Rethinking Mobility: Towards a Race and Gender Inclusive Theory

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ABSTRACT

This paper critiques traditional mobility research for its neglect of White women and people of color and then identifies some themes which can guide future research designed to incorporate race and gender into our understanding of the subjective experience of upward mobility in America. It examines evidence from social science and popular reports of mobility as well as two studies of upward mobility for Black and White women conducted by the authors. Three major themes are seen to characterize the mobility experiences of White women and people of color. They are: the simultaneous experiences of multiple forms of oppression (class, race, and gender); the significance of affiliations with family, community, and the race; and unique personal costs and struggles. Mobility for many White women involves steering to marriage as a primary life goal and into gender-segregated sections of the middle class. Upward mobility for people of color is complicated by steering into both race and gender segregated sectors of the middle class as well as by crossing color lines. The experiences of White women and people of color suggest that mobility is motivated by a desire for personal but also collective gain; is defined by interpersonal commitments to family, community, and the race; and involves competition but also cooperation, community support and personal obligations.
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Against a pitch black backdrop, five grim-faced eight year old children
stare blankly at you: Black, Asian, Latino and White boys, and one White
girl. The picture covers three-quarters of the newspaper page. The caption
reads:

What will happen when they wake up from The American Dream?

How do you tell a kid that the American dream might not apply in
his case? Well, you don't. You can't. So United Way agencies
work hard to help children who face tougher-than-ordinary odds.
Refugee kids. Minority kids. Kids who are pregnant, taking
drugs, drinking. Kids you know.

Maybe we can't guarantee all our children a white-picket-fence
kind of life. But we can love them enough to give them a fighting
chance.

Don't Give Up.
Give.
It's the American Way.
It's the United Way.

This advertisement, which appeared in a daily newspaper, says a lot
about common mythology regarding the American Dream, of equal opportunities,
chances for mobility. What does it say? Poverty is four boys to one girl.
Females of color are not poor. It says everyone wants a "white picket fence
kind of life". It doesn't deny that the dream exists, but leaves the dream
intact and asserts that only a few are denied the "fighting chance to be
mobile." It says that those who face structural barriers to attainment of
the "good life" are minority and immigrants, and racism and ethnocentrism
translate in this sanitized view of the world into "tougher than ordinary
odds" which can be remedied by voluntary personal contributions to United Way. And it says that the others who face "tougher than ordinary odds" are kids who have "personal problems"—that is, kids who forfeit presumably available opportunities by getting pregnant, drinking or taking drugs.

No feature of stratification is more characteristically American or is as steeped in mythology as upward social mobility. Many generations of immigrants from around the globe were drawn to the United States in part because of it's reputation as "the land of opportunity" where a man of limited means could "make it" so long as he was willing to work hard. This ideology was summarized early by Andrew Carnegie: "The justice of industrial capitalism in America . . . is that society here will not fail to reward a man of talent. If a man is worthy of escaping poverty's terrors, he can do so" (Sennett and Cobb, 1972:72).

The belief in the openness of the American social system, that "the cream will rise to the top", is at the core of our cultural ethos and—even to this day—permeates public discourse and academic research in the social sciences. America's public schools have been the foundation on which rests the myth of opportunity. Many public officials argued in the early 20th century, that public schools would identify talented, hard-working young men and facilitate their climb up the ladder of success. Schools would provide information and skills as well as nurture appropriate values and aspirations by exposing working- class youth to middle class role models and college-bound peers (Ellis and Lane, 1963; Turner, 1964). And capitalist society would be the ultimate benefactor by having secured "the best possible man" for every job (Kornblum, 1987).

But the reality of life for most Americans has never matched these myths. Two important facts of American social stratification contradict the
above image. First, despite its' continued popularity in American culture (e.g., in literature, television, music, theater, and folklore), the frequency and range of upward social mobility in America have never been as great as the myth of the open society would have us believe. In fact, significant mobility from the working class to the middle class has been quite limited (Ryan and Sackrey, 1984; Vanneman and Cannon, 1987). For example, Coleman and Rainwater (1978) reported that mobility from the blue-collar working class to the professional-managerial class (professionals, managers or administrators) occurred in only seven percent of the cases in their study of social standing. Ryan and Sackrey (1984: 114) conclude their review of mobility research as follows: "few are called and even fewer are chosen. . . . For the great majority, the rule is rags to rags and riches to riches."

Second, the opportunity to be mobile in America has never been evenly distributed among all the talented in the population, but rather is grossly restricted by gender, race, region, and age. Gender bias is blatantly obvious in the male language typically used to describe mobility opportunities ("the best man for the job"; "If a man..." etc.), but race, region, age, and other factors have also impeded mobility for the majority of Americans in the working class (Alexander and Ekland, 1974; Hout, 1984; Knottnerus, 1987; Oliver and Glick, 1982; Pomer, 1986; Rosenfeld, 1978; Sewell, Hauser and Wolf, 1980; Treiman and Terrell, 1975; Wright, 1979).

Although opportunities for upward social mobility have been historically limited, structural economic changes in the Post World War II era have produced significant growth in the professional-managerial "middle" class. In just one generation, professional, managerial and administrative positions increased from 15% to 30% of the labor force ( Ehrenreich and
Ehrenreich, 1979; Vanneman and Cannon, 1987). This expansion of middle class positions also accompanied the Civil Rights and Women’s movements which brought down many race and gender barriers to occupational attainment and upward class mobility. Because of these shifts in the occupational structure and breakdowns in some race and gender barriers, more White women and people of color (especially in the baby boom generation) have experienced upward social mobility in the Post War II period than at any time in this century (Fossett, Galle, and Kelley, 1986).

Purpose of the Paper. Our aim is to identify some themes which can guide future research designed to incorporate gender and race into our understanding of the subjective experience of upward social mobility in America. Social mobility is a complex process which poses many problems for researchers, not the least of which is the meaning of the term itself. This paper focuses on intergenerational class mobility—the movement of individuals from a working class family of origin to a middle class destination. Most quantitative research on social mobility defines mobility as any movement from one occupation to another no matter how insignificant the change in power, prestige, or income (Pomer, 1986). These definitions produce estimates of the extent of mobility in society which seem to support the ‘open society’ image. Yet major questions remain about how much of that mobility represents significant changes in class or status. In this paper, we are interested in how White women and people of color move through significant societal barriers to attain a qualitatively different social class position in the social structure. The qualitative shift we are addressing is movement from the working class to the middle class, that is,
to a position of greater power and control in society—not just to any new
occupation, even those with higher earnings, or prestige.

The middle class, also called the professional-managerial class, refers
to the mental laborers whose primary role in modern industrial capitalism is
to plan, manage, and monitor the labor of the working class. The middle
class typically enjoys greater income, prestige, and education than workers.
But it is the social relations of dominance and subordination—control over
workers and subordination to capital—which makes this group a separate
"middle" class with separate class interests ( Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich,
1979; Vanneman and Cannon, 1987). Operationally, the middle class as herein
defined, corresponds roughly to the census occupational categories of
professionals, managers and administrators (Braverman, 1974).  

There has been so little research into the subjective experience of
upward mobility for White women and people of color that our work is
necessarily exploratory and seeks to identify some dominant themes which
merit future investigation. The themes we identity are not meant to
represent a set of empirical generalizations based on a "test" or set of
tests of various perspectives on mobility. It would be premature to begin
testing hypotheses at this time. Instead, these themes appeared frequently
enough in our original research, and in the popular and research literatures
we reviewed, to suggest that they merit future systematic investigation.
Not surprisingly, when we examine mobility for White women and people of
color, key questions arise about the prevailing theories and descriptions of
mobility for White men. Thus, this paper begins with a critique of

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1 The exceptions are technicians and foreman, who are categorized in the
U.S. census in the category of professional, managers and kindred workers,
but are recognized in Braverman’s dichotomy as members of the working class.
See Vanneman and Cannon (1987) for a detailed explanation.
stratification research which examined the subjective experience of mobility among White males. That early research never examined how race and gender shaped mobility, and yet these findings form the basis for dominant popular and social science images of the process. As we shall see, the mobility process among White women and people of color suggests that theories of White male mobility should also be reexamined at this time.

