SOCIAL CLASS TENSIONS WITHIN FAMILIES

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The upward or downward social class mobility of an individual family member can result in tensions between the individual and the rest of the family, tension which is heightened because it rarely is identified and named as a class issue. This article explores the issue of class, identifies common situations in which class tensions occur within families, and discusses clinical considerations.

Social class is one of the least discussed—and most significant—issues in American life. Although rarely mentioned, perceptions of one's social class status strongly affect how people feel about themselves, about others, and about their families. Despite our culture's pride in not having rigid, inherited class structures like those in England or India, and the widely believed myth of social equality, ours is nonetheless a very class-conscious culture. Sociologists have rsearched and written about this issue extensively, but the subject's academic and popular heyday was in the 1950s, when social status research became an issue in the mass media (e.g., Vance Packard's *The Status Seekers*). Since that time, the subject of class and its effects on individual and family psychology have been curiously absent in the professional and popular literature.

Therapists, like most Americans, are able to avoid dealing with the issue of class and how it creates tensions between people because most of us tend to think of ourselves and others as being middle class. Class is also difficult to define. It can, however, be identified, although not necessarily, by the amount of money and education one has, as well as how much leverage comes from them, and one's social prestige and political power (Fussell, 1983). At the most visible level, the benefits of being upper class

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are obvious: freedom from financial worry and physical labor, and also the freedom to spend one's time doing things one enjoys and finds personally rewarding. The problems of being lower class also are obvious: a life of economic anxiety, coupled with a pervasive sense of powerlessness over one's own life.

Class is a complex construct, defined by more than external circumstances and saturated with the value implication that higher class means higher status. This relates, for example, to "internal powers" that come from "self-development through intellect and rational control" (Sennett & Cobb, 1972). One working-class man Sennett and Cobb interviewed illustrated the implicit value hierarchy of class when he said he believed that "people of a higher class have a power to judge him because they seem internally more developed human beings; and he is afraid, because they are better armed, that they will not respect him" (p. 25). Sennett and Cobb go on to say that "cultured people do acquire in their (the working class') eyes a certain right to act as judges of others, because society has put them in a position to develop their insides; on the other hand, it is outrageous for society to do this, because people ought to treat each other as equals" (p. 39).

The premise throughout Sennett and Cobb's groundbreaking book, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1972, reissued in 1993), is that despite the myth of social equality, ours is a society excrutiatingly aware of class, especially for those in the lower classes, who feel inadequate compared to those in the higher classes. Tension between the classes is perpetuated by the belief that if one works hard enough and is gifted enough, one can rise in class position. The converse of this belief is, of course, that if one has not risen, one is doubly damned: not a hard worker nor gifted. One of our culture's most persistent beliefs is that each person, by virtue of hard work, individually determines her or his own social class status. As a result, one's social class is considered a reflection of one's motivation and effort. A corollary of this belief system is that if one is not actively working to improve one's social class, one is lazy and therefore deserving of lower status. Class, many in our culture believe, is based on effort, not on power or access or race or ethnicity or gender. Furthermore, the belief that those who have it, deserve it, is supported by the prevalence of belief in the Calvinist work ethic and our evolution-based (survival of the fittest) capitalist economic system. It is played out in our culture by our pride in individual efforts and our disdain of those on welfare. This belief system also can be played out within families and how they manage their money, particularly when there is variation in achievement among family members. It is not uncommon, for example, for family members who have achieved success and wealth not to share their money with other family members.

FAMILY THERAPISTS AND SOCIAL CLASS

Family therapists use a number of lenses through which to view family dynamics, such as structural, psychodynamic, cultural, feminist, gendered (Sluzki, 1992; Weeks, 1994). However, we tend to avoid social class issues,

except when assessing a family for resources and available opportunities or considering the psychological effects of the family's socioeconomic status. We avoid these issues because most of us have no training in them. We are well educated in individual and family psychopathology, but graduate mental health programs do not train in the sociology of the family, with the exception of programs that specialize in this subject area. Perhaps we also avoid social class issues because many of us are first-generation professionals within our own families, and social class issues are too close to our own experiences.

Regardless, when we do look through the lens of social class, we are forced to consider the "great unmentionable" of a culture whose myths promote the belief that we do not have a class structure and individuals can raise themselves by their own efforts. Looking at social class issues forces us to consider uncomfortable topics. Using the lens of class, we might, for example, see the cost paid by individuals and families when upward mobility, highly valued in our culture, results in socioeconomic stratification and emotional dissonance within the family. Social class can be an especially difficult, yet important, lens for viewing problems *within* families. By avoiding class and status issues, we may miss occasions when the subtext of family and marital conflict is dissonance caused by such issues.

