

Turns in the Road

Narrative Studies of Lives in Transition

Edited by

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and Amia Lieblich

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THE NARRATIVE STUDY OF LIVES: INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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SERIES EDITORS

This book is the first in a series showcasing research and scholarship using a "narrative study of lives." Each volume in the series will examine how psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and other scholars examine and conceptualize human lives in narrative terms. The term *narrative* suggests matters that are both epistemological and conceptual. Under the wide umbrella of narrative epistemologies, we include case studies, autobiographical approaches, psychobiography, life histories, content analysis of life narrative accounts, discourse analysis, ethnographies, and other related approaches and traditions of study that emphasize qualitative over quantitative research, hermeneutic over logical-positivistic frames, idiographic over nomothetic points of view, and inductive over hypothetico-deductive strategies of inquiry. Narrative inquiry rests on the assumption of the storied nature of human experience, a standpoint that has been receiving increasing attention within psychology and related fields.

Even before the recent proliferation of theories, research programs, and psychological applications centered on stories, scripts, myths, autobiographical recollections, and the like, Theodore Sarbin (1986) suggested that the concept of narrative provides a new "root metaphor" for the field of psychology as a whole. Psychologists of many different persuasions have turned their attention toward what Sarbin first called "the storied nature of human conduct" (e.g., Birren, Kenyon, Ruth, Schroots, & Svensson, 1996; McAdams, 1999; McCabe & Peterson, 1991; Schank & Abelson, 1995). Included within this trend are the many different approaches to "narrative therapy" that have sprung up over the past decade (e.g., White & Epston, 1990). According to Jerome Bruner (1986, 1990), narrative modes of knowing privilege the particulars of lived experience rather than constructs about variables and classes. Meaning is not inherent in an act

or experience but is constructed through social discourse. Meaning is generated by the linkages the participant makes between aspects of the life he or she is living and his or her understandings of these aspects. The role of the researcher is then to connect this understanding with some form of conceptual interpretation, which is meaning constructed at another level of analysis.

Although narrative approaches and concepts have come to have a significant influence in the field of psychology, it is clear to us that the narrative study of lives requires an interdisciplinary forum. Outside of psychology, many scholars have remarked on a turn toward narrative in the social sciences and the humanities (Gergen, 1992; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). For example, life-history research methods are enjoying a renaissance in sociology (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and in research in education (Casey, 1996). Many historians now view historiography as, in part, the construction of convincing narratives about the past in light of current cultural concerns. Narrative theology has become an extremely influential movement in many Protestant and Catholic seminaries (Hauerwas & Jones, 1989), and in moral philosophy, MacIntyre (1981) has argued that human virtue has its essential meaning within the narrative quest that defines an individual life. In an applied vein, religious and moral educators underscore the importance of storytelling in the socialization of virtue and the enhancement of moral development (Coles, 1989; Vitz, 1990). Scholars of many persuasions speak of contemporary social life in the postindustrial West as akin to a storied text to be interpreted as if it were a literary product, as they debate a wide variety of hermeneutical problems pertaining to authorship, power, and identity in the construction of social texts (Shotter & Gergen, 1989; Widdershoven, 1993). Josselson and Lieblich (1993) wrote that the narrative study of lives is a wide-ranging and loosely coordinated interdisciplinary effort to write, interpret, and disseminate people's life stories, with special attention paid to the accounts of women, people of color, and representatives of other groups whose lives and whose stories have historically been squelched, marginalized, or ignored (Franz & Stewart, 1994; Heilbrun, 1988; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992). Furthermore, the upsurge of scholarly interest in narrative inside and outside of psychology is truly an international endeavor, with some of the most sophisticated and advanced thinking and research coming from Europe and other centers of scholarship outside of North America.

The purpose of the book series that we are launching with this volume is to publish the best work being done today on the narrative study of lives. We wish to provide a forum for first-class research and theorizing on narrative studies, life histories, psychobiography, and other qualitative approaches to psychological inquiry and to draw on a wide range of disciplines and an international authorship. We believe that such a forum is a great need

today. Although many scholars are engaged in narrative research, very few publication outlets for the narrative study of lives currently exist.

Each volume in the series will be organized around a theme. To date, plans for three volumes have already been laid. The second volume in the series will focus on "Teaching and Learning Narrative Methods in Psychological and Social Research." The third volume will take up the broad topic of "Narrative and Psychotherapy." We look forward to more.

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URNS IN THE ROAD: INTRODUCTION TO THE VOLUME

It has become a cliché in the modern world to say that the only thing that remains the same in human life is change. Whether we are talking about technology or fashion, medical knowledge or social norms, we cannot help but be struck by how things continue to change, how rapid and unpredictable change can be, how exhilarating it can be to witness change, how ill-prepared we may be for change, how we welcome change and how we dread it. As much as we cherish stability and predictability in our relationships and our routines, we expect our lives to change, too. Until death stops it all, human lives are always in transition. But some transitions, some periods of change, stand out as especially significant in the life course. We may see them as turns in the road, changes in the direction or the trajectory of our lives.

Even in the absence of dramatic external events, people construe and reconstrue their experiences to point to (or to foreclose) possibility in the future. Living involves continually constructing and reconstructing stories of our lives, without knowing their outcome, revising the plot as new events are added. The self, then, consists of a configuring of "personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 150). Thus meaning-making lies at the heart of those turns in the road that people think of as life transitions. This is the central question of this book: How do people make meaning out of the transitions in their lives? We believe that such meaning-making centrally involves storytelling—the construction and the sharing of stories of the self. The stories we make and tell about the major transitions in our own lives contribute to our identities, help us cope with challenges and stress, shape how we see the future, and help to determine the nature of our interpersonal relationships and our unique positionings in the social and cultural world.

Since the 1970s, psychologists and other social scientists have recognized that developmentally consequential transitions can and do occur in the adult years. A central message of life-span theorists such as Bernice

Neugarten (1968), George Vaillant (1977), and Daniel Levinson (1978) was that psychological and social development does not end with adolescence. The interdisciplinary study of adult development and aging assumes that human lives continue to change up to the very end. Life stage theorists map out predictable sequences of transitions, passages, or seasons in life (Erikson, 1963; Gould, 1980; Levinson, 1978), whereas theorists who favor a life course perspective emphasize social context and roles, social timing, and the socially contingent nature of adult development (Cohler, Hostetler, & Boxer, 1998; Elder, 1995). Whether they talk in terms of stages or contexts, however, life-span theorists and researchers focus their attention both on the on-time and generally socially scripted transitions of life, such as getting married in young adulthood or retiring around age 65, and on the off-time, often unexpected turns in the psychosocial road—from divorce and personal trauma to winning the lottery to experiencing a religious conversion at age 55. To study these phenomena, researchers have developed and refined a wide range of methodologies and techniques. The research literature on life transitions is replete with well-designed survey studies, questionnaire assessments, psychological experiments, and other approaches that place a premium on quantification and hypothesis testing. But this literature leaves us without much sense of the phenomenology or meaning-making that accompanies life's changes. Such a silence hinders our efforts to devise theories that seek to understand complex developmental milestones.

The experience of life transition is one that is narratively constructed rather than imposed by social reality. People choose to make changes in their lives, or they make changes in their experience of their lives in response to external events. Sometimes there is awareness of a state of being in transition. At other times, people are unaware of having undergone a time of change until they look back and see that they and their lives are inexorably changed. They may wonder, "How did I get here?" Such a question invokes a need to restory their life—to make sense of events so that they form some coherent narrative that ends in the psychological place where they now find (construct) themselves.

People choose from among a vast array of events, thoughts, wishes, and interactions to form a unique and ever-changing life story. In studying these life stories, or narrations, we come to understand better the ways in which meanings of transitions are constructed. It is these meanings that guide the person through the next phase of their existence, only (usually) to have the meanings change once again as life moves on.

Each of the 11 chapters that make up this book uses the analysis of narratives to understand significant transitions and turning points in the human life course. The authors use a broad range of narrative modes of inquiry—from psychobiography to discourse analysis—and draw on a wide

assortment of theories—from Erikson to Labov to Bakhtin—to make sense of lives in transition. Among the particular transitions they examine, we find adolescent identity struggles; the move from school to work; divorce; turning points in moral development; setbacks in professional careers; the onset of illness; recovery from addiction; and dramatic epiphanies and conversions in life involving crime, confession, and redemption.

Life transitions may be experienced as changes for better or for worse—depending on how they are viewed and storied. Sometimes what is experienced initially as tragedy or loss is later emplotted as epiphany or insight leading to growth. In chapter 1, Dan P. McAdams and Philip J. Bowman consider differences in people whose life stories contain sequences of redemption or contamination—that is, good following bad or bad following good. Redemption and contamination are ancient story forms, but they are appropriated into contemporary life narratives in ways that reflect culturally anchored hopes and fears, developmental issues, and the psychosocial ethos surrounding a single life. Blending qualitative and quantitative research strategies, McAdams and Bowman document important relationships between redemption and contamination forms in life narrative on the one hand and objective indices of psychological well-being and generativity on the other.