The mobility themes we discuss are derived from three major sources: (1) preliminary analysis from an on-going study of race, social mobility, and women’s mental health conducted by the co-authors, (2) an earlier study of mobility among Black women conducted by the senior author, and (3) reexaminations of existing research and writings which reported on people’s upward mobility experiences even though mobility may not have been the researcher’s primary focus.

The first study examines the roles of social mobility and race in the lives of 200 Black and White professional, managerial and administrative women in a Southern metropolitan area. All the subjects were "baby boomers" born between 1945 and 1960, and were college graduates employed full-time at the time of the study, 1985-87. Interviews were focused life histories and lasted two and one-half to three hours each (for details see Cannon, et al., 1987). The second study is of the family and educational experiences of fifty-six Black women who graduated from Boston area colleges between 1968 and 1970. Born between 1945 and 1949, they were either completing graduate educations or working as professionals or administrators at the time of this study, 1976-78. Data include lengthy focused life history questionnaires for all fifty-six women and additional in-depth personal interviews with twenty of them (Higginbotham, 1980).
Throughout this paper women are quoted from both of these and other studies. The actual names of the subjects have been changed to protect their anonymity. Rather than repeat the study source each time we quote a subject, we have listed in Appendix 1 the pseudonyms for each subject and the study in which she participated.

The specific questions we address in this paper follow. What are the major structural barriers to mobility for each race-gender group? Why do White women and people of color strive for mobility? What role do family and community play in the mobility process? What is the role of marriage in the mobility process? What are the personal costs attached to various mobility strategies and routes? In summary, we are interested in the ways that mobile individuals personally experience and perceive their own upward social class mobility: why they do it, what it feels like, what it costs.

We also seek to make intergroup comparisons highlighting similarities and differences, thus, we may at times present images which seem too simplistic to characterize an entire race-gender group. These instances should herald a special need for further research which explores intragroup variability.

Identifying themes which emerge in examining the subjective experience of mobility for women and people of color is our primary aim. However, we also include brief descriptions of the major contours of the social structure which inhibit and support mobility for each race-gender group. The subjective experience of mobility cannot be understood in isolation from the social structural conditions within which it takes place. If people’s subjective experiences are explored separately from their social structural context, then individualistic interpretations of those experiences can lead to victim blaming arguments like the following: those who don’t "make it"
simply haven’t tried hard enough or don’t have what it takes; or conversely, those who do "make it" prove that others could also, if they only had the talent and the drive.

RESEARCH ON MOBILITY, GENDER AND RACE

There are three distinct bodies of literature which bear on the intersection of gender, race, and the subjective experience of upward social class mobility. They are: "mainstream" White male-dominated stratification research, and the two ghettoized fields of gender and work, and race and work. Research in each of these fields is limited in its’ ability to help us find answers to the above questions for several reasons.

First, stratification research which described the subjective experience of upward social mobility focused almost solely on White males, and having been conducted mostly in the 1950’s and 1960’s, even that research is now outdated (Blau, 1956; Ellis and Lane, 1963; Hollingshead, Ellis and Kirby, 1954; LeMasters, 1954). Most early studies of the subjective experience of upward social mobility for women explored their mobility through marriage (Psathas, 1968), while only a few reported the experiences of women who were mobile through their own educational attainment or occupational achievements (Ellis, 1958; Stuckert, 1963).

Second, the publication of The American Occupational Structure by Peter Blau and Otis D. Duncan (1967) began a new quantitative tradition in social stratification research which redirected the field and has dominated it ever since. At that time, research on mobility shifted from describing the subjective experience of the individual and his family to identifying the variables (e.g., father’s occupation, father’s education, son’s education,
son's first job) which predict status attainment. Thus research efforts shifted from the qualitative interpretation of face-to-face interviews and first-hand observations to the quantitative analysis of national surveys and from the social psychological to the structural. Other researchers, like Sewell, Haller, and Ohlendorf (1970), extended the Blau-Duncan model to incorporate intervening variables like motivation, aspirations, mental ability, and academic performance. Status attainment research dominated the field in the 1970s and continues as a primary stratification theory today.

The presumed scientific "objectivity" of the Blau-Duncan model was reinforced by the sophistication of statistical and computer techniques employed in the research, the large numbers of survey respondents in the studies (20,000 in the 1967 study), and the consistency of the results across different tests. The model so dominated the field that it began to appear to many as a social universal, unrestricted by theoretical assumptions (Breiger, 1981). At one point it even became necessary to document that status attainment research—like other research—had theoretical assumptions guiding it. Horan's (1978) article, "Is Status Attainment Research Atheoretical?" noted that status attainment research rests on the neo-classical functionalist assumption of the fully open and competitive allocation of individuals to jobs based on the individual traits (talents) of the job holder. So the basic assumptions of status attainment research are quite consistent with the earlier models.

Even the neo-Marxist and structuralist models, which have contradicted the status attainment model have not directly challenged the prevailing image of the subjective experience of mobility. This is because this research also rests upon quantitative analysis of large secondary data sets
which contain little insight into the personal experiences of the individual and his/her family (Vanneman and Cannon, 1987; Wright, 1979).

The status attainment model has also been soundly criticized by feminist scholars on a number of counts. First, most of the studies in this area have excluded women (Acker, 1973). When women are included the assumptions underlie their inclusions are also subject to criticism. The status attainment model ignores unpaid work and mother’s employment even when paid. Furthermore, its assumption of equality of opportunity denies the reality of the gender segregated labor force and wage discrimination against women (Fox and Hesse-Biber, 1984; Kessler-Harris, 1982; Reskin and Roos, 1987).

In the last decade, status attainment models have been developed for White women (Sewell, Hauser and Wolf, 1980) and people of color (Hout, 1984; Oliver and Glick, 1982). Studies have concluded that White male attainment is more closely tied to ability, while attainment for women and people of color is less affected by their abilities and more by their gender, race, and class background (Alexander and Eckland, 1974; Knottnerus, 1987; Pomer, 1986; Rosenfeld, 1978; Treiman and Terrell, 1975; Wright, 1979). Most importantly for our purposes, they have not reexamined the subjective experience of mobility—how it feels, what are the personal costs, and so forth—for White males nor has it been examined for White women and people of color.

Third, some research has described the subjective experiences of women workers. Research on women and work has focused on: entry into the paid labor force (especially into middle class occupations); mobility into male-dominated fields (Harkess, 1985); or the work experiences of class "stables" (e.g., professional-managerial class women or blue collar women) but not
upwardly mobiles. In some of these studies, the life experiences of the women are richly described, but it is the way that gender shapes their experiences that is the focus of attention, and social class is either held constant or ignored (Epstein, 1983; Kahn-Hut, et al., 1982).

