Is There a Status Order in Contemporary British Society?

Evidence from the Occupational Structure of Friendship

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This paper considers whether it is still possible to identify a status order in contemporary Britain. We analyse the occupational structure of friendship and present empirical results which show that there is one dimension of this structure that can be plausibly interpreted as reflecting a hierarchy of status. This status hierarchy is gender-neutral, and displays clear continuities with that depicted for the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries in historical and earlier sociological research. We examine the connection between status and both income and education and show that the status order we identify is distinct either from income or education or from 'socioeconomic' status as determined by income and education in combination. As regards status and class, we find that, while some classes show a rather high degree of status homogeneity, in other classes status stratification is quite extensive. Our results suggest that the Weberian distinction between status and class remains valid and potentially highly revealing. By retaining this distinction in social stratification research, a range of questions on the articulation of the class structure and the status order and of their effects on life chances and life choices is opened up.

Introduction

The main question we consider in this paper is that of whether present-day British society has a recognisable status order. We treat this question, however, in the context of a larger problem concerning the stratification of modern societies in general: namely, that of whether it is still empirically defensible and conceptually valuable to distinguish, on broadly Weberian lines (Weber, 1922/1968: 302–307, 926–939), between a status order and a class structure.

By a status order we understand a set of hierarchical relations that express perceived and typically accepted social superiority, equality or inferiority of a quite gener-alised kind, attaching not to qualities of particular individuals but rather to social positions that they hold or to certain of their ascribed attributes (e.g. 'birth' or ethnicity).[1] A class structure, in contrast, we would see as being grounded specifically, and quite objectively, in the social relations of economic life – i.e. in the social relations of labour markets and production units. While typically generating differential, and often extreme, advantage and disadvantage, a class structure does not necessarily take on the consistently hierarchical form that is inherent to a status order (cf. Dahrendorf, 1959: 74–77; Giddens, 1973: 106).

At least up to the middle decades of the last century, it was in fact commonplace for sociologists to distinguish

between status and class much on the lines indicated above (e.g. see Mills, 1951; Marshall, 1953/1963; Lockwood, 1958).[2] Subsequently, though, this approach has been far less often followed, as a result, it would seem, of a number of only rather loosely connected developments.

On the one hand, doubts have arisen over whether in the more advanced societies of the present day well-defined status orders still exist. Historians, drawing in part on earlier sociological work, have produced evidence of a long-term decline in deference. Individuals treated by others as social inferiors would appear to have become less ready to accept such derogation or at all events to acknowledge it through words or actions – such as the use of honorifics, curtseying, cap-touching etc. The overt expression of social superiority has also, perhaps, become less acceptable (cf. Runciman, 1997: 153–158 esp). At the same time, 'local status systems' that in an earlier period were often documented in fascinating detail in community studies (e.g. Warner and Lunt, 1941; Warner *et al.*, 1949; Plowman *et al.*, 1962) have been seen as increasingly threatened by the mobility and anonymity of modern 'mass' society (Goldthorpe, 1978).

On the other hand, though, sociologists would seem to have become attracted to 'one-dimensional' understandings of social stratification, which discount or override the status/class distinction as much out of methodological or theoretical predilections as of any responsiveness to actual social change. Thus, in North America the popularity of the concept of 'socioeconomic status' has clearly reflected the advantages, as demonstrated by Duncan and others, of being able to treat stratification through a single continuous measure, such as the Duncan SEI (Duncan, 1961), in work using correlation and OLS regression techniques (e.g. Duncan and Hodge, 1963; Blau and Duncan, 1967). In Europe, in contrast, a more important influence has probably been the theoretical efforts of Bourdieu (1984) to 're-think', and indeed overcome, Weber's 'opposition' of status and class: that is, by treating status as the symbolic aspect of class structure, which is itself seen as not reducible to 'economic' relations alone. For Bourdieu and his followers attention thus focuses on the lifestyle or underlying habitus that is specific and distinctive to different classes (or 'class fractions') rather than, as in Weber's case, on 'the most varied ways' in which class and status, and thus lifestyle, may be contingently related to each other.

However, while the developments in question cannot be lightly disregarded, they do not, in our view, amount in themselves to a demonstration that, in the study of contemporary societies, the distinction between status and class as qualitatively different forms of stratification is now either empirically outmoded or conceptually redundant. In particular, the two following issues remain to be determined:

(i) Can status orders still be identified in modern societies, even if of a less overt, less sharply demarcated and less localised kind than previously existed, and as a form of stratification that can be empirically as well as conceptually differentiated from class structure?

(ii) In so far as this is so, what is the relative importance of these two forms of stratification as determinants of individuals' experience and action in different areas of their social lives – or, in other words, of the pattern of their life-chances and life-choices?

In the present paper, our primary concern is with the first of these questions which we take up in the case of present-day British society. We aim to show that the question can in fact be answered positively, i.e. a status order can be identified and one that, we suggest, maps onto the class structure in an intelligible, though far from straightforward, way. In subsequent papers, we will then address the second question on the basis of an ongoing research programme.

Methodological Approach

In our attempt to trace a status order in present-day Britain we follow the approach pioneered in the USA by Laumann (1966, 1973; Laumann and Guttman 1966) in seeking to move beyond 'small town' studies of social stratification such as those of Warner and his associates previously cited. Laumann accepted that differential association could be taken as a key indicator of status. He recognised, however, that in the urban 'mass' society of the later twentieth century individuals' associational networks were not restricted by the boundaries of local communities but could extend over a wide geographical area. Thus, in studying differential association, ethnographic work, reliant on participant observation, would need to give way to survey-based research of a more spatially extensive kind.

More specifically, Laumann proceeded by collecting information from samples of urban populations on respondents' own occupations and on the occupations of other individuals within respondents' more immediate

social networks. For different occupational groupings of respondents, the occupational distributions of reported associates could then be established and, in turn, the extent to which these distributions differed from one grouping to another. Finally, by using the (at the time) novel technique of multidimensional scaling, the dimensionality of these differences could be investigated, and the further questions addressed of whether a dimension emerged that could be plausibly interpreted as one of status and, if so, of what ordering occupational groupings took along this dimension. In his earlier work, it should be added, Laumann sought information on a relatively wide range of respondents' associates, including kin, neighbours and friends; but in later work he made what for us is a significant change in concentrating on friends alone.

Laumann's approach depends on two basic assumptions, both of which we believe are defensible. The first is that in modern societies occupation is one of the most salient characteristics to which status attaches. That this is indeed the case would, at all events, appear to be a matter of some consensus among sociologists of otherwise often divergent views (e.g. Blau and Duncan, 1967; Parkin, 1971; Coxon and Jones, 1978; Stewart *et al.*, 1980; Bourdieu, 1984; Grusky and Sørensen, 1998).[3]

The second assumption is that recurrent association is a good indicator of a state of social equality between individuals and is, moreover, a better indicator of such equality, the 'freer' the choice of associates and the closer or more intimate the association – which would appear to be the reason for Laumann's eventual decision to work with data on friends only. Again, this assumption would seem a plausible one, and, for Britain at least, there is evidence to show that differential association is in fact more marked in the case of friends who are regarded as 'close' than in the case of those who are simply frequent leisure time companions (Goldthorpe, 1987: ch.7). While association with the latter may result primarily from shared interests and activities (cultural, sporting, hobby, political etc.), relations with the former are more likely to be based on 'pure' sociability, thus making social inequality within the relationship especially unlikely – which, from our point of view, is the crucial consideration.

In this regard, it is relevant to refer the work of Prandy and his associates, who have also sought to apply Laumann's approach to the British case. In their initial work in constructing a stratification scale, the 'Cambridge Scale', (Stewart *et al.*, 1973, 1980), this group also rely on occupationally linked data on friendship, but define friendship in a deliberately loose way so as to allow even relatively transient associations to be included. However, for the purposes of a revision and updating of the scale (Prandy and Lambert, 2003), they then abandon analysis of data of this kind in favour of data on the (current) occupations of married couples, mainly because they can then draw on samples of census data and gain the advantage of working with large numbers of cases.