The theme of redemption is central to chapters 2 and 3 as well. In chapter 2, Janet Landman compares and contrasts two celebrated instances of crime and punishment—Dostoevsky's story of Raskolnikov and the real-life account of Katherine Ann Power, a former honors student at Brandeis University who was involved in a murder in 1970, lived underground for 23 years, and finally turned herself in to the authorities to begin serving a prison sentence in 1993. These remarkably parallel narrative accounts—one fictionalized in a classic novel and the other pieced together from journalistic accounts and Landman's own interviews of Power—explore the power of guilt and repentance in human life and the narrative links that people forge between suffering and personal salvation. Yet the two stories are very different as well, and on this score Power's life narrative may even improve on Dostoevsky, Landman claims, because it offers a fuller and more satisfying account of a transformation in moral commitment.

The ways in which guilt, suffering, and physical imprisonment combine to transform a person's ethical stance in the world are at the center of William Todd Schultz's examination of Oscar Wilde's life turning point in chapter 3. Schultz's psychobiographical study begins with what Wilde himself identified as the "tragically critical moment of all my life." Sentenced to serve two years in prison for "gross indecency" (sodomy), the famous playwright lost everything—his family, his money, his reputation. When he emerged from prison, he was a broken man. Yet Wilde claimed he

underwent a conversion experience in prison, and he wrote about the transition in a posthumously published letter, titled *De Profundis*. Schultz examines the letter and Wilde's life with great care. Was Wilde really redeemed? Were his insights in prison more rhetorical than real? Does it matter? Schultz raises a host of fascinating questions about the relationships between life stories of transition and life transitions as actually lived.

Chapters 4 through 8 examine opportunities and complications that arise from the developmental challenges of going to college, choosing a career, and getting divorced. In chapter 4, J. Scott Roberts and George C. Rosenwald reveal the complexities of upward mobility in American society. What looks on the surface to be a progressive life transition, a positive movement from working-class origins to the comforts and prestige of the professional classes, brings with it considerable costs in interpersonal relationships and self-esteem. The compelling first-person accounts provided by Roberts and Rosenwald remind us of how well-suited qualitative research is for bringing abstract ideas to vivid life. In chapter 5, Richard L. Ochberg and William Comeau pick up where Roberts and Rosenwald leave off. Analyzing survey data and qualitative reports from working-class college seniors looking forward to graduate school, Ochberg and Comeau examine the conflicting moral agendas expressed by upwardly mobile children and their parents. Although the students may invest moral capital in self-fulfillment, their working-class parents often deeply resent the sense of entitlement they believe their children feel. Self-fulfillment looks like self-indulgence to them. Their worlds have different moral contours; their life plots are situated within different ideological settings.

Choice of career is similarly more multilayered and internally contradictory than univariate studies of vocational choice would suggest. In chapter 6, Marcy Plunkett explores themes of serendipity and agency in young women's stories of career change. Plunkett draws on Erikson, Levinson, and other theorists to discuss the ways in which young women fashion stories to account for their movement through careers. Plunkett's nuanced analysis reveals a complex interplay between two very different narrative voices—one depicting the protagonist in control of her choices and another suggesting that the plot is driven by chance encounters, unforeseen circumstances, lucky and unlucky breaks. Narratives of serendipity may be very valuable in the construction of identity, Plunkett maintains, because they create a space of uncertainty to accommodate the competing demands of careers and personal relationships.

Career strivings are also at the center of Varpu Löyttyniemi's explication of a setback of a doctor's career in chapter 7. Bringing together theoretical perspectives and methodological conventions from linguistic studies and communications, Löyttyniemi provides a richly layered, line-by-line analysis of a young doctor's description of a negative turn in his career—a turn that

might have seemed only a minor bump in the road until both the narrator and the chapter's author recognize its import in the life story. As part of her analysis, Löyttyniemi addresses some of the same critical questions raised by Schultz in his study of Oscar Wilde: What features of a life episode qualify it as an important transition? Are transitions lived as real events or reconstructed as narrative accounts? What is the role of audience in life-story construction? For whom, to whom, and for what purposes are life transitions made, told, and lived?

Although divorce is usually understood as a marker of marriage in dissolution, its larger meaning may vary enormously across the life course. Amy M. Young, Abigail J. Stewart, and Kathi Miner-Rubino (chapter 8) examine how women talk about their own divorces. Their readings of longitudinal data from 51 women in midlife suggest that the meanings women invoke in accounting for their divorces are partly a function of the developmental demands they faced at the time of the divorce. Erikson's stages of identity, intimacy, and generativity provide a theoretical framework out of which the authors generate provocative hypotheses that could be tested in future studies.

Relationships with others have no independent existence outside of their narrative construction by the individuals involved. Research on adolescent development has tended to investigate the perception of parents by adolescents, but we know little about how young people story their parents into their sense of themselves. Developmental psychologists Michael W. Pratt, Mary Louise Arnold, and Kathleen Mackey in chapter 9 consider adolescents' accounts of moral turning points in terms of their representations of their parents' voices. To what extent is the adolescent responsive to the voice? To what extent does he or she appropriate the voice as his or her own? The study illustrates the use of qualitative, narrative data to build general theory. The authors arrive at a five-step stage model for representations of parental voice that proves to be useful for testing hypotheses drawn from sociocultural theories concerning the nature of moral development in the teenage years.

Although Pratt and his colleagues use qualitative data to build theory, Jefferson A. Singer takes the opposite approach in chapter 10. Returning to themes of suffering and (attempted) redemption, Singer uses concepts from existing life-narrative theories to analyze the struggles of one Richard Markham, a heroin addict in his early 40s. Though he has yet to achieve a lasting recovery, what we learn from Markham's account and Singer's interpretations is how an internalized narrative of the self continues to play a pivotal role in the choices Markham makes and the ways in which he moves through life transitions. Of particular interest are the narrative's competing protagonists—the "imagoes" of Richard-the-derelict and Richard-the-magician. Singer is not talking about dissociative states but

rather narrative devices that people use to emplot contrasting tendencies they perceive in their own lives. Singer suggests that growth and healing for Markham should involve a creative recasting of the main characters in his life story.

Michele L. Crossley continues with the theme of sickness and suffering in chapter 11. Crossley interviewed 38 HIV-positive adults, all of whom had been living with the diagnosis for at least five years. Crossley finds in these narratives a factor largely neglected in psychological theories—the sense of place. The settings in which life is lived, like Markham's imagoes, may come in contrasting pairs, because, as Crossley puts it, "We all live with culturally saturated images of places of Paradise and places of Hell." Stories of lives in transition portray protagonists who move from place to place, from safe havens to risky spaces, for example, from the Garden of Eden to the perilous wilderness and back again. Like life transitions themselves, the places we go—and how we experience them—may be overdetermined symbols of complex psychological and cultural issues. Crossley's insightful readings of these life texts bring to light unexpected and important meanings in the stories we live by.

In conclusion, each chapter in this volume adopts a unique conceptual lens and narrative approach to understanding how people make sense of the most important transitions in their own lives. People convey change through stories. As social scientists, humanists, mental health professionals, and human beings, we need to tune in to the stories of change we hear all around us, the stories each of us tells ourselves about who we were, who we are now, and who we may be in the future.

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4

EVER UPWARD AND NO TURNING BACK: SOCIAL MOBILITY AND IDENTITY FORMATION AMONG FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

J. SCOTT ROBERTS AND GEORGE C. ROSENWALD

What will happen to Cinderella after she marries the prince? Will she slide into her regal role as smoothly as he, who has been groomed for it all his life? Following her rise in social status, will she retain a saintly generosity toward her family? And when an occasional courtier snickers about the parvenue princess, as once her stepsisters snickered about her wish to attend the ball, how will she react? Can we really be so sure she will live happily ever after?

Of course, Cinderella's is an unusual case of social mobility; others cannot rely on supernatural assistance in "turning upward." Yet we may also wonder about the ultimate well-being of those upwardly mobile individuals coming of age in contemporary America: How will their tales of social advancement turn out? The question is certainly not a novel one. Upward mobility has long played a prominent role in both our social science and cultural mythology, often celebrated in the latter as a point of national pride. Horatio Alger's "rags to respectability" stories and present-day politicians'

This study was supported in part by grants from the Department of Psychology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Several study participants were recruited through the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions (MSALT; Dr. Jacquelynne Eccles, principal investigator). Discussions with Deborah Carr, John Lynch, Sherrill Sellers, and Jennifer Stevens helped us greatly in clarifying the conceptual, methodological, and historical aspects of this project. We would also like to thank the following people for their practical assistance: Debra Josefowicz, for helping coordinate recruitment of MSALT participants; and Meredith Englander and Meredith Lee, for transcribing interviews.

references to the "American Dream" are just a few of the ways in which social mobility has been romanticized in our culture.

