MODELS OF INFLUENCE

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Original reviews, CS 9:1 (January 1980), by Charles Mueller, Joan Huber, Keith Hope, and Herbert Gintis. From the reviews of Joan Huber and Keith Hope:

Featherman and Hauser have provided a valuable replication of a major inquiry. By choosing to revive the analysis of mobility tables they have posed in acute form the problem of the relation between mobility and status-attainment research (Hope, 11).

The book is long and, like the Bible, it contains statements that will please readers of a plethora of persuasions. . . . The careful and detailed description of the findings makes summarizing a real chore—every empirical nugget is honed and polished in a dazzling display of methodological virtuosity (Huber, 5).

Like many disciplines, sociology often asks that its scholars complete analytic tasks for which they have no formal training, thus obliging them either to proceed as novices or, more rarely, to crash-train in the required skills. The present exercise is a case in point; that is, insofar as our charge is to characterize the consequences of a single event (i.e., a book publication), one might reasonably conclude that historical rather than sociological methods are most appropriate. . . . We accordingly lead off our review by attempting a thought experiment of the sort favored by some historians. In a series of follow-up analyses, we also devise and evaluate formal models of influence wielding, with our principal objective being to distinguish the true effects of Opportunity

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and Change (hereafter, O&C) from those of the larger academic, social, and political context in which O&C is embedded. The latter exercise might be regarded as sociological in spirit, since it formalizes the causal forces at work and interprets the influence of O&C through the lens of these forces.¹

We begin, then, by asking how the field of stratification would have evolved in the absence of O&C. The rules of play for such counterfactual exercises are poorly defined; most notably, the task of assessing influence is complicated when functional equivalents are allowed or presumed to emerge, since the reviewer is then obliged to speculate about when (or whether) these equivalents would appear and how the discipline would likely receive them. We clearly have no choice but to ignore all such complexities and simply assume that excising O&C would not unleash reactive or compensating forces in the discipline (e.g., the emergence of equivalents). If the foregoing assumption is accepted, the following seven pathways of influence suggest themselves:

1. The most obvious “O&C effect” is of course the revitalization of mobility analysis. After years of neglect, the publication of O&C and related pieces (e.g., Hauser 1978) ushered in a new era of tabular mobility research, much as The American Occupational Structure (Blau and Duncan 1967; 1978; hereafter, AOS) introduced and popularized status attainment research.

2. This development had the further effect of legitimating categorical representations of the class structure rather than the vertical socioeconomic scales favored in AOS. If “class models” were thereby reinvigorated, it should also be stressed that O&C relied on conventional Census Bureau categories and therefore had a largely conservative influence on the development of class models.

3. In their analyses of racial stratification, Featherman and Hauser followed in large part the analytic example set by Blau and Duncan, but they also advanced and elaborated this framework by distinguishing Hispanics explicitly and thus moving beyond simplistic black-white dichotomies (see ch. 8). The research of Marta Tienda, Matt Snipp, and many others can be seen as building on this example.²

4. The O&C project provided an early and influential prototype that assisted scholars in replicating AOS elsewhere. In many respects, O&C was a more important template for replication than AOS, since most of the replicate studies in other countries were planned and implemented concurrently with O&C.

5. The log-linear models that O&C popularized were subsequently applied to diverse research areas (e.g., assortive mating, educational mobility, sex segregation, response consistency, geographic mobility). The influence of O&C was, in this regard, twofold; namely, it not only contributed to the diffusion of log-linear models in general, but it also spawned a small industry of spinoff research applying levels models in particular.

6. The main conceptual contribution of O&C was the development of an elaborated theory of postindustrial change (esp. ch. 5). The resulting framework, emphasizing as it does institutional sources of change, went well beyond prior work (e.g., AOS) that treated “universalizing forces” in abstract form without specifying the social institutions through which such forces might be realized. This institutional approach provided the conceptual underpinnings for much subsequent work on stratification trends.

7. The most important influence of O&C may nonetheless be stylistic rather than substantive. Indeed, while some skeptics question whether O&C made any conceptual contributions at all (e.g., Gintis 1980; Huber 1980), it is rather more difficult to dispute that O&C provided an influential model of disciplined and systematic research that served, if only stylistically, as the prime exemplar of “Wisconsin research” for generations of scholars. The main features of this approach are (a) a willingness to ransack data for whatever they may reveal (Huber 1980); (b) an insistence that all interpretation be closely substantiated by analysis; and (c) a commitment to attend to operational details that, while seemingly minor, have the (presumed) potential to materially affect results and conclusions.