Finally, in contrast to the middle class bias of research on White women, the research on men and women of color (especially on Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans) has overwhelmingly concentrated on poor and working class people, often generalizing the findings to the entire population (Baca Zinn et al., 1986). Furthermore, the minority of research that focuses on middle class people of color tends to assume that all middle class people were raised in "the ghetto" or in working class families.\footnote{Willie (1983) suggests that the majority, perhaps two-thirds of the Black middle class is upwardly mobile. Our study of professional, managerial and administrative women in the Memphis SMSA finds a similar distribution: two-thirds of the Black women volunteers were upwardly mobile, while only one-third of the White women volunteers were upwardly mobile (Cannon, et al., forthcoming).}

Therefore, unlike the research on the White middle class where it is commonly assumed that they have replicated their parents' middle class positions and upwardly mobiles are a hidden population, research on middle class people of color is rich with details of upward social mobility because virtually everyone is assumed to have been mobile.

As a consequence of these contesting assumption about the White and minority middle classes (i.e., whites are stable middle class and people of color are upwardly mobile) the dimension of class goes unexamined in research on each group. The class mobility experiences of people of color are interpreted in racial not class contexts.

For example, in their study of Black Life in Corporate America, Davis and Watson (1982) explain the conflicts faced by Black managers in corporate
America as primarily the cultural outcomes of growing up Black in the ghetto of a racist society. This ignores the fact that not all Blacks grew up in the ghetto and thus diminishes the potential of class for explaining the conflicts that many Black managers face. Without diminishing the role of racism in shaping the lives of Black and other people of color, it is important to recognize that the movement from ghetto to boardroom is not only a transition from Black to White cultures, from segregation to token integration, and for women, from the female sphere to the male, but from the working class to the upper ranks of the middle class as well. And while White male and female upwardly mobiles may not experience the boardroom in the same way as Black men and women, they may have personal reactions like alienation or isolation which are similar. Thus, it is important that we disentangle the roles of race, class, and gender inequality in shaping the subjective experiences of mobility.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND MOBILITY

White Males. Even though there is little significant upward mobility in America, White male mobility is more frequent and less restricted in the range of occupational and industrial destinations than for any other gender/race group (Acker, 1973; Farley, 1984; Pomer, 1986; Rosenfeld, 1978; Sewell, Hauser and Wolf, 1980). This is because White males benefit from specific structural supports for their educational and occupational advancement.

For example, in the post World War II era, athletic scholarships, military experience, federal loan programs and the G.I. Bill played a major role in making it possible for individuals to move on to career paths
leading to significant upward mobility (Ryan and Sackrey, 1984). Furthermore, until the 1970's, virtually all athletic scholarships were given to White males. As men of color have increasingly gained access to athletic scholarships, the graduation rates of college athletes have declined precipitously, the curriculum for athletes has been criticized for lacking content, and across the nation communities are charging that the treatment of Black athletes is no more than racist exploitation. In addition, few colleges and universities have achieved gender parity in athletic scholarships despite the requirements of Title IX legislation.

Greater structural supports for White male mobility mean that the process of mobility for them will be quite different than for other race-gender groups. For example, White males may be better able to move up the educational system with "average" academic records than other groups because the system has supported White male mobility financially. Also they are more likely candidates for encouragement and assistance of professors and other professionals who view men's careers as more important than women's and who hold more open visions of what White men as opposed to men and women of color can be expected to achieve. Ryan and Sackrey (1984: 310), in their study of academics from the working class, report with some amazement that "many of our respondents reported an early lack of distinction that might have indicated a potential for academic work." In other words, these white male Ph.D.'s had a common trait of having done poorly in primary and secondary schools. Their early performance in school did not restrict their mobility because the system supported college attendance for White males anyway. To explain the mobility of their male subjects, Ryan and Sackrey (1984: 310-311). state, "Clearly, it was a combination of their talent and, most especially, historical circumstances and happenstance that made
possible their upward movement." They should also have added gender and race to the list of "circumstances" producing upward mobility for their subjects.

In addition to greater system supports for upward mobility among White males, there are also greater opportunities for White men to remain in the working class and to obtain a comfortable standard of living. Especially in the primary labor force, the unionized, private sector of the economy, working class White men have been able to obtain the job security, income, and benefits which enable them to provide well for themselves and their families (Freeman and Medoff, 1984). Although these positions in the economy have been limited, they have been historically dominated and controlled by White men. Thus, some White males have had the option of maintaining a comfortable lifestyle, and passing on opportunities for advancement to their children while remaining in the working class. Thus, they can have economic security and still avoid the potentially distasteful social relations of dominance and subordination (sometimes involving relations with one's own family and community) which accompany movement into the middle class (Sennett and Cobb, 1972).

This privilege has recently been severely threatened by the "deindustrialization of America" (Bluestone and Harrison, 1982). With the decline of Northern urban manufacturing industries, the increased entry of White women and people of color into primary sector blue-collar jobs, and the growth in the service sector of the economy, this group of White men who could earn a comfortable living without benefit of class privilege is severely threatened (Steinitz and Solomon, 1986). Now, many of these same men are having to attend community and senior colleges to gain the credentials to obtain less desirable jobs. One possible interpretation for
the charges of "reverse discrimination" which have become common in the 1970's and 1980's is that they signal the decline of White male privilege—meaning that White men's ability to achieve a comfortable lifestyle without class privilege has diminished as more women have entered the labor force.

**White Women.** For White women, racial privilege means greater opportunities for upward class mobility than for women and men of color. However, the patriarchal social structure greatly restricts their mobility options to those avenues which represent legitimate relationships to White men. For most of the post World War II era, the primary socially sanctioned, legitimized, and supported mobility route for White women was to become legally linked through marriage to a middle class (either mobile or middle class stable) White man. Due to the patriarchal nature of family life, White female socialization primarily directs them towards marriage as the ultimate goal; towards education as a mechanism for increasing their exposure to middle class men and increasing their desirability as marriage partners; and towards female-dominated and marginal employment sectors where (presumably) their labor market status would not be affected by their family roles.

Lillian Rubin reports that for most young working-class girls, marriage was—and probably still is "the singularly acceptable way out of an oppressive family situation and into a respected social status—the only way to move from girl to woman" (quoted in Kaufman and Richardson, 1982:49-50).

Similarly, Daphne Joslin's (1979) study of White female mobility through marriage, identified marriage as the major vehicle available to improve their status. She notes: "'Bettering oneself' has been equated
with finding a husband from a higher social class or a working-class son whose talent and ambition are sure promises of a higher social position'" (Joslin, 1979: abstract).

Although marriage may have been the primary vehicle for upward mobility for White females, the chances of being mobile through marriage have never been high. Furthermore, the rising divorce rate since the 1960's has shown how tenuous is the hold females have on the middle class whose only claim is through marriage (Weitzman, 1985). These rates and their precipitous decline in social class and status when White middle class women divorce has gained national attention in social science and the media (Arendell, 1988; Lefkowitz and Withorn, 1986).

It is clear that White women's privilege is largely dependent upon their attachments to White men. When they attempt to be mobile through routes other than marriage, they face both rigid and subtle educational barriers (Angrist and Almquist, 1975; Benokraitis and Feagin, 1986) as well as blatant job discrimination (Hoffman, 1979; Ireson, 1978; Reskin and Roos, 1987). Research documents that the talents of White women play a smaller role in deciding their economic, and occupational futures than is the case for White males (Kaufman and Richardson, 1982; Knottnerus, 1987; Treiman and Terrell, 1975). For example, even status attainment researchers, whose work assumes that the educational system is open indicate that:

female attainments appear to be more closely tied to the ascribed criterion of family background status, while those of males are strongly related to the presumable functional criterion of academic ability (Alexander and Ekland, 1974: 669).

Working class White girls are steered into work in sex-segregated jobs like clerical work, nursing, teaching, dental hygenists, in the garment
industry and in other service work (Hillsman and Levinson, 1975; Sacks and Remy, 1984; Southeast Women's Employment Coalition, 1986). Furthermore, workers in female-dominated occupations are paid less than workers in male-dominated occupations for equivalent education and skill levels (Kaufman and Richardson, 1982; National Committee on Pay Equity, 1987; Treiman and Hartman, 1981).