Proponents of a marginality thesis, by contrast, have pointed out that such upward mobility is apt to be accompanied by multiple strains (e.g., Durkheim, 1951; Sorokin, 1927). Outdoing the previous generation both financially and educationally can bring about disruption in relations with family and friends, as well as the discomfort and uncertainty of moving into an alien world. More simply put, one does not escape society after leaving the social class of one's origins. All along the upward journey, the mobile person experiences changes in class-specific norms and the subjective effects of dislocation. Such processes—that is, those engendering the psychological costs of upward social mobility—were what we wished to learn more about in this study. We did so primarily through life-historical interviews of upwardly mobile individuals. Yet before we could adequately conceptualize these processes, some background was in order.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF UPWARD SOCIAL MOBILITY: A BRIEF RETROSPECTIVE

The personal consequences of social mobility attracted considerable interest among social scientists in the 1950s and 1960s. Domains of interest at that time included racial prejudice (Bettelheim & Janowitz, 1950), political orientation (Barber, 1970), mental disorder-neuroticism (Hollingshead, Ellis, & Kirby, 1954), and psychological adjustment (Ellis & Lane, 1967). The standard method in these studies involved the quantitative comparison of upwardly mobile with socially stationary individuals to determine if and how the two groups differed. In the 1970s this stream of investigation dried up rather suddenly. Critics pointed out that differences obtained in various dimensions, although often attributed to the stresses of upward mobility, could also be accounted for by the groups' differing conditions of origin. To this day, it is not clear whether mobility's psychological effects occur in forms eluding the demanding statistical tests of contemporary social science (Jackson & Curtis, 1972). Partly as a consequence of this methodological impasse, partly because of an interest in social structure rather than social psychology, researchers shifted their focus from the consequences to the predictors of intergenerational mobility. Innovative multivariate statistical analyses prompted an explosion of studies on "status attainment," an area that remains a mainstay of sociological research (Savage, 1997). The puzzle of mobility's psychological effects remains, however, and is one stimulus for this study.

Although psychological studies of upward mobility have been rare in recent decades, we are beginning to see a revival of interest in the topic,

manifest in qualitative research and retrospective autobiographical accounts of working-class academics (e.g., Dews & Law, 1995; Grimes & Morris, 1997; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993). Such work has shown us the power of narrative approaches in illuminating the psychological complexities of upward mobility. This work also suggests a wave of mobility different in important respects from earlier decades, as women and racial and ethnic minorities have moved into social positions largely inaccessible to them previously. An important psychological implication of this cohort difference may concern the public visibility of mobility. Women and minorities who move up within society today are visible to each other for mutual support and can draw on special resources offered them in many institutions. Within universities, for example, they may find student organizations and academic disciplines related to their gender, racial, and ethnic identities. As a result, upward mobility, although still a great challenge for many (and compounded by the pernicious effects of sexism and racism), may be a less isolated and isolating process than it once was (Higginbotham & Weber, 1992). This cohort difference, with its attention to social factors other than class, may mask some of the effects of mobility per se. The theme of invisibility with regard to upward mobility's psychological costs has long been noted in qualitative research (Newman, 1988; Sennett & Cobb, 1972). Our belief that these costs remain underappreciated was another impetus for this study.

SOCIAL MOBILITY AND THE OCCUPATIONAL DOMAIN: LESSONS FROM A SCARCITY OF RESEARCH

It seems curious that even before the aforementioned shift to status attainment research, psychological investigations of social mobility rarely focused on well-being within the occupational domain. This, after all, is a central issue for those who leave their working-class backgrounds behind; they want a different, "better" kind of work. Yet studies in this area generally have not been reported. We can make out several reasons for this seeming oversight. First, the overcoming of educational and occupational barriers is, by definition, the forte of the upwardly mobile. The sheer resolve to succeed may discount the frustrations and privations along the way (and those who do not complete the ascension because of its stresses would not even be represented in mobility studies). Second, an individual who pursues "membership" in a higher social class does so in pursuit of certain powerful incentives. Once these are realized, well-being may be determined by strains and satisfactions having little to do with mobility per se. Indeed, its psychological effects may not operate in a sufficiently uniform fashion to be detected in aggregate data (Marshall & Firth, 1999).

Given the difficulties of researching the occupational domain, it seemed wise to explore instead the beginning phases of upward mobility—that is, the experience of the higher educational domain, a transition point where mobile individuals separate themselves from working-class families and peers. This domain may allow a clearer view of the social-psychological aspects of upward mobility. There is another important reason for this focus. In discussions of mobility, sociologists since Sorokin have attended mainly to the disruption of existing relations and the difficulty of achieving a new social integration. To this, we believe, must be added the implications of mobility for the individual's sense of ego identity.

SOCIAL MOBILITY, HIGHER EDUCATION, AND EGO IDENTITY

As famously elaborated by Erikson (1968), ego identity is a developmental challenge whose outcome is largely realized (at least in Western society) by the end of the years in which young people attend college or prepare themselves in other ways for a productive adulthood. It is a challenge in that it requires the integration of many components: "an evolving configuration [of] constitutional givens, idiosyncratic libidinal needs, favored capacities, significant identifications, effective defenses, successful sublimations, and consistent roles" (Erikson, 1968, p. 163). Two aspects of ego identity are especially relevant to the study we report. First, the components temporarily synthesized at each point in ego-identity development are *psychosocial*. That is, each component is socially relevant and socially shaped. This is obviously true of sublimations, identifications, and roles. But it applies no less to defense-effectiveness and to the seemingly elementary constitutional and libidinal ingredients of identity; these, too, are under the intense and pervading influence of socialization. Second, the synthesis of these components is an *evolving* one, always subject to revision but never so urgently topical as in adolescence and young adulthood. This period witnesses identity struggles in part because this is the time during which young people define the occupational role they may take on for the rest of their lives. The centrality of occupation in ego identity is a main reason why the study of identity formation is especially interesting in the case of upwardly mobile individuals.

Taken together, the psychosocial and evolving aspects of identity imply that its formation involves a tension between (a) the adaptive demands of new external tasks that the individual encounters and (b) the restraints imposed by earlier workings of identity components and syntheses. When this tension between these innovative and conservative forces is optimal, producing neither paralyzing immaturity nor a headlong rush into incoherent impersonations, the individual enjoys "a sense of psychosocial well-being:

a sense of knowing where one is going, and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count" (Erikson, 1968, p. 164). As Erikson implies, identity is contingent not only on achievement in the occupational domain but also in that of social and family relations.

It is not hard to imagine how upward mobility via higher education might influence identity formation. A young working-class person's commitment to higher education signals to herself as well as to "those who count" that she is seeking a life different from theirs in important respects. As we know from research on first-generation college students¹ (Billson & Terry, 1982; London, 1989; Piorkowski, 1983), significant others may greet this departure from the historical family norm with a range and intensity of reactions: pride and joy, to be sure, but also sadness, bewilderment, and envy. Emerging tensions in these crucial relations may then bring about in the young person feelings of guilt, confusion, bitterness, and loss. Especially important during identity formation are relations with parents, and previous research has found that working-class parents tend not to be as supportive of formal education as their professional-class counterparts (see chapter 5, this volume, for a review). Given this potential tension between the pull of significant others and the demands of a consciously chosen discontinuous future, it is perhaps not surprising that working-class students may experience more intensely than others the challenges of social integration and acculturation in higher education (Granfield, 1991; Stewart & Ostrove, 1993).

Strains in family and peer relations are not the only possible sources of difficulty during identity formation for the upwardly mobile in higher education. Others may stem from the aforementioned dispositions referenced by Erikson. While studying reasons for attrition in higher education, Trent and Medsker (1968) found that college "persisters were more selective in choosing their colleges and saw more reasons for attending. . . . They tended to be more intellectual . . . and open-minded before entering college" (p. 126). These traits are manifest signs of a certain kind of ego identity. They represent a set of cultivated capacities, values, styles, and outlooks, or what Bourdieu² (1977) might call a "habitus": that is, a class-influenced personal code of taste, knowledge, and behavior, as mediated by childhood experience. Actual or perceived deficits in one's habitus—which may become more apparent for the upwardly mobile in the life transition of higher education—

¹Exact statistics are not available on this group's enrollment in higher education, but a survey of incoming U.S. freshmen (Dey, Astin, & Korn, 1993) indicated that at the university level 22.5% of students' fathers and 27.7% of their mothers were not educated past high school.

