

## **Social Class: Conflict and Creativity**

### **Workshop**

### ***Cultures, Conflict and Creativity...***

**15<sup>th</sup> European Symposium in Group Analysis**

**London, United Kingdom**

**September 1, 2011**

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This experiential workshop will explore the meaning and functions of social class in the context of psychodynamic group psychotherapy. The participants will have an opportunity to see how the issue of status and social class in themselves and their patients affects the therapeutic process. The repression of our feelings about social class, its use as a resistance, and its effect on transference, countertransference, subgrouping, and impasses will be explored.

We will offer mini-lectures and brief exercises to highlight awareness, membership, and identity of status and social class. We will then use this information to examine the impact of social class and status on the therapeutic process in ourselves and our patients.

#### **What would you like to see participants draw from the presentation?**

1. A greater awareness of status and social class issues and their impact on the therapeutic process.
2. Learning to make creative use of social class issues in the context of group.
3. Greater freedom to identify and creatively use the conflicts that develop around class and status issues in group psychotherapy.

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# DSM OF CLASS

## DSM II—Rich-Poor

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If the popular number of classes is three, the number sociologists seem to favor is five:

Upper  
Upper middle  
Middle  
Lower middle  
Lower

## DSM III

And trying to count the classes, some people simply give up, finding, like John Brooks in *Showing Off in America* (1981), that "in the new American structure there seem to be an almost infinite number of classes," or like the man in Boston asked about class there who said, "You have too many classes for me to count and name. . . . Hell! There may be fifteen or thirty." (He then added, like a good American, "Anyway, it doesn't matter a damn to me.")

My researches have persuaded me that there are nine classes in this country, as follows:

Top out-of-sight  
Upper  
Upper middle

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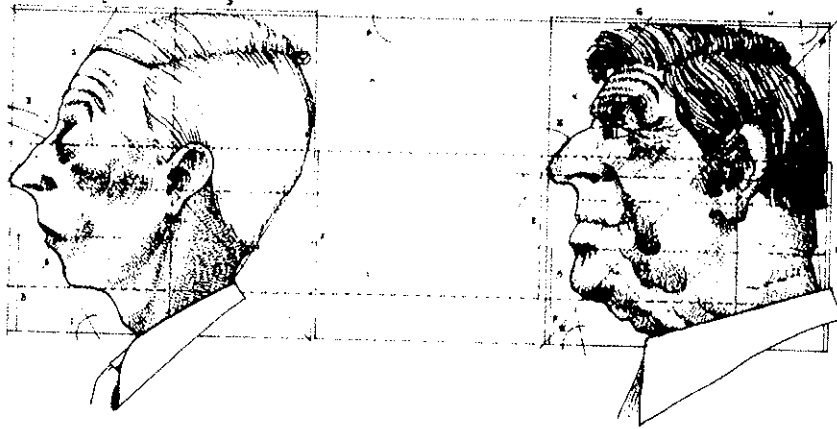
Middle  
High proletarian  
Mid-proletarian  
Low proletarian

## DSM IV

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Destitute  
Bottom out-of-sight

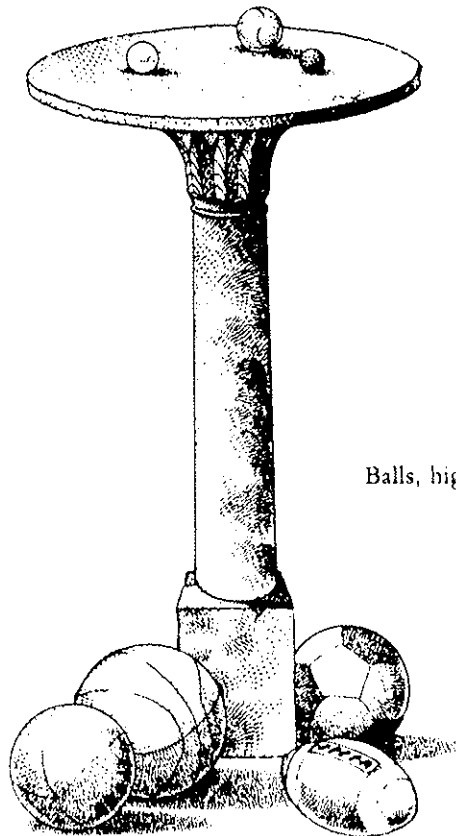
One thing to get clear at the outset is this: it's not riches alone that defines these classes. "It can't be money," one working man says quite correctly, "because nobody ever knows that about you for sure." Style and taste and awareness are as important as money. "Economically, no doubt, there are only two classes, the rich and the poor," says George Orwell, "but socially there is a whole hierarchy of classes, and the manners and traditions learned by each class in childhood are not only very different but—this is the essential point—generally persist from birth to death. . . . It is . . . very difficult to escape, culturally, from the