**Men of Color.** For men of color, the obstacles to upward mobility are formidable. Historically, men of color were denied access to industrial work, which paid "a family wage" to White males, and once unionized, enabled many White families to pass on economic advantages to their children. With limited access to primary labor force positions, Black males face futures in low wage jobs and also have unemployment rates much higher than White males. For example, Black male unemployment rates in the post World War II era have remained at twice the rate of White men (Farley, 1984). Employment prospects for Black youth seriously declined in the early 1970's in the face of a worsening national economy. The unemployment rate for Black youth (individuals between 16 and 19 years of age) was 30 percent, which was double the rate for White youth (Taylor, 1977). When they are employed, Black males are overrepresented in the lowest rungs of the occupational distribution and are less likely than White males to hold white-collar jobs (Blackwell, 1985; National Committee on Pay Equity, 1987). While gains have been made in the past twenty years, racial discrimination remains severe in this country (Farley, 1984; Willie, 1983). Furthermore, the decline in public sector aid to higher education will have a direct impact on the numbers of Blacks and other people of color, as well as working class Whites, who attempt college.
Recent examinations of educated Blacks reveal some gains, but research also reveals that the Black middle class population is still plagued by racial discrimination (Farley, 1984). When Blacks become professionals or managers they are less likely to be self-employed, to wield significant authority, and are more likely to be found in the public sector in powerless positions (Collins, 1983; Higginbotham, 1987a). Thus, as was the case for White women, "a low correlation between personal attributes and achievement emerges among minority group members" (Hout, 1986: 215).

Also similar to the case for White women, Black mobility is not only less frequent but also more restricted in the range of occupational and industrial destinations. For example, various researchers have noted that Black upward mobility since the New Deal is largely into the public sector of the economy (Sitkoff, 1978; Higginbotham, 1987a). A growing number of scholars are recognizing that Black mobility is into particular segments of public sector work which involve direct service to the minority community. Collins (1983) refers to these sectors as "segregated," Stanley Lieberson (1980) refers to work in "community service occupations," and Michael Lipsky (1980) speaks of "street level bureaucrats." Michael Hout notes:

>a sizable minority community, if sufficiently segregated, can support a number of service professionals, proprietors, and tradesmen. Residential segregation may also create support for other occupations like school teaching and community service if majority members are reluctant to work in predominantly minority neighborhoods. . . . The result is a middle class. Such a middle class, based as it is on community service, is distinct from the middle class of engineers, managers, and clerks of the majority (Hout, 1986: 215).

Sharon Collins (1983) notes the precariousness of the Black middle class because community service positions are created by government policies not by consumer generated market forces. Thus, the withdrawal of federal
supports could seriously erode the position of the Black middle class in America.

**Women of Color.** Women of color face the most restricted set of options for upward mobility of any race-gender group. Unlike White women, racist restrictions on interracial marriage coupled with the vulnerability of men of color in the labor market means that marriage is virtually eliminated as a possible mobility route for most women of color. The denial of the family wage to men of color meant that Black and other women of color, as daughters, wives and mothers, would enter paid employment to support their families (Higginbotham, 1983). In that labor market, women of color were relegated to the most demeaning and poorest paid of gender segregated jobs—especially agricultural, factory, domestic and service work (Barrera, 1979; Glenn, 1986; Jones, 1985; Ruiz, 1987). Women of color also faced severe restrictions on their educational attainment. First, the demands of helping to support their families kept them out of schools. Second, the institutionalized discrimination in primary and secondary schools complicated the process. Many southern communities lacked high schools for Blacks and people of color faced de facto discrimination in educational institutions throughout the nation. Furthermore, women of color faced rigid dominant culture gender expectations, which barred women from many educational settings and steered them into traditionally female fields (Hillsman and Levinson, 1975; Jones, 1985). Yet, these expectations and patterns of institutionalized discrimination denied the fact that women of color played a critical role in the economic support of their families.

When they could secure secondary schooling, women of color faced racial barriers to traditional women’s occupations, such as clerical and sales
positions. As early as the 1930's and 1940's, scholars acknowledged the
difficulties that Black women faced in translating their secondary education
into higher paying jobs. Typically, women of color could only hold clerical
and sales jobs within their racial ethnic communities, where firms were
small and employed few people (Barrera, 1979; Drake and Cayton, 1962).

In the Black community, achieving higher education was viewed as the
only means of escaping private household work. With higher education, more
employment options existed for women of color. Yet, they entered a middle
class labor market segregated by both race and gender (National Committee on
Pay Equity, 1987; Segura, 1984). As a result, women of color actually work
in a very limited range of professional, managerial and administrative
positions: as social workers, teachers, nurses, and librarians. All of
these niches require education (often graduate degrees), so the strong
emphasis on higher education in many racial-ethnic communities is
understandable in light of many obstacles to mobility faced in other routes
(e.g., private business or corporate sectors). Thus, upward social mobility
for women of color is typically to the sex-segregated sectors of the middle
class—the sectors that pay less and wield less power (Higginbotham, 1987a).
The majority of professional and managerial women of color are public sector
employees, and over the last decade, women of color have had less success
moving out of the public into the private sector than their White
counterparts (Higginbotham, 1987b).

In conclusion, it is clear that the opportunities for mobility and the
ways in which people are mobile vary by gender and race. The avenues open
to White men, of staying in the working class and earning a comfortable
living, or of finding economic and social support for a relatively wide
range of possible mobility routes, are greatly reduced for White women.
White women are restricted to mobility through marriage to middle class White men, or through individual attainment in education and occupational systems which steer White women into low paying traditionally female occupations. Women and men of color do not have the sanctioned option of attachment to White men, and face instead, racial barriers to educational achievement, and occupational advancement in a system which leaves men of color with the highest levels of unemployment and women of color steered into the lowest paying of "women's jobs".

The mobility stories of the vast majority of people (i.e., White women and people of color) in no way support a major theme of the research on and mythology about mobility in America: that the system is set up to recognize and reward the talented. The system's gender and race bias ensures that instead much talent goes unrecognized and unrewarded.

**MOTIVATION FOR MOBILITY: MOBILITY FOR WHOM?**

The first theme in the subjective experience of upward mobility to be explored is the motivation for mobility: why do people seek to be mobile? This is a question which takes on very different significance for people of color and Whites. A review of the literature on White male mobility reveals two common assumptions: (1) that despite personal costs, mobility is universally desired; and (2) that the working class is worthless.

The assumption that mobility is a universal goal is so common in the research and popular literature that it is impossible to find a written word asking or answering the question why individuals would want to be mobile. The question is not discussed because the rationale for mobility is so seemingly obvious—anyone with any sense would want to "make it" in America.
Everyone should strive to get ahead. Further, since the early research quite explicitly documented the problems associated with upward mobility for the individual, the failure to address the motivation for mobility seems even more puzzling.

As the literature describes it, mobility is an escape from the working class for White men (Blau, 1956; Ellis and Lane, 1963; Sennett and Cobb, 1972; Strauss, 1971, Stuckert, 1963; Turner, 1964). When a man is upwardly mobile, he improves his ability to provide for his family and performs well the traditional role of family breadwinner. White men are mobile for themselves and their nuclear families. This motivation is highlighted in the common charge (usually to White men) to "make something of yourself". This charge also contains the unstated message that to remain in the working class leaves a person less than "something".