²In Bourdieu's argument, not only do working-class individuals have less economic resources than professional-class counterparts, but they are also hampered by deficits of "social and cultural capital." Examples include in-group membership conferring the advantages of social networking and "connections" (social capital), language skills and information about manners, fashion, and style (embodied cultural capital), cultural items such as books and paintings (objectified cultural capital), and academic credentials (institutionalized cultural capital).

can have manifest implications for social relations, career development, and, therefore, the formation of ego identity. The importance of attending to processes of identity formation among the upwardly mobile seems further underscored by research suggesting that identity resolution influences overall adult well-being (Vandewater, Ostrove, & Stewart, 1997) and, with perhaps even more enduring consequence, intimacy and generativity (Stein & Newcomb, 1999).

IMPLICATIONS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the relative inattention to the subjective costs of social mobility—both in the research literature and society at large—we wished to provide a detailed and inclusive portrait of its psychological challenges. We decided to explore the experience of upward mobility in individuals whose lives were subject to the cultural and social dislocations of mobility, who had not yet settled into careers whose specific characteristics might obscure the experience of mobility as such. Our focus was on the experience of higher education, often a “turning point” in the lives of the upwardly mobile. Given the complex interaction of social and personal factors in determining the experience of upward mobility, we did not expect uniform aggregate effects and offered no predictions concerning these. We especially wished to understand upward mobility in regard to ego identity formation; this meant evaluating mobility as a process rather than as an outcome.

METHODS

Logic

Studying ego identity formation as a process, rather than as a product, calls for a suitable method. Outcomes can be framed as “ego identity status” and represented quantitatively (Marcia, 1980). But the *development* of identity involves a continual balancing of multiple components, negotiating of tensions, and resolving of contradictions. We have stressed thus far the psychosocial aspect of identity formation, referring to the values and attitudes of significant others that the young person internalizes. Narrative methods are ideally suited to represent internalization. It is their essence to bring the context into the main action, the past and future into the present. Central events are, as it were, irradiated by the ambient situation; “before” and “after” give meaning to, and gain meaning from, the here and now. It seemed to us, therefore, that a *contemporaneous* narrative account of the

young person's experience was the most advantageous medium for exploring the identity development of upwardly mobile youth.

In making this choice, we have the support of Savage (1997), who, in a methodological review of the upward mobility literature, concluded that life historians can best "tease out the complex interplay between people's strategies, values, and their mobility, a set of connections which has been rather elusive within virtually all survey-based approaches to the subject" (p. 321). In his even-handed review, Savage mentioned possible drawbacks of biographical methods as well. But given our special focus on the interaction among identity's ingredients, on the internalization of values and attitudes, and on the tracing of sameness-within-change, these drawbacks mattered less than the evident strengths. Our methodological decision was further eased in that we had neither hypotheses to test nor empirical generalizations to establish—tasks that would have required sampling and inferential statistics. Rather, the scholarly literature on upward mobility and identity formation sensitized us to certain focal topics, which we explored in our interviews.

Participants

Participants were four-year college students and graduates whose parents' highest level of education was high school or less ($N = 15$; 8 women, 7 men; age range: 19–27 years; 12 European Americans, 2 African Americans, 1 Asian American). Six participants from southeastern Michigan, all of them known to be first-generation students, were recruited from the subject pool of the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions (Eccles et al., 1993). The remaining nine participants were recruited in the Durham, North Carolina, area through newspaper advertisements specifying the first-generation criterion. At the time of the interviews (1994–1995), five participants were enrolled in college, six had graduated college in the past year, and four were enrolled in a graduate or professional school program. Eleven different state and private colleges and universities were represented in the participants' schooling.³

Procedure

After informed consent was obtained, participants were interviewed on three occasions and financially compensated for their efforts. Interviews covered a wide range of topics, in keeping with our earlier discussed interests. Topics included (a) how the pursuit of higher education had shaped, and

³Although our theoretical introduction refers to upwardly mobile students' working-class backgrounds, this constellation was not found in every case. For example, two respondents' fathers were wealthy businesspeople with a high school education.

been shaped by, the participants' longstanding relationships, especially those with parents, siblings, and hometown peers; (b) how respondents experienced the transition to higher education, including the challenges of moving into an environment new to them, their families, and peers of different class background; and (c) how participants negotiated occupational choice. Although we made sure these topics were taken up in each set of interviews, we followed no fixed interview schedule. Rather, we began interviews with open-ended questions and allowed participants substantial freedom to proceed in their own ways.

Interview Analysis

Interviewing an individual to collect a clarifying narrative is itself an act of interpretation preceding the more notorious one of culling from what is gathered the excerpts to be reported (Runyan, 1982). Interpretive choices multiply as we survey a collection of narratives. The interpretive challenge of a multiple-case study is always to synthesize an abstract social object—in this case, “upward social mobility”—out of the respondents' perspectival accounts. But this challenge is somewhat lightened as we focus our interest on certain favored rubrics. Because we concentrated on identity formation, we could select the portions of each set of interviews relevant to this developmental task and bring them into conversation with one another. The resulting syntheses are not offered as hypotheses to be tested on other upwardly mobile individuals—though there is no reason *not* to do so—but as tentative interpretations of the seemingly disparate accounts offered by the given group of respondents (Rosenwald, 1988).

A common hazard in dealing with life-historical narratives is to take them at face value. Yet if one keeps in mind that adolescents and young adults are noted for their volatile characterizations of others, especially parents (Marcia, 1980), then one can allow for the possibility that these significant others might have described the narrative's events, interactions, and relationships quite differently from the participants themselves. Whether a narrative study can ever shed sufficient light on the objective conditions of subjectivity is a complex question in any case. But our interest was in the students' own experiences and interpretations.

The interview sets were taperecorded and transcribed for analysis. After several readings of transcripts, the first author wrote case synopses for each participant, with relevant themes and illustrative quotations identified. These case synopses were then synthesized into the summary we shall present. We organized the interview syntheses under two main headings of identity theory: relatedness and career development (another major component of identity, ideology, was not considered separately). It will become clear that the narratives were analyzed primarily through the sociological lens of class.

This does not imply that race, gender, ethnicity, and region are not powerful influences in this group's identity formation.⁴ Yet their extensive treatment was beyond the scope of this chapter.

THEMES OF IDENTITY

Relatedness

Parental Relations

All students are apt to experience significant changes in family relations on entering higher education; the physical and emotional separation that this move usually entails alters relationships between the two groups regardless of class background. For first-generation students, however, pursuing higher education means entering a formative world that their parents have never inhabited. This move had important consequences for participants' parental relations, especially for those respondents whose pursuit of higher education represented dramatic upward mobility. Value clashes and communication difficulties marked these relations in ways that seem directly related to their movement in class. For example, many noted that their parents had "no clue" about how college worked or what they did there, that "they don't ask a lot about it . . . [and] don't even know what to ask about it." Discussing an experience so foreign to one's parents can prove frustrating, as in the case of Lisa.⁵ A recent graduate of a selective state university, Lisa said that her parents were very supportive of the idea of higher education and at her graduation ceremony told her "thousands of times" how proud they were of her. Indeed, like many other respondents, she felt that her parents enjoyed a vicarious sense of achievement through her higher education. Yet despite their praise, Lisa found it hard to relate the specifics of her college experience with them.

My mom is very supportive. But I don't know if she is necessarily interested. I was doing an oral history project, and I was so into it that whole semester; it was a graduate class. That was just my life, and I think she thought it was cool that I was in a graduate class [and] that I loved it, but when I would try to tell her what I was doing, she would start talking about something else, or she would get this kind of glazed look in her eyes.

⁴Higginbotham and Weber (1992), for example, found that African Americans may be more likely than Whites to view upward mobility as a *family* rather than an individual goal. This group may experience greater family support and less isolation from kin during upward mobility.

⁵Names of all participants have been changed for the sake of confidentiality; other identifying characteristics have also been altered or otherwise obscured.

Lisa worried that her father was even more thoroughly dismissive of her "impractical" studies. He has often forgotten Lisa's major and has reportedly questioned the wisdom of her course selection, with his "big question" being, "Are you learning anything that's going to help you in the real world?" Lisa has not felt comfortable sharing her classroom experiences with him.

It's just so hard to explain to them what you're doing. . . . Here's my dad who's just gotten off working ten-hour days, six days straight. To tell him that in Medieval History I'm learning about the Goths and the architecture—even though he didn't try to make me feel guilty, or make me feel that things were irrelevant—just looking at him, I'm like, it's interesting to me, but it won't be interesting to him.

Other participants reacted with anger to this perceived lack of interest in and understanding of their college experiences. For example, Kevin, a recent graduate of a prestigious state university, expressed his frustration at his parents' alleged lack of support:

I looked at it as I'm the first person in this entire—not this immediate family, this entire—family to ever go to school, and they don't seem to be really supporting me as much as they can. . . . I would ask for things and my dad would be like, "You're on your own right now" . . . My dad, every single time that I talk to him, he asks me about a job. He didn't seem to care how I was doing in school; it was just like, "Are you working?" . . . I'm like, "Dad, I got straight A's." [He'd reply,] "You need a job" . . . That made me want to talk to them less about college. I was like, they don't care how I'm doing. All I ever hear is "Money that, money this." I'm just like, fuck it, I just won't talk to them.