CATEGORIES OF SOCIAL CLASS TENSIONS

There are three common, often interrelated, categories of situations in which differences in social class status within the family can cause tensions:

1) When one family member achieves significantly more—or less—than others, and then does not fit in with the family group because of attempts to differentiate, manifested by changes in interests, points of view, and, often, decreasing contact with the family-of-origin.
2) Marrying someone who is "up" or "down" in social class from the family-of-origin, which can cause conflict regarding which spouse's social class standards and customs will prevail, melding the two families, etc.
3) Divorce and remarriage, causing class differences between children and one parent. (The movie *Stella Dallas* is a well-known depiction of this problem.)

Each one of these situations, and relevant clinical implications, will be considered in turn.

EFFECTS ON INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

In looking at the effects of the social class mobility of individuals within a family, one has to consider the effects on both the upwardly or downwardly mobile individual and on the other family members. It is most likely that therapists will see the socially mobile individual, not the family, but social mobility is not likely to be the presenting problem. Instead,

issues around estrangement from and tensions with the family-of-origin may emerge during discussions about the individual's history.

> Paul and Don share similar stories. Both come from lower-middle-class families. Both are ambitious, driven to succeed. Although neither has a college education, both have risen from blue collar to high-paying white-collar managerial jobs. Both married "up," women with college educations, moved far away from the working-class neighborhoods where their families still live, and adopted the customs of their wives' families. Paul and Don's interests have changed along with their income levels, so that they have little in common with their family members. Today, neither feels comfortable around his family-of-origin, nor does either's wife. Their families also seem uncomfortable around them.

In both these cases, the upward mobility was individual, not part of a group process, such as that which can occur among immigrant families where there is a collective effort toward helping the entire group improve its status. Both these men decided to separate from their families-of-origin in ways that resulted in estrangement. The cost of this separation was that they lost their sense of belonging to the family group. There also was likely a cost to the rest of the family, who, if they buy into the prevailing belief that individual achievement determines success, may suffer from a perceived blow to their esteem.

Individuals

For the individual, one needs to consider the following:

1. How separate from the family-of-origin is the person, and is the separation the result of a deliberate or accidental process? Some become totally physically and emotionally estranged, while others stay close. We can hypothesize a different set of attitudes toward the family-of-origin operating in those who deliberately choose to move away from the family than in those whom good fortune, not necessarily good planning, allowed to leave their families. Those who are deliberately upwardly mobile are more likely to move away and to reject the family-of-origin, while those who do not plan their success may want to stay connected to the family and so will deny the changes in their behavior, attitudes, etc.

Downward mobility has a similar dynamic, inasmuch as those rare people who choose to become lower class than their family-of-origin are more likely to contribute to their own estrangement. Those who are downwardly mobile, however, by accident of fate or illness (or, in some cases, lack of intelligence), are more apt to want to stay in touch with the family and its resources. For them, it is more likely the family has initiated the estrangement, because of embarrassment or unwillingness to share resources.

2. We also need to consider how the mobility has affected the individual's identity. Regardless of the cause, changes in social class require a process of "cultural realignment" (Litwack, 1960) in which one adopts the cultural and behavioral patterns of the new group. This is manifested, for example, by changes in dress, in interests, in leisure pursuits, in foods, and in companions, which all together can be felt as a change in core identity. Individuals manage change differently, some with more security than others. But, more often than not, those who have changed social class feel a sense of "classlessness," as if they fit in nowhere. Feeling at home in a new environment is hard work and probably never completely achieved.

> My middle class friends know enough about the destructive force of class to see me as an exception: a triumph of will over environment. . . . What I don't mention, and what others don't see, is that I often feel more lost than ever, caught between two widely separated social rungs, never sure whether I should forge ahead or fall back, uncertain whether either option really is mine. I have learned to pose easily in the middle-class culture, but at a price. I live most of the time on borrowed instincts, afraid to trust that part of the working class I still carry inside. (Erkel, 1994)

Similarly, feeling as if one's loyalties are split is common among those who have moved up in social status. As one man said, "I'm always feeling disloyal. I can never go back. . . . They think I was disloyal to leave and they don't trust me. But you can't go forward either, because you're not trusted there. There's an invisible barrier [to moving up]. I feel I'm disloyal to my upbringing, but also to my new life, where I don't feel I fit in, and am afraid to give my all" (Perry, personal communication, 1994).

