dimension affects the position of the two anchors. The position oneself is in tends to strengthen whichever anchor is closer to that position. Thus, judges in high status positions strengthen the top anchor in ordering. They will discriminate more than judges in low status positions who, by their low position, reinforce the bottom anchor. That is, high status respondents polarize social hierarchies, low status respondents level these hierarchies.
(*c*) The direction of ordering, however, determines which end point operates as the top and which as the bottom anchor and, accordingly, which of the two anchors is stronger in affecting a person's judgment. It seems universally true that the direction of ordering runs from the preferred end point to the less preferred end point, that is we order from "good" to "bad" (De Soto & Bosley 1962, Lindenberg 1977). Therefore, *values* determine the direction of ordering and the strength of end anchors.

From this, a paradoxical conclusion must be drawn. Owing to end-anchoring and the directionality of ordering, the ability to discriminate social distributions is more pronounced for high-status respondents than for low-status respondents. The paradoxical finding is that these interindividual differences are not caused, as one might expect, by differences in value preferences in a society but rather by value consensus. Because high- and low-status individuals agree on what is to be preferred in a society, they agree on where to place the top and the bottom anchors. But because of the different locations of the judges in relation to the anchors, differential social perceptions result. This phenomenon has been labeled the value consensus paradox (Wegener 1987). With regard to prestige, what we see is that, according to end-anchoring theory, prestige consensus is possible only when high- and low-status groups in a society *differ* in their preferences for the anchor jobs. But it is difficult to imagine a society in which some prefer high status over low status and some prefer low status over high status. As De Swann (1989:262) recently observed: "Prestige distributions necessarily involve jealous relations." It must be concluded, therefore, that to the extent that discrimination differences with regard to social prestige exist, those of lower social status are disadvantaged. Their lack of discrimination excludes them from appreciating the strategic behavior typical of higher status positions and from acquiring information that would be relevant for gaining access to these higher positions. The value consensus paradox operates as a social closure mechanism that forcefully inhibits social mobility. While prestige is a "culturological construct" (Udy 1980:161), it also has structural consequences. These become visible, however, only if dissensus in prestige evaluations is taken seriously as a sociological problem.

CONCLUSION

According to the dominant view of prestige research, prestige is a variable representing a hierarchy of individual social positions. Following this conception, a considerable amount of knowledge has accumulated. First, as an aggregate scale, prestige reflects material advantages and thus may mirror the desirable features of positions. Accordingly, Sørensen (1991b:4) suggests that prestige is a multidimensional measure of welfare. Second, it is warranted to base prestige scales on individual prestige judgments even though interrater variation depends on rater characteristics to a certain extent. But following the argument of Hodge et al (1982), we can say that variation within groups is larger than variation between groups when conventional methods are used. Third, profile correlations of aggregation scales reveal that prestige exhibits high cross-cultural and temporal stability. These findings make it useful and mandatory to have updated aggregate prestige scales, like the new NORC scale, particularly because socioeconomic measures rely on such scales.[7]

Also, it would be misleading to identify this conception of prestige and its application with functionalism (as do Blaikie 1977, Horan 1978, Fox & Suschnigg 1989 and many others), since the notion of hierarchy need not be based on achievement and functional needs. It is compatible with Shils' idea of charisma and deference as the foundations of prestige (e.g. Treiman 1977, Hodge 1981); that is, rational as well as normative foundations of prestige are possible. The hierarchical conception seems to be restricted to societal processes characterized by "open" positions, that is, by the free supply of prestige based on whatever it takes to accumulate it. While prestige may be distributed in this way—being perhaps more common in some societies than in others—structural constraints may restrict the allocation of prestige and the

[7]This is not only true for Duncan's SEI but also for alternative measures like Sørensen's (1979) *Status Attainment Scale* which starts out from a rank order of occupational positions for which an aggregate prestige scale may be the appropriate choice (Wegener 1988: 168–74).

access to prestigious positions. Of special interest here are those instances in which prestige is itself of causal relevance for creating "closed" positions. Where this is the case, however, prestige applies not to individual positions within a hierarchy but to social aggregates. This is what Weber's social closure conception of prestige is about. In order for prestige to play this role, members of specific groups in a society must share homogeneous prestige perceptions. That is, they must see society in the same way. It seems that the long neglected study of judgment variation in prestige research is on its way to discovering instances of prestige closure. This review has covered two such instances: the mobility consequences of differential prestige discrimination due to the value consensus paradox and the sex-typing of occupational prestige perceptions by which men as well as women are kept from entering sex-atypical occupations. But other domains and mechanisms of prestige closure are bound to be uncovered as we learn more about the regularities of individuals' prestige perceptions.

In pursuing that course of research, it is important not to conceive the study of dissensus as opposed to the conventional hierarchical prestige paradigm. There is nothing wrong with studying two separate classes of phenomena. Theoretically, the hierarchical and the social closure conceptions of prestige are sociologically relevant. Considering both not only would bring prestige research more in line with the complexities of prestige theories, it would also reflect the present interest of mobility research in breaking away from an exclusive dedication to status attainment research.

Of course, there is still the problem of social closure and hierarchy, meaning the problem of how prestige, in qualifying members of social aggregates, is then transformed into a hierarchy of individual positions. While it is true that the different prestige theories have not been able to deal with this problem adequately (unless one is willing to follow Parsons in combining both levels by fiat), class theory has not found a solution either. Class theory is confronted with the same type of problem, though it is primarily interested not in the distribution of prestige but the distribution of income. Following Sørensen (1991 a,b), the decision to abandon the classic value theory of labor by current class theories, based either on Marxian (Wright 1985) or Weberian (Goldthorpe 1987) ideas, has led to identifying classes with groups of homogenous members without providing a theory of how income inequality and separate class interests are generated. Parallel to this, prestige theory is still lacking the structural mechanisms which transform differences in social honor into a prestige hierarchy. I argue here that until we find these mechanisms, prestige research is well advised to study the two phenomena in separation and not to confine itself to the dominant view. Entering the 1990s, prestige research seems on its way to doing just that.

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