Despite his bitterness, Kevin followed his father's advice and for most of college worked at least 40 hours a week while maintaining a full courseload. Yet he rarely called or made the short trip home during his undergraduate years. Another participant, Frank, spoke of similar dissatisfaction, which has grown through encounters with friends' college-educated parents.

[They] know what going through college is all about and what it's like to be in my shoes. . . . Some of my friends' parents. . . . I love them to death, and I'm like, "God, if my parents were just as supportive as they were." It's not just financial support either, but it's, "Yeah, I can see you doing this. I can see you doing that" . . . To this day I wonder if, [my parents] think, "Wow, you did a good job. You know, we're really proud of you for putting up with a lot" . . . I just wish that people could look at my achievements as commendable as opposed to, you know, "You could be doing a little bit better."

Frank's hunger for approval was striking; he spoke proudly about earning a recommendation letter from a reputable corporation and gaining acceptance into a college fraternity. His need for validation may be related

to the perceived lack of parental recognition that has accompanied his pursuit of higher education.

Also complicating participants' parental relations at times during higher education was a shared sense of shame regarding family class background, one that seemingly became more pronounced as the students interacted with peers and professors from more moneyed and formally educated families. For example, some participants noted that their parents were reluctant to have their occupations revealed or homes shown to their children's college friends. Meanwhile, a few respondents expressed great embarrassment regarding their parents' alleged sexism and homophobia, intolerance that was attributed in part to class background. Returning to Lisa's case, we learn how perceptions of family prejudice prevented her from sharing an important piece of her education with her parents.

My parents, especially my dad, [given] the generation they are in, being from the South, there is like definite racism. I can kind of console myself by saying, "Well, I have this education and he doesn't, he just hasn't been in any environment where he can see another side." [But] it is kind of awkward sometimes. I took a History class and I wrote this paper about Black laborers and my teacher was like, "A plus." I felt so good about that. He had written a really great comment about it like, "You should consider doing graduate work in history and I don't know if I could have written this paper." I was just like, oh my gosh, I hadn't had that kind of feedback. Anyway, the first thing I want to do is tell my parents about it . . . but then I didn't want them to read it because it's all about the injustices that these men felt as African-Americans. My dad would take one look at it and say, well, what about this and what about this. So I never let them read it.

Such an incident might not have been as disturbing if Lisa did not greatly respect her father, a hard-working mechanic who helped finance her education. Managing conflicting emotions about loved ones is a universal task but one distinctively shaped by upward mobility.

Several respondents felt that their pursuit of higher education prompted defensiveness in their parents. Many parents were described as self-deprecating about their own educational achievement or belittling of their children's coursework (e.g., emphasizing how "book smarts" are overrated and intellectuals are "out of touch" with the "real world"). Often the growing educational disparity between parents and students was reflected through vocabulary differences. Mary, a graduate student whose mother has an eighth-grade education, elaborated, "We just don't talk the same language. I make a conscious effort to bring the vocabulary down to a certain point. . . . In the past we've had fights because she thinks I'm being condescending to her, treating her like a child." Respondents suggested that their parents sometimes addressed such differences by making them feel that in asserting their new-

found knowledge they were "putting on airs." Henry recalled "getting picked on for using certain words. Like the summer I worked for my dad, one time I used the word 'eschew,' and they called me 'eschew' all day, the workers and my dad." The students reported tailoring their vocabulary to avoid such scenes and hiding knowledge gained in college for fear of appearing arrogant or overshadowing relatives.

Of course, disruption in these crucial relationships adds to the developmental burdens already present for students in college, those involving formation of career and relational identities. Some respondents and their parents may become closer after they have gained more perspective on this tumultuous period in their relations. Yet Mary's case suggests that, for other students and their parents, the distance will remain.

I go home, we talk about the weather, talk about people in the family, people in the neighborhood. . . . The stuff I would like to talk about, [my mother] can't. She doesn't understand it. Stuff she'd like to talk about I think would be incredibly boring. . . . I learned very early on that they couldn't discuss [school]. To try to discuss it with them would be very frustrating to me, and embarrassing for them. . . . I realized I had far educated myself past my parents. There's like this vast gulf between us. It's never been able to be crossed.

These stories illustrate a range of discomfitingly perceived parental reactions—from approval without substantive comprehension to outright, sometimes cruel disparagement. From the standpoint of identity formation, one must consider the consequences of these students' vividly experienced outsidership with respect to their families. For example, Lisa may feel that, no matter what studies she undertakes, she will remain well-loved by her parents. But will she feel loved as Lisa the historian? How will she cultivate this affection if she must withhold cherished intellectual and moral preoccupations from the family conversation? How wide must she cut the swath of silence in their relationship? We do not know enough about the effects of such secrecy to make forecasts about the maintenance of "psychosocial well-being." Kevin, at least, is evidently unhappy about the silence he has imposed on himself. As we saw, such silence separates students not only from their parents but also from their peers, when they protect their parents from shame. The long-term consequences of such students' attenuated moral support and of their intellectual self-fragmentation deserve further attention.

Sibling Relations

Higher education significantly alters students' relations with siblings as well. For first-generation students with younger siblings, their college experiences can enable them to counsel those brothers and sisters who might also pursue an advanced degree. In this way, they might lend the

kind of guidance they wish others had provided them. Yet many participants did not feel their siblings saw them as dependable guides through higher education. Instead, some worried about how their academic success might alienate them from brothers and sisters. Henry described relations with his younger siblings:

They knew that regardless of how they performed, they could only do as well as me, they could never do better than me, and in all likelihood they wouldn't do as well as me. . . . My brother excelled at sports, partly in reaction to my academic achievements. He wanted to make his own path, a name for himself. My sister, she tells my mom, "Any club I join, Henry was the president" . . . she feels like everything has been taken away from her. She talks very openly about not wanting to finish high school and not wanting to go to college. It's a really awkward situation right now. Part of me feels guilty, like if I hadn't done so well she would at least go to a college and make a name for herself and get out of the trap that my mother's in of working at a dead-end job.

One might point out how Henry's guilt over his hard-won achievements is irrational, as is his sister's belief that all has been "taken away" from her. Yet guilt over having outdone the family by too much seems a real risk of upward mobility. Henry, attuned to potential family tensions, said that he does not share his *summa cum laude* success with his siblings for fear they might become discouraged in their own academic pursuits.

Of course, siblings are not always threatened by mobile students' rise. Many participants reported that siblings encouraged their academic exploits, feeling that the "good of one [family member] was for the good of all." Furthermore, some siblings are upwardly mobile themselves. Still, those who are not may have negative reactions to being "left behind," heightening students' sense of isolation from family and decreasing motivation to proceed further upward. Kevin's case illustrates this point. Though an A student at a prestigious university, he described himself as the "black sheep of the family in that I've gone on and pursued higher education."

Understanding this peculiarly negative spin becomes easier when one considers his relationship with his younger brother, who did not go to college but remained with the extended family and took over its landscaping business. His family's first college graduate, Kevin now finds himself out of touch with the gang back home—and scoffed at by his brother.

Everyone's always told me, you know, "You gotta go to college to succeed, to make money. You'll be a success, go to college, you're smart." Now I've gone to college and I have nothing but debts. . . . On the other hand, here's my brother who just sort of coasted through high school, didn't even care . . . got the business right after he graduated basically and he's making three, four thousand dollars a month. . . . He tells me, "You never had a TV that big. You're not making anything

and you graduated from college." Now that he's got money, he takes me out to dinner once in a while and he shoves it all in my face.

This contentiousness might be chalked up to sibling rivalry, but it seems a rivalry made all the more intense by Kevin's educational rise.

As we know, parents play a unique role in identity formation as caretakers, authorities, and purveyors of value. Siblings, meanwhile, at least for those who separate themselves from the family via higher education, can represent the traditionalist alternative. Socially stationary brothers and sisters embody what the upwardly mobile might have, could have, or should have become (or remained). Not only for Kevin but for other first-generation students siblings can serve as the enduring reminder of the road not taken. Identity formation always involves choices effected through identification processes. But for the upwardly mobile student, the sibling who pursues what he abandoned and spurns what he idealizes may remain like a *doppelganger*, painfully recalling to consciousness alternate choices and possibilities that would otherwise be consigned to the margins of awareness.

Relations With Hometown Friends and Peers

Also often "left behind" during upward mobility are close friends from the precollege years. Although many participants drew their friends in high school from a college-bound crowd, several bonded with those who did not pursue higher education. For those whose close childhood friends were primarily of working-class origin, there seemed more a danger of, to quote one respondent, "losing that connection between an original set of friends because you chose such different paths in life." For example, upward mobility shaped the decline of Sam's old friendships during higher education. Sam dropped out of high school but later enrolled in a community college where he flourished academically. Now a student at a prestigious law school, he has kept in touch with high school friends, some of whom went to college but few of whom stayed there. Sam has the sense that his success makes his friends feel answerable to him for lagging behind educationally, deference that, though flattering, makes him uneasy.