Upper-middle and prole profiles  
(after Molloy)

CLASS

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Balls, high and low

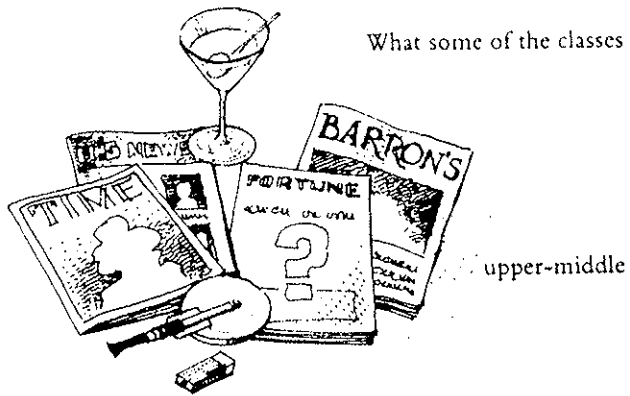


"Your weight is an advertisement of your social standing."



Drinks of the classes: left, the upper-middle scotch and water; center, the middle-class bourbon and ginger, with decorations and cutesies; right, high-prole beer in legible vessel which replaces the can on special occasions

What some of the classes like to take in



<b>Privileged Childhood</b>	<b>Privileged Adulthood</b>
<b>Under-Privileged Childhood</b>	<b>Under-Privileged Adulthood</b>

**Place yourself in one of the above categories and discuss it with your subgroup. Focus on the type of power relationships that you were aware of between groups.**

**Fussell, P. (1983). *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System*. New York: Simon & Schuster.**

Original paintings, drawings, or prints by family members	subtract 4 (each) add 5
Windows curtained, rods and draw cords	add 2
Windows curtained, no rods or draw cords	add 3
Genuine Tiffany lamp	subtract 4
Reproduction Tiffany lamp	subtract 3
Any work of art depicting cowboys	
"Professional" oil portrait of any member of the household	subtract 3
Any display of "collectibles"	subtract 4
Transparent plastic covers on furniture	subtract 6
Furniture upholstered with any metallic threads	subtract 3
Cellophane on any lampshade	subtract 4
No ashtrays	subtract 2
Refrigerator, washing machine, or clothes dryer in living room	subtract 6
Motorcycle kept in living room	subtract 10
Periodicals visible, laid out flat:	
<i>National Enquirer</i>	subtract 6
<i>Popular Mechanics</i>	subtract 5
<i>Reader's Digest</i>	subtract 3
<i>National Geographic</i>	subtract 2
<i>Smithsonian</i>	subtract 1
<i>Scientific American</i>	subtract 1
<i>New Yorker</i>	add 1
<i>Town and Country</i>	add 2
<i>New York Review of Books</i>	add 5
<i>Times Literary Supplement</i> (London)	add 5
<i>Paris Match</i>	add 6
<i>Hudson Review</i>	add 8
Each family photograph (black-and-white)	subtract 2
Each family photograph (color)	subtract 3
Each family photograph (black-and-white or color) in sterling-silver frame	add 3
Ported citrus tree with midget fruit growing	add 8
Potted palm tree	add 5
Bowling-ball carrier	subtract 6
Fishbowl or aquarium	subtract 4
Fringe on any upholstered furniture	subtract 4
Identifiable Naugahyde aping anything customarily made of leather	subtract 3

## THE LIVING-ROOM SCALE

(Revised)

(An early, primitive form of this was promulgated in 1935 by F. Stuart Chapin in his book *Contemporary American Institutions*.)

Begin with a score of 100. For each of the following in your living room (or those of friends or acquaintances) add or subtract points as indicated. Then ascertain social class according to the table at the end.

Hardwood floor	add 4
Parquet floor	add 8
Stone floor	add 4
Vinyl floor	subtract 6
Wall-to-wall carpet	add 2
Working fireplace	add 4
New Oriental rug or carpet	subtract 2 (each)
Worn Oriental rug or carpet	add 5 (each)
Threadbare rug or carpet	add 8 (each)
Ceiling ten feet high, or higher	add 6
Original paintings by internationally recognized practitioners	add 8 (each)
Original drawings, prints, or lithographs by internationally recognized practitioners	add 5 (each)
Reproductions of any Picasso painting, print, or anything	subtract 2 (each)



