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AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE
SIGNIFICANT OTHERS CONCEPT

BY

EUGENE GILBERT PENISTON

A research report submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree Master of Education, Department of
Education, South Dakota State
College of Agriculture
and Mechanic Arts

August, 1962

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EGP

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In recent years the field of social psychology with its traditional emphasis on the importance of inter-personal relations, a new concept, i.e. "significant others" has gained some stature. The term itself was introduced by Harry S. Sullivan¹ and since has come to be used extensively by many other writers in the field.² Notwithstanding the apparent popularity of the concept, little if anything has been done with it, either clinically or in research, and there is little consensus on the meaning of the concept itself.

Statement of the Problem

It is the purpose of this study to (1) develop an objective instrument for identifying "significant others" and (2) present some evidence concerning the validity and reliability of this measuring instrument. In particular, this study will focus on adolescent patterns of "significant other" relations, especially focusing on the role of parents as "significant others" for the adolescent.

¹Harry Stack Sullivan, Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry, pp. 19-29, W. W. Norton and Co., New York, 1953.

²Tamotsu Shibutani, Society and Personality, p. 339, Prentice Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1961.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The orientation from which this study stems may be termed an interactionist position. It views man as living in inter-personal networks. Man is seen as a social animal and only develops his human qualities through association and interaction with others. In this symbolic environment of the individual, created by communication and language, it is not surprising to find that other persons constitute the most important objects for the individual. Only through communication with others can the individual come to see himself as an object and orient himself to his fellow man.

The individual's attitudes and behavior may be and often are influenced by many other people who stand in a variety of relationships to him or with whom he is in some contact. Not all others are equally significant for the individual, certain others stand out or have a special degree of influence on the individual. These we shall simply call "significant others."³

Relationships to "significant others" can be characterized as positive in their affect, intimate or close, featuring a high degree of positive identification, warm and accepting, and sympathetic.⁴ To

³Ibid.

⁴The possibility that still another form of significant other relations can exist, namely a negative one, or one featuring the exact opposites of a positive relationship as described here should be mentioned.

the extent that an individual's relationship with another does not embody these characteristics it is considered as a secondary or relatively superficial one. Most of modern man's relationships to others in a mass culture, such as ours, is of the latter type.

Through his relationships with these "significant others" the individual is provided with a set of stable reference points for viewing himself and the world around him. He can, through taking the other's perspective or empathizing with them, develop and maintain a consistent self image as well as some sort of favorable or positive evaluation of himself as an object. Without such strong, positive relations with "significant others," identity becomes problematical and unstable and behavior becomes erratic and unpredictable.

"Significant others" are also important sources of influence in that they come to represent or embody societies norms and values for the individual. Through "significant others" the individual becomes motivated to play roles appropriately and thus meet the demands and expectations placed on him.⁵

"Significant others" also function as the enforcers of norms and are the prime agents of social control.⁶ To the extent that the individual internalizes their norms and values and to the extent that he heeds their wishes, he is exercising self control.

⁵Nelson Foote, "Identification as the Basis for a Theory of Motivation," The American Sociological Review, pp. 14-21, XVI, 1951.

⁶C. A. Hickman and M. H. Kuhn, Individuals, Groups and Economic Behavior, pp. 21-46, Dryden Press, New York, 1956.

Adolescence or the teen-age period as it is now called is usually viewed as a period of transition for the individual. The period represents a state in development where the individual is changing from the roles and status of a child to that of an adult. At the same time it represents the individual's introduction to the larger society in contrast to his earlier absorption with family as a primary group. No longer are parents and other family members the only "significant others" on the individual's horizon, now they must give way to friends, teachers and a variety of other non-family members.

It has been observed by many that this transition from child to adult in our society is not a simple one. Indeed it has often been called a "troubled time," where the individual is confronted with conflicting norms. At best, this period of identity reorganization and shifts in the individual's constellation of "significant others," leads to considerable anxiety about oneself and feelings of inferiority and extreme self-consciousness. A lack of strong positive relationships with "significant others," such as parents, during this period would only serve to magnify this preoccupation with self.

Following this orientation the present study will attempt to develop a valid and reliable instrument for measuring both quantitatively and qualitatively the inter-personal relations that exist between the adolescent and certain other persons around him, especially his parents.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This study in keeping with its purpose of developing an instrument for describing and measuring inter-personal relations and by so doing to identify "significant others," is necessarily descriptive and exploratory in its approach. Rather than testing certain specific and carefully formulated hypotheses under controlled conditions, this study seeks to determine whether such hypotheses may be formulated at all, and if further research along these lines seems warranted or feasible. This study hopes to discover whether certain concepts and theories as well as certain research techniques developed in other areas of study may profitably be extended to the study of inter-personal relations of adolescents.

This research is stimulated in part toward the development of a new instrument for measuring inter-personal relations because of a certain dissatisfaction with existing measures of the phenomenon. On both theoretical grounds and methodological ones, current methods of assessing inter-personal relations suffer from serious deficiencies. First of all many current measures if objective are overly structured and inflexible. An example of this type would be the MCI.⁷ On the

⁷R. F. Berdie and W. L. Layton, Minnesota Counseling Inventory, Psychological Corporation, New York, 1953.

other extreme we have such tests as the TAT⁸ which are unstructured and flexible but hardly objective or even reliable.