Those who are downwardly mobile also can suffer feelings of displacement as they struggle to live in a world they likely did not choose and in which they may not be comfortable, either physically or emotionally. Few people enjoy living in reduced circumstances, and fewer still are prepared for the emotional cost of being part of a group upon which the rest of the culture looks down. The movies may exalt the "nobility" of the poor—a recent example was *The Fisher King*—but in real life, many in our culture believe the poor are deserving of their plight.

3. Shame and pridefulness are strong components in upward mobility. Individuals may feel ashamed about wanting to leave their origins, shame about being ashamed of their family-of-origin, and shame about feeling superior to the family once they have gotten ahead. It is unlikely this shame has been shared with others; therefore, addressing it is an important component of psychotherapy with the upwardly mobile person.

Shame also affects those who are downwardly mobile, even when the downward mobility is due to circumstances beyond their control, such as illness or financial setbacks. It is all too easy for victims to blame themselves for their downfall and to feel they should be able to pull themselves back up, even when that would be impossible.

At the other end of the affective spectrum, upwardly mobile individuals may struggle with inordinate pridefulness regarding their successes, coupled with feelings of entitlement about their achievements. Lasch (1995) noted that contemporary "elites" believe their upward social mobility is solely the result of their own merits. A public example of this was Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, who, during his confirmation hearings, prided himself on getting himself out of poverty, while he blamed and disdained his sister for being on welfare. He seemed to forget that he had benefited from his grandfather's rearing him, from special programs for minority students, and from the help of powerful individuals such as Senator John Danforth (Mayer & Abramson, 1994).

Despite our cultural mythology, the reality is that people who get ahead do so because of the help of others. It may not have been the family who helped, but someone did, and it is important for individuals to realize their achievements occur within a human context. Otherwise, they live with a prideful, narcissistic fantasy of their own worth, a fantasy that maintains their estrangement from their heritage, and from a piece of themselves.

5. Ambivalence pervades the psyche of the socially mobile, especially those who move upward, and can be a source of grave discomfort. On one hand, they wanted to change their station in life, but on the other hand, they may not have recognized that there would be such high emotional costs to pay. Age may be the most effective way to moderate the ambivalence. Generally, those between ages 20 and 45 are focused on their upward climb and may have difficulty coordinating their status strivings with a relationship with the family-of-origin. As people age, however, they realize upward mobility and class status have their limits. With some rare exceptions, there is a ceiling to success and class mobility, especially if one is not born into wealth and educated privately. These limitations often are realized once one has reached the mid-forties. As a result of hitting that ceiling, the middle-aged person who has become estranged from the family over the years may set aside worries about the social cost of associating with the family and desire rapprochement with them. And, at that point in life, the socially mobile person may feel more able to integrate the several social classes of which she or he is a part.

Families

For the family, one needs to consider these issues:

1. "Invidious status comparisons" (Kulis, 1992) occur in which family members observe the upwardly mobile member's changes and recognize that the changes are related to the improvement in social status. Often, Kulis (1992) notes, upwardly mobile offspring decrease time spent with their lower-status family members, in order to sustain their upward movement. This is based on the belief, well known within social psychology, that one's status can be enhanced by associating with those of the social status in which one would like to be included. Likewise, status aspirations can be jeopardized if one socializes with those of lower status. Both sides,

the upwardly mobile member and the family, are aware that the decrease in time is related to and is a way of defining status differences.

To go back to the example of Paul and Don: Both men were aware that the differences between themselves and their families were due to differences in social class status, but this attribution was not spoken aloud when either was with the family-of-origin. They did not discuss the gap. If they did, what would they say? How would they discuss the fact that they are around less often because they have "moved up," have joined a class the larger culture considers to be higher, therefore better? If either man broached the subject, he might risk being considered "uppity" or "full of himself." Family members would be reluctant to talk about it, except in defensive terms, because doing so would be to acknowledge their lesser status, which would be putting them in an extremely vulnerable position.

2. Invidious status comparisons can cause family members to have their own identity crises as they confront, usually individually and in private, the fact that a family member has achieved something important—upward mobility—that they have not. This can be particularly painful if one believes class immobility is a personal issue, reflecting lack of motivation or achievement. Thus, attributions about the cause of success can intensify the tensions among family members. Personal attribution may heighten the sense of superiority felt by the upwardly mobile and the sense of inferiority felt by their family members.