- Any item exhibiting words in an ancient or modern foreign language (Spanish excluded)
- Wooden venetian blinds
- Metal venetian blinds
- Tabletop obelisk of marble, glass, etc.
- No periodicals visible
- Fewer than five pictures on walls
- Each piece of furniture over 50 years old
- Bookcase(s) full of books
- Any leather bindings more than 75 years old
- Bookcase(s) partially full of books
- Overflow books stacked on floor, chairs, etc.
- Hutch bookcase ("wall system") displaying plates, pots, porcelain figurines, etc., but no books
- Wall unit with built-in TV, stereo, etc.
- On coffeetable, container of matchbooks from funny or anomalous places
- Works of sculpture (original, and not made by householder or any family member)
- Works of sculpture made by householder or any family member
- Every item alluding specifically to the United Kingdom
- Any item alluding, even remotely, to Tutankhamen
- Each framed certificate, diploma, or testimonial
- Each "laminated" ditto
- Each item with a "tortoiseshell" finish, if only made of Formica
- Each "Eames chair"
- Anything displaying the name or initials of anyone in the household
- Curved moldings visible anywhere in the room

add 7  
 subtract 2  
 subtract 4  
 add 9  
 subtract 5  
 subtract 5  
 add 2  
 add 7  
 add 6  
 add 5  
 add 6  
 subtract 4  
 subtract 4  
 add 1  
 add 4 (each)  
 subtract 5 (each)  
 add 1  
 subtract 4  
 subtract 2  
 subtract 3  
 add 1  
 subtract 2  
 subtract 4  
 add 5

## CALCULATING THE SCORE

245 and above Upper class  
 185-245 Upper-middle  
 100-185 Middle  
 50-100 High prole  
 Below 50 Mid- or low prole

## Exercises

### LEARNING TO DRAW CLASS INFERENCES

(Answers at end of Exercise)

Indicate the class of each of the following:

1. A small girl who gives this account of her first visit to a symphony concert: "A waiter came out and tried to beat the band with a little stick."
2. A 50-year-old man on the deck of a 35-foot Chris-Craft, drinking from a can of Bud and attended by three luscious girls wearing halters and inexpensive white yachting caps.
3. A clean-cut young man on a plane. He's dressed in a three-piece dark suit, with a white shirt and conservative tie, and as he talks to his neighbor you can pick out words like *interface*, *funding*, *dialogue*, *life-style*, and *bottom line*.
4. A clean-cut young man on a plane. He's dressed in a three-piece dark suit, with a white shirt and conservative tie, and as he talks to his neighbor you can pick out words like *patina* (pronounced not just correctly but assertively and elegantly), *quattrocento*, and *the V and A*.
5. A young woman lawyer in a large New York firm who likes to watch Shakespeare on Educational Television and to frequent restaurants said to serve gourmet food. "*The New Yorker* is practically my Bible," she says.
6. A middle-aged woman professor of classical epigraphy at a large and old East Coast university who spends her summers on digs in Anatolia and her winters copulating with a much younger

boyfriend. Her mother was an orderly in a woman's prison, her father a high-school teacher of woodshop. Both were avid churchgoers.

7. A man in his late twenties wearing three shirts at once. The undermost one is bright red, then there's a yellow one, and the one on top is a light-blue Oxford-cloth button-down.

8. A small-town barber whose wife is getting very fat.

9. A boy and girl in their twenties on a flight from New York to Los Angeles. They both wear dirty, raggedy jeans, and the boy's cotton shirt is faded and torn. Beneath her shirt you can clearly see her nipples. They both wear moccasins without soles, and without socks.

## ANSWERS

### (LEARNING TO DRAW CLASS INFERENCES)

1. This girl's class depends on the way the conductor was dressed. If he was in white tie, the girl's probably upper-class. If he was dressed otherwise, she's upper-middle—no little girls below upper-middle would be taken to the symphony.
2. He's a high prole, and he's saved all his life for that horrible boat. If he'll take the caps off the girls and pour his beer into a glass, he might pass for middle-class, or even upper-middle if he gets the girls into men's old shirts with the tails hanging out.
3. This guy's middle-class or even high-prole, a trainee with some hypertrophied corporation on his way to a "conference." He thinks he's giving off an upper-middle-class effect, but boy, is he wrong. He thinks he's going to be high in the company someday, but he's wrong there, too.
4. This guy's either upper-middle or upper. He's inherited some money, but he still enjoys doing a little work if it's appropriate—in his case, either part-time museum curatorship or light work in a gallery classy enough to deal in non-contemporary art. His friends will roll their eyes with astonishment if he ever marries.
5. She is hopelessly middle-class, and probably consumed with secret bitterness that she's not made upper-middle.