Whether the revised 'CAMSIS' scale that is based on such marriage data is essentially the same as the original Cambridge scale based on friendship data, as Prandy and Lambert claim, is, in our view, debatable; and they indeed concede that '[c]ertainly, the strength of the relationship between marriage partners is less, statistically speaking, than it is between friends' (Prandy and Lambert, 2003: 401). But what must be recognised here is that a fundamental theoretical difference exists between our position and that of Prandy and his associates. In an early statement, they assert that 'the Weberian distinction of classes . . . from status groups . . . is neither useful nor necessary' (Stewart *et al.*, 1980: 28). More recently, Bottero and Prandy (2003: 180) maintain that 'social interaction distance is taken as a stratification order in its own right' and that 'research has tended to eliminate the distinction between class and status, or the economic and the cultural, which was once seen as central analytically to conventional stratification theory'.[4] The implication then is that their scale reflects 'stratification arrangements' in some quite general and undifferentiated sense. In contrast, we would believe that the Weberian distinction between class and status is conceptually clear and potentially highly important; that it cannot be rejected by fiat; and that whether or not a status order is still identifiable in contemporary British, or any other, society must be treated as an empirical question.

Data and Analytical Techniques

The data we use come from wave 10 (year 2000) of the British Household Panel Study (BHPS). We restrict our analysis to respondents aged 20–64 but, unlike Laumann and most others who have subsequently taken his approach, we include women, categorised on the basis of their own occupations.[5] The idea of a status order from which we begin could be described as 'gender neutral'. That is to say, one would expect there to be a common status order for men and women together rather than two separate, gender-specific orders. By including women, we can then of course investigate how far this expectation holds good.

In wave 10 of the BHPS, respondents were asked to think of three people they considered to be their closest friends. Information about these friends, such as their age, sex, employment status, and their relationship to respondents was recorded. For the first-mentioned friend, respondents were also asked to report his or her occupational title.[6] Data on the current (or last) occupation of these 'first' close friends, together with similar data on the current (or last) occupation of respondents, form the basis of our empirical analyses.

These data were coded to the three-digit unit groups of the UK standard occupational classification (OPCS, UK, 1990) and could thence be allocated to the 77 two-digit minor occupational groups (MOGs). Although the BHPS affords us a relatively large sample size ($n=9160$),[7] the MOGs were still a more detailed classification than we could sensibly employ. A 77×77 contingency table

would, on average, have had less than two observations per cell. Some collapsing of the MOGs was therefore necessary. Operationally, we combined MOGs according to their functions, while taking into account their relative size and the work milieux of their constituent occupations at the same time.[8] In the end, we worked with the 31 categories of Table 1. As can be seen from the last column of the table, each of these categories accounts for between 1.6 and 6.3 per cent of our respondents.[9]

Our basic data arrays are therefore 31×31 contingency tables, for men and women separately and together, in which respondent's occupational group is related to the occupational group of respondent's 'first' close friend. We subject these contingency tables to multidimensional scaling (MDSCAL), the technique used by Laumann and most of those following him.

Table 1 Occupational categories used in the analysis and their constituent minor occupational groups

Code	Descriptive title	OPCS MOGs	%
GMA	General managers and administrators	10, 13, 15	2.5
PDM	Plant, depot and site managers	11, 14, 16	2.7
SM	Specialist managers	12	2.7
MPS	Managers and proprietors in services	17	4.4
OMO	Managers and officials, not elsewhere classified	19	2.0
SET	Scientists, engineers and technologists	20, 21	1.9
HP	Higher professionals	22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29	3.3
TPE	Teachers and other professionals in education	23	4.5
API	Associate professionals in industry	30, 31, 32, 33, 39	3.9
APH	Associate professionals in health and welfare	34, 37	4.8
APB	Associate professionals in business	35, 36, 38	2.6
AOA	Administrative officers and assistants	40	2.1
NCC	Numerical clerks and cashiers	41	3.7
FRC	Filing and record clerks	42	1.9
OCW	Other clerical workers	43	3.5
SDC	Store and dispatch clerks	44, 49	2.1
SEC	Secretaries and receptionists	45, 46	3.3
SMC	Skilled and related manual workers in construction and maintenance	50, 52	3.5
SMM	Skilled and related manual workers in metal trade	51, 53, 54	3.5
SMO	Skilled and related manual workers not elsewhere classified	55, 56, 57, 58, 59	3.9
PSP	Protective service personnel	60, 61	1.9
CW	Catering workers	62	2.3
PSW	Personal service workers	63, 66, 67, 69	2.2
HW	Health workers	64	2.6
CCW	Childcare workers	65	2.6
BSR	Buyers and sales representatives	70, 71	1.6
SW	Sales workers	72, 73, 79	6.3
PMO	Plant and machine operatives	80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 89	6.2
TO	Transport operatives	87, 88	3.3
GL	General labourers	90, 91, 92, 93, 99	2.2
RWS	Routine workers in services	94, 95	6.1

Our MDSCAL exercise proceeds as follows. We first generate 'outflow' rates from our contingency tables, i.e. the percentage distributions of friends across our occupational categories for each category of respondent. We then compute the index of dissimilarity for each pair of rows of outflow rates. This gives us a measure of the between-category dissimilarity, δ. We then use the half-matrix of δs as input to the simplest form of MDSCAL analysis.

That is, we seek to represent our 31 occupational categories as points in a Euclidean space, such that the distance between category A and category B in this space, d_{AB}, best approximates the observed dissimilarity between the two categories δ_{AB}. Formally, this idea can be represented as follows:

$$d_{AB} = \alpha + \beta \, \delta_{AB},$$

$$d_{AB} = \left[\sum_{m=1}^{M} (x_{Am} - x_{Bm})^2 \right]^{1/2},$$

where x_{Am} and x_{Bm} are the coordinates of points A and B in the mth dimension, and α and β are parameters.[10]

Results

In Figure 1 we report stress-values from our MDSCAL analyses.[11] It can be seen that, if men and women are taken together in the analysis, the three-dimensional solution achieves a stress-value of 0.075, indicating a rather
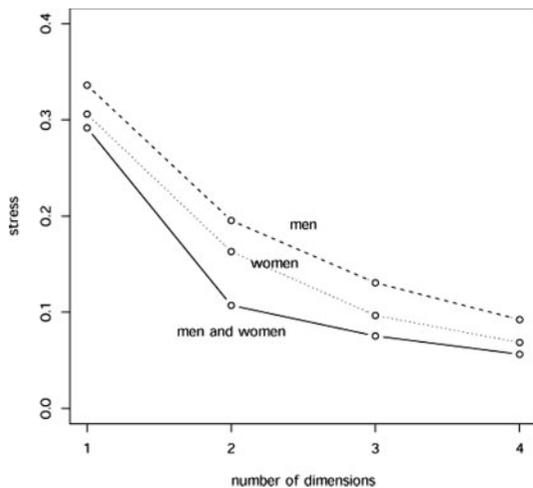

Figure 1 Stress values of multidimensional scaling applied to 2000 BHPS best friend data, using data for all, and for male and female respondents separately

good fit. However, if men and women are analysed separately, the fit is generally worse, requiring, in the case of men, a four-dimensional solution to obtain a stress value that falls below 0.10. Since it is difficult to visualise a space of four, or more, dimensions, we would incline here not to go beyond the three-dimensional solution.[12]

So what, then, are the main features of our favoured MDSCAL solution? The panels of Figure 2 show the positions of our 31 occupational categories as projected onto the three planes involved – with men and women included in the analysis together.

The first dimension, shown horizontally in the first and second panels of Figure 2 is, at least prima facie, that which captures status. Thus, at the left extreme of the dimension are located six categories comprising manual occupations, while moving in from the right extreme come the categories of Higher professionals, Associate professionals in business, Specialist managers, Teachers and other professionals in education, General managers and administrators, Associate professionals in industry, and Scientists, engineers and technologists. In between, the categories can be seen as ordered according to what might be described as a manual/non-manual continuum that we discuss further below.

In this respect, our findings are in fact much in line with those of Laumann and others. That is to say, these earlier investigators have also found a first dimension in their MDSCAL analyses that is likewise interpretable as reflecting status. However, it has been a recurrent finding in previous work that while more than one dimension is required in order to obtain a well-fitting MDSCAL solution, the further dimensions introduced have not been open to interpretation, or only in a rather speculative way (e.g. see Laumann, 1966: 102–104, 1973: 79–80; Pappi, 1973; Stewart *et al.*, 1980: 41–44; Prandy, 1998). Does this same difficulty arise in our case and, in particular, with our second dimension which, as noted above, also shows up when we analyse our data using Goodman's RC(M) model?