In the present context, such stylistic influences have motivated us to supplement our own commentary with quantitative evidence, albeit of an indirect sort. We have proceeded by searching the Social Science Citation Index for articles that cited O&C (between 1979 and 1996)

that ongoing demographic and political changes rendered simple black-white classification systems increasingly untenable.
and then coding the citations in these articles by year, subject, and context.\textsuperscript{3} The resulting citation counts suggest that \textit{O\&C} disproportionately influenced research on mobility, attainment, and race (see Figure 1). Moreover, when compared to such classics as \textit{The Declining Significance of Race} (Wilson 1978; 1980) and \textit{States and Social Revolutions} (Skocpol 1979), we find that \textit{O\&C} very much holds its own with respect to total citation activity (see Figure 2).\textsuperscript{4} The influence of \textit{O\&C} falls short, however, of the more spectacular standard set by \textit{AOS}, not merely in terms of total citation activity but also with respect to the shape of the trend line and the implied “staying power” of \textit{O\&C}. As revealed in Figure 2, the take-off period for \textit{AOS} citations stretched over ten years, whereas that for \textit{O\&C} lasted at best four years. By contrast, the trend lines for Wilson (1978; 1980) and Skocpol (1979) are slightly less steep during the first four years (relative to the \textit{O\&C} trend line), but the subsequent tailing-off in citation activity is also less pronounced.

What, then, limited the influence of \textit{O\&C} and produced the declining citation activity in Figure 2? Although many competing accounts might be adduced, we are persuaded by such standbys as (a) the discipline values replication less than “breaking new ground” (Mueller 1980, 4); (b) the social indicators movement, which was the principal impetus behind \textit{O\&C}, had fallen into academic and political disfavor by the early 1980s; (c) the status attainment tradition had likewise outlived the usual half-life of academic movements and was vulnerable to backlash and revisionism; (d) the all-male analyses of \textit{O\&C} quickly dated the study and precluded it from contributing to the burgeoning field of gender stratification;\textsuperscript{5} (e) the period covered by \textit{O\&C} (i.e., 1962–1973) predated the rise of the black underclass and hence lent itself to a more optimistic assessment of African American progress than was justifiable or fashionable in the post-\textit{O\&C} period; and (f) the

\textsuperscript{3} We will provide on request a more detailed discussion of the data collection and coding procedures.

\textsuperscript{4} The counts in Figure 1 pertain to the total number of citations, whereas those in Figure 2 pertain to the number of articles in which these citations appear. Although \textit{O\&C} was cited 969 times between 1979 and 1996, some of these citations appeared in the same article; and, consequently, there are only 479 articles in which citations to \textit{O\&C} can be found. The corresponding counts for Wilson (1978; 1980), Skocpol (1979), and Blau and Duncan (1967; 1978) are 535, 695, and 1,430 respectively.

\textsuperscript{5} Although Featherman and Hauser opted for an all-male sample (thereby following the lead of \textit{AOS}), women did nonetheless enter the analysis as wives of the sampled men.
prose in O&C is relentlessly descriptive and lacking, therefore, in sweeping generalizations of the sort that generate much controversy and influence. The latter consideration is arguably the most important one. Indeed, the long-standing recipe for academic fame and influence involves combining sweeping claims and incendiary statements with more careful qualifications, thereby generating the requisite controversy while also protecting the authors from charges of irresponsibility. The prose in O&C, which is consistently and irritatingly careful, violates this fail-proof formula.

The foregoing discussion of O&C, standard though it may be, is nonetheless unsatisfying, and not merely because the evidence on which it rests falls far short of the Wisconsin standard. It is also troubling that we have not distinguished the influence of O&C from that of the larger scholarly traditions (i.e., “paradigms”) that O&C both reflected and created. There is surely good reason to believe that scholarly production is reactive not merely to individual classics but also to more encompassing traditions and conventions (Kuhn 1962). The model of Figure 3 allows us to frame a series of questions that address this potentially complex relationship between O&C and its academic context:

1. To what extent was O&C innovative and agenda-setting rather than reflective of a pre-existing tradition? Although Featherman and Hauser obviously stood on the “shoulders of giants,” their work also undermined and supplanted the AOS paradigm on many fronts. This conclusion implies that the left-hand paradigm in Figure 3 may well be large.

2. If O&C is partly derivative (as might be expected of a replicate study), was subsequent scholarship more strongly influenced by this pre-existing tradition than by O&C itself? The task of reviewing O&C, when taken seriously, obliges us to distinguish its true effects (i.e., paths d and e) from the continuing influence of the larger tradition from which it flowed (i.e., paths b and c).

3. Was the accumulation of Featherman-Hauser research so substantial by the late 1970s that O&C was effectively crowded out by its sister publications? The “pre-O&C tradition” of Figure 3 includes, of course, a large body of earlier Featherman-Hauser scholarship, much of which was quite influential and hence capable of squeezing O&C out of its natural citation niche.