Likewise, a review of the available resources on White female mobility also suggests that mobility is sought for women's personal betterment (Joslin, 1979; Steinitz and Solomon, 1986). Upwardly mobile Whites, both men and women, describe pulls to be middle class, like being driven to seek "the good life," and pushes to escape the working class, like leaving the financial insecurity, lack of material resources, and for some unpleasant family situations (Joslin, 1972; Strauss, 1971; Turner, 1964). For example, Jane Ellen Wilson is a musician, a folklorist and one of the two women in Ryan and Sackrey's (1984: 209) study. She described her motivation for advancement: "Getting married or going to college were the two acceptable ways to leave my family and I bet on education."

People of Color. Racial oppression casts the motivation for mobility in an entirely different light. People of color, like Whites, seek mobility
to improve their own and their family's life circumstances. In addition, however, there is a commitment to racial uplift, "la raza", and so forth, which also drives many racial ethnics to seek upward mobility. Mobility is motivated by a desire to improve the lot of their racial community and thus becomes a collective and not just an individual process (Anthony, 1980). As we shall see in the next section, support for the mobility under these circumstances is broad-based in the community.

In their early socialization, many mobile Blacks are taught that they are personally responsible for the image and uplifting of the race. By advancing and performing well, an individual can demonstrate that Black people are capable of holding responsible positions and thereby increase opportunities for others of the race (Higginbotham, 1980). For example, in her Newsweek essay entitled, "The Middle Class Black's Burden", Leanita McClain (1986: 14), an upwardly mobile Black woman journalist said: "I disprove black inadequacy and prove to my parents' generation that their patience was indeed a virtue."

The commitment to "do it for the race" is often the motivation necessary to keep women and men of color striving to achieve in the face of active discouragement and blocked paths. The belief that individual freedom is tied to collective freedom is a common theme throughout African American history (Brown, 1987). Research and popular literature on people of color is filled with references to the commitment to racial uplift as a motivation for mobility and the obligation to "the race" which accompanies life in the middle class.

Leanita McClain (1986: 15) also succinctly describes these ties—especially to the working class and underclass members of the race:
"These comforts (of the middle class) do not make me less black, nor oblivious to the woe in which many of my people are drowning. As long as we are denigrated as a group, no one of us has made it. Inasmuch as we all suffer for every one left behind, we all gain for every one who conquers the hurdle."

This perspective on the collective motivation for mobility is decidedly missing in traditional research on White Americans. A recent study by Steinitz and Solomon (1986) on White working class baby boomers in a northeastern city indicates that many males and females, especially those in homogeneous working-class communities, seek to be mobile and desire to remain connected to their families and non-college going friends. The authors note that in an era when higher education was becoming accepted by the working-class, only a few of their adolescent subjects "imagined that going to college would take them into world alien to their parents" (p. 4). Their work supports the need for a reexamination of the extent of individualism even among White males.

THE PROCESS OF MOBILITY: THE SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF MOBILITY

How do people personally experience mobility? We discuss five domains of the subjective experience of mobility: (1) the relationship to family of origin and the larger community; (2) the role of marriage; (3) educational experiences; (4) sources of support for mobility; and (5) some personal costs associated with mobility. These five aspects of mobility will be discussed for each group, however, since our primary aim is to begin to stimulate thinking and research on White women and people of color, our discussion of the White men (which is also most familiar) will be brief.

White Men. Early research and writing on White men recognized that mobility would not necessarily be easy for individuals. Those who were
upwardly mobile would have to take on a new reference group, embrace middle-
class values and aspirations, and spend time with "the right people". To
accomplish this, working-class men would be expected to distance themselves
from their families and friends in the working class and to take on a new
set of values (Strauss, 1971).

This distancing process was seen as the price that one would have to
pay to achieve "the good life". An upwardly mobile corporate executive in
Ellen Goodman's (1979:272) study of how people move through major life
changes expresses these mobility issues well: "We were driven. It was
tough for my dad. He drove us out of Gary (Indiana). In a way, he drove us
away from him and yet he was never reconciled to the fact that we did make
it."

In addition to establishing distance from family of origin, the
extended family and their communities, mobile White men were also expected
to raise their job to primacy in their self definition. Even the nuclear
family would be relegated to a secondary place in their lives. Ellen
Goodman's (1979:276) respondent also expresses this priority quite
succinctly, when he stated: "it got to the point where I would have thrown
my family down the toilet for the job."

These emphases on the primacy of work and the nuclear family are in
direct conflict with working-class values where people are appreciated for
"who they are not what they do," and where extended families and the
collective good are revered (Hall, et. al., 1987; Lubeck, 1984; Stack, 1974;
notes, people who are raised in working-class families are forced to make
critical adjustments in their personal relationships in order to cope as
middle-class persons.
Implicit in this picture is devaluation of the role of marriage in the White mobile man's experience, as evidenced by the comment that one would "throw the family down the toilet". In Ryan and Sackrey's (1984) study, few of the men ever mentioned marriage when they described their mobility experiences, so it is impossible to know if they are married or have children. Although, marriage may be seen as desirable, it is certainly not key to the mobility strategies of most White men (except perhaps in the special cases where individuals are expected to have spouses to move up the corporate ladder (Strauss, 1971). In fact, John D’Emilio (1983), in his study of the gay movement in the post World War II era even suggests that a gay lifestyle supported the mobility strategies of some White males. It freed them from the "burden" of having to support a family while they were attempting to overcome class obstacles to attainment.

In short, it is the job which is seen as key to the mobility of White men. Families and broader social systems provide the support for them in their quest—financial, economic, and emotional support buttressed by a socialization for distance and independence, detachment, and rational (economically motivated) decision-making. While it has its' advantages, this mobility route can also be a lonely pursuit. Research by LeMasters (1954:229) in the 1950's indicated that mobile White men felt as if they had deserted their families and had varying degrees of guilt. In addition, he said,

they (the families of mobile individuals) were not real families in the traditional sense; they do not have a common language; in a sense they do not inhabit the same community . . . they live in different social class groups; they very often have quite different value systems.
White Women. In contrast to the detachment and independence of White male mobility, recent research on White women presents a picture of the female experience which emphasizes commitment, interdependence, and affiliations especially with family. Far from a willingness to distance self from family for the greater goal of "making it", social relationships are viewed as the core of women's lives (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982). Jean Baker Miller (1986:83) notes:

women stay with, build on, and develop in the context of attachments and affiliations with others. Indeed, women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then to maintain affiliations and relationships. Eventually, for many women the threat of disruption of an affiliation is perceived not as a loss of a relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self.

The strongest support for upward mobility among White working class women is through marriage to middle-class White men. In our study of upward mobility, this is apparent in the lower levels of support for college and career found among the White raised working-class women. Even though all 200 of these women ultimately graduated from college, White working-class women received less support from family than the Black working-class women or any of the middle-class women.

When asked "Who provided emotional support for you to make the transition from high school to college?" Fifty-six percent (N=28) of the White working-class women indicated that they received support from family. Sixty-four percent (N=32) of the Black working class women indicated that they received support from family. Middle-class Black and White families were most likely to support their daughters: 86 (N=43) and 70 percent (N=35), respectively.
White working-class families in the study were also least likely to encourage their daughters to pursue a career. When asked, "Who, if anyone, encouraged you to think about a career?" Only 40 percent (N=20) of the White working-class women said encouragement came from family, while 52 percent (N=26) of the White raised middle-class women received encouragement from family. Support for careers was higher among the Black women, with 56 percent (N=28) of the raised working-class and 60 percent (N=30) of the raised middle-class women answering that they received encouragement for careers from their families.

Obtaining an education and a middle-class profession for working-class White women often takes place in the face of powerful counter pressures and obstacles. Common ones include: the devaluation of girls' educations and careers (while boys in the same family may be pressured to "make it"), steering to traditionally female occupations, and an emphasis on marriage as the primary life goal. The emphasis on marriage is frequently coupled with a recognition of the need among working-class women to contribute to family income and/or to support oneself economically.