In fact, it turns out that this second dimension can be interpreted rather convincingly – and in a way that follows directly from our inclusion of women in the analysis. It can be taken as a dimension that expresses the degree to which our 31 occupational categories are characterised by sex segregation. Thus, looking at the first panel of Figure 2, where the dimension is shown vertically, one finds at the top occupational categories in which men predominate – Plant, depot and site managers, Skilled and related manual workers in metal trades, Skilled and related manual workers in construction and maintenance, and Scientists, engineers and technologists; while at the bottom come categories in which women
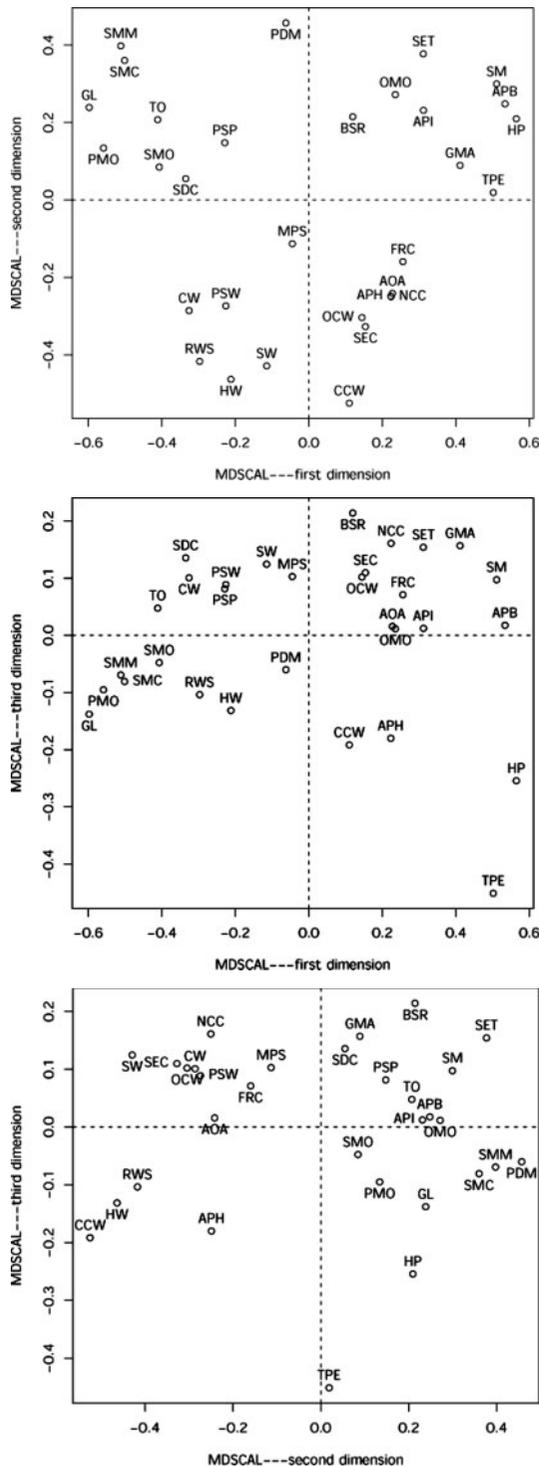
Figure 2 The three dimensional MDSCAL solution projected onto three basic planes

predominate – Childcare workers, Health workers, Sales workers, Routine workers in services, and Secretaries and receptionists. We can check this interpretation of our second dimension by relating the scores of our categories on it to their sex composition (i.e. percentage female) within our sample. We obtain a correlation of r = −0.92.[13]

If, then, we do capture here the effects on the occupational structure of friendship of differences in work environments according to the degree to which they constitute male or female 'worlds' – the effects of, say, the engineering shop, building site or maintenance department as against those of the care home, supermarket floor or word-processing room – an important implication follows. Because our second dimension in this way represents the gendering of opportunities for friendship formation, our first dimension, being thus 'purified' of this influence, should, if it does indeed reflect actual friendship choice as influenced by status, apply to men and women alike. For, as we earlier observed, the conception of a status order with which we operate entails gender-neutrality. We can easily check whether or not this expectation is met by turning to our MDSCAL analyses for men and women separately.

The relevant results are shown in Figure 3 in which category scores on the first, putatively status, dimension for men and women are plotted against each other. As can be seen, there is a quite high correlation (r = 0.75). Moreover, the two obvious 'outlier' categories, which are identified, have one feature in common that suggest that their significance should not be over-estimated:
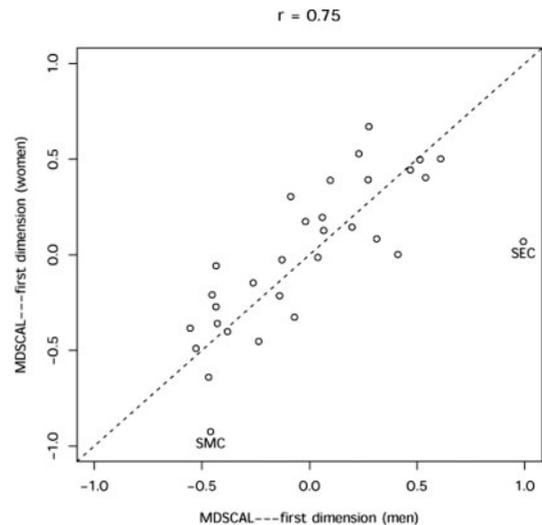

Figure 3 First dimension MDSCAL scores estimated separately for men and for women plotted against each other

they fall towards the extremes of the second dimension (see Figure 2), i.e. they are markedly sex-segregated. Only 2.3 per cent of the Secretaries and receptionists are men, and only 3.1 per cent of the Skilled and related manual workers in construction and maintenance are women. We would then believe that these discrepant scores are likely to come about mainly by chance, because respondents of the 'minority' sex are too few in number to allow reliable results.[14] From this point of view, the outlier categories are, at least to some extent, artefacts of inescapable limitations of our study in terms of sample size; and in turn, we would regard Figure 3 as giving quite strong support to the idea that the first dimension of our three-dimensional MDSCAL solution does reflect a status order that is, as it should be, common to men and women.[15]

Finally here we should comment briefly on the third dimension of our MDSCAL solution. This dimension was not as clearly picked up in our RC(M) analyses as the other two dimensions (see note 10) and we would not therefore wish to attach any great importance to it. It should, however, be recognised that the dimensions of MDSCAL solutions do not have to be interpreted in terms of some single factor: they may simply 'mop up' a number of different effects. With this point in mind, it may be noted that on the third dimension – as a detailed examination of the plots of Figure 2 will confirm – several categories come into close proximity whose members will tend to occupy similar occupational situses (Morris and Murphy, 1959): for example, Plant, depot and site managers, our three categories of Skilled and related manual workers and Plant and machine operatives; or Managers and proprietors in services and Sales workers, Catering workers and Personal service workers; or again, Associate professionals in health and welfare and Health workers and Childcare workers. In so far, then, as the third dimension, like the second, even if in a less straighforwardly interpretable way, does capture features of the occupational structure of friendship that derive primarily from the different opportunities for friendship that are offered by particular work environments, rather than from actual friendship choices expressing status considerations, we are further encouraged to believe that in our first dimension it is status per se that is primarily reflected.[16]

The Status Dimension in More Detail

We now turn to a more detailed examination of what we would take to be the status dimension of our MDSCAL analyses, although, as will be seen, with a continuing concern for the validity of this interpretation. This concern is important since the ordering of categories along any MDSCAL dimension is in itself indicative only of their relative closeness or separation according to some metric. Thus, it could be suggested that our first dimension reflects no more than homophily – the tendency for people to make friends with others like themselves. To sustain the stronger claim that it captures a hierarchical ordering by status, further evidence is called for, external to that of the MDSCAL analysis.

To begin with, we show in Table 2 the rank-ordering of our 31 categories on the putative status dimension and, to make our discussion somewhat more concrete, we also identify 'representative' occupations: that is, occupations that account for relatively large numbers of individuals within each category and at the same time give some idea of its range. There are two features of the rank-ordering to which we would draw attention.