There is definitely something different within me. Law school does change you [and] the way other people look at me, or at least the way I feel I'm being looked at. When I see people now, even though I don't want any justification from them as to what they are doing now, they feel the need to give it to me: "I'm going back to school to do this, I'm going to do that" . . . That's just how our society is, and I try not to buy into it, that somehow doctors and lawyers and Ph.D.'s are better than friends of mine who are landscapers and construction workers. But some of them do want to make those kinds of comparisons. It makes me feel good when they ask for advice, like "where is a good place to

go to school?" or "how can I get started again?" But I don't feel comfortable being asked to judge what they are doing just by virtue of me being in law school.

Sam questions the moral valuation of success in Western society. He understandably feels that his education does not warrant the distinctions others make between him and his friends. Nevertheless, the higher his educational rise, the more pronounced these judgments become. Success is thus not only a source of pride but also of inner conflict. Despite their apparent admiration, Sam worries about his friends' suspicions that he is no longer "one of them."

I don't know if they think I'm looking down on them, but sometimes that's the feeling I get. . . . If I'm around and it's a big party or something, and people are getting drunk and smoking pot or whatever, and I'm not doing those things, you add that to it as well and they start wondering, "Who is this guy any more?" Why you're not doing some things that you used to do. . . . People just wonder why you care about this type of thing so much. Higher education in my case, law in particular. "Why do you care about that?"

Sam's friends seem to interpret his ambition as a judgment of their own important life decisions. The result, predictably, is strain in key social relationships.

After higher education, upwardly mobile individuals often leave their hometown without turning back. Practical career concerns can motivate such a departure, but so, too, can unfavorable attitudes toward the people within it. Frank spoke of his disdain for the hometown in which he was reluctantly spending his summer.

There's a lot of lower-class people. I didn't want to start ragging on the town with my parents here [but] I just don't like all the trash. There are a few college kids, but there's no one I can really hang out with. . . . I don't want to say I feel superior. That sounds terrible, but I don't know, it kind of limits me socially. . . . There's nothing for me here, everyone knows your business. . . . It's just kind of a dead town, a bunch of drunken idiots, you see them waxing their cars and gearing up to cruise down Main Street.

We see again how thickly moralism can pervade discussion of class and educational differences.

Harriet is another student for whom financial constraints have precipitated a move back home after college. Though a tough, independent, self-described "beer and pretzel" person, she recalled beginning to cry after spotting the city limits sign on her return drive to her hometown. "I really just want to get out of here. I just hate it, I absolutely hate it here. I don't fit in [Hometown], and I've been wanting to get out forever . . . [but] I got

trapped here again. It's so depressing." Revulsion for one's hometown is not necessarily tantamount to rejection of one's family and old friends, but some respondents admitted that motivation for leaving was a desire to escape the lifestyle and influence of these important others. This departure may ultimately prove pivotal in the estrangement of the upwardly mobile from their families and hometown friends.

It appears from these excerpts that upwardly mobile students may unexpectedly be cast into the limelight by old friends and peers. Ironically, these students—who may feel at sea in their new surroundings—find themselves approached for direction by those still with the firm ground of familial continuity and class tradition under their feet. These supposed pacesetters must cope with loneliness—and may do so, as we have seen, by disdaining old companions still enjoying one another's affirmation or cutting themselves off altogether from this group. To put it tritely, the grass on the other side of the class boundary seems greener; Sam's old friends' admiration of his new position is evident, and Harriet, on the other side of the fence she erected, finds her success a source of alienation.

Relations With Professional-Class Peers

Higher education brought most participants into more extensive contact with peers from more moneyed backgrounds. Living among them in college often made class differences readily apparent. Several respondents commented on this financial disparity with bitterness. Harriet, a recent graduate of a state university, elaborated.

There were some hard times. I only slept like four hours a night in college 'cause I had to work and go to school and study 'cause I was gonna try to get into law school. . . . Most of the people that I became friends with, their family paid for everything. . . . I never had that luxury. I always paid for everything, even in high school I paid for everything. I was bitter about that for a long time. I'd be like, "You had things handed to you on a silver platter and I worked my ass off for it!"

Class tensions were especially pronounced for participants at private or "elite" institutions. These respondents expressed outrage at their wealthier peers' alleged reckless spending and sense of entitlement. These peers were also criticized for a lack of appreciation for working-class employees on campus and ignorance of student differences in class background. Henry, a senior at a highly selective private university, detailed the personal effects of the latter.

People complain that I'm cheap . . . that when we can't go to a nice restaurant for steaks [if I come along]. They complain and they probably don't even think about it. It's really irritating. It seems like they've

been given things their whole lives, everything they've needed. I find it disgusting that people drive \$30,000 cars around campus, probably never having worked a day in their life. Their parents gave them their car [and] they complain that their parents yelled at them because they had a \$200 credit card bill [that the parents also paid for]. . . . I have so much more of my time every week taken up by things like work. It's frustrating, it's aggravating.

Such a dynamic can take its toll on working-class students as they try to finance their education, compete academically, and achieve pleasurable social relations. These demands are considerable enough without having to be endured in silence, and yet participants did not seem willing to articulate their financial concerns to peers. Their embarrassment about not having money (or their pride in not wanting to complain about it) meant they were often reluctant to explain in detail why they could not in good conscience be a part of the costly fun. So when college friends and acquaintances joined Greek organizations, went to concerts or fine restaurants, or traveled to the beach or ski slopes on spring and winter breaks, many of the students interviewed could not come along, increasing the isolation and jealousy some of them felt at school.

Some participants discussed how relations with professional-class peers made them more self-conscious about perceived deficiencies in cultural capital and what Bourdieu calls the "habitus." Mary, who attended social functions in the professional world as a graduate student, office worker, and spouse of an engineer, elaborated.

I'm very conscious that I don't spend a lot of money on clothing. . . . [I'll think] I look like White trash, I can't wear that. . . . At the office Christmas party, everyone else shows up in drop dead dresses. . . . I show up in something I happen to find at Goodwill. . . . You put me in front of a classroom, no problem. You put me in a room full of people all dressed better than I am, all sipping champagne, all talking about a favorite kind of wine and why it tastes the way it does, and I'll feel about that big. I'll just want to go shrink in a corner. . . . When people start talking about their vacations in Europe, I just look at them and go find someone else to talk to. . . . When the party's over with, I'm so tired. What have I got in common with these people?

For Mary, concerns about sharing values and background with peers—not salient issue for her as an undergraduate—have emerged as she has moved into the professional world. She, like other respondents, seems at an impasse, one with distinct class cultures on either side. In the thick of such adaptational struggles, the upwardly mobile person's sense of rightness about her accustomed style and values is apt to be severely tested.

Class Disadvantage and Its Psychological Effects

Conservative views of upward mobility suggest that increased access to higher education in the postwar era has "leveled the playing field" for working-class individuals with high occupational ambitions. Yet participants detailed how class-related disadvantages often shaped their college experiences. For example, because of financial constraints, most participants' higher education options were much more limited than their professional-class counterparts'. Furthermore, their parents' insistence on self-reliance meant they were often "on their own" when applying for and financing their higher education.

Family limitations in social capital were also demoralizing for students. Some participants, because of a lack of guidance or other resources, found their college experiences disrupted. Henry, for example, reported that his parents advised him to set his sights on community colleges near home. Neither they nor he realized he was capable of attending more competitive schools. Henry dropped out of college once he decided he did not want to pursue engineering. During a year away, he worked 80 hours a week to pay off college loans and support himself. He seriously considered not returning to college, but eventually matriculated at a private university with a financial-aid package. Although he developed into an accomplished premed student, the earlier events still frustrated him.

Neither of [my parents] really knew about college. They didn't really know about how to apply, about how to get money, even that you should visit and find out what's there. I think if my parents were more supportive, if we had gotten our act together, all three of us, I think I wouldn't have wasted my time at [Engineering University]. I didn't really blame them or feel that it was their responsibility. I guess part of that comes from having it drilled into me all my life that it was going to be up to me, whatever was to happen. . . . Five of my friends from high school just graduated. It was hard on graduation day when all their family was here and they were all wearing their caps and gowns. I was thinking, of all my friends, there's no one who has worked harder to get to college and to get where I am and they are. I felt like I deserved, I should be graduating now.

Henry realizes the unfairness of his class-based disadvantages but seems unsure about whom or what to fault for this injustice. An obvious target of blame is not available, but bitterness remains; this dynamic was common among respondents.