Working-class girls are encouraged to pursue an education as preparation for work in traditionally female fields. Work in these fields presumably allows women to keep marriage, family, and child-rearing as primary life goals while contributing to the family income; and to have "something to fall back on" if the marriage doesn't work out. This complex interplay between marriage, education, and class mobility is revealed below.

Mary Ann Tidwell, a White woman raised-working class in the rural South, is now an environmental manager with a public utility. She has a B.A. and an M.A. in physics. Despite the scarcity of women in her
occupation, Mary’s experiences getting there were not unusual for working
class women of this era. In high school, Mary Ann excelled in science and
math, yet her parents held very traditional expectations for her:

"They wanted me to be a teacher, be married, have grandkids for
them, and live near home. They wanted me to attend school so that
I could support myself in case I . . . ended up with a husband
leaving me. My brothers were encouraged to have a big career, be
something big! Mine was to have financial independence. They
expected the same grades from us, but they didn’t expect a career-
daughter."

Those different expectations for the boys in Mary Ann’s family even
extended to her twin brother. Different family expectations coupled with
limited family resources and her rural education, proved problematic in
college. Mary Ann had done well in math and science in her rural high
school, but had done so without developing study skills. Like many Black
women who attend White colleges after attending schools which did not offer
advanced math and science courses, Mary Ann found the transition to college
courses very hard (Higginbotham, 1980). She recalled:

"In high school . . . I didn’t study. So it was a major change to
be thrown into calculus and some of these other subjects and
discovering you are not as smart as you thought you were when you
were in high school."

The devaluation of her education by family members only added to the
difficulties. She had to attend the closest college which entailed a 60
mile commute each day, live at home, continue with household chores, and
work to pay her expenses. After two difficult years making poor grades,
Mary Ann got a break. Her brother rebelled, quit school, and left home.
Because Mary Ann’s parents didn’t want her driving alone, they allowed her
to move into a dorm on campus. Her GPA went from 1.8 her freshman and sophomore years, to over a 3.0 her junior year, and to 4.0 her senior year.

When working class White women seek to be mobile through their own attainments, they face conflicts. Their parents encourage educational attainment, but when young women develop professional career goals, these same parents can become ambivalent. This was the case with Elizabeth Marlow, who is currently a public interest attorney—a position her parents never intended for her to hold. She described her parents’ traditional expectations and their reluctance to fully support her career goals.

My parents assumed that I would go to college and meet some nice man and finish, but not necessarily work after. I would be a good mother for my children. I don’t think that they ever thought I would go to law school. Their attitude about my interest in law school was, "you can do it if you want to, but we don’t think it is a particularly practical thing for a woman to do."

Elizabeth is married and has three children, but she is not the traditional housewife of her parents’ dreams. She received more support from non-family members for her chosen lifestyle.

Once in college, many women continue to be steered into female-dominated professions. Those who major in male-dominated fields report a variety of obstacles. For example, in Ruddick and Daniels’ (1978) volume women pursuing non-traditional careers describe their struggles. A common theme is that women were unaware of any gender bias in their undergraduate educations (even when they were in male-dominated fields), but they faced tremendous opposition when they began to pursue graduate education in those same fields. Since their earlier treatment had not been perceived as problematic, the women had not expecting to encounter barriers, so this
opposition was difficult to handle. These women, largely White and middle-
class, have contrasting experiences with women of color who face racist
obstacles throughout their schooling, but who are "socialized for survival"—
—that is, to identify racism and to base their self-assessments on internal
standards (Higginbotham, 1980).

Both the structural barriers and the complexity of interpersonal
expectations means that upward social mobility might come with particular
costs for White women. These concerns are voiced in the interviews with
mobile subjects as well as in written accounts of mobility experiences.

The societal pressures to sever ties with one's family of origin and
other working-class relationships conflicts with women's socialization to
attend to the needs of others. White men's socialization prepares everyone,
including parents, to expect social distance to accompany their son's upward
mobility, but this may not be part of a daughter's experience. In fact,
working-class daughters may be expected to maintain close family ties even
while they are mobile, and they are more likely than sons to be called on by
family members to deal with "family problems" (Steinitz and Solomon, 1986).
These expectations may make the mobility itself more difficult to achieve.

Crossing class barriers also involves overcoming financial needs.
Subjectively, economic need is experienced in many ways. Alice Trent, a
raised working-class art historian, felt economic need as pressure to accept
whatever mobility opportunities came her way regardless of any other
considerations: "People look at me and say how much I've 'accomplished',
but I feel that I've been shackled by my working-class origins—that I
couldn't say no to fellowships" (Ryan and Sackrey, 1984:231).

Beyond the pressures to "take" whatever financial opportunities arise,
some women express the sense that being mobile means "giving up" things that
you value, your world view. Jane Ellen Wilson described the process
beautifully: "The whole process of becoming highly educated was for me a
process of losing faith. I was taught not to trust my perceptions, but to
refer to the bibliography and the traditions of my field" (Ryan and Sackrey,

Another theme found in the lives of upwardly mobile women is the
realization that educational and occupational mobility may mean foregoing
marriage. For example, Alice Trent describes these issues:

As a woman, I don’t feel a career—whatever it is—is enough. I
seek emotional fulfillment as well. My ‘differentness’ has meant
that I’ve gone through my teen years alone, and graduate training,
as for many women, made me undesirable to many men. After years
of self, I now seek an other and wonder whether such will ever be
possible in my life as an academic" (Ryan and Sackrey, 1984:233).

In sum, mobility for White women takes place in the context of the same
class-structured society that White men from the working class face. In
addition, working-class women’s doubly vulnerable economic position in the
class-gender system is expressed in White women’s lives as encouragement to
pursue marriage as the primary life goal; to pursue an education to find a
middle-class marriage partner; and to obtain credentials for working in
traditionally female fields like teaching.

For White women, like for many women of color, family members may
provide the motivation for mobility and the support that makes mobility
possible in the face of discriminatory barriers. Pressures to distance self
from family in the mobility process can be especially problematic for women,
whose very mobility may also make marriage less likely. According to Miller
(1976:83), the breakdown or loss of these relationships may be experienced
as something like a "total loss of self". Alice Trent described it as
follows: "One of my biggest problems of these last years has been searching for a way to relate to my parents, the very people who have helped to make the whole thing possible. Once again, it is this 'differentness' that I feel" (Ryan and Sachrey, 1984:232).

**People of Color.** In the context of structures of racial oppression, America's racial-ethnic communities develop values systems that contrast with the individualism of the dominant culture but ensure the community's survival (MoAdoo, 1978; Stack, 1974; Valentine, 1978). Racial-ethnic communities place a high premium on cooperation, interdependence, and a collective sense of responsibility. These values mean that relationships to family and community, sources of support for mobility, the role of marriage, and the nature of educational experiences of mobile people of color differ significantly from those of both White men and women. Because many people of color seek mobility to improve life chances for themselves, their families, and their communities, the process of mobility is more characterized by interdependence, affiliation, and commitment to racial uplift.

MoAdoo (1978) suggests that lacking wealth, the greatest gift a Black family has been able to give to it's children has been the motivation and skills to succeed in school. Aspirations for college attendance and professional positions are stressed as family goals, and the entire family may make sacrifices and provide support. In both studies conducted by the authors, Black women identified family as the major source of the motivation to attend college. When asked: "Where did the idea of going to college come from?" Earnstein Washington, a social worker, described how her
parents' expectations connected with her own personal desires and the goal of helping her community.