Personal attribution can work against the downwardly mobile family member, since it can result in family members' feeling they are not responsible for helping the person. "You made your bed, now lie in it" is the axiom families apply in many cases, which allows them not to help the downwardly mobile person.

3. Money can be a source of tension and can challenge people's perception of equity, especially when one family member becomes financially successful. The rest of the family may feel the bounty should be shared. Successful family members, however, do not always feel obliged to do so:

> Anita is single, in her mid-forties, and living on disability because a chronic illness prevents her working. She has two brothers, one who lives nearby and has a blue-collar job and another who lives out of state and is a middle manager. She is hurt because the out-of-state brother has little to do with her. She does spend some time with the brother who lives nearby, who has given her some things to help her live more comfortably. She wishes the out-of-state brother would see her financial plight and offer some help, which she believes he could easily afford. She also is very hurt by what she perceives as his tendency to avoid all contact with her.

Anita is very aware of social class issues. As a result, she attributes her middle-class brother's distance to the fact that she has fallen to the lowest class. She believes he and his family are embarrassed by her. She also

believes the reason the local brother is somewhat attentive is that he is only a step or so above her in social status and, therefore, does not risk his own social status by being associated with her.

Situations such as Anita's provoke difficult questions for us as clinicians, and force us to examine our own values. For example, should the wealthier brother send her money? Should he feel obligated to help, to share his resources? Why, or why not? How is it that some families do share resources, and others do not? If, for example, one attributes social status to individual ability, it is possible to distance oneself from responsibility to less upwardly mobile family members by believing that they could have the same if only they worked for it. On the other hand, should all members of a family live at the same economic level, regardless of individual talents or efforts? One upwardly mobile man (Paul, in the example above) reported having lent hundreds of dollars to his siblings, "which they frittered away." He said, "I felt like I'd been taken. I could give them everything I have and they still wouldn't live like me."

4. Moving up or down creates dissonance based on issues other than social status. Changes in interests and lifestyle and in the way one looks at the world can have a strong impact on the interpersonal dynamics of the family-of-origin. For example:

> Ted and his older brother, Stan, are at war with each other. Stan feels Ted doesn't listen to him or give him proper respect. Ted feels that Stan is pushy and too aggressive with advice, which Ted does not like or want to follow. The two glare at each other when they're at family functions. What they do not discuss, although it is a significant part of the undercurrent between them, is that although they both do blue-collar work—Stan is a construction foreman and Ted is an artisan in glass—Ted has a college education and chose to become a craftsman, whereas Stan went into the family business, feeling that as the oldest son, he had no choice.
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> Ted's education separates him from his older brother, as he has used it to change his views of the world and of himself—he sees himself differently than he did before he went to college. One result is that Stan's authority as the older brother is not automatic for Ted, and Stan knows and resents this. Both feel the divide, but do not name it. Stan blames the changes in Ted on Ted's wife, Amy, who has a master's degree and is a school administrator.

Ted believes the changes in his identity, his self-perceptions, were key causes of the changes in his relationship with his brother, along with his brother's negative (most likely defensive) beliefs about those with college educations. Ted thinks that his brother feels he went to college to get away from the family. He also sees that the changes within him led to other changes, such as choice of hobbies and the "yuppie" neighborhood where he and Amy live. Ted asks himself whether he should, when he's with

his family, just "fake it" and be respectful of Stan and pretend he still likes all the things they do and shares their interests. He feels torn between two worlds.

The family members also struggle to deal with the "new" Ted, who feels to them like a relative stranger. If we could survey the family members, we likely would find they feel disconnected from Ted, as if they have lost him. They also struggle to connect with Ted's wife, who seems even more a stranger.

EFFECTS ON COUPLES

Social class issues in couples are often manifested in everyday decisions about holidays, food, household decoration, music and art, and the children. The couple may struggle over whose customs and mores will prevail, without conscious labeling of the social class issues. For example, the higher-class partner may insist on certain ways of doing things, because she or he assumes the other wants to behave in ways that are indicative of the higher class. The fight begins when the lower-class partner defends behavioral aspects of his or her class-of-origin. Too often, neither partner is aware of the potential loss faced by the lower-class person (S. Betchen, personal communication, January 31, 1995). For example:

> Ken and his wife, Ginny, got into a terrible argument over the purchase of a car once their second child was born. Ken wanted to buy a Volvo for his family because he felt it would be the safest car he could provide for his wife and two young children, but Ginny was insistent they buy a less expensive car. Ken had grown up in a middle-class suburb, but Ginny had grown up in a working-class neighborhood. She worried that if she drove a Volvo in her old neighborhood, her family and friends would think she was "uppity" and "too good for them." She acknowledged to the therapist that she feared that should she drive such an obvious middle-class status symbol into her old neighborhood, she would never again feel welcome there.