Their families' lack of acquaintance with college culture often made participants' transition to higher education particularly difficult. To quote

Ray, a rising college senior, "[I didn't know] what to expect socially. I didn't know what to bring, I didn't know anything about a dorm experience, I didn't know anything about setting up presentations for seminar classes. I was just completely unfamiliar with what I had to learn." Of course, not only working-class students feel trepidation about their initially unfamiliar school surroundings. Yet the potential for a crisis of confidence would seem greater among those whose loved ones had never before made the trek into higher education. Doubts about ability can combine with pressure to succeed in creating significant anxiety. "The first to go to college" may represent the mobility aspirations of the entire family and thus greatly fear "letting down" those back home. Jill, a case in point, reported that she "panics" during big exams and "feels terrible" about having a low class rank after her first year of school: "It's always been, 'Get out of this, have a better life than I do' . . . I guess that's why I started freaking out because I'm right in the important stages, and I mess up." Several students evidenced such a self-critical style. A lack of professional role models in the family may further shake confidence. As Tanya noted, "My parents don't have connections. You become aware of that when you are at someplace like [Private U]. Everybody's parents seem to be able to get everybody else jobs."

Occupational Choice

One of the major developmental tasks for any student in higher education is refinement of career goals and skills. Psychologists in the Eriksonian tradition have long suggested the suitability of the college years for allowing young adults a "psychosocial moratorium" to experiment with various career identities at a relatively leisurely pace. However, for many participants, their financial responsibilities and internal and family pressures to seek out practical vocational preparation made engagement in such moratoria quite difficult. Participants who were able to integrate preprofessional training into their education managed to quell concerns about its practical pay-offs. Others, whose career interests changed in college, found that the occupations to which they had tentatively given allegiance (and that their parents advocated) no longer seemed so apt. The process of occupational choice seemed especially difficult for those respondents who chose not to pursue family-approved job options.

A case in point is Kevin. Like many other respondents, he reported that his family viewed college as a means to an occupational end rather than as learning for learning's sake. As he became less enchanted with his law school plans and found validation from professors and peers for his creative talents, Kevin strayed from the occupational path his family endorsed.

[My parents] were always telling everybody, "You know, he wants to be a lawyer." So everyone was always asking me, "Oh, you're the future lawyer; how's it going up there at [State U]?" And I couldn't bring myself to say, "Well, uh, that's actually not it anymore. I have no interest in law whatsoever." Because all of my uncles were like, "So man, are you going to represent me later on?" And it was like, "Uh . . ." So I started lying to them, saying I was going into environmental law for a little while just because they didn't know what the hell it was. So they stopped asking me questions anyway, they're not the inquisitive type. . . . But [my parents'] view of college was just a period of time that it took to get a really stable job. They didn't think of it as a time where I need to find myself. . . . When I started figuring out more about what I wanted to do and realizing that it was farther away from what I had originally said I was going to do when I got in, it just became harder to communicate with them. . . . They're pushing me in all these [other] directions . . . [and] that hurts in that I feel if I go to try to pursue [acting and writing] that I won't have any help. . . . They didn't seem to want to listen to that part of it.

Respondents with interests in areas such as fine arts and philosophy seemed to have difficulty committing to these fields, partly because of perceptions that such a decision would elicit derision from relatives. Indeed, several noted family concerns about "impractical" careers with intangible fruits of labor. Ed, who was working on a PhD in the social sciences, elaborated.

It might be hard for them to understand just the concept of being in school as long as I've been. . . . At 21 my dad had his business . . . [at 25] I'm still at school making next to no money. So they are all waiting for me to finish my education. . . . They don't really understand it. They are just waiting for me to be a doctor or something.

Many respondents seemed to have internalized suspicions of unconventional careers. Emily's science prowess prompted her to consider briefly advanced studies in biology, but she came to feel that she would "rather die the death of a thousand screams" than follow this course (she now avoids such a scenario in medical school). Sam, meanwhile, became more politically aware in college and contemplated a doctorate in political science. He chose law school instead because "it's just less time and the sooner I can get to doing something: less money and also less questioning by other people of 'why are you doing that?'" What Sam wanted to hurry up and "get doing" was public service law that could benefit those like his father, whose own attempt at an American Dream—running his own car dealership—ended in near bankruptcy.

A big part of my personality and motivation has been for years thinking about how difficult it has been for my parents. . . . I couldn't see myself writing a bunch of academic crap to go in some law review somewhere

that's going to sit on the shelves of the law library and maybe one person in every ten years is going to read that article. That's going to be a great thing for that one person to find, but to me that is not very much action.

What was striking in such interviews was not the common concern about whether or not one's work would "make a difference." Rather, the interviews impressed us with how little moral freedom these respondents felt in arguing inner conflicts out with themselves. The pressures toward what Erikson calls "identity foreclosure" seem powerful, leaving little room for deliberate exploration of one's work possibilities.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Upward Mobility and Relational Identity

Our findings demonstrate upward mobility's multiple influences on family and social interactions. An "internalization of class conflict" (Sennett & Cobb, 1972) seemed to mark many participants' relations. As Ochberg and Comeau (chapter 5, this volume) found, academic ambition tends to strain family bonds more for working-class college students than their professional-class counterparts. Indeed, many respondents perceived that their educational advancement had disrupted family communication and heightened a sense of estrangement from important others.

The interviews begin to fill in the details of related research, including that which shows that strains in family attachment may lead to a variety of negative educational outcomes, including lower academic achievement and poorer college adjustment (Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, & Russell, 1994; Rice, Cole, & Lapsley, 1990). Results also specify the manner in which problems in family relations can affect identity formation. In terms of Josselson's (1994) model of relational identity, upward mobility seems to present special challenges in achieving successful *eye to eye validation*, *idealization and identification*, and *embeddedness*. As seen earlier, those students perceiving family indifference (and at times, hostility) toward their aspirations found this lack of validation profoundly disquieting. Similarly, many students noted problems in the dimension of idealization and identification, as higher education brought into focus their families' difficulties in providing models for achievement in the professional world. Working-class students can compensate by finding supportive peers and professors in college (that a few described instructors as second mothers or fathers perhaps bespeaks their considerable desire for mentorship), but many respondents often felt alone or confused as they navigated the transition to the professional class.

Another important dimension of relational identity is embeddedness, which, according to Josselson (1994, p. 98), "involves finding and taking a place with others; it encompasses belonging. . . . Where might there be a place for me?" Erikson placed embeddedness at the heart of identity by noting that during this developmental task the young person must grapple with the challenging question, "How do I fit into the adult world?" Distanced from families and hometown friends, yet feeling like intruders in the professional-class world, many participants felt betwixt and between two subcultures, with their deracination overshadowing often dramatic achievements. For instance, Sam, once a high school dropout, had gained entrance to one of the nation's most prestigious law schools. But rather than celebrating his story as one of personal triumph, he described his first year in professional school as follows.

I'm not part of the community. I don't feel very accepted by it and I'm not sure that I want to. I don't have many friends there in the sense of other people I know as friends. . . . I was definitely utterly alone this past year. There really was no one that I could talk to about what I was doing and why it was so frustrating to me. Part of that is law school. More so was just my view of things and my not being accepting of how things are as most people there are. There really wasn't anyone, no one in my group of family or friends who could relate to that. I just didn't feel real connected.

Upward Mobility and Occupational Identity

As implied earlier, difficulties in relational identity can complicate efforts to achieve occupational identity. Ideally, young people pursue careers with the guidance and recognition of important others. Failures in the relational dimensions of validation and identification, however, can burden their pursuit of rewarding work. Marcia (1980) has conceptualized identity formation according to the quality and extent of occupational exploration and commitment. Respondents' accounts suggested that it may be difficult for upwardly mobile individuals to sustain an extended period of exploration (e.g., via graduate school); in doing so they would risk not only financial stress but also family scorn. As Ochberg and Comeau (chapter 5, this volume) summarized,

Fathers who have less education and less prestigious careers often feel that graduate school encourages frivolous occupational fantasies: careers with poor pay and security or no specific career goal at all. Further, many less-educated parents feel that graduate school encourages young people to put off adult responsibility: starting a family of one's own and paying one's own way. In contrast, parents with more education and

more prestigious careers may take for granted a longer period of exploration and preparation.

Not only their parents express such concerns; the respondents themselves desired more immediate pay-offs from their educational endeavors. Settling quickly on a prescribed career would therefore be tempting, yet such identity foreclosure may ultimately represent an unsatisfying solution to this developmental dilemma.

It should be clear by now that the struggle of occupational choice for upwardly mobile individuals often represents a clash of values: the hard-headed practicality of their working-class background versus the intellectual idealism fostered by higher education. Conflict may arise as the upwardly mobile student adopts "professional-class" work values that are at odds with family notions of what constitutes a worthwhile occupation. Where values clash, moral judgments are soon to follow. Participants' disparagement of hometown peers who "go to beauty school and marry the guy at the gas station" was reportedly countered by family ridicule of "nerd schools" and exhortations to "get a real job." As the interviews suggested, an inflexible and threatening moralism often marks discussion of class and educational differences. What concerns us most is that by internalizing these rigid judgments, upwardly mobile students may miss an opportunity to integrate their talents and motives during a suitable period of career exploration.