The first, on which we have in fact already commented, is that the categories can be seen as ordered overall according to the degree of 'manuality' of the work involved in their constituent occupations. More specifically, occupations in categories 1–7 in the ranking are essentially non-manual in character, and categories 8–18, only slightly less so. Or, somewhat more specifically, one might say that these occupations require working predominantly with symbols and/or people rather than directly with inanimate material entities. Categories 19–25 are then ones that cover occupations, falling mostly within the services sector, that tend to some significant degree to have both non-manual and manual components – the former usually involving some kind of 'people processing'. And, finally, categories 26–31 comprise occupations that require the performance of predominantly manual tasks, in effect working with things rather than with either symbols or people.[17]

The second feature of the ranking that we would pick out relates specifically to its non-manual range – i.e. categories 1–18. It can be seen that within this range there is a tendency for managerial categories to rank lower than do professional categories. It is true that the two highest ranking categories, Higher professionals and Associate professionals in business, are followed in third place by a managerial category, Specialist managers. But individuals falling in this latter category are more likely than other managers to have professional qualifications and to be operating to some extent in a professional role.[18] Following Teachers and other professionals in education, General managers and administrators then rank fifth, but other managers and officials rank only ninth, below in fact the highest ranking clerical category, and the two remaining mangerial categories, Managers and proprietors

Table 2 The 31 occupational categories ranked by status score and representative occupations within each category

Code		Representative occupations
1	HP	Chartered accountants, clergy, medical practitioners, solicitors
2	APB	Journalists, investment analysts, insurance brokers, designers
3	SM	Company treasurers, financial managers, computer systems managers, personnel managers
4	TPE	College lecturers, education officers and inspectors, school teachers
5	GMA	Bank and building society managers, general managers in industry, national and local government officers
6	API	Computer analysts and programmers, quantity surveyors, vocational and industrial trainers
7	SET	Civil and structural engineers, clinical biochemists, industrial chemists, planning engineers, software engineers
8	FRC	Conveyancing clerks, computer clerks, library assistants
9	OMO	Security managers, cleaning managers
10	AOA	Clerical officers in national and local government
11	NCC	Accounts assistants, bank clerks
12	APH	Community workers, nurses, occupational therapists, youth workers
13	SEC	Personal assistants, receptionists, secretaries, word processor operators
14	OCW	General assistants, commerical and clerical assistants
15	BSR	Buyers and purchasing officers, technical sales representatives, wholesale representatives
16	CCW	Educational assistants, nursery nurses
17	MPS	Catering managers, hoteliers, publicans, shopkeepers and managers
18	PDM	Clerks of works, farm managers, maintenance managers, transport managers, works managers
19	SW	Cash desk and check-out operators, sales and shop assistants, window dressers
20	HW	Ambulance staff, dental nurses, nursing auxiliaries
21	PSW	Caretakers and housekeepers, hairdressers and beauticians, travel attendants, undertakers
22	PSP	Fire service and police officers, security guards
23	RWS	Car park attendants, cleaners, counter-hands, couriers and messengers, hotel porters, postal workers
24	CW	Bar staff, chefs, cooks, waiters and waitresses
25	SDC	Despatch and production control clerks, storekeepers
26	SMO	Gardeners and groundsmen, printers, textile workers, woodworkers
27	TO	Bus and coach drivers, lorry and van drivers, taxi drivers
28	SMC	Bricklayers, electricians, painters and decorators, plasterers, roofers, telephone repairmen
29	SMM	Ftters, setters, setter-operators, sheet metal workers, turners, welders
30	PMO	Assemblers, canners, fillers and packers, food processors, moulders and extruders, routine inspectors and testers
31	GL	Agricultural workers, factory labourers, goods porters, refuse collectors

in services and Plant, depot and site managers are found together at the very end of the non-manual range.

These two features of the ranking we would regard as having particular significance in that they lend support to the idea that it does indeed express status rather than homophily alone. This is so because both can be taken as providing rather clear 'echoes' of the relatively explicit and well-defined status order that prevailed in British society from, say, the later nineteenth through to the mid-twentieth century. Sociologists and historians would appear largely to concur (for useful reviews see Runciman, 1997: 153–163, 212–229; McKibbin, 2000: chs I–IV) that the non-manual/manual distinction marked a major boundary within this order, and one that was strongly upheld even

in fact as the distinction became less consequential in terms of economic conditions; and, further, that professional employment was generally regarded as being socially superior to managerial employment, and especially to managerial employment in industry or 'trade'.

At the same time, though, it should also be recognised that, today, the non-manual/manual distinction is in itself less clear-cut than it was previously, chiefly as a result of the growth of the services sector of the economy. Many occupations that have concurrently expanded are ones to which the distinction does not all that easily apply. As we have observed, categories 19–25 are largely made up of occupations in services that involve both non-manual and manual work, and official

statistics would indicate (cf. Table 1 and also Jackson, 2002) that these occupations now account for as much as a quarter of the total employed population. Even if, then – as we would believe to be the case – the degree of 'manuality' of work remains an important influence on social status, it would seem likely that the resulting lines of division will now be rather more blurred than they were half a century ago.

Finally, change in this regard may be in part related to one further feature of the ranking of Table 2 that calls for some comment: that is, the relatively low positions of the skilled manual worker categories. To some degree, this result may be artefactual in that the official occupational groupings from which these categories are constructed are not, despite their labels, drawn up according to skill in any very strict way (hence the 'skilled and related . . .' formulation). However, we would doubt if this is a factor of major importance, and would emphasise, rather, the real changes that have occurred over recent decades in the nature and occupational distribution of skills, in consequence of developments in economic structure, technology and organisation (cf. Gallie et al., 1998: ch. 2), and that indeed underlie the difficulties that arise in using earlier nomenclature. It is usually supposed (e.g. see Roberts, 1971: ch. 1) that, under the 'old' status order, skilled, 'time-served' craftsmen formed an 'aristocracy of labour' and ranked clearly above semi-and unskilled manual workers and also above the typical service workers of the day – domestics, shop hands etc. But the fact that we do not reproduce this pattern has to be understood, we would suggest, in relation to the declining demand for, or dilution of, many traditional craft skills at the same time as new kinds of skill with different sectoral and occupational linkages have emerged – including technical skills as, say, in connection with computerisation, but also communication and 'social' skills more generally.

In sum, while the present-day status order that is suggested by our empirical analyses can claim to show continuities with that of an earlier period that, we believe, can scarcely be dismissed as coincidental, this order would at the same time appear to be in several respects less sharply demarcated than previously, as well as being less openly recognised and acknowledged.

Status, Income and Education

A further issue that we should take up concerning the ranking of Table 2, and its validity as an indicator of a status order, is that of how far this ranking is simply an expression of other, arguably more 'basic', factors, such as income and education. One would of course expect a status order to be correlated with the distribution of income and education. A certain level of income will be necessary in order to sustain the lifestyle characteristic of a certain level in the status hierarchy, and the preferences that shape the form and content of lifestyles are likely to be influenced by education. However, if the correlation between these factors and a putative status ranking based on the occupational structure of friendship should turn out to be very high, the question would arise of whether the concept of status might not be redundant or, at all events, of whether status is anything more than a mere epiphenomenon of differences in income and education.

We can pursue this matter by drawing on the further information available to us on respondents' income and education within the BHPS data-set. As regards income, taking men and women separately – because of the much larger proportion of women working only part-time – we correlate individuals' personal income of 1999 with the scores of their categories on the status dimension. In both cases, the correlations are quite modest: for men $r = 0.31$ and for women $r = 0.36$.[19] Turning now to education, we are able to allocate respondents to the categories of a sixfold classification of 'highest level of qualification achieved' which ranges from 'no qualification' to 'degree level and higher'.[20] If we then consider our status categories as likewise forming an ordered classification, we can use Kendall's tau as a measure of the association existing between educational attainment and status. With men and women being taken together, we obtain a value of $\tau = 0.34$. In other words, the connection between education and status, like that between income and status, would not appear to be especially strong.