My parents always expected to me go to college. In my elementary school in Mississippi, we had split-terms. Schools were closed in the fall so that students could go into the fields and pick cotton. I remember thinking, "If there is any way to get out of this field, I’m gonna take it." At the end of October, I would go back to school, but other children would still be working in the fields. And I thought, "There’s got to be a way to help people do better." That’s when I started thinking about going to college.

McAdoo (1978) argues that Blacks have only been able to advance in education and attain higher status and higher paying jobs with the support of the wider Black community, teachers in segregated schools, extended family networks, and Black mentors already in those positions. This widespread community involvement enables mobile people of color to confront and challenge racist obstacles in credentialing institutions, and it distinguishes the mobility process in racial-ethnic communities from mobility in the dominant culture. For example, Lou Nelson, now a librarian, described the support she felt in her southern segregated inner city school. She said,

There was a closeness between people and that had a lot to do with neighborhood schools. I went to Tubman High School with people that lived in the Tubman area. I think that there was a bond, a bond between parents, the PTA . . . I think that it was just that everybody felt that everybody knew everybody. And that was special."

For racial-ethnics, these strong family and community bonds can also be the source of conflicts and tensions. In our society, social mobility takes place within a system organized around the competition among individuals. Furthermore, upward mobility means entrance into a class whose formal structural relation to the working class is one of control and exploitation,
and whose informal interpersonal relations are often characterized by
devaluation of the labor and lives of working-class people (Braverman, 1974;
Poulantzas, 1975; Vanneman and Cannon, 1987). For people raised in the
working class, these new relations to it can pose intense conflicts. This
is especially the case among racial-ethnics when members of their working
class communities participate in the mobility and are "owed" for their
support.

For example, McAdoo (1978) reports that upwardly mobile Blacks received
more requests from their working-class kin to share resources than Blacks
from the middle class received from their kin. Many mobile Blacks felt a
"social debt", because their families aided them in the mobility process and
continued to provide emotional support. In their study of Black corporate
managers, Davis and Watson (1982:41) report that many

suffered because they were making so much money while many of the
blacks they grew up with, even members of their own families, were
still struggling to survive. Others feel guilty over allowing
themselves to be regimented, their behavior and speech to be
standardized.

Steele (1978), in a study of both mobile and stable Black and White
subjects, found that upwardly mobile Blacks felt controlled by external
forces, as did downwardly mobile and stable Whites. Yet, mobile Blacks were
more likely to be depressed. Steele attributed their depression to
increased vulnerability and insecurity because mobile Blacks were unfamiliar
with higher social circles. It is equally plausible that depression is
related to the conflicts and tensions mobile Blacks experience as they
negotiate relations with family and community.
Looking specifically at professional Black women, Christine Carrington (1980:266) found that the sense of debt can contribute to depression this population:

Depressed black women express strong needs to nurture and "take care of" significant others in their lives—spouses and children. They also feel guilty when engaging in self-enhancing activities, either professionally or personally, that do not directly or indirectly include their families. This sense of guilt is particularly observed in depressed black women who are upwardly mobile.

Women of color. Gender as well as race influences the experience of mobility for women of color. Unlike White women, women of color are typically socialized to view marriage separately from economic security, because securing a racial-ethnic mate does not insure improved economic advantages. Thus, women of color have to be prepared to assume roles in the labor market.

Recognizing these limitations, working-class Black families encourage their daughters to get an education and be prepared to support themselves and, sometimes, their children (Higginbotham, 1981). So Black families socialize all their children for self-sufficiency. It is as critical for their girls' survival as it is for their boys'. In our study of Black and White women, we asked: "Do you recall your mother or father emphasizing that marriage should be your primary life goal?" Lou Nelson's response was typical of the Black working class women. She said:

Never! I can truly remember my parents saying 'I want you to go to school and get your degree, get you a job, then get married if you choose to.' It was always a case of you being in a position to get married if you choose to marry and not having to rely on a man to provide you with food and clothing and things of that sort. They said, 'Always be able to take care of yourself'.
Janice Freeman, now a college professor, responded similarly, "The main thing that they wanted me to do was to become financially independent. I mean be stable and be able to take care of myself and not be a burden to anybody."

While singlehood might be part of a successful mobility strategy (Higginbotham, 1981), many Black women also regret missed opportunities. There are many journalistic accounts of how professional and managerial Black women find their singlehood troublesome (Campbell, 1984).

While Black families are more likely than White families to encourage their daughters to prepare for careers, they are similar to White families, in directing their daughters towards traditionally female occupations such as teacher, nurse, and social worker. This is particularly true of working-class families, who lacked knowledge about the range of middle class occupations and steer their daughters towards a few highly visible employment options. In the end, Black and White working-class women may be steered towards the same few visible occupations.

For example, Lynn Johnson was encouraged by her working-class mother to get a degree in education, but instead, she had majored in economics and never told her mother until graduation day. She described her encounter,

Momma said, "Be a teacher." That's all she wanted me to do. . . . She came to my graduation from Regional College and she got my degree, and it said Bachelor of Science in Economics. Momma said, "Girl, what are you gonna teach? They don't teach Economics, . . . and you can't type either!" I said, "That's right Momma, I sure can't." "Well, I want to see you get a job with this!" She threw that degree back at me. Oh, she was so mad! She has since learned better, but initially she was really hurt, because she thought my only option was to teach.

While both Black and White women are increasing their numbers in traditionally male professions (Sokoloff, 1987), it is difficult to decipher
if mobiles or stables are the pioneers in these fields. It is possible that a majority of working class women, especially Black women, continue to join the ranks of public school teachers, social welfare workers, public health nurses, and public librarians (Higginbotham, 1987b).

**Crossing the Color Line.** Mobility for people of color is complex because in addition to crossing class lines, mobility often means crossing racial and cultural ones as well. Since the 1960’s, people of color have increasingly attended either integrated or predominantly White schools. Only mobile White ethnics have a comparable experience of simultaneously crossing class and cultural barriers, yet even this experience is qualitatively different from that of Blacks and other people of color. White ethnicity can be practically invisible to White middle-class school peers and co-workers, but people of color are more visible and are subjected to harsher treatment. Our research indicates that no matter when people of color first encounter integrated or predominantly White settings, it is always a shock. The experience of racial exclusion cannot prepare people of color to deal with the racism in daily face-to-face encounters with Whites.

Linda Trott, a working-class Black woman raised in the North, was one of three Black students in the highest track of her integrated junior high school. This was the educational track designed to lead to a college preparatory program in high school. While college was her ultimate goal, there were personal dilemmas associated with her token position in this class. She recalled:

There I was sitting in this class, trying to decide whether or not it was worth it. It might be better to mess up and get put in the next class, where I knew there were more Black kids. So I was quite unhappy. I did not like it. I was now at the bottom of the totem pole.
Linda’s educational advantages came at a price. She tolerated years of neglect in predominantly White classrooms in junior and senior high schools because she was intent upon mobility. This is a common saga, especially for Northern Black Americans who attended schools in the 1950s and 1960s, when there were still few Black teachers in Northern public school systems. These students were highly visible tokens and they keenly felt the pressures to succeed for their families and the larger Black community (Higginbotham, 1985).

Lynn Johnson was in the first Black cohort to attend Regional College. The self-confidence and stamina she developed in her supportive segregated high school helped her withstand the racism she faced as the first female and the first Black to graduate in Economics at Regional College. Lynn described her treatment:

I would come into class and Dr. Simpson (the Economics professor) would alphabetically call the roll. When he came to my name, he would just jump over it. He would not ask me any questions, he would not do anything. I stayed in that class. I struggled through. When it was my turn, I'd start talking. He would say, "Johnson, I wasn’t talking to you" (because he never said Miss Johnson). I’d say, "That’s all right, Dr. Simpson, it was my turn. I figured you just overlooked me. I’m the littlest person in here. Wasn’t that the right answer?" He would say, "Yes, that was the right answer." I drove him mad, I really did. He finally got used to me and started to help me.