4. Did O&C exert its influence indirectly through the creation of a new post-O&C scholarly tradition (see paths d and f)? As Kuhn (1962) noted long ago, most authors no doubt wish to establish a new paradigm, but not necessarily one that is fast moving and hence quickly overshadows their own work. There is clearly great variability in the rate at which sociological paradigms fill out and change; indeed, some subfields never progress much beyond their canonical works, whereas others generate more transitory classics that are rapidly supplanted by the very work they inspire.

It is easier to pose these questions than to answer them. Once again, the only quantitative evidence at our disposal is O&C citation data, but now we are interested in the character and context of these citations rather than simply the raw counts themselves. We have thus distinguished standard solitary citations of O&C from those that are targeted, illustrative, or seriatim (see Figure 4 for definitions). In the following discussion, we assume that solitary or targeted citations indicate the singular influence of a canon, whereas seriatim or illustrative citations give priority to the larger undergirding tradition (see Goodwin 1998 for related comments). We are well aware that such interpretations are eminently contestable. Indeed, our discussion of O&C effects will also rely heavily on our qualitative understanding of the

6. The unit of analysis in Figure 4 is the citation itself (rather than the article in which the citation appeared).
solitary and targeted references to O&O (see Figure 4) testifies to this strong direct effect on the mobility literature. At the same time, the Citation Index reveals heavy citation activity for various spinoff articles published before 1978, thus suggesting that O&O was by no means the exclusive inspiration for early converts to log-linear analysis. Although O&O was the flagship of the larger Featherman-Hauser project, it faced stiff competition from precursor publications that assumed a prominent position in the pre-O&O literature and were not easily supplanted thereafter.

The log-linear modeling that O&O popularized was of course elaborated and extended by an active post-O&O research literature. As noted by Yamaguchi (1995), the resulting log-linear tradition quickly took on a life of its own, so much so that fifteen years later Hauser (personal communication) bemoaned the endless analysis and reanalysis of mobility tables and the consequent inattention of scholars to the mediating processes through which reproduction and mobility occur. The sibling analyses that Hauser (1987) subsequently published can be viewed in this context as a partly successful effort to reintroduce the discipline to alternative modes of analysis. We therefore suspect that the direct effects of O&O are gradually weakening; indeed, insofar as Featherman and Hauser have lost control over the research literature they spawned, the effects of O&O may be increasingly mediated through a post-O&O tradition.

The contribution of O&O to the status attainment literature was less fundamental. As shown in Figure 5, a trimmed three-variable model probably suffices here, since the publication of O&O did not in this case substantially alter research practice and convention. The model in Figure 5 implies that O&O borrowed heavily from a pre-existing research tradition, that a new O&O-inspired paradigm failed to emerge, and that any stylistic similarities between O&O and contemporary research are spurious. The citation counts of Figure 4 reveal that, as predicted, seriatim and illustrative references to O&O occur disproportionately relative to what prevails in the mobility do-

7. We suspect that citation practices are affected by such extraneous factors as “house-specific” editorial policies and the purely idiosyncratic styles of authors, reviewers, and copy editors.

8. The citation counts for such articles as Hauser (1978), Hauser et al. (1975), and Featherman, Jones, and Hauser (1975) are 102, 79, and 120 respectively.

9. The model of Figure 5 represents our argument in admittedly extreme terms. While O&O did not break new ground in the modeling of attainment processes, it did introduce an elaborated version of the “industrialism thesis” (Kerr et al. 1966) that proved to be quite influential.
revisionist movement. The preceding argument again finds support in Figure 4; that is, when scholars of race and ethnicity did cite O&C, they opted disproportionately for seriatim citations and hence minimized the distinctiveness of O&C (see Figure 4). It follows that paths d and e in Figure 3 are both likely weak.

We could readily elaborate similar models for other research domains, but we have undoubtedly tried the patience of our readers. The skeptic might indeed suggest that the foregoing is all so much useless formalism. In our defense, such formalism at least has the merit of obligating reviewers to attend to competing accounts, whereas past practice simply privileges "great book" formulations without any serious consideration of more sociological alternatives. This practice arises, in part, because of the personal benefits accruing to those who are generous in attributing influence, yet it hardly helps matters that the field offers so little in the way of alternative models of influence and influence wielding. In the present case, our models imply that the net effect of O&C was moderately strong within the race and attainment domains, but far stronger among scholars whose passion lies in analyzing mobility tables. It is impressive for a replicate study to rise above the natural constraints of the form and become so influential in a core domain of quantitative sociology.

REFERENCES


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