The issue of loss often is overlooked because the struggle over whose social class customs will prevail is usually based on the value judgment placed on social status, the belief that the customs of the higher class are better than those of the lower. The lower-class spouse may want to hang on to vestiges of her or his previous life, but feel unable to defend the decision because she or he is wanting something "less" than what is now available. The upper-class spouse may not understand the partner's loyalty to lower-class customs, because she or he is likely to assume that the partner would want to assimilate all the upper-class customs and mores in order to fit into the "better" class. What too often is missed is that when one changes one's life, there is loss, especially of the familiar, which can be so comforting. Thus, the argument over customs often masks the pain of change and the loss that accompanies it.

Gender can play a part in how social class differences are managed by the couple and in whose customs prevail. When people marry outside their social class, it is more common for women than for men to marry up. In fact, marrying up has long been a way for women to improve their social and financial standing (Zinn & Eitzen, 1993). Because most women are accustomed to having to accommodate to men, adopting the customs of their husbands' class, such as styles of dress and entertaining, is more easily accepted as an enhancement, not a threat, to their identity. Men marrying up, however, may have a very different emotional response. Many men have a very hard time learning from women, because they experience it as a reverse in the usual male dominant role. Thus, it can be emotionally very difficult for a man to put himself in the position of being the subordinate and learning his wife's social class customs.

Couples also need to look at their individual issues regarding social class (issues addressed above). After all, both people realize they are marrying someone whose background is different from theirs, and yet too often they deny this basic difference. Questions the therapist needs to consider include: What does marrying someone of another class mean to both people, and what does it reflect about their relationships with their own families? Why has this person chosen to marry up or down in class? What did she or he expect the marriage would be like? Did each person anticipate possible difficulties in joining the two families? The therapist also needs to help the couple to deal with each person's ambivalence about social class issues, the varied feelings about leaving and staying, the push to remain the same versus the pull to become someone new.

EFFECTS ON DIVORCED FAMILIES

It is not uncommon for divorce to result in the two parents being in two different social classes, whether it is due to the all too common reality of men faring better economically after divorce or to the woman's remarrying up. The children are the ones who end up having to deal most directly with the discrepancy in lifestyles:

> During his early twenties, Aaron had an affair with Sheila, a woman from a working-class background, and, although they never married, they had a daughter, Pam. Aaron prided himself on his financial support of his daughter, even after her mother and she moved to a distant city. Aaron eventually married a woman from an upper-middle-class background similar to his, and they had two children.
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> Sheila and Pam moved back to the area when Pam was about eight, providing Aaron the opportunity to get to know her. This, however, created conflict between him and his wife. His wife railed about the fact that Sheila was unreliable about having Pam ready for visitations, that she was unpredictable about being home when Pam was to be returned, and that Pam always arrived "looking like a waif."

What was not discussed by Aaron and his wife was how Pam felt, and how she was coping with the large discrepancy between her mother's and her father's lives as well as her stepmother's obvious disapproval of her mother. To her credit, she behaved well when she was at her father's house, and she got along well with her younger half-siblings. But it must have been very difficult for her to live in two worlds and to have one of those worlds so obviously disdained. Also, Aaron and his wife were not considering how Pam must have felt about herself as a person being only a visitor to her father's comfortable home and then having to return to her mother's spare apartment. They did not think that Pam might question why she did not deserve the same comforts and privileges of her half-siblings.

Remarriage that results in social status differences can cause loyalty conflicts for the children, who may feel they have to transform themselves when they visit the noncustodial parent in order to avoid dealing with discrepancies in lifestyle. Children who live with the less affluent parent may be angry with the wealthier, noncustodial parent, which may manifest itself in behavior problems, unwillingness to visit, and the like. Or the children may long to live with the wealthier parent and feel a sense of abandonment because they cannot. Children living with the more affluent parent may feel uncomfortable visiting the less affluent parent and may feel as if they have to hide the advantages they have living with the wealthier parent.

Another class-related undercurrent can occur when the wealthier parent is uncomfortable with a child's behaving as a person from a lower class. This became manifest in one family when a daughter who had for years lived with her working-class father went to live with her mother and her new husband, a professional. The class differences between mother and daughter became evident once they were sharing a home and, for example, the mother had to adjust to the daughter's friends, whose interests were different from the friends of her other two children. Although the mother had married and moved up, her one daughter had not, keeping the mother somewhat rooted in the working class she had wanted to escape. Once the mother and daughter were able to discuss the social class undercurrents, the tension between them was somewhat relieved.

CLINICAL ISSUES

The most helpful thing the therapist can do is to identify, when appropriate, the social class basis for family tensions. This identification is essential, as it gives a name, a label, to that which people often are afraid to acknowledge because of embarrassment or shame. In our culture, people may feel personally responsible for being lower class. On the other hand, if they have been upwardly mobile and acknowledge it, they risk being labeled a snob. Naming the issue and helping people to compromise can alleviate many social class tensions within families.

When tension is caused by family visits, the clinical goal should be to

help the person find a comfortable way to stay connected to the family-of-origin. Before this can be achieved, the upwardly mobile person must realize that one never fully leaves one's past behind, despite mythology that suggests people can reinvent themselves. Once this is recognized, the person needs to realize that some discomfort is unavoidable and therefore has to be accepted, as it is not likely the family will stop making comments about the individual's changes and differences in lifestyle.

The individual who has dropped in social class status may face the dilemma of dealing with a family who does not welcome him or her at family gatherings. A woman with a long history of repeated hospitalizations for mental problems was not invited to her family's Thanksgiving dinner, even though several family members knew she had no plans. "I'm not good enough for them," she said. "They don't want to be associated with me because I've been depressed and I'm on disability." This rejection occurred despite the woman's recent, successful recovery. Anita, noted in an example above, was able to deal with her family's tendency to exclude her by being rather bold in making inquiries about the family's plans for holidays and other occasions such as her nieces' and nephews' birthdays. "I'm never *invited*," she said, "but I'm *allowed to come*, and I live with that."

If the upwardly mobile person is partnered with someone of a higher class, the partner needs to develop acceptance of his or her loyalty to the family-of-origin as well as any financial responsibility to them. Too often, the upwardly mobile person and partner develop a shared "delusion" that the lower-class origins do not exist. This delusion has to be challenged and the reality of both families' existence faced, so that the lower-class person can have some involvement with the family-of-origin. This is necessary because, if for no other reason, children will want to know why they only see one side of the family, and they will be curious about the people they do not see. Dealing with both sides of the family means the couple will have to make compromises, as well as decisions about whether the two families can be visited together (sometimes not) or will need to be visited separately, honoring customs from both partners' backgrounds. As noted above, naming the issue and discussing it openly can facilitate communication and, then, compromises.

One of the most complicated and difficult issues when there are intrafamilial differences in social class is that of sharing money. Our culture says that we are our siblings' keepers—but only if the siblings work as hard as we do. We need to be clear about what we, as therapists and as individuals, believe about how money should be shared within a family and how we communicate this to our patients. With our patients, we need to explore the guilt that can accompany being more successful than the rest of the family, and the anger that can consume the life of the less successful family member.

Upward mobility does, by definition, estrange people from their origins. This provokes another ethical issue—of whether one should leave at all. Too often individuals feel they have to choose between upward mobility and their loyalty to their family, and because some ethnic groups value

mobility more than others, it can result in within-group and intergenerational conflict (McGoldrick et al., 1982). Rubin (1994) talks about the high price the family pays for the mobility of its children, the estrangement parents feel from children, and vice versa, and their inability to process the loss.

SUMMARY

Upward or downward mobility of individual family members can be the basis for many tensions within the individual and the family. Too often, the social class origins of these tensions go unacknowledged by the individuals, their families, and therapists. By making the social class issues manifest, we can help our patients and their families cope with the changes in their lives as well as the mixed blessing that comes from leaving one's origins.

It is important to remember that these tensions do not occur in every family whose members' social class status changes. Some individuals change social class in areas such as education and money, yet stay well within the boundaries of the family. Apparently, they do not allow the changes they experience to change their relationships with their families. Others, however, do change and do feel estranged, for as many reasons as there are individuals. It is these individuals we are likely to see in therapy and whom we are challenged to help negotiate the discomforts, the shifts in family relationships, and the never-ending ambivalence with self.

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