In a Southern city, where previous interaction between Blacks and Whites followed a rigid code, adjustments were necessary on both sides. It was clear to Lynn Johnson and others that college faculty and students had to adapt to her small Black cohort at Regional College.
For some Black women, their first significant interaction with Whites did not come until graduate school. Janice Freeman described her experiences:

I went to a Black high school, a Black college and then worked for a Black man who was a former teacher. Everything was comfortable until I had to go to State College for graduate school. I felt very insecure. I was thrown into an environment that was very different—during the 1960s and 1970s there was so much unrest anyway—so it was extremely difficult for me.

It wasn’t in graduate school, but on her first job as a social worker that Janice had to learn to work with White people. She said, "After I realized that I could hang in school, working at the social work agency allowed me to learn how to work with White people. I had never done that before and now I do it better than anybody."

Other people of color face similar barriers. While he emphasizes the importance of being able to speak English to move within the "public" world, Richard Rodriguez (1983) also captures the trauma of moving from his supportive Spanish speaking Mexican family into the Anglo world. There, formal interaction was conducted in English, and he was transformed from Pacho into "Rich-heard Road-ree-guess." When interviewed on television after the publication of her book, Chinamen, Maxine Hong Kingston (1980) said the hardest think she ever did in her life was to leave her family in Stockton, California and go to college at Berkeley.

The dilemmas of resolving a commitment to one’s racial group with the demands of individual mobility are common for many men and women from traditionally oppressed racial groups. Yet, there is little societal acknowledgement of these difficulties nor assistance for mobile people of color. Instead, they must struggle with these issues in a society that
assumes mobile individuals are mobile solely for personal gain; are
socialized for independence; will be rewarded for their efforts; and are
emotionally prepared to make breaks with family of origin at the appropriate
time.

These tensions are vividly captured in the work of John Edgar Wideman.
Both his fiction and non-fiction tell the story of his own mobility and the
family he left behind in a Pittsburgh ghetto. Wideman is now a successful
college professor and writer, who has a brother serving a life sentence in
prison. Even as a high school student, Wideman had to bridge a gap between
two worlds. "Easier to change the way I talked and walked, easier to be two
people than to expose in either world the awkward mix of school and home
that I'd become" (Wideman, 1984:32).

The transition into college further complicated his life. As one of
ten Black students in a freshman class of 1700 at the University of
Pennsylvania, Wideman (1984: 33) experienced the pressures of being a token.
In college he found himself

losing contact with the truth of my own feelings. Not trusting,
not confiding in anyone else, learning to mistrust and deny my own
responses left me no solid ground, nowhere to turn. I was an
expert at going with the flow, protecting myself by taking on the
emotional and intellectual coloring of whatever circumstances I
found myself in.

Yet, there was no possibility of reclaiming his old world. "Away from
school I worked hard at being the same old home boy everybody remembered,
not because I identified with that mask but because I didn't want you all to
discover I was a traitor" (Wideman, 1984:33). It took Wideman years of
self-exploration to provide readers with a honest account of his experiences
and his relationship with his family.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper offers a critique of traditional research and identifies some themes to guide the development of a race and gender inclusive theory of the subjective experience of upward mobility in America. We asked how race and gender might shape: the structural obstacles to mobility and people's experiences of them; the motivations for mobility; the sources of support for mobility; the role of marriage in mobility; and the personal costs of different mobility paths.

Our review suggests that theories of upward mobility in America must be race and gender specific. Virtually everything about the process of social mobility is shaped by race and gender inequalities so race and gender specific theory should better represent the mobility experiences of White men as well as White women and people of color. Just as racism and sexism limit opportunities for White women and people of color, they enhance opportunities for White men. But the nature of privilege is such that it is taken for granted in the lives of the privileged. It is only in comparison with those for whom advantage is absent that the full meaning of privilege is revealed. Thus, theories of mobility that have focused solely on White men have been incorrect because they have not addressed various dimensions of mobility which are most visible in the mobility of White women and people of color.

Several core themes emerged to characterize the mobility experiences of White women and people of color. They include: the simultaneous experience of multiple forms of oppression (race, class and gender); the significance
of affiliations with family, community, and the race; and unique personal costs and struggles.

First, when men of color and women are mobile, they often cross color and gender barriers at the same time that they cross class lines. For many, upward mobility is subjectively experienced and understood in conjunction with the experience of "desegregating" institutions along race and/or gender lines. The "token" experience involves heightened visibility to those around you—the "fishbowl phenomenon"; increased pressures to perform; and feelings that one’s actions will reflect on the entire race (and for some women, on the gender) as well as on one’s own career.

Second, central to the mobility of White women and people of color are their affiliations with family, community and the race. Among White men, the motivation for mobility is personal, the primary strategy is to compete as individuals, to out perform others, and to reap the rewards available in the system. Middle-class standing can be achieved in many ways. It is expected that mobile White men will distance themselves from families and take on a new set of values.

For White women and people of color, the mobility process is better seen as one in which people are tied to oppressed communities, and have a limited range of socially sanctioned avenues through which to achieve some power and economic security. As members of oppressed groups, their motives, strategies, routes, and goals are often at odds with dominant culture ideology and behavior. As a consequences, mobility is more characterized by conflict and a lifelong process of negotiating and renegotiating interpersonal associations and commitments.

Third, White women and people of color pay a personal price for their mobility. The costs range from withstanding personal assaults (like having
your name changed), to a sense of aloneness, to guilt at not doing enough for others. The mobility process poses problems throughout the life cycle, many of which are tied to the renegotiation of affiliations. For example, one central problem for mobile individuals is how they relate to the class from where they came. They negotiate their new relationships to the working class: in relations with working class family and friends, with members of the race who may have sponsored their mobility, with working class subordinates on the job, and with new middle-class peers. Struggling to find comfort in these relationships was a prevalent theme among the mobile adults who lives are reviewed.

Alice Trent continues to struggle to find a way to relate to her parents "...the very people who have helped to make this whole thing possible" (Ryan and Sachrey, 1984:232). Black corporate managers resolved their relationship to the working class in many ways. "Some . . . did everything they could to avoid identifying with the black masses from which they sprang, while others wanted to cling tenaciously to an identification with past and culture, sometimes in rebelliously immature ways" (Davis and Watson (1982:39)

Maria Diaz, a Puerto Rican attorney interviewed in 1981 by the senior author, resolved the conflict by holding on to working class values and rejecting the materialism of the middle class. When Maria was pregnant, her mother, who worked in a garment factory, lamented that she had been unable to give Maria the material advantages that Maria would now be able to give her own child. Maria responded to her mother, "Oh, you gave me alot. You taught me everything you knew and when you learned new things, you taught them to me. But most of all you taught me about injustice." And John Edgar Wideman (1984:26) vividly describes how he was able to deal with his
family across the different worlds: "The problem was that in order to be the person I thought I wanted to be, I believed I had to seal myself off from you (his brother), construct a wall between us." Over time, he has reached the point where he no longer needs the shell to protect himself.

When we take account of White women and people of color, mobility can no longer be viewed as the universally desired process of individual competition and success in climbing the social ladder, separating from family, shedding working class values and blending (even if somewhat uneasily) into the middle class. Instead the experiences of White women and people of color suggest that mobility is motivated by a desire for personal but collective gain, is defined by interpersonal commitments to family, community, and the race; and involves competition but also cooperation, community support, and personal obligations.
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APPENDIX 1

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