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6. Category X, obviously, which makes the family background irrelevant, thrown in here merely as a smokescreen.
7. He is not insane, merely upper-middle-class displaying his command of layering. If he's stepped out of a very dirty old Chevrolet, he's probably upper-class.
8. He is barely a craftsman, but still he is one, and so he qualifies as a high prole. But if his wife gets much fatter, he will sink to mid-prole.
9. They are either upper-class or category X, engaged in the *épater-les-bourgeois* act of dressing way down for travel. If they were middle-class or prole they'd be dressed way up. Watch them closely. If they take off their moccasins and pad up and down the aisle in bare feet, they're probably category X. The nipples already argue category X.

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HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL  
PRESS

## DAY JOB

*Street vendor.*

I work a coffee-and-doughnut pushcart in lower Manhattan. The day for me starts at 5 A.M. That's when I meet the truck that comes to unload the cart on the street. Usually, the gas is already lit and the water is heating up. I can start making the coffee as soon as the truck leaves. Then, later, another little truck comes around with boxes of pastry.

The first customers start trickling in at six. From seven until eleven, it's a big flood of people. I go through about ten or twelve pounds of coffee in a morning. After that slows down, I clean up and then usually sit down on the milk crate. Maybe look at the paper. After the lunch hour people come again, although not like the morning, and then I start closing everything down. About two-thirty or so, the truck comes back and loads up the cart.

Having to deal with the public, it's pretty much constant working. But it's an O.K. living. I would be lucky if I owned my own cart, but the cart licenses are expensive. And it's really hard work. You're out there in the freeze of the winter and the heat of the summer. It's also pretty unsafe doing this. Sometimes you get held up early in the morning. I protected myself with a pot of boiling water one time. A guy showed me something sticking up out of his pocket—it might have been a pipe, I don't know. I had fifteen dollars in my money bag. I wasn't about to give it to this guy. I picked up the bucket of water and heaved it at him. It was wintertime and he had a big army coat on, but he leaped back and took off.

The worst thing is the customers, almost all of whom are appallingly hateful, horrible people. I mostly work Wall Street, and the worst class of people are in the tan raincoats and business suits. The stockbrokers and people who work in the offices are just horrendous.

And they're all very particular about their coffee. You gotta put your little cream in, your sugar, however you make it just so. It makes it a drag to be selling coffee. They stick their heads right into the cart and tell you what to do. I'm always feeling like I want to punch their head back out again. I've gotten to where I can't stand people, especially the yuppies and the businesspeople. I really loathe them, so much so that I can't watch TV, because the male newscasters look just like the customers. You know? They have that haircut. Just the sound, the click and scrape of a briefcase being put down when they go to get their stupid, fat wallet out, makes me cringe. And they make this ugly gesture, reaching in between their legs where their coat is buttoned to pull back their coat and get their wallet, usually out of their front pocket. The women are just as bad, wearing their stupid running shoes with their little female business suits. They are just hateful.

—Interviewed by Dana Rouse



STEPHEN KRONINGER

**Blackwell, D. (1998). Comment on paper by L. Stork. *Group Analysis*, 31, 116-120**

It is commonly said that, in England, class is where you come from. In the USA class is where you have got to....

As George Bernard Shaw remarked, 'All professions are conspiracies against the laity' (*The Doctor's Dilemma*, 1934)....

For me, as the son of a trade union organizer, to identify myself as middle class by virtue of my status as psychotherapist, university graduate, associate editor of a professional journal or whatever, is not only to signal a change of culture or to claim a success in upward mobility but, more importantly, it is an act of betrayal. It is not an oedipal triumph in going beyond and achieving more than my father, it is in fact a rejection of that conflict, a refusal to aim for the same goal, a denial of the very identity and relationship upon which my oedipal rivalry can be based; a denial that I am, in fact, his son. In that moment I am not Oedipus but Othello—a stranger in an alien land, seduced into destroying the thing he loves, and bereft of an authentic identity, identified only with the oppressor. It is this particular alienation which is, as far as I know, recognized nowhere within the psychotherapeutic discourse....

I drew attention [in my article on racism] to the problems of being the only member of the oppressed group, of the need for the conductor to initiate analysis of these issues of oppression and the way in which, in the context of oppression, there tended to develop a competition for 'victim' status. I think it is significant that I made those points in relation to identities rooted in phenomena other than class, the phenomenon that I personally experience most immediately. Indeed, my one effort to address the class issue in a conference presentation remains unwritten-up and unpublished. To speak on behalf of black people who are my clients and friends, and to own up as white person with a racist unconscious is difficult enough. But to speak from my own specific class identity, to struggle with an internal and an external conflict has proved even more so. I am only too aware of the readiness with which such claims are interpreted as a chip on the shoulder, an antediluvian world view, a paranoid-schizoid split, an outdated and rigid ideological position and such other labels as the psychotherapeutic and contemporary political discourses have available to them to defend themselves against such problematics....