However, it might be argued that these individual level relationships are unduly weakened by the extent of variance in income and education within the categories of our status ordering. We therefore go on to consider aggregate level correlations. Figure 4 plots the median income of the 31 status categories against their status score. It can seen that the correlation is higher than at the individual level at $r = 0.55$, as would indeed be expected. But what should further be noted is the number of categories that are clear outliers from the regression line: i.e. where income and status could be regarded as being 'discrepant'. Thus, Specialist managers, Scientists, engineers and technologists, Other managers and officials, Plant, depot and site managers, Protective service personnel, Skilled and related manual workers in metal trades, and Skilled and related manual workers in construction and maintenance all have notably low
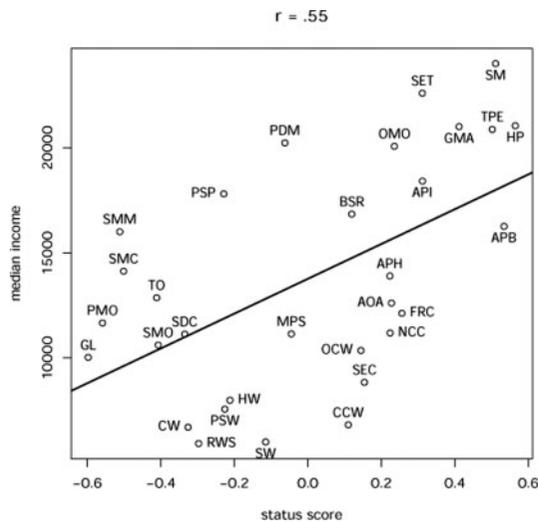
r = .55

Figure 4 Median income of occupational categories plotted against their status score

status relative to their income, while the reverse is the case with Numerical clerks and cashiers, Secretaries and receptionists, Other clerical workers, Childcare workers, Sales workers and Routine workers in services.

Figure 5 then plots the proportion of respondents in each status category having A-levels or above against the category status score. The correlation here is consider-
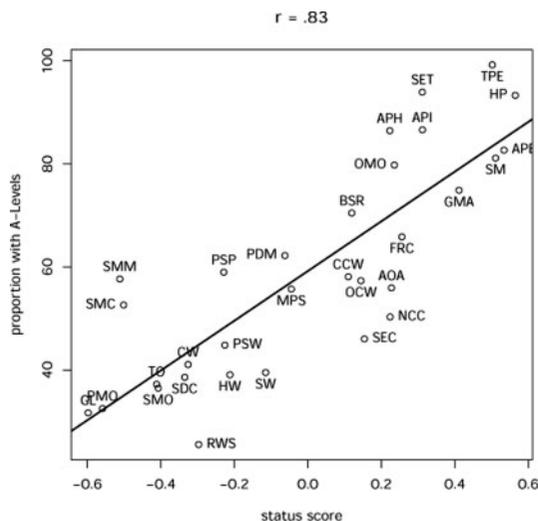
r = .83

Figure 5 Proportion of respondents in occupational categories with A-levels plotted against their status score

Table 3 Regression of estimated status scores on income (measured in £10,000) and proportion of respondents with A-levels or above

	β	s.e.
Intercept	−0.805**	0.109
Median income	−0.220*	0.113
Proportion with A-levels	1.871**	0.290

*0.05 < P < 0.10; **P < 0.01.*

ably higher than with income at r = 0.83.[21] But it may be observed that there is some evident similarity in the location of categories in relation to the regression line and likewise in the obvious outliers. Scientists, engineers and technologists, Skilled and related manual workers in metal trades, and Skilled and related manual workers in construction and maintenance again appear especially low on status, given their levels of qualification, while the reverse is true for Numerical clerks and cashiers, Secretaries and receptionists and Routine workers in services.

Finally, it is of interest to find that if our category status scores are regressed on both median income and proportion of people with A-levels, the coefficient for income is marginally insignificant at the 5% level, and in fact negative (see Table 3).[22] This suggests that the ranking that we derive from modelling the occupational structure of close friendship captures something clearly different from measures such as Duncan's SEI and Ganzeboom and Treiman's occupational status scale, where the coefficients for income and education in a comparable regression would both be statistically significant, and with that for income being of similar magnitude to that for education (Blau and Duncan, 1967: 125) or only slightly less (cf. Ganzeboom and Treiman, 2003: 161).[23] Or, in other words, the indication is that, if we are succeeding in capturing social status in the classic Weberian sense, then this can and should be distinguished from the looser idea of 'socioeconomic' status (cf. Sørensen, 2001).

Status and Class

Having now presented evidence to suggest that through the analysis of the occupational structure of friendship a status order in contemporary British society can still be identified, at least in its broad lines, we come finally to the issue that is salient in the Weberian perspective that we have adopted: that of the relationship between status and class. As we have already indicated, we take the view that the distinction between class and status is, conceptually, a

well-defined and coherent one and that its applicability and value in the context of present-day British society, as in any other, has to be a matter for investigation, not assertion. In this regard, therefore, a question of immediate interest that we seek here to address is that of how the status order we hope to have identified in present-day Britain maps onto the class structure.

The Goldthorpe class schema, which treats class positions as being defined by social relations in economic life or, more specifically, by employment relations (Goldthorpe, 1997, 2000: ch. 10) has been shown to possess an acceptable level of criterion validity and also of construct validity in being strongly predictive of individuals' economic security, stability and prospects (Evans and Mills, 1998; Goldthorpe and McKnight, 2004). The nine-class version of this schema is displayed in Table 4. Figure 6 then gives a first indication of how status is distributed within and between classes. It is evident that there is a status gradient across classes, as might be expected. In terms of the median or interquartile range of the status of their members, the non-manual classes (I, II and IIIa) rank clearly above the manual classes (V, VI and VII); and, within the non-manual classes, the median status of members of Class I is above that of members of Class II who in turn rank above the members of Class IIIa.

However, it also appears from Figure 6 that the spread of status within classes is often quite considerable and that there is a good deal of overlap in status between classes, both in the case of the non-manual and manual classes considered separately and across the non-manual/manual divide. These features of Figure 6, we should recognise, may well be in some degree artefactual – most obviously as the result simply of any measurement error in regard to both status and class. Further, as we have acknowledged, the categories on which our status ordering is based are by no means as refined as we would ideally wish. Thus, when these categories are related to
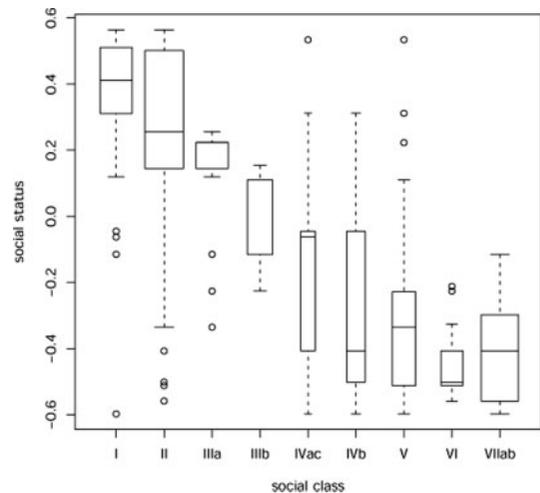

Figure 6 Distribution of social status within and between classes.
Note: The boxes are drawn with width proportional to the square-root of n of the classes. Because of the small n of classes IVc and VIIb, they are collapsed with classes IVa and VIIa respectively

classes, the category members represented in one class may in fact have higher or lower status than those represented in another. In other words, classes may pick up variation in status within categories in a systematic way. But, even with all reasonable allowance being made for these possibilities, the lack of congruence between status and class has still to be regarded as far from negligible, and likewise the differences in the degree of such congruence from one region of Figure 6 to another.

To provide further information on the interrelation between status and class, and especially on status stratification within classes, we show in Figure 7 the composition of

