

**A FALL FROM GRACE?
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF DOWNWARD INTRAGENERATIONAL
MOBILITY**

JASON N. HOULE

The Pennsylvania State University
Department of Sociology & Population Research Institute

ABSTRACT

This study assesses the psychological impact of downward intragenerational mobility from the middle class. Recent qualitative research suggests that downward mobility from the middle class causes a great deal of psychological distress, self-blame, and mental anguish. However, this work has left it unclear as to whether or not the diminished psychological well-being of the downwardly mobile is an effect of their downward mobility, or the result of landing in a lower social class that carries greater psychological burdens for all of those who inhabit it. Using data from the Wisconsin Longitudinal I use Diagonal Mobility Models to estimate the association between downward mobility from the professional and petty bourgeoisie classes and psychological distress and self-acceptance. After accounting for origin and destination effects, I find that the downwardly mobile are not at any greater risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes than their nonmobile counterparts. Insofar that the downwardly mobile middle class are distressed and have poor psychological functioning, it seems to be the result of living in and acculturating to their destination social class, not their downward mobility, per se.