Continuation of Conflict Into Adulthood

What will happen as these students move more fully into adulthood? The study design does not allow us to know whether these themes of conflict would remain prominent beyond higher education. One might expect that certain tensions reported would die down over time. For example, some difficulties in parental relations may be explained by the general adolescent tendency in moratorium to use parents as negative models (Erikson, 1980). That is, to facilitate differentiation, parents may be temporarily cast in an unflattering role as the antithesis of what the young person wants to become. Parental relations may become less stormy once the young person's individuation is more complete.

Still, many of the psychological costs of mobility mentioned may encumber identity development well beyond the college and graduate school years. We were struck by how themes of adult conflict in the autobiographical reflections of working-class intellectuals (e.g., Dews & Law, 1995; Grimes & Morris, 1997; Ryan & Sackrey, 1984; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993) paralleled those in our interviews. For example, Rodriguez (1982), a Mexican American writer with a PhD in Renaissance literature, discussed how education

"shattered the intimate bond that once held my family close" (p. 30). And Podhoretz (1967), in his discussion of the "prices to be paid for the rewards of making it in America" (p. ix), recounted his own journey from working-class Brooklyn to the professional-class publishing world of Manhattan (pp. 3-4):

It appalls me to think what an immense transformation I had to work on myself in order to become what I have become: if I had known what I was doing I would surely not have been able to do it, I would surely not have wanted to. No wonder the choice had to be blind; there was a kind of treason in it: treason toward my family, treason toward my friends. In choosing the road I chose, I was pronouncing a judgment on them, and the fact that they concurred in the judgment makes the whole thing sadder but no less cruel.

We found again in such accounts the difficulty of explaining work to family, the sense of social dislocation (feeling "caught in the middle," "nowhere at home"), anxiety about professional competence and social grace, resentment of professional-class peers' privileges and assumptions of class homogeneity, and guilt about having advanced well beyond family and friends. For these authors, the costs of upward mobility in adulthood seemed largely the same as those encountered in our interviews; the difficulties of identity development—of integrating disparate class personas—remained.

Qualifications

It is clear that our presentation focused on the psychological "dark side" of upward mobility. Yet mobility per se is not always necessary or sufficient to bring about many of the conflicts discussed. Furthermore, within these difficulties lie possibilities for creative and productive resolution. Indeed, respondents made the point that their relative lack of financial and emotional support in college has bred independence and responsibility that they are thankful to possess. They noted that straddling the professional and working classes has allowed them to find common ground with an impressive diversity of people. They said that they have developed uncommon work ethics, and that they have an appreciation of achievements and possessions for which they have worked harder than most peers. We should not lose sight of the fact that many upwardly mobile students achieve unusually mature relational and occupational identities.

Our focus on conflict may also have created the impression that participants generally viewed their parents and families with scorn or pity. This was not the case. Most students expressed at least some admiration and affection for their families. In fact, it was their closeness before college that

made negative developments in family relations especially unnerving for some; these changes were not experienced as trivial, predictable annoyances but as deeper and alarming losses. Perceptions that their families no longer appreciated their achievements or approved of their plans were particularly stinging—in part because these judgments were from respected loved ones and also because respondents' academic success had previously been a less ambiguous source of personal and parental pride. Such conflicts did not mean, however, that respondents necessarily perceived their family relations as abnormal.

A final qualification: Although our discussion at times implied otherwise, we realize that first-generation students are hardly a homogeneous group. As was only briefly acknowledged in this chapter, differences with regard to race, gender, ethnicity, region, and college institution can shape identity development in powerful ways. Especially interesting to us was the intersection of issues of race and class. For example, a few White respondents mentioned masking aspects of their class background in efforts that might be described as "passing" for someone from a wealthier and more educated background—much as racial minorities may feel pressure to mute their backgrounds in "White" America. It may not be far-fetched to apply DuBois's classic concept of "double consciousness" to the upwardly mobile (DuBois, 1903).

We noted other parallels between the accounts of White and Black participants. In characterizing the experience of Black students at her university, one participant, Tanya, described stresses similar in nature to those White respondents reported.

We didn't get here very easily. People say that to get here we are meeting quotas, that we got an easier ride and we are all here on scholarships just so we can add color to the campus. . . . [But] we aren't here to chill and then go work for Dad's oil company. It just doesn't work like that. If we fail here, we don't have things to fall back on. We don't have a back-up plan. It's either we make it or we don't and we go home and be poor.

Tanya implied the primacy of race in her identity, discussing her involvement in Black student groups and describing "the posse," her close-knit group of five Black women college friends. All of these women were reportedly first-generation students, but according to Tanya, "it never really occurred to us that none of our parents went to college." Still, when asked to describe what bonded this group together, Tanya mostly referenced issues of class.

What united us? A lot of times we would talk about the fact that we had no money, and how if we had money we would get straight A's. We were like, I don't understand how people can have money and not

do well because you don't have to go to work and you'll have all your time to study. . . . We would vent our bitterness . . . talk about how everybody around us had [money] and had no appreciation for it.

We expect that the increasing attention on social mobility within research on African Americans (e.g., Fordham, 1995; Higginbotham & Weber, 1992) will yield fruitful insights.

The Still Hidden Injuries of Class

As mentioned earlier, a lack of financial, social, and cultural resources often left participants with a sense of injustice; in jockeying for position within the social structure, they knew that the race was, in a sense, rigged. Although they could recognize how their backgrounds had shaped their experiences, participants seemed not to have conceptualized the frustrations of upward mobility in terms of social class. Who was to blame for the unfairness of it all? Respondents sometimes accepted their disadvantages as the "way of the world." At times they expressed anger at their families or complained about being unable to take advantage of institutional minority preferences. Most often, they blamed themselves for an inability to make the most of their educational experiences. Rarely did they link their difficulties to class structure. That they may have lacked class consciousness is not surprising given that admitting social stratification contradicts the American national faith in equal opportunity.

Yet viewing the obstacles to upward mobility as systematic, rather than idiosyncratic, barriers could be liberating for these students. Other campus groups have benefited from such collective sociological imagination. For example, student organizations for women, racial and ethnic minorities, and gay and lesbian students speak out against social injustices and provide supportive communities for their members. Perhaps most important, such organizations support the development of ego identity, offering peer validation and identification along with a sense of belonging. Still, the notion of a "First-Generation Students' Association" or an "Upward Mobility Club" seems peculiar, perhaps because the view of a rise in class as potentially alienating hardly commands the attention of the American public. Class background did seem to bond several first-generation students interviewed, but its potential for drawing peers together is often overlooked. As Lisa commented about her best friends at a selective university, "It was just kind of ironic that a lot of us are from working-class backgrounds. We didn't even talk about it until we were pretty close, which I think is pretty interesting. . . . It's not like you introduce yourself, 'Hi, my name is Lisa and my parents didn't go to college, but I'm at [State U] anyway.'" Such material reinforced Fussell's (1983) view of class as "America's dirty little secret."

CONCLUSION

It was also Fussell who claimed that "the number of hopes blasted and hearts broken for class reasons is probably greater in the world of colleges and universities than anywhere else" (1983, p. 141). Indeed, the potential psychological costs of upward mobility via higher education seem considerable, with implications for the crucial task of identity formation. Respondents found their personal and academic progress undermined in various ways: through the pains involved in leaving family and friends behind, the uncertainty of entering a foreign educational world, and the confusion of pursuing a career without obvious role models or a wealth of financial and cultural capital. One worries about the challenges these costs pose to the further development of relational and occupational identities.

It is worth noting that higher education can provide serious challenges for all students, regardless of class background. We do not claim that the difficulties presented in this study are unique to first-generation students, that their higher education is only a time of inner struggle, or that its intellectual and social rewards remain unavailable to them. What we do assert is that this group's path to success is psychologically more complex and demanding than is generally imagined. Fuller consideration of the emotional costs of upward mobility seems imperative in a society that champions this process while often denying the antagonisms within its class structure.

We offer this discussion with the hope of prompting a larger public conversation on the psychology of upward mobility. Multiple-case studies are not designed to provide the "last word" on the phenomenon of interest. Ideally, they involve the "quest for good examples . . . displaying the generality and comparability of seemingly private experience, articulating the social sources of fate and the systematicity of what seemed random and inexplicable, [and] enriching public discourse about previously occluded issues" (Rosenwald, 1988, pp. 263–264). These are lofty goals, to be sure, but we hope that this chapter helps spark dialogue among educators, counselors, policymakers, and, perhaps most important, upwardly mobile individuals themselves. Such discourse only seems appropriate in a nation that claims the permeability of class boundaries as proof of greatness.

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