

Mr. R: . . . so, ah, we're always—somebody doing something for one another; yet in their minds, they're always doing for me. I'm not doing for them, they're always doing for me. If Daddy will get a cramp in his left leg, "Ooh, Jill, I got a cramp in my left leg, ah, work it out for me." So Jill will put a little alcohol on it, or hot cloth, and she'll massage me, so on and so forth. And I'll do it for Steve, I'll do a little something for Jill. Laura—in the last year or so, ah, we seem not to have done too much for one another, have we? (*Jill turns and looks at Laura, who does not respond.*)

Dr. M: (*to Laura*) No?

Laura: (*softly*) No.

Mr. R: Laura used to comb my hair, rub my back, and so on.

Dr. M: Ah, Dad is describing a lot of nurturance going between him and the kids. (*to Mrs. R*) Where are you when all that happens.

Mrs. R: Well, sometimes I'm just laying on the bed, you know, watching TV with them. Ah, sometimes she'll want her back rubbed, I'll rub her back—he'll want his back rubbed. Other times I'll just be sitting on the bed, either doing needlepoint, or maybe I'll be going down to the kitchen and emptying the dishwasher, or heating up coffee or . . .

Dr. M: Daddy's a cuddler, he likes to cuddle, he likes the children to cuddle with him . . .

Mrs. R: Yeah, he enjoys that at night.

Dr. M: (*to Mrs. R*) What about you, are you a cuddler?

Mrs. R: Am I? Ah, not as much as him I guess. Ah—I don't know, I'm always busy in the house it seems. I don't know, I'm folding clothes and putting them away, or . . .

Dr. M: Do you like to cuddle with him?

Mrs. R: Yeah, (*laughing*)

Dr. M: But he likes to cuddle with the kids?

Mr. R: Yeah.

Dr. M: Sometimes would you like him to drop the kids, and be with you alone?

Mrs. R: No! No, absolutely not. (*shaking her head*)

Dr. M: There are times in which you say to the kids, O.K. kids, it's the end of—you leave because it is now time for . . .

Mrs. R: No.

Dr. M: . . . time for me and daddy alone?

Mrs. R: Never! Never!

Dr. M: The door of your room, do you leave it open during the evening?

Mrs. R: Always.

Dr. M: Always open. (*to Dr. B*) I would expect that.

Mrs. R: In fact, I don't even like the children to close theirs, which they very rarely do for sleeping—they do for (*inaudible words*).

A: This is a revealing scene. Minuchin asks about the disagreements, Jill starts to tell him, and what he gets is a complete denial from the father that there are any. Or not a denial, but the father turns it around so that what comes out is a narration about family closeness. At the same time, all the information about the relationships spills out.

O: At the beginning, why did Minuchin go over and rumple Jill's hair?

A: He thought she meant father criticized her for having messy hair. This is a technique Minuchin often uses. He will ask people to re-enact an issue: "Play it back for me."

O: The father says Minuchin doesn't understand.

A: That's true, he didn't. Jill meant that sometimes father asks her to comb his hair, and she doesn't want to. But the father, in setting Minuchin straight, takes the issue of disagreement and buries it. Instead, you get this idyllic picture of how everybody cuddles on the bed before bedtime, and father gets the children to comb his hair, and look for dandruff in it, and massage his legs.

O: You could interpret this as a symbolic statement about incest. Apparently Laura and her father did this a lot before she began to mature. He says now they don't do it so much, so it has turned into a kind of avoidance. But he is still very involved with her.

A: You could also interpret it structurally. There is no boundary between this father and his kids. Family therapists who think along structural lines see a "healthy" family as one where there are clear demarcations between the generations.⁴ Within each generation level, there will be strong ties, as well as adequate differentiation between individuals. The pair that is the governing unit, the parents, have to have a particularly strong alliance and clearly worked-out areas of functioning special to each. The same is true of children, except that differentiation with them should be appropriate to age. Of course, much of this will be defined by the culture, but the general rule of clear generation lines and adequate differentiation will hold. In an "unhealthy" family, or what Minuchin sometimes calls an "enmeshed" family, there is a blurring of the generation lines and a lack of differentiation. So this is what the therapist goes for. Here Minuchin has

⁴Cf. S. Minuchin, "Structural Family Therapy," in Arieti, S. (Ed.), *American Handbook of Psychiatry* Vol. III, in press; also, Haley, J., "Toward a Theory of Pathological Systems," in Zuk, G. and Boszormenyi-Nagy, L., (Eds.), *Family Therapy and Disturbed Families*, Palo Alto, Calif., Science and Behavior Books, 1969.