The type of instrument being proposed here uses as its prototype, still another technique known as the Sociometric device advocated by Moreno⁹ and others. It is objective and at the same time allows the individual considerable freedom in response, but has been used exclusively in quite restricted senses. First it has usually been applied to behavioral criterion or choices of those with whom one would like to do something with and secondly the respondent in his choices has usually been restricted to a certain specified group. As used in this study this technique will be applied to choices of others on attitudinal as well as behavioral criterion and the individual will not be forced to limit his choices of others. Instead he will be encouraged to mention those others whom he considers relevant without any restrictions of any kind.

Technique for Measuring Significant Other Relations

"Significant others" as defined in this study are those others with whom the individual has developed a strong positive relationship similar to the one described previously in the orientation (i.e. warm, friendly, trusting, intimate, and close). Empirically then our data

⁸Henry A. Murray, Thematic Apperception Test Manual, p. 18, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1943.

⁹J. L. Moreno, Who Shall Survive, pp. 64-69, Beacon House, New York, 1953.

will consist of the individuals mention of specific others with regard to these kinds of relationships.

A total of eight sociometric type questions, each having five possible responses were asked. No restrictions were placed on who could be mentioned. The questions, in the order they were asked, are as follows:

- (1) List those persons who you particularly like or feel great affection for.¹⁰
- (2) List those persons who you respect highly.
- (3) List those persons who you think understand you well.
- (4) List those persons who you would ask for help or advice if you had a problem.
- (5) List those persons who you feel particularly close to.
- (6) List those persons who you model yourself after or whose example you would like to follow.
- (7) List those persons who you are most intimate with.
- (8) List those persons who you especially want to approve of you.

In answering these questions the respondent was asked to not give proper names but rather to specify the persons connected to him.

Significance of a specific other was measured by counting the number of mentions he receives on these eight questions. Scores can range from zero to eight on this index, with a high score indicating greater significance.

¹⁰For the sake of increased understanding and for reducing ambiguity, "who" is substituted for the more grammatically correct pronoun "whom" in these questions.

Total scores were computed for several different specific others including father, mother, and teacher. The number of mentions of these specific others will be presented in the findings.

Validity and Reliability

Since an instrument's usefulness in suggesting and formulating hypothesis for study as well as its employment clinically and in further research depend on its demonstrated validity and reliability, these two questions are of central importance.

Validity is usually defined as the extent to which a given measure actually measures what it claims to measure. Two methods of examining and determining the validity of our measure of interpersonal relations are employed in this study. Either method may be considered as sufficient but in combination both should demonstrate even more vigorously the degree of validity to be attached to the measure.

Perhaps the most common method used in establishing the validity of tests involves the use of known groups. Nearly all the psychological tests in use today such as the MMPI and TAT rest on this kind of validation. Briefly, this method involves the selection of two or more study populations who it is thought will exhibit varying or widely different degrees of the phenomenon to be measured. The instrument is then applied and improved on or refined until it can differentiate clearly between the groups in question.

In this study two different groups were selected, (1) a "normal" group of 48 adolescents attending public schools and living at

home and (2) a sample of 37 "institutionalized" adolescents of the same age and sex, residing in a correctional institution. Logically, the inter-personal relations of this latter group should be considerably weaker and more tenuous than those of the "normal" sample and our measure, if it is to be considered valid, must differentiate clearly between these two groups.

The second test of validity conducted consisted of obtaining in some detail, data or information from an independent source bearing on the accuracy of the reports made by respondents. This is called the external criterion test of validity. Rather than accepting the reports on relationships with others and selfviews at their face value, other data bearing on these matters either from an objective observer or from records, were gathered. Data were collected to check on the validity of reports made by the "institutionalized" sample and of the normal sample adolescents.

Each institutionalized adolescent's respective Houseparent,¹¹ who is in close touch with him, was asked to indicate how often the child received mail and from whom, also how often the child talked about his parents and in what manner. Certain other relationships were also inquired into such as peers and staff. In addition the adolescents' manifest attitudes toward school are also investigated. These observations were then compared to mention or non-mention of specific others (parents and teachers). Logically the two sets of

¹¹Children at the Lutheran Homes live in groups of from 20 to 30, each supervised by one or two adults who are called Houseparents.

data should be highly inter-related if the test is to be considered as valid. These data will all be presented in the chapter on findings.

The question of reliability involves gathering information on whether the individuals' mention of parents as significant others, in this case, in response to the various questions both singly and in combination, are consistent from one test administration to another. This is called the test-retest method of assessing reliability. To answer this question a sample of institutionalized adolescents and normal adolescents chosen at random were retested some eight weeks after their initial testing. The consistency of their responses on both tests will be reported in the findings.

Still another form of reliability testing--the split-half reliability test--consists of checking the homogeneity of items in the test by correlations between answers to two sub-sets of items selected randomly. This test was also performed on our significant others measure and will be reported on later in the chapter on findings.

Responses to the eight item Significant Others Measure will also be analyzed by means of the Guttman Scalogram Analysis technique. This technique serves as a test of both validity and reliability. This data will also be reported on and discussed in some detail in the findings.

Technique for Measuring Self-Conception

The second major theoretical variable which is to be used as a dependent and as an intervening variable in this study, is that of self-conception. If one thinks of an individual as having some sort of organized self image or identity made up of attitudes toward himself as an object, then logically one dimension in identity is that of self evaluation or conclusions and inferences made about one's self as an object of value or worth in and of itself.

Since the self is a social product in every sense, arising from relations with others disturbances in inter-personal relationships should be associated with disturbances in self-conception and self-evaluation. As mentioned earlier, lack of strong positive relations to "significant others," implying a loose or weak anchoring point for purposes of self reference and support, would seem to make the individuals task of evaluating himself much more difficult and hence lead to quite unstable and/or extreme self-evaluations of one kind or another.

Our empirical measure of self-evaluation will rest on the phenomenological¹² reports of the adolescent in answer to the question, "What kind of a person am I?" This open-ended question was followed by ten spaces in which the individual could make brief statements in answer to this question. The question was phrased so

¹²Donald Syngg and Arthur Combs, Individual Human Behavior, pp. 79-81, Harper and Bros., New York, 1949.

that the individual adolescent would address the question to himself thereby removing any possible situational basis in reporting.

Code for Content Analysis of Self Conception Statements

Responses to this open-ended question were content analyzed and were found to fall into one of four general categories. First, some reports referred to physical attributes or appearance, for example, height, weight, color of hair, or mentions of strength and agility. Second, a large category of response were statements about likes and dislikes with reference to many objects such as school, other sex, work and sports. The third and by far the largest category were references to inter-personal relations such as "I am hard to get along with," "independent," "friendly," and other such statements all involving other persons as objects. Finally the fourth group consisted of subjective inter-personal references, such as generalizations of ones own worth, for example, "I am conceited," "moody," "self conscious" or "no good." All of these categories of self-evaluations was further broken down into three distinct sub-categories based on qualitative differences in form and substance.

- (1) EGOCENTRIC SELF STATEMENTS
- (2) INADEQUATE SELF STATEMENTS
- (3) DEROGATORY SELF STATEMENTS

Each of these will be described further and defined.¹³

¹³A more complete sample of self statements in each of these categories can be found in Appendix B.

- (A) EGOCENTRIC SELF STATEMENTS - Statements of being self centered, conceited, spoiled, cocky, extremely self-confident, mouthy, etc.
- (B) INADEQUATE SELF STATEMENTS - Self conscious, unsure, feel inferior, moody, sensitive, bad temper, self-critical, lack self confidence, mixed up.
- (C) DEROGATORY SELF STATEMENTS - Statements reflecting low, undesirable self view, no good, bad, mean, hood, etc.

Each protocol was scored simply by noting whether each of these classes of self-evaluative reports were present. There was no attempt to quantify these statements, instead a qualitative measure of mention, or non-mention, will be employed. The three categories are mutually exclusive, but all three types could be mentioned by any given individual. Mention of any one or any combination of these types of self statements will be considered as evidence of disturbance in self-conception.¹⁴

Observed Behavioral Patterns

Along with the Houseparents observations on the quality of the child's relationship to others around him, certain other data bearing on the adolescent's behavior in the institution and in the school situation were collected. If as we suppose self-conception is associated with behavior, then we would expect to find some relationship

¹⁴Karen Horney, Neurotic Personality of Our Time, p. 80, W. W. Norton and Co., New York, 1937.

between self-conception and observed behavior.

A check list of various problem behaviors was given to each Houseparent and each was asked to check which if any applied to each adolescent in the institutionalized sample. Among other things, behavior showing inward tension such as nervousness, night mares, and difficulty in sleep were included. Overt and acting-out forms of conduct were also inquired into, such as fighting, destructiveness, running away, rebelliousness, and stealing. Data gathered on these check lists will be presented as they relate to self-conception. (The instrument is presented in Appendix A.)

Description of Sample

The so-called normal sample used in this study were 47 students in the public schools. The normal sample ranged in age from 13 to 18 years and included 25 boys and 22 girls. The institutional sample consisted of 38 adolescents ranging in age from 13 to 18 and included 9 boys and 29 girls. Insufficient information and data on some individuals will cause the total numbers in some of the following tables to vary somewhat.¹⁵

¹⁵Originally it was hoped that upwards of 50 institutionalized adolescents would be used in this study; however, due to foster home placements and disqualification on the grounds of substandard intelligence, only 38 subjects could be used.

Mode of Analysis

Chi squared tests using contingency tables will be used to test for statistical significance. Differences which could occur by chance only five or fewer times in a hundred will be arbitrarily designated as significant.¹⁶

As mentioned earlier, in testing for reliability, a Pearsonian linear correlation coefficient was used to measure the extent of association.¹⁷

In the analysis of the scalogram technique, the Guttman coefficient of reproducibility was computed.¹⁸ The formula for this coefficient can be found in Appendix C along with the other data on the scaling of parental mentions.

Background Data

Data were also collected on sex, age, and other background information. Information on the home situation of both samples was gathered concerning the presence of parents in the home, either real or otherwise. For the institutional sample in addition certain

¹⁶Sanford M. Dornbusch and Calvin F. Schmid, A Primer of Social Statistics, pp. 207-209, McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., New York, 1955.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 190-195.

¹⁸A. D. Edwards, Techniques of Attitude Scale Construction, pp. 172-198, Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York, 1957.

information on previous institutionalization and foster home placement and also length of time spent in the institution was also collected.

Questionnaire Administration

Data were collected from both samples by means of a research questionnaire. The questionnaires were group administered and no limits were set on time. Respondents were instructed simply that there were no right or wrong answers to these questions and to simply note their own opinions. Respondents with questions were told to answer as they thought best. In general, completion of a test took between 15 and 20 minutes.

The research instruments used in the collection of data can be found in Appendix A.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Inter-personal Relations of Adolescents

Inter-personal relations, especially those existing between the adolescent and his or her parents are the central focus of this study. The term "significant others" as used in this report will be measured by counting the number of times each parent is chosen by the respondent in answer to eight specific questions. Arbitrarily this report will treat parents who are accorded five or more choices by the respondent as "significant others" and those with four or less choices as "non-significant others."

Father as a Significant Other

When the institutional sample and the normal sample are compared with respect to mentions of father as a "significant other," as in Table 1, we see clearly that normals make a significantly greater number of mentions of father than do the institutionalized adolescents.

Approximately 30 per cent of our normals made four or fewer mentions of father, while better than 80 per cent of the institutional sample did so. It is apparent that our institutional sample of adolescents as a group do seem to lack a strong, positive relationship with their fathers.

Table 1. Father as a "Significant Other"
for Normal and Institutional Samples

No. of Mentions	Normal	Institutional	Totals
0-4	14 (25.4)*	32 (20.6)	46
5-8	33 (21.6)	6 (17.4)	39
Totals	47	38	85

$$\chi^2 = 24.89 \quad P .001$$

*Figures in brackets refer to expected frequencies.

To clarify this association still further, individuals with no father present in the family, either real or otherwise, were removed. In Table 2 we see that this refinement in no way explains the lack of mention of father; for even when a father figure is present the institutional sample made fewer mentions of him than do the normals.

Table 2. Father as a "Significant Other"
for Normals and Institutional Samples
(Father Figure Present)

No. of Mentions	Normals	Institutional	Totals
0-4	13 (20.3)	18 (10.7)	31
5-8	33 (25.7)	6 (13.3)	39
Totals	46	24	70

$$\chi^2 = 13.67 \quad P .001$$

Mother as a Significant Other

When the institutional sample and the normal sample are compared with respect to mentions of mother, again we see in Table 3 that the institutional group tend to make fewer mentions of mother than do the normal adolescents.

Table 3. Mother as a "Significant Other"
for Normal and Institutional Samples

No. of Mentions	Normals	Institutional	Totals
0-4	9 (18.2)	24 (14.8)	33
5-8	38 (28.8)	14 (23.2)	52
Totals	47	38	85
$\chi^2 = 16.30 \quad P .001$			

It should be pointed out that even though our institutional sample gives every evidence of lacking a strong positive relationship to their mother it would appear that in general mothers are more "significant others," than are father for both the normals and the institutional samples. This can be seen by comparing Tables 1 and 3.

When respondents without mothers, real or otherwise, were removed from the analysis we see in Table 4 that mention of mother as a "significant other," is still less common among the institutional sample than it is in the "normal" sample.

Table 4. Mother as a "Significant Other"
for Normals and Institutional Samples
(Mother Figure Present)

No. of Mentions	Normals	Institutional	Totals
0-4	9 (16.8)	20 (12.2)	29
5-8	38 (30.2)	14 (21.8)	52
Totals	47	34	81
$\chi^2 = 13.41$	$P .001$		

Approximately 41 per cent of the institutional sample make five or more mentions of mother as compared to almost twice that many in the normal sample. Evidently, the absence of a mother figure in the institutionalized adolescents' home does not explain their failure to mention such figures as being "significant others."

Before proceeding to study still other inter-personal relations of the adolescents it seems logical to consider for a moment the possible role of the institution itself as a factor making for a lack of strong, positive relations to parents. Removal from the family setting for any extended period might interfere with and diminish the very sort of close inter-personal ties that we are studying. To the extent that this institutionalization may affect these relations, we would expect that adolescents with prior history of institutionalization or those who spent the most time in institutions would display the weakest relations to parents. In Tables 5 and 6, we see that

Table 5. Father as a "Significant Other" in the Institutional Sample by Institutional Background and Time Spent in Institutions

No. of Mentions	Previous Institutions	Over Two Years	Two Years or Less	Totals
0-4	9 (9.3)	13 (12.6)	11 (11.1)	33
5-8	2 (1.7)	2 (2.4)	2 (1.9)	6
Totals	11	15	13	39

χ^2 = is not significant.

when the institutional sample is divided on the basis of previous experience in other institutions and on length of time spent in the present institution, that neither father nor mother relations vary appreciably.

Table 6. Mother as a "Significant Other" in the Institutional Sample by Institutional Background and Time Spent in Institutions

No. of Mentions	Previous Institutions	Over Two Years	Two Years or Less	Totals
0-4	6 (6.7)	10 (9.2)	8 (8.1)	24
5-8	5 (4.3)	5 (4.8)	5 (4.9)	15
Totals	11	15	13	39

χ^2 = is not significant.

It is concluded that regardless of the extent of institutional experience, the institutional sample relations to their parents are sadly deficient in comparison to our normal sample, and this condition is likely to have prevailed even before actual institutionalization or perhaps diminished almost simultaneously with admission to the institution. The first interpretation would seem more probable.

Some External Criterion Tests of Validity

Another test of validity consisted of correlating mentions of significant others by the institutional adolescent with certain information which were gathered from independent sources, either from observers in close contact with him or from secondary sources such as his school records.

In Table 7 we see that the number of mentions of father as a "significant other" is associated with an adolescent's talking of home and parents, as reported on by Houseparents observers.

These data while not statistically significant, are taken as strong evidence confirming the validity of responses by our institutional sample. If the father is a "significant other" in reality we would expect the child to talk about home and family frequently. Of course Houseparents can not be expected to overhear every conversation that takes place, and it may be that their reports are not completely accurate. With a larger number of cases the differences in proportions would have attained an acceptable level of statistical significance and in any case the direction of the association is in

the expected direction.

Table 7. Father as a "Significant Other" in Institutional Sample and Houseparents Observation on Mentions of Home and Family

No. of Mentions	Mention of Home and Family	Non-Mention	Totals
0-2	9 (10.5)	8 (6.5)	17
3+	14 (12.5)	6 (7.5)	20
Totals	23	14	37

$\chi^2 =$ is not significant.

When mentions of mother as a "significant other" were cross tabulated with talking about parents, we see in Table 8, a quite similar picture to that obtained with father mentions. As expected the more "significant other" the mother figure is, the more likely was the Houseparent to report the child as making frequent mention of home and family.

Approximately two-thirds of those who mentioned mother three or more times also talked of home as compared to only 40 per cent of those who mentioned mother only once or not at all. These data also support the validity of the reported relationship to mother.

To digress for a moment from our focus on parental mention, we note that two or more mentions of teacher as a significant other among the normal sample, as seen in Table 9, is also associated with

Table 8. Mother as a "Significant Other" in Institutional Sample and Houseparents Observation on Mentions of Home and Family

No. of Mentions	Mention of Home and Family	Non-Mention	Totals
0-2	7 (9.9)	9 (6.1)	16
3+	16 (13.1)	5 (7.9)	21
Totals	23	14	37
$\chi^2 = 3.92 \quad P .05$			

better than average school progress as indicated by official records of grades. Those with an overall grade point better than a C average are called above average, those with a C average are termed average, and those with a below C average are referred to here as below average.

Table 9. Teachers as "Significant Others" and School Progress Ratings (Normal Sample)

No. of Mentions	+ Average	Average	- Average	Totals
0-1	1 (2.3)	14 (14.0)	7 (5.7)	22
2+	4 (2.7)	16 (16.0)	5 (6.3)	25
Totals	5	30	12	47
$\chi^2 =$ is not significant.				

Unfortunately, the small number of cases again cause this association to deviate from our desired level of significance but we shall include it here because it is in the expected direction.

Mention of teachers among the institutional sample as seen in Table 10 is associated with observed attitudes toward school as rated by Houseparents.

Table 10. Teachers as "Significant Others" and Observed Attitude Towards School (Institutional Sample)

No. of Mentions	Good Average	Poor	Totals
None	16 (18.5)	16 (13.5)	32
1 or More	6 (3.5)	0 (2.5)	6
Totals	22	16	38
$\chi^2 = 5.07$	$P .01$		

It is interesting to note that of the 16 who were rated as having a poor attitude towards school none made any mention of teachers as a "significant other." This stands in marked contrast with the 27 per cent of those who were rated as having good or at least average interest in school who made one or more mention of teacher as a "significant other."

If mentions of parents is considered as evidence of a personal parental preference by the adolescent and if we assume that generally

the child will tend to prefer the parent of the same sex we should expect findings similar to those reported in Table 11. Here we see that males in the normal sample make more mentions of father than of mother while girls mention mother more often than father.

Table 11. Sex and Parent Preferences

Sex	Father	Both	Mother	Totals
Male	16 (9.0)	6 (7.4)	3 (8.6)	25
Female	1 (8.0)	8 (6.6)	13 (7.4)	22
Totals	17	14	16	47
χ^2	= 19.97	P	.001	

Unfortunately many of the institutional sample lacked one or the other parent and for that reason could not be included in this table.

Similarly, as mentioned earlier, we should expect parents to diminish in significance as the child matures and broadens his field of interest. In the case of the normal sample again we see in Table 12 that there are significantly fewer mention of father among adolescents aged 15 or more than there are in those aged 14 or less.

However, when mention of mother was tabulated by age no such decrease in significance was noted which may be due to the mother's relatively greater significance for children throughout life. Unfortunately we don't have enough cases to control for sex here and go

Table 12. Age and Significance of Father

Age	0-5	6+	Totals
13-14	5 (8.4)	16 (12.6)	21
15+	14 (10.6)	12 (15.4)	26
Totals	19	28	47
$\chi^2 = 4.15$ P .05			

into further elaborations and interpretations of this finding. In summary, evidence has been presented which tends to lend some validity to our measure of significant other relations.

Tests of Reliability and Homogeneity

In keeping with the purpose of this study to test the consistency and stability of the measure of significant others relations, several tests were performed. The first to be considered here is the test-retest procedure of evaluating test reliability. This will be followed by a test of the split half reliability of our measure.

Nine subjects in the public school sample (normals) population were re-tested approximately eight weeks after the initial testing. Total mention of each parent was plotted and compared with total mention of each parent respectively on the first test. Father mention on both tests was found to be highly correlated with a positive linear coefficient of .99 computed, and mention of mother showed a

perfect correlation of one with no differences in responses. In spite of the small number of cases, these correlations are taken as strong evidence of reliability.

In contrast, when the responses of ten institutional adolescents were compared on both tests, much more variability was noted with a r for father mention of .01 and mentions of mother having only a slightly higher r computed at .26.

In defense of these low coefficients for the institutional group, it should be noted that this does not necessarily reflect lack of reliability, but rather demonstrates the sensitivity of our measure. One hypothesis which should be entertained here, is that this is still further evidence of the lack of stability in parental relations among our institutional sample. Theoretically we would expect a certain lack of stability in ties with significant-others among this group. Further research should be directed to interpret this finding more completely.

Still another test of reliability was performed on the data at hand. This is the so-called split-half reliability test. In this case the original eight items were divided into two sub-sets of four items each, and the individuals scores on each sub-set was compared.

Using only the normal sample of public school adolescents, (N=47), because of the restricted range of scores in the institutional sample, a positive correlation coefficient of .749 was found between the number of mentions of father (0-4) on both of the

sub-sets of items.

The total number of mentions of mother on one sub-set of items was also highly correlated with the number of mentions on the other. Here the r was computed to be .568. In view of these significant split-half correlations for parental mention to the "significant other" measure used in this study, this is taken as still more evidence that our measure is reliable.

Scalogram Analysis

As a further test of the consistency and homogeneity of the items composing the "significant others" measure it was decided to apply the Guttman Scalogram Analysis technique to this data. Without going into much detail, this technique tests the data for its cumulative properties and yields a score which accurately reproduces the individuals responses in their entirety--unlike other scaling techniques.

When responses of the normal sample¹⁹ were arranged in Guttman fashion (see Appendix C) for father mentions and also for mother mentions (treated as a favorable response), both scales demonstrated a sufficient amount of cumulativeness. That is, a person will tend to respond favorably to the more popular items in order, but will not go beyond a certain point. In other words, a person with a higher score than another will have answered all the items endorsed by the latter

¹⁹Because of the restricted range of responses made by the institutional adolescents, testing the normal samples total number of parental mentions provided a more rigorous test of scalability.

plus some of those with less popularity.

Errors, defined as failures to respond in this fashion, were counted in typical Guttman fashion. Using all eight items, the father scale achieved a coefficient of reproducibility of .913 and the mother scale a coefficient of reproducibility of .897. These compare favorably with the coefficient of reproducibility of .90 arbitrarily demanded by Guttman for demonstrating unidimensionality.²⁰ These coefficients simply mean that from knowledge of the individuals scale score--(defined as the most difficult item successfully answered) one can reproduce all of the other responses correctly making less than one error in ten.

In summary, evidence has been presented which points to the strong probability that this significant others measure is reliable and valid and of great potential utility in identifying and isolating relationships to significant others.

Egocentric Self Statements

Reports of seeing oneself in an egocentric fashion were noted in both samples of adolescents. When the incidence in each group was compared, however, as shown in Table 13, we see that approximately

²⁰The total error count on each item and the distribution of errors revealed that two items--numbers 7 and 8--created most of the errors. Removal of these two items would appreciably improve the scale. In general, the data also conformed to other criterion of scalability, with only two items falling outside the desired range of marginal frequencies (20 to 80 per cent) and the minimal marginal reproducibility was not sufficiently high to create any spurious scalability.

one-third of the institution sample and only 10 per cent of the normals made such self-statements.

Table 13. Egocentric Self-Conception in Normal and Institutional Samples

Self Conception	Normal	Institution	Total
Egocentric	4 (9)	12 (7)	16
Non-Egocentric	43 (38)	24 (29)	67
Totals	47	36	83
$\chi^2 = 7.84$	P .01		

Plainly then, this is evidence of significantly more disturbance in self-conception among the institutional sample as compared to our normals.

Inadequate Self Statements

Reports of another kind of self-disturbance were also observed, as expected, in both samples. These are statements indicating a strong degree of self-doubt or uncertainty. When both groups are compared as in Table 14 it is obvious that significantly more of the institutional sample report these kinds of statements than do the normal adolescents.

In addition when the incidence of this form of self-disturbance is compared with that of egocentrism and derogation (Tables 13

Table 14. Inadequate Self-Conception in
Normal and Institutional Samples

Self Conception	Normal	Institution	Totals
Inadequate	10 (19.8)	25 (15.2)	35
Non-Inadequate	37 (27.2)	11 (20.8)	48
Totals	47	36	83
$\chi^2 = 18.82$	$P .001$		

and 15), we find that self-inadequacy or uncertainty is the most common form of self concept disturbance noted for both samples.

This is not surprising in view of the difficulties experienced by the adolescent in moving from the status of child to that of that of adult. Almost 70 per cent of the institutional sample make some reference to self-inadequacy and only 20 per cent of the normal sample report such self-views.

Derogatory Self Statements

Feelings of self-derogation or perceived lack of worth of self are reflected by statements in this category. (See Appendix B for some examples.) When the two samples are compared, we see in Table 15 that nearly two-thirds of the institution group derogated themselves as contrasted to only about 10 per cent of the normal sample who made such statements. This is taken as strong evidence that the

institutional sample exhibits more disturbed self-conceptions than do the normal adolescent sample.

Table 15. Derogatory Self-Conception in Normal and Institutional Samples

Self Concept	Normal	Institution	Totals
Derogatory	4 (14.7)	22 (11.3)	26
Non-Derogatory	43 (32.3)	14 (24.7)	57
Totals	47	36	83
χ^2 = 26.12	P .001		

As in the case of inter-personal relations we might expect that the institutionalization process itself may account for at least some of the observed high rate of disturbed self-conception in our institutional sample. When previous experience in similar institutions and length of time spent in the present institution were controlled, however, no significant variations in the prevalence of self concept disturbances of any type were noted. This would seem to indicate that either removal from the family itself explains all the disturbances observed or that in all probability the disturbances in self-conception precede or ante-date the institutionalization. More research is needed to clarify the time order of this relationship.

Inter-personal Relations and Self-conception

For this part of the analysis both samples will be combined and the number of mentions of each parent as a "significant other" will be cross tabulated with the individuals reported self-conception. Theoretically, we should expect that lack of strong positive relations to parents will be associated with some manifest degree of disturbance in self-conception of all three specific types.

In Table 16, we see that the more significant the father is, the lower the incidence of disturbance in self-conception (using a combined measure of all three types of disturbance). Approximately 77 per cent of those adolescents who mention father four or fewer times as a "significant other" also report some form of self-conception disturbance.

Table 16. Father as a Significant Other and Self-Conception

No. of Mentions	Non Disturbed	Disturbed	Totals
0-4	10 (18.0)	34 (26)	44
5+	24 (16)	15 (23)	39
Totals	34	49	83
$\chi^2 = 26.12$	$P .001$		

In comparison we see only about 38 per cent of those who mentioned father five or more times reporting any type of disturbance in self-conception.

A quite similar picture is seen in Table 17, when mentions of mother as a "significant other" are cross tabulated with disturbance in self-conception. Here almost 80 per cent of those adolescents who mention mother four or less times give some reports of disturbance in self-conception as compared to less than half of those who mention mother five or more times as a "significant other." In summary both Tables 16 and 17 seem to substantiate our theoretical hypothesis.

Table 17. Mother as a Significant Other and Self-Conception

No. of Mentions	Non Disturbed	Disturbed	Totals
0-4	7 (12.7)	24 (18.3)	31
5+	27 (21.3)	25 (30.7)	52
Totals	34	49	83
$\chi^2 = 6.92$	$P .01$		

Disturbed Self-Conception and Observed Tension Behavior

To a certain extent at least, anxious behavior, or tension behavior as we shall call it, is likely to occur when any individual is removed from a familiar situation and placed in a strange setting.

Nevertheless it is significant that certain forms of tension behavior such as restlessness, sleep disturbance and enuresis, as reported by observers of the institutional sample, are quite common among those adolescents in the institution who give self-statements classed as inadequate or uncertain self-statements. In Table 18, we see that about 80 per cent of those adolescents who give inadequate self-statements apparently experience some tension behavior while only 45 per cent of those not making self inadequate statements do so.

Table 18. Inadequate Self-Conception and Observed Tension Behaviors

Self Conception	No Tension	Tension	Totals
Inadequate	6 (8.3)	19 (16.7)	25
Non-Inadequate	6 (3.7)	5 (7.3)	11
Totals	12	24	36
$\chi^2 = 3.08$ P .10			

While the data is not statistically significant due to the small number of cases involved, it is included here because of the direction of the association represented.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

This study, following a Social Psychological approach to the study of human behavior, has attempted to (1) develop an objective instrument for identifying "significant others" and (2) present some evidence concerning the validity and reliability of this measuring instrument. Attention is focused especially on the adolescent pattern of "significant others" relations emphasizing the role of parents as "significant others."

This variable "inter-personal relations" is considered to be a significant theoretical concept. Human behavior is viewed as a learning process resulting from association and interactions with others. Individual behavior is not considered to be physiologically based nor instinctual in nature, but rather it is a matter of manipulating symbols or language.

Since the objective devices in use today are overly structured and inflexible they are considered as unsuitable for identifying "significant others." Since the Social Psychologist views human behavior as a conscious and organized development from within, rather than being something hidden or below the level of awareness, projective devices are also considered unsuitable and inconsistent with our approach as well as being highly unreliable.

A sociometric technique, being both objective and flexible also has the advantage of being consistent with our approach. This

technique would seem to meet all these requirements and hence is used in this study. For these reasons this research study presents evidence concerning the theoretical validity and reliability of an objective test of inter-personal relations based on this form of measurement.

Significant others relations can be characterized as positive in their affect, intimate, close, warm, and accepting, featuring a high degree of positive identification as well as being highly sympathetic in nature. It is through these kinds of relationships with these "significant others" that the individual is afforded with a set of stable reference points for viewing himself and the world around him. A lack of this type of relations to others will lead to disturbances in self-conception and behavior.

To test this hypothesis two groups of adolescents were selected: (1) a sample of 37 "institutionalized" problem adolescents living in an open Correctional Institution, and (2) a "normal" group of 48 adolescents attending the Muscatine Public Schools and residing in their respective homes.

Theoretically it might be hypothesized that the inter-personal relations of the "institutionalized" group should be inadequate and meager when compared to those of the "normal" group. The measure "significant others," which consists of the number of mentions made of parental figures, if it is to be considered valid must differentiate clearly between these two adolescents groups.

Substantial differences were found between the "normal" and the "institutional" groups with respect to mention of parents as "significant others" (using as a criterion for significance at least five out of a possible eight mentions).

Among the normals in the sample 70 per cent mentioned father as a significant other and 80 per cent mentioned mother as a significant other.

In contrast to this only 10 per cent of the institutional sample listed father as a significant other and only 37 per cent gave mother as a significant other. As indicated above, it appears that both samples regard mother as a more significant other than father.

These relationships were found to hold even when the presence of each parent figure in the home was controlled and also when previous institutionalization and length of time in the present institution were controlled.

We would expect logically, that if the father or mother was a significant other the institutional adolescent should talk about home and family frequently.

Approximately 70 per cent of those who mentioned father as a "significant other" were also reported to have spoken frequently and favorably about home and family. This compares to only about half of those who do not mention father as "significant other."

Almost 80 per cent of those who mention mother as "significant other" were reported to have spoken frequently and favorably about home and family. Only 40 per cent of those who do not mention mother

as "significant other" were observed to speak frequently of home and family.

Substantial differences were also noted between the "normal" and the "institutional" groups with respect to statements indicating disturbances in self-conceptions.

Among the institutional sample approximately one-third reported seeing themselves in an egocentric fashion compared to only 10 per cent of the normals who made such self-statements. This evidence would seem to indicate that there is more disturbances in the self-conception of the institutional sample than there is in the normal sample.

The second type of disturbed self-conception consisted of inadequate self-statements. Almost 70 per cent of the institutional sample make some reference to self-inadequacy compared to only 20 per cent of the normal sample who reported such self-views. An inadequate self-concept is the most prevalent of all three types of disturbed self-conceptions in both the normal and the institutional groups.

The third type of disturbance in self-conception was a type called derogatory self-statements. Among the institutional sample approximately two-thirds derogated themselves in contrast to only 10 per cent of the normal sample who made such statements. This again is taken as strong evidence indicating that the institutional sample exhibits more disturbed self-conceptions than do the normal adolescents.

To evaluate the tests reliability, nine adolescents of the public school sample population were re-tested approximately two months after the initial testing. The total number of mentions of father on each test was found to be highly correlated with a positive linear correlation coefficient of .99 computed, and total number of mentions of mother showed a perfect correlation of 1.00 with no differences in responses. These correlations are taken as strong evidence of reliability.

In contrast, when the responses of ten institutional adolescents were compared on both tests, much more variability was noted, with a father mention correlation coefficient of .01 and mentions of mother having a somewhat higher coefficient of .26. These low coefficients for the institutional group do not necessarily reflect any lack of reliability, but rather demonstrate the sensitivity of our measure, in as much as this is still more evidence of the shallowness of parental relations among the institutional sample.

The Guttman Scalogram Analysis Technique was applied to the responses to the eight item measure of "significant others," as a further test of homogeneity and reliability. Using all eight items, the father scale achieved a coefficient of reproducibility of .913 and the mother scale a coefficient of reproducibility of .897. These compare favorably with the coefficient of reproducibility of .90 arbitrarily demanded by Guttman for demonstrating unidimensionality.

In conclusion, in keeping with the purpose of this study, considerable evidence has been presented which points to the strong probability that the significant others measure which has been developed is a reliable and valid one.

The lack of a strong positive relationship to parents was also found to be associated with disturbances in self-conception indicating the potential importance of the concept of "significant others" for understanding juvenile behavior problems.

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APPENDIX A

Research Instruments

APPENDIX A

In answering the questions that follow please do not give proper names rather specify the person's connection with you.

- (1) List those persons who you particularly like or feel great affection for.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

- (2) List those persons who you respect highly.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

- (3) List those persons who you think understand you well.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

(4) List those persons who you would ask for help or advice if you had a problem.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

(5) List those persons who you feel particularly close to.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

(6) List those persons who you model yourself after or whose example you would like to follow.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

(7) List those persons who you are most intimate with.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

(8) List those persons who you especially want to approve of you.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Ask yourself the question, "What sort of a person am I?", and give ten different answers in the spaces below.

I am:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

CHILD'S PROGRESS REPORT

Name: _____ Date: _____

Birthdate _____ Houseparent _____

I. GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

A. Concern for personal appearance and clothing care

_____ Above average Comments: _____
 _____ Average
 _____ Below average

B. Attitude toward work

_____ Works willingly
 _____ Poor work attitude
 _____ Rejects responsibility
 _____ Fails to follow through

C. Relation to other people

1. To members of own family on visits and otherwise

_____ Does child speak about
 his or her parents?
 _____ Does child speak about
 any other person who is
 important to him?

2. In his peer group

_____ Leader
 _____ Follower
 _____ Isolate
 _____ Neutral

3. In play group

_____ Accepted
 _____ Rejected

4. In work group

_____ Cooperative
 _____ Non-cooperative

5. To staff members

_____ Talks back
 _____ Argues

5. (continued)

- Uncooperative
- Friendly
- Over anxious to please

Comments:

D. Mail

- Does child receive mail
- From whom
- How often
- How does this affect him

E. School

1. Interest in subjects

- Good
- Average
- Poor

2. Study habits

- Good
- Average
- Poor

II. Signs of emotional STRESS OR UNHAPPINESS:
(Check one of the following that apply)

A. Eating problems:

- poor appetite or loss of appetite
- overeating
- average appetite

B. Sleeping problems:

- failure to go to sleep
- restless and disturbed sleep
- sleepwalking
- normal sleep

C. Elimination problems:

- bowel problems
- bladder problems (enuresis)
- How often
- Normal elimination problems

D. Tension problems:

- excessive crying
- thumb-sucking
- nail-biting
- temper tantrums

D. (continued)

Comments:

_____ tics
 _____ mannerisms
 _____ sleep pattern
 _____ stuttering (slurring)
 _____ restless
 _____ How often?

E. Conduct problems:

_____ starting arguments, picking
 _____ fights, destroying things,
 _____ degrading
 _____ showing off
 _____ withdrawn, shy, quiet
 _____ smoking

F. Physical health:

_____ sick feelings
 _____ accident-proneness
 _____ physically ill

III. SIGNS OF BEHAVIOR DISORDERS:

A. Aggressive problems:

_____ Rebelliousness
 _____ stealing
 _____ running away
 _____ truancy
 _____ destructