

Is There a Status Order in the Contemporary United States?  
Evidence from the Occupational Structure of Marriage

by

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## Introduction

Replicating Chan and Goldthorpe (2005), we ask whether a status order can be identified in the contemporary United States and whether it remains useful to draw the distinction (after Weber) between *status* and *class*.

*Longer Term:* Our root hypothesis is that the status order is a linchpin of “post-materialist” and “post-modern” lifestyles and patterns of cultural consumption (e.g., the univore/omnivore framework).

## Data and Method

*“The answer to the question, ‘What sort of work do you do?,’ provides the single best clue to the sort of person one is.”*

*- Don Treiman (1977) Occupational Prestige in Comparative Perspective*

We do not make any assumptions about the relative status of occupations. Nor do we rely on variants of subjective prestige scales to deduce a “status order” based on occupation. Instead, our approach is to allow a status order to emerge from patterns of association in tables of occupations in which rows and columns are partner to a married or cohabiting couple.

## Data and Method

- After Chan and Goldthorpe (2005), we draw on Ed Laumann's work of the 60s and 70s for inspiration.
- Laumann built on Warner's early "associational approach" to stratification. Sampling from urban populations, Laumann cross tabulated respondent's occupation against the occupation of associates and analyzed resulting similarities/dissimilarities in patterns of association in the aim of identifying an ordering of occupations in terms of status.
- This approach rests on the assumptions that association is an indicator of social equality and, thus, that *differential association* is an elementary and necessary feature of a status hierarchy.

## Data and Method

- Where Chan and Goldthorpe use data on friendship (after Laumann's later work in this vein), we use data on marriage and straight and gay cohabitation.
- We believe that the use of data on marriage makes for a rather severe "test" of this approach in that 1) marriage is based on psychologically and culturally conditioned choices that may be resistant to pressures "external" to the mating system, 2) we expect men and women to adjust their behavior in response to marriage in ways that have implications for education and careers and, thus, for occupation.

## Data and Method

- Data are from the 5% Public Use Microdata Sample of the 2000 U.S. Census
- Couples aged 20-64:
  - 2,297,139 married couples
  - 137,229 black married couples
  - 199,913 heterosexual cohabiting couples
  - 27,532 homosexual cohabiting couples
- Using the 2000 U.S. Standard Occupation Classification, we analyze a 94 X 94 table containing “minor occupational groups.”

## Data and Method

- We use multidimensional scaling (MDS) to analyze these tables. Very generally, MDS produces a visual representation of the proximities between occupations, such that the larger the dissimilarity between occupations, the further apart they appear on the map. The goal is to identify meaningful underlying dimensions that explain the observed proximities.
- Given the differences in sample size across subpopulations, we focus on the MDS of the row dissimilarities of a 94 X 94 table for married couples that has been symmetrized by taking the average of the lower and upper halves of the table (i.e., replace  $x_{ij}$  and  $x_{ji}$  by  $(x_{ij} + x_{ji})/2$ ).
- We explore the degree to which the status order we identify is “gender neutral,” “race neutral,” and robust to the type of intimate relation analyzed by performing separate analyses of 1) men and women, 2) black married couples, 3) straight cohabiting couples, and 4) gay cohabiting couples.

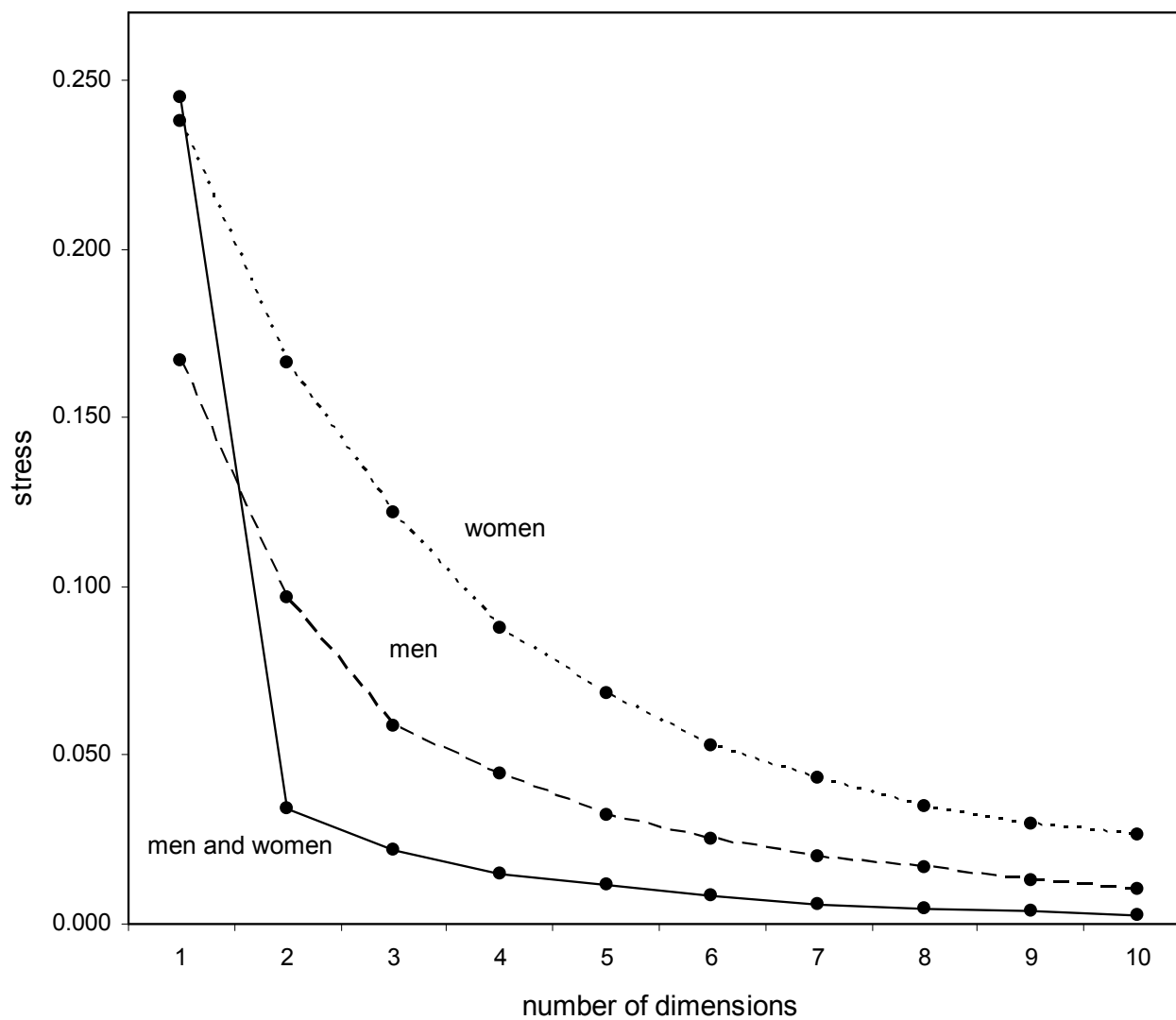


Figure 1. Stress values of MDS applied to married couples, and to women and men separately (n = 2,297,193)



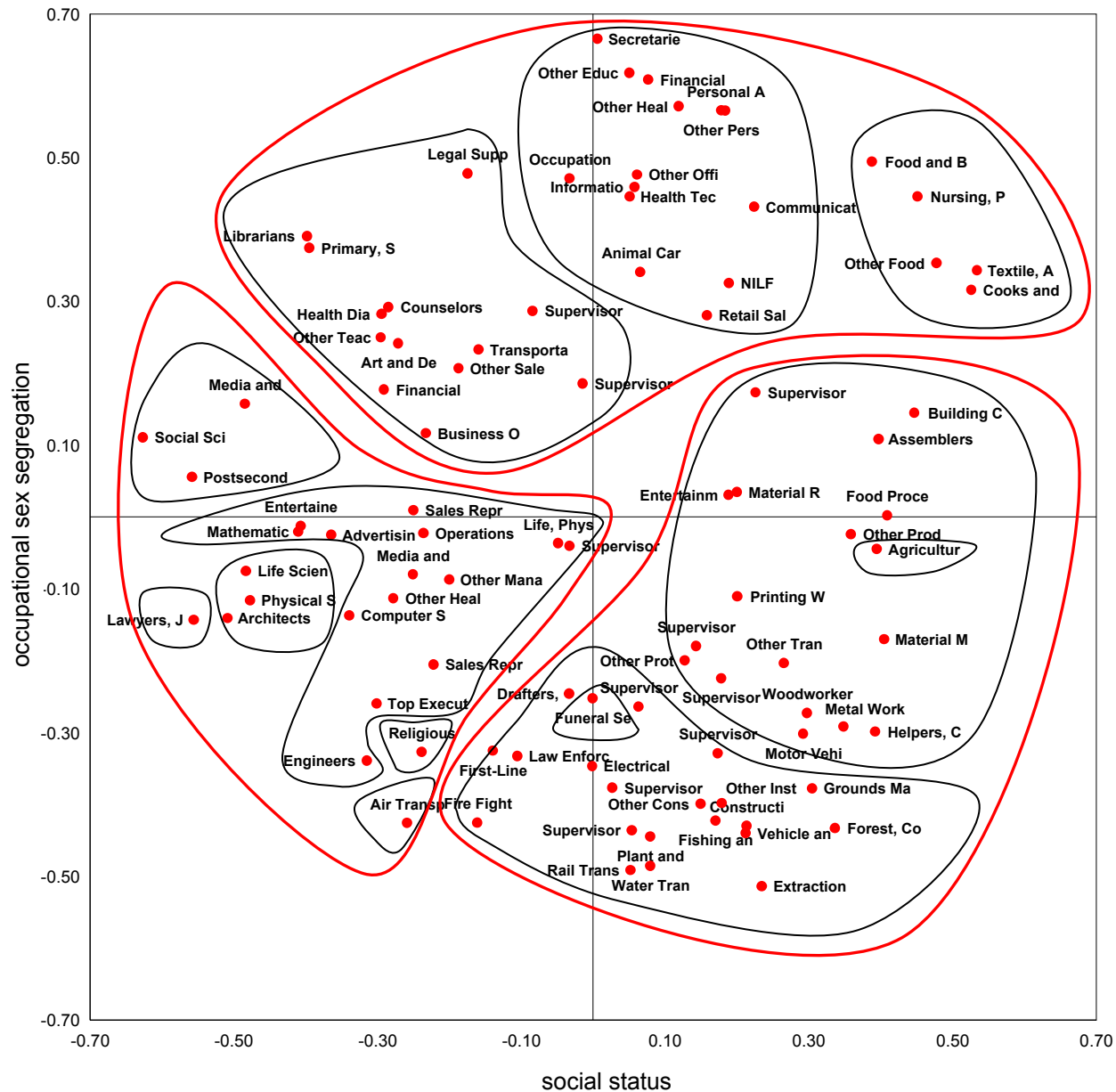


Figure 3. First two dimensions of three dimensional MDS solution (married couples). Loops based on hierarchical clustering of dissimilarities at different average distances (black = 0.4771, red = 0.6838).

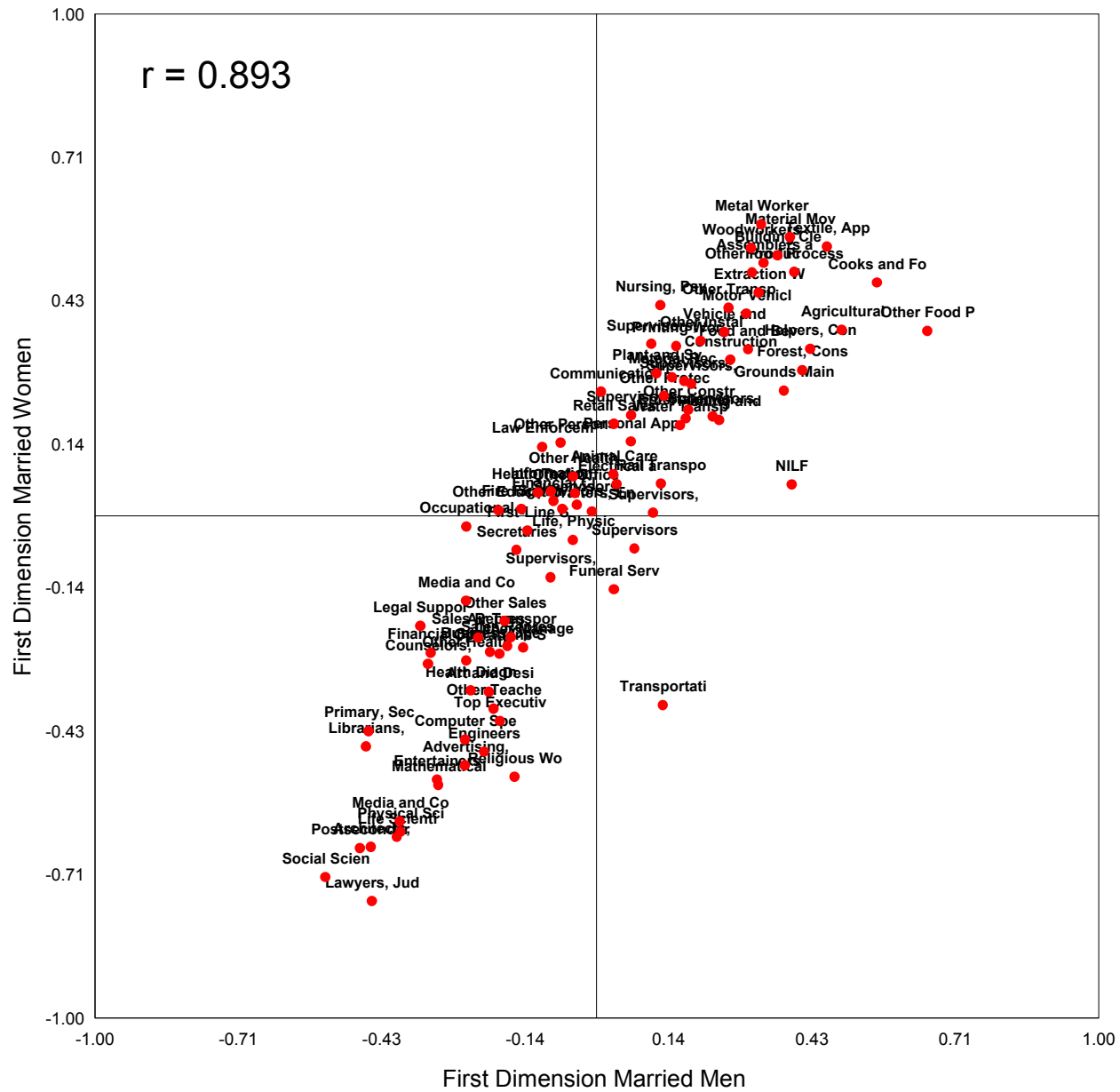


Figure 4. Status dimension: MDS scores estimated separately for married women and men



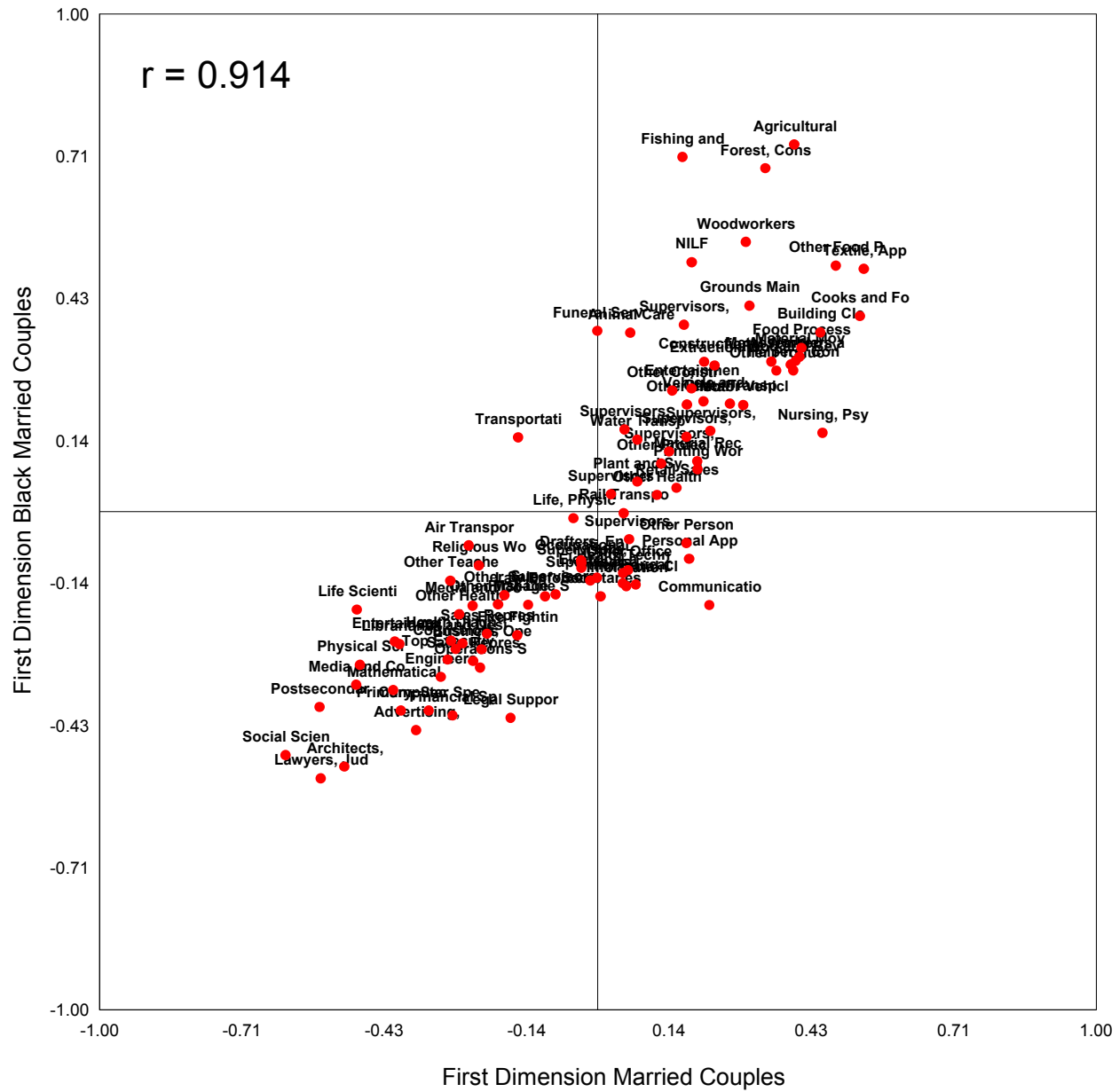


Figure 6. Status dimension: all married couples plotted against black married couples

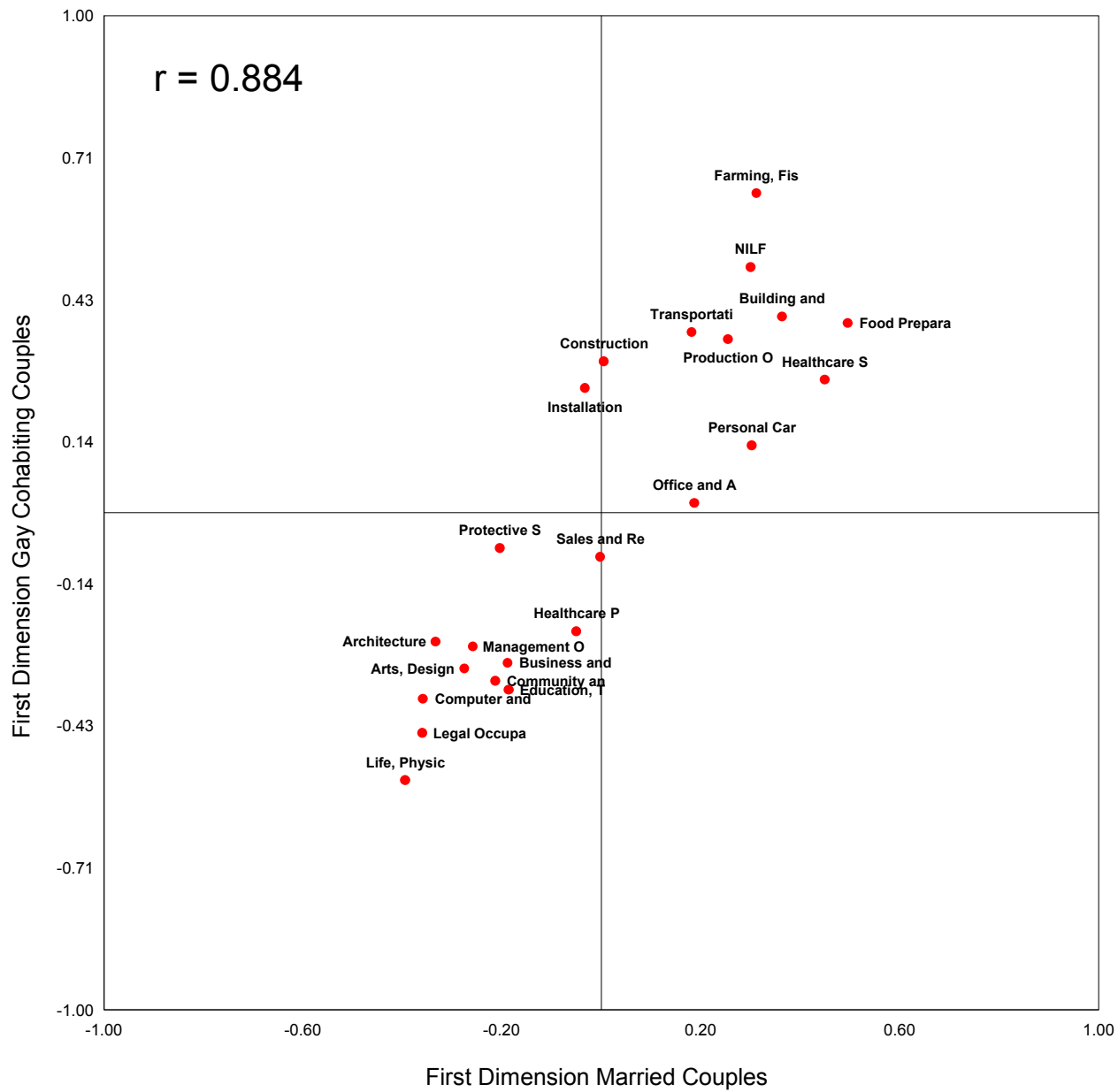


Figure 7. Status dimension: married couples plotted against gay cohabiting couples

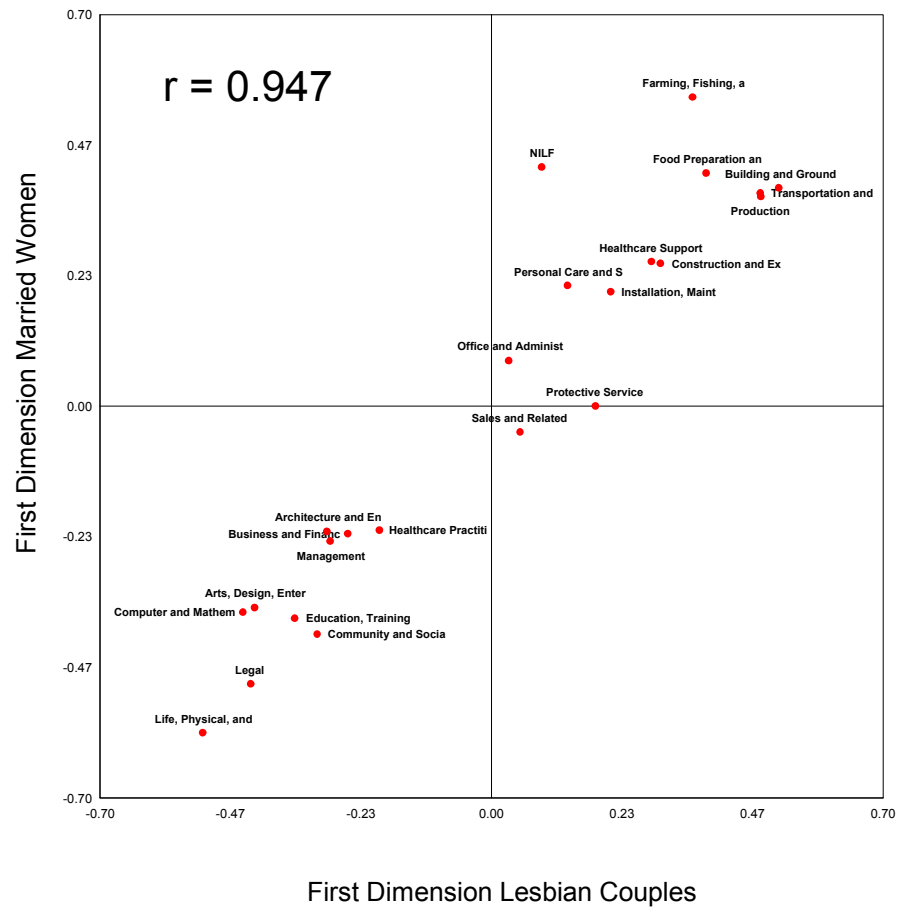
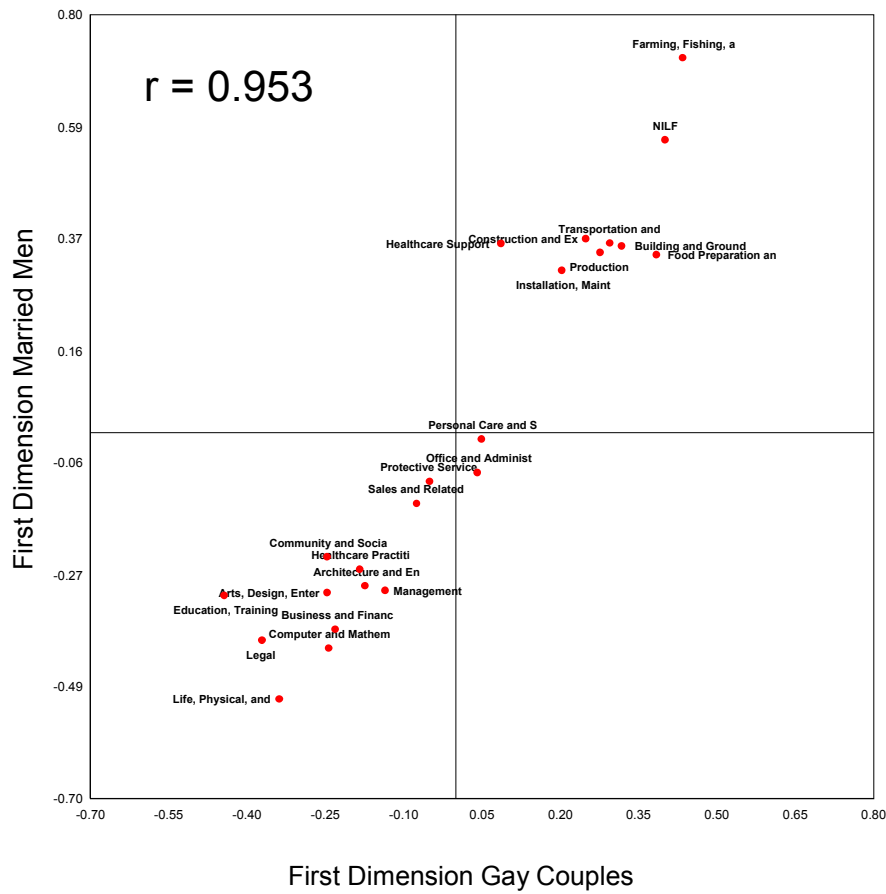


Figure 8. Status dimension: gay and lesbian couples against married men and women

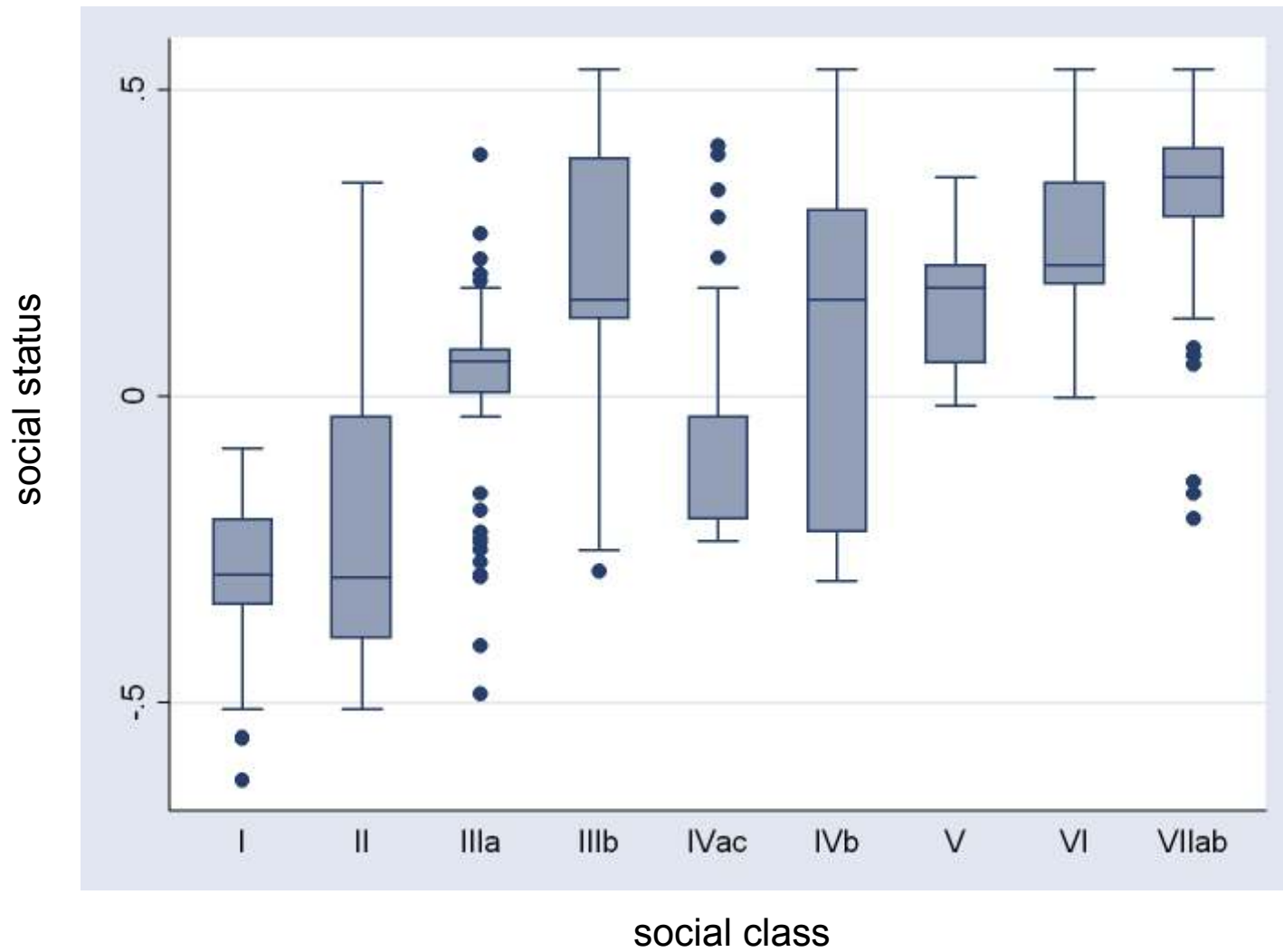


Figure 9. Distribution of social status (married couples) within and across social classes

## Conclusions

- Using data on differential association by occupation, MDS identifies a dimension that can readily be labeled “status”
- Occupations along this dimension are ordered on *non-manual / manual* and *works with symbols / works with people / works with things* gradients
- The ordering of occupations along this dimension is very similar across sub-populations
- There is a notable lack of fit between the status order we identify and social class, suggesting that a distinction between status and class can usefully be drawn in the contemporary U.S.