Table 4 The Goldthorpe class schema (nine-class version)

| Class	Description
I	Professional, administrative and managerial employees, higher grade; large employers
II	Professional, administrative and managerial employees, lower grade; technicians, higher grade
IIIa	Routine non-manual employees, higher grade
IIIb	Routine non-manual employees, lower grade
IVac	Small employers (other than professionals) including farmers
IVb	Self-employed workers (other than professionals)
V	Technicians, lower grade; supervisors of manual workers
VI	Skilled manual workers
VII	Non-skilled (i.e. semi-and unskilled) manual workers
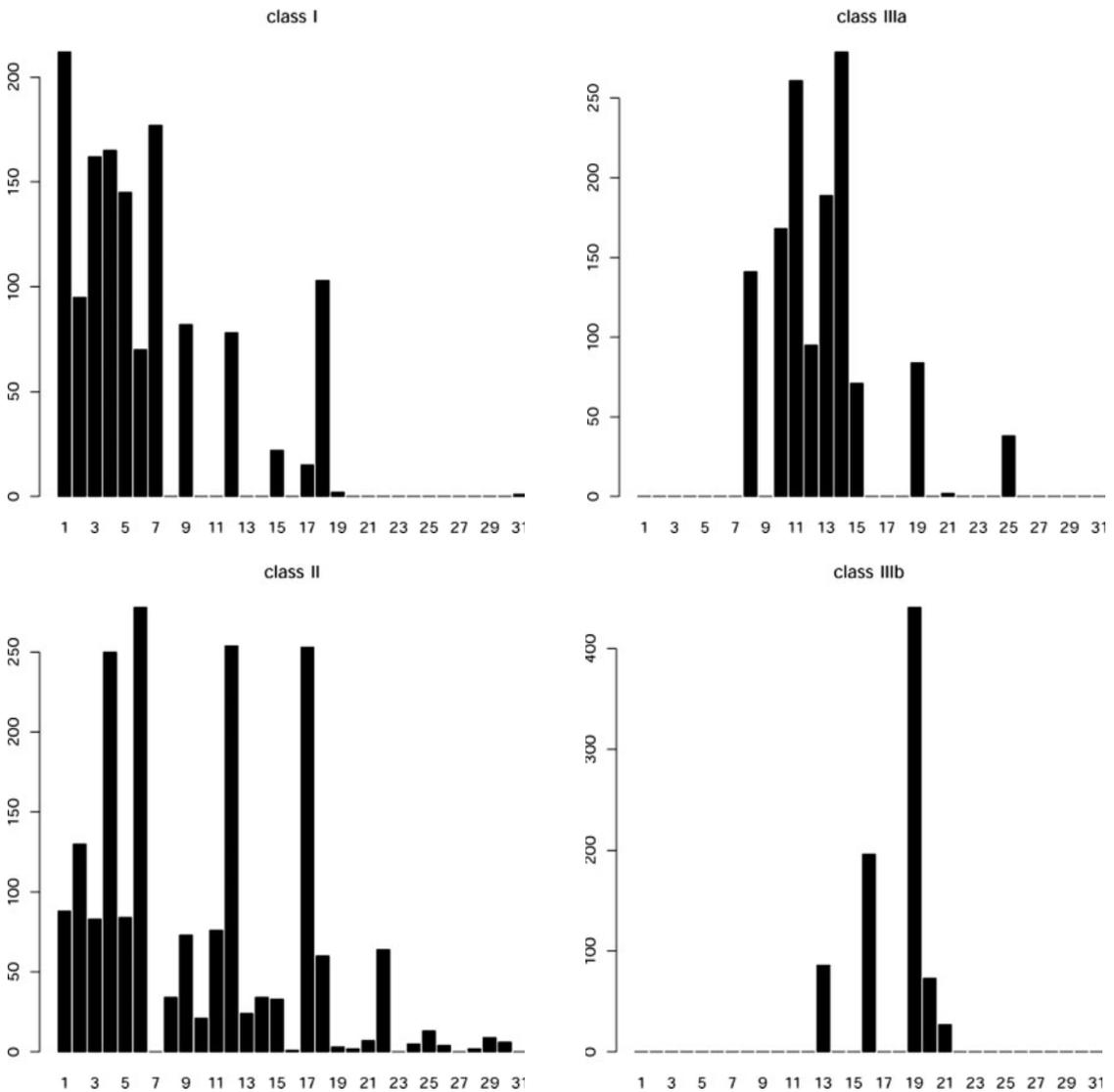
Figure 7 Distribution of respondents by social class, and by occupational group within social class.
Note: the occupational groups are numbered according to their status ranking

each class in terms of our occupational categories as ordered by status.

To begin with the salariat, it could be said that in Class I status stratification is quite limited: 77 per cent of those in this class are in fact covered by the seven highest categories in the status order. Moreover, so far as the remainder are concerned, the point made above concerning artefactual effects could well apply. For example, we know that the Plant, depot and site managers who are the main discrepant – i.e. relatively low status – category within Class I will be employed in large establishments

and individuals in this subset of the category may then have higher status than their counterparts employed in small establishments and allocated to Class II. When we turn to Class II itself, however, stratification by status is far more extensive and would seem less likely to be of an artefactual kind. From Figure 7 three broad status levels can in fact be identified. First comes a grouping of professionals and specialist managers, secondly, one of administrative officials and associate professionals in health, and thirdly, one in which managers in industry and services predominate, i.e. those occupational groupings
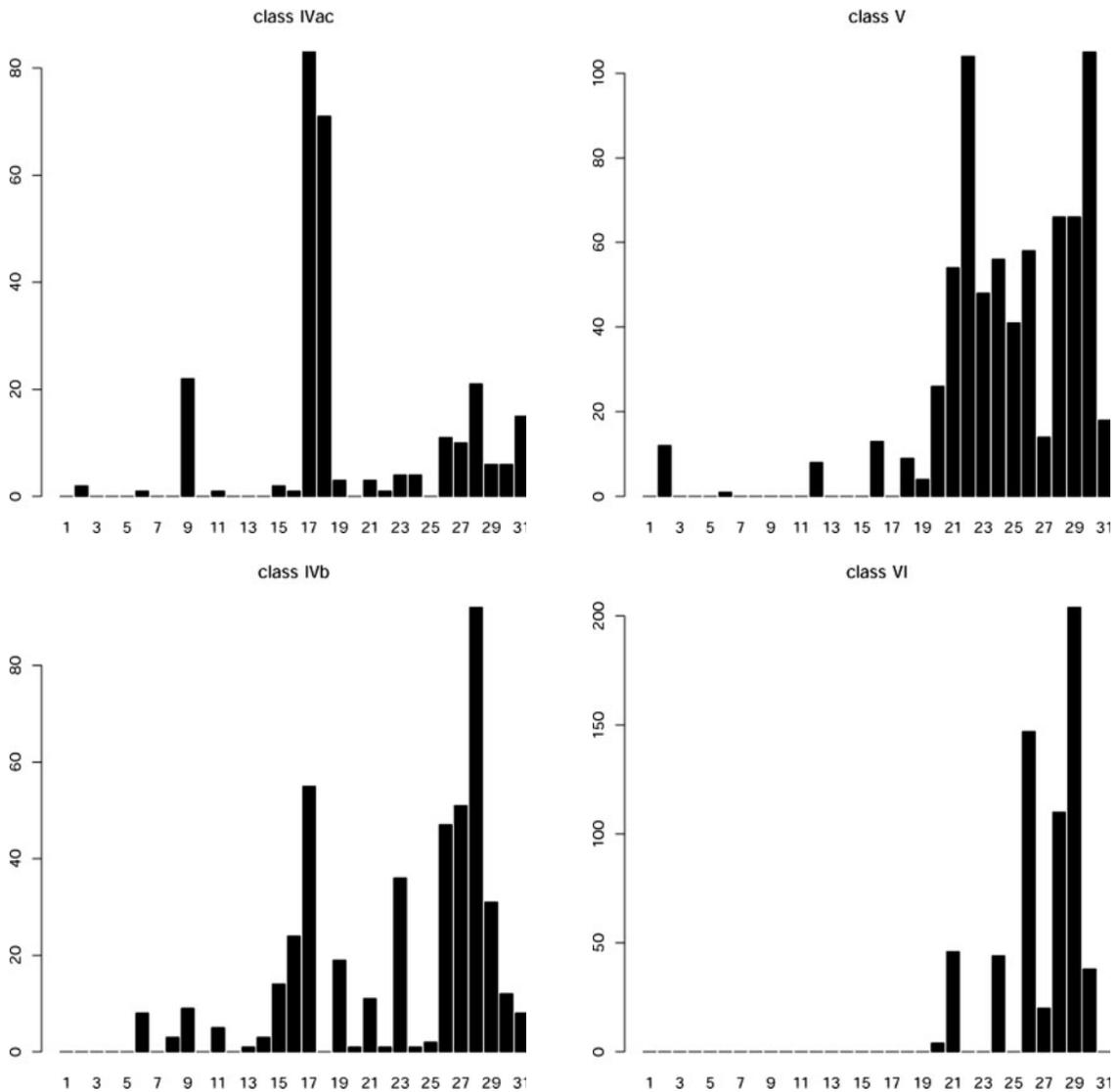
class IVac

class V

class IVb

class VI

Figure 7 *(continued)*

that, as we have seen, tend to have low status relative to both their income and educational qualifications.

With the classes of routine non-manual employees, Classes IIIa and IIIb, we again find only rather limited status stratification. In IIIa, two status levels might perhaps be distinguished – the higher comprising routine non-manual employees working in predominantly administrative contexts, and the lower, such employees working in sales and services. But in IIIb two thirds of those in the class fall within just three occupational categories that are in fact neighbours in our status order.

Turning next to the two classes of 'independents', IVac and IVb, status stratification is in these cases quite marked, as might be expected given the occupational range that is covered. In both cases alike, Figure 7 points to two main groupings, the higher comprising those running largely service or small industrial enterprises and the lower involved in enterprises entailing various kinds of mainly artisanal, that is, manual work.

Finally, with the 'blue-collar' classes, V, VI and VII, the finding of variable degrees of status stratification persists. Such stratification is least apparent in Class VI,
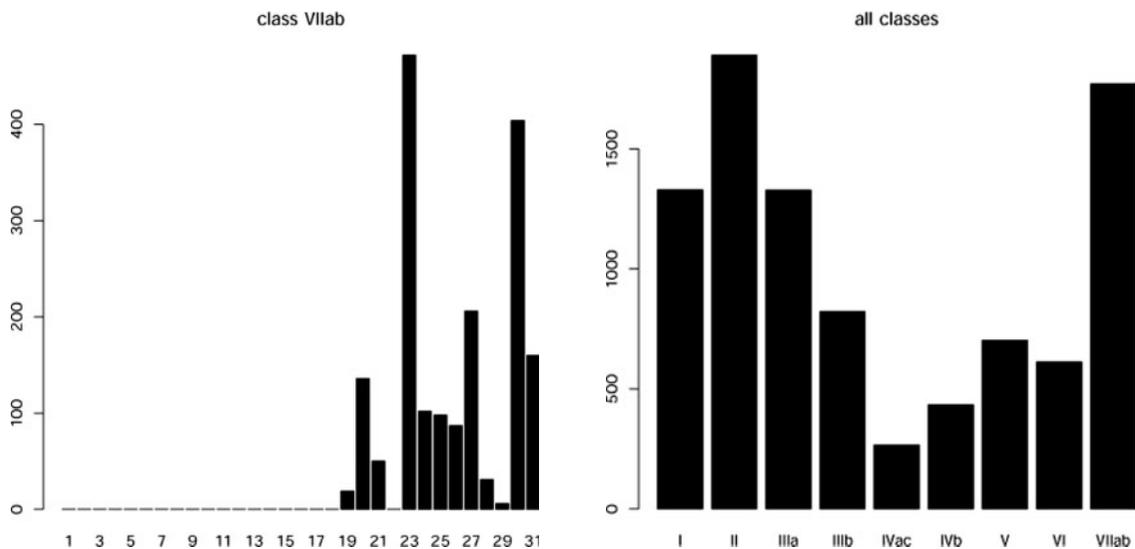
class VIIab

all classes

Figure 7 (continued)

that of skilled manual workers, with 85 per cent of those in the class being accounted for by five neighbouring categories in the status order. In contrast, in Classes V and VII status stratification appears far more extensive. The main line of division that is indicated in Class V is that between technicians and supervisors of service workers, on the one hand, and supervisors of manual workers outside of the services sector, on the other; and in Class VII, a somewhat similar division is apparent between unskilled manual workers in services and those employed in manufacturing, construction, transport etc.

To revert, then, to the question of how closely the status order of contemporary British society maps onto the class structure, what our investigations thus far would lead us to say is that, if we view the matter in terms of status stratification within classes, the mapping is much closer in some cases than it is in others. More specifically, status homogeneity appears relatively high in Class I, the higher division of the salaraiat, in Classes IIIa and IIIb, those of routine non-manual employees, and in Class VI, that of skilled manual workers. But in the remaining classes status stratification would appear far from negligible.

Why such a pattern should exist calls for further inquiry, although one pointer to emerge from the foregoing, relating to the services sector, may be noted. In this sector, and especially in sales and personal services, 'white-collar', that is, managerial and other non-manual, workers would appear to have relatively low status, as is seen within Class II (and also perhaps Class IIIa), while independents, and blue-collar supervisory and manual

workers have relatively high status, as is seen within Classes IVac, IVb, V and VII. The suggestion then is that one source of status stratification within classes may lie in a tendency for the occupational status hierarchy within the services sector to be more compressed than elsewhere – perhaps because of the typically small scale of enterprises and establishments and perhaps also because, as we have previously remarked, in work in this sector the manual/non-manual division is often rather blurred.

However, for our present purposes, the outcome of main importance here is that the mapping of status onto class does not appear to be so close as to make further research into their interrelation and its consequences unduly difficult and, at the same time, rather pointless. There are at least certain 'regions' in which significant disjunctions between class position and status level would appear to occur.

Conclusions

In this paper we have been concerned, as a first step in a larger research programme, with investigating how far in contemporary British society it is still possible to identify a status order, despite an evident decline in deference and in the readiness of individuals to openly assert their social superiority over others. Using the approach pioneered by Laumann, and focussing on the occupational structure of close friendship – within which social equality can be supposed – we have presented empirical analyses to show that there is one

dimension of this structure that can be plausibly interpreted as reflecting a hierachy of status and one that is, as it should be, essentially 'gender-neutral'. We attach particular significance to the fact that this hierarchy displays clear continuities with that depicted for the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries in historical and earlier sociological research, although there are also indications that the present-day hierarchy is less sharply demarcated. This would appear to be largely the result of the growth of occupations, especially within the services sector of the economy, to which the manual/non-manual distinction does not easily apply.

We have further shown that the status order that we have derived cannot be understood as simply an epiphenomenon of the distribution of income and education. Some of our status categories stand out as having either distinctively low or distinctively high status relative to both the income and the educational levels of their members. Finally, as regards status and class, we have argued that it is important to treat these as two distinct concepts and then to consider as an empirical question in what way, in any particular society at any particular time, the status order and the class structure relate to each other. So far as present-day Britain is concerned – and assuming of course that a status order does indeed exist broadly on the lines we have claimed – we find that while some classes show a rather high degree of status homogeneity, in others the extent of status stratification is quite extensive. And in this connection also we have raised the possibility that the growth of the services sector may play a significant role.

Following our research programme, we are presently addressing the second question that we initially posed: that of the relative importance of status and class as determinants of individuals' experience and action in different domains of their social lives. Thus, we are examining the relationship between the positions individuals hold within the status order, as we would envisage it, and their cultural tastes and preferences and, in particular, in areas where 'high' and 'low' tastes and preferences are widely recognised as marking out distinctive lifestyles. To the extent that in this regard we can show that the effects of status clearly outweigh those of class – and our preliminary results indicate that they in fact do[24] – then the validity of the status order that we have proposed will be further confirmed. And moreover, to the extent that we can in other domains – as, for example, those of experience in economic life and in turn the perception of economic and political interests – show that the reverse is the case – i.e. that class is a more potent force than status – then the value of a Weberian

perspective will be underlined and the way opened up to an understanding of the form of stratification of modern societies more consistent with the complexity that, we would belive, it does indeed display.

Notes

1. Cf. the distinction made by Davis (1948) between 'esteem', which attaches to individuals per se, and 'prestige', which he uses in our sense of status.

2. It may also be noted that from the nineteenth up to the mid-twentieth century, sociological interest in the distinction – and possible empirical discrepancies – between class and status was clearly paralleled in imaginative literature. In novels and plays the nouveau riche industrialist and the impoverished aristocrat, entangled in matters of money, honour and the marriage of their children, were almost stock characters.

3. This is not of course to deny that, as we indeed noted at the outset, status may attach to other positions or attributes. Laumann (1973) himself showed the importance in urban America of ethnoreligious affliation as well as occupation. However, he also found that the status-conferring effects of occupation were largely replicated within each ethnoreligious grouping and that no interaction effects occurred. We see no reason to suppose that any very different situation would occur in present day Britain, although we do not have at our disposal data that would allow this supposition to be adequately tested.

4. However, Prandy and Lambert (2003: 401) then take up a weaker position: 'Of course, hardly anyone, from Weber onwards, has ignored the close links between the material, or economic, and the cultural, or social – between, conventionally, class and status. . . . Even accepting the argument that this is an important analytical distinction that should be maintained, in practice it is a difficult one to make'.

5. Thus, Stewart et al. (1980) have only male respondents and Pappi (1973) categorises married women according to husband's occupation.

6. Similar questions were asked in the BHPS in 1992, 1994 and 1998. The actual wording of the question is as follows: 'Thinking now of your first friend, what is the name or title of your friend's current job? If this friend is not working, please give details of his/her last job. What kind of work does (or did) this friend do most of the time?'

7. We excluded all cases where a respondent or his or her friend had been coded to occupational unit

group 997 'Insuffcient Detail' (915 cases) or 999 'All Others in Miscellaneous Occupations NEC' (85 cases) within MOG 99 'Other Occupations NEC'. It seems reasonable to infer that BHPS coders had in fact coded to the unit group 999 other inadequately described occupations, since, exceptionally, it accounts for substantially more friends than respondents. Overall, the distributions of friends and respondents over MOGs are quite similar.

8. Due to space constraint, we cannot report the details of the rules we followed in forming the 31 occupational categories in this paper. But they are available from the authors on request. We have also repeated the analysis of this paper using a slightly different classification of 25 occupational categories, and have obtained essentially the same results. On the other hand, an attempt we made at using the full 77 MOGs as the basis of analysis led to many implausible results, traceable to an undue sparsity of data.

9. It may also be noted that the categories comprise individuals with fairly similar age distributions, with average ages ranging from 35.9 for Catering workers to 43.6 years for Teachers and other professionals in education. See Table in the Appendix.

10. We have also analysed our data using a multidimensional version of Goodman's RC II model (Clogg and Shihadeh, 1994), essentially as a check on our MDSCAL results. It turns out that the two methods give essentially the same results, as far as the first two dimensions are concerned. Thus, the scores of the first dimension given by the two methods correlate at $r = -0.97$, while those of the second dimension correlate at $r = -0.96$. The third dimensions do, however, correlate somewhat less closely, at $r = -0.75$, and the indication then is that, in working with our three-dimensional MDSCAL solution, we can most safely base substantive conclusions on the first two dimensions that it identifies, since these two dimensions are also identified in an analysis that is based on significantly different principles. Because of space constraint, we cannot report the results of our association models in this paper. But these are available from the authors on request.

11. All graphs in this paper are generated with R (cf. Dalgaard, 2002; Venables and Ripley, 2002).

12. The dimensions that we identify in higher-order solutions correlate perfectly with what can be taken as the corresponding dimensions of lower-order solutions. Details are available from the authors on request.

13. We may also note that while our results show a general tendency for individuals to report same-sex (83.2% for men and 89.1% for women) rather than different-sex friends, this tendency is attenuated for both men in female-dominated occupations and women in male-dominated occupations. Thus, men working in the six occupational categories whose workforce is at least 80% female (SEC, CCW, HW, APH, SW and OCW) reported 79.0% of same-sex close friends. Similarly, women working in the seven occupational categories that are at least 80% male (SMM, SMC, TO, PDM, SET, GL and PSP) reported 85.1% of same-sex friends.

14. The correlation of Figure 3 goes up to 0.84 if the two outliers are omitted from the analysis.

15. The separate analyses of men and women reported here are important for another reason. The BHPS is a household survey, and in many sampled households two or more adults were interviewed. Since two persons from the same household should be more similar to each other than is the case for a pair drawn randomly from the population, our sample of individuals within households has less variation than a true random sample of individuals. This is a legitimate concern. But we are reassured by the fact that our separate analyses for men and women give very similar results. Because 87% of the men in our sample (and 90% of the women) were the only male (female) respondent in their household, our gender-specific analyses have largely alleviated the problem of correlated observations within households.

16. Here, and similarly in regard to the second dimension, it must be stressed that in analysing the occupational structure of friendship, our interest is focused on the possibility of thus identifying a status order, rather than on giving a comprehensive account of this structure itself. It should also be noted that our approach in no way involves the assumption that the workplace itself is the only, or a distinctively important, source of friends. Indeed, as the text above should indicate, we regard it as important in our analyses to try to separate out – in order to discount – the effects on patterns of friendship of workplace environments in themselves.

17. These are not, we might add, simply our own subjective judgements but reflect the official descriptions of the occupational groupings referred to (OPCS, UK, 1990).

18. We know in fact that they more often have degrees or non-graduate professional qualifications – 34 per cent as against 28 per cent of General administrators and managers and 19 per cent of Plant, depot and site managers.

19. If women working part time, defined as those who work for less than 30 hours a week, are excluded from the analysis, the correlation for women remains virtually unchanged at $r = 0.34$. If the logarithm of income is used in the computation of the correlation coeffcients, we observe that for men $r = 0.15$, and for women $r = 0.25$.

20. The six categories are: 6, university degree; 5, teaching, nursing, or other post-secondary qualifications, including City & Guilds certificates, HNC, HND, BEC/TEC/BTEC higher certificate/diploma, and university diplomas; 4, A-levels or equivalent; 3, O-levels or equivalent; 2, clerical or commerical qualifications, CSE, recognised trade apprenticeship, youth training certiciate; 1, no qualification.

21. Different cutoff points of education give similar correlation, with $r = 0.79$ for university degree, $r = 0.78$ for post-secondary qualifications, $r = 0.85$ for O-levels.

22. If proportion with university degree, postsecondary qualifications, or O-levels is used in the regression, the effect of income becomes even weaker. Details are available from the authors on request.

23. Duncan's socio-economic index is a weighted average of the income and educational attainment of incumbents of occupatons with the two regressors making roughly equal contributions (for a recent review and update see Hauser and Warren, 1997: 190–195).

24. See, e.g. Chan and Goldthorpe (2003, 2004) which provide, respectively, analyses of the social stratification of newspaper readership and of listening to different genres of music and participation in musical events.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix

Table A1 Further information on the 31 occupational categories

	n	% Female	MDSCAL scores			Respondent's age	
			First	Second	Third	Mean	S.D.
HP	300	42.33	0.5643	0.2094	−0.2545	40.8	10.9
APB	239	43.51	0.5337	0.2479	0.0176	39.1	10.8
SM	245	36.33	0.5107	0.2994	0.0973	39.8	10.5
TPE	415	71.57	0.5017	0.0188	−0.4514	43.6	11.7
GMA	229	51.53	0.4114	0.0890	0.1569	41.5	10.0
API	358	32.96	0.3116	0.2311	0.0123	38.7	11.4
SET	177	14.69	0.3115	0.3768	0.1539	41.4	11.7
FRC	178	72.47	0.2559	−0.1596	0.0710	38.5	12.5
OMO	186	42.47	0.2355	0.2715	0.0114	42.8	10.5
AOA	189	73.54	0.2274	−0.2414	0.0157	41.0	11.5
NCC	343	76.38	0.2238	−0.2502	0.1610	39.3	11.8
APH	435	86.21	0.2228	−0.2486	−0.1799	40.3	11.6
SEC	300	97.67	0.1539	−0.3271	0.1096	42.4	12.7
OCW	316	81.65	0.1443	−0.3041	0.1018	38.4	12.2
BSR	142	38.73	0.1193	0.2144	0.2140	37.7	12.2
CCW	235	96.60	0.1097	−0.5249	−0.1917	40.0	10.7
MPS	406	52.46	−0.0453	−0.1131	0.1029	41.8	12.2
PDM	243	12.76	−0.0625	0.4567	−0.0602	43.5	10.5
SW	575	81.74	−0.1151	−0.4288	0.1245	38.4	12.9
HW	242	88.02	−0.2121	−0.4634	−0.1314	39.5	12.0
PSW	200	77.50	−0.2261	−0.2738	0.0887	39.7	13.0
PSP	170	20.00	−0.2288	0.1474	0.0814	39.5	11.9
RWS	560	73.57	−0.2974	−0.4170	−0.1038	43.3	12.1
CW	212	74.06	−0.3261	−0.2861	0.1007	35.9	13.1
SDC	192	34.90	−0.3353	0.0548	0.1357	38.2	12.1
SMO	354	31.64	−0.4072	0.0846	−0.0477	40.7	12.5
TO	301	7.64	−0.4114	0.2068	0.0475	42.8	11.6
SMC	322	3.11	−0.5014	0.3599	−0.0809	41.0	11.7
SMM	322	2.80	−0.5121	0.3975	−0.0694	40.2	11.9
PMO	571	35.90	−0.5589	0.1337	−0.0952	40.2	11.9
GL	203	17.24	−0.5979	0.2384	−0.1381	40.1	12.8
Overall	9160	52.86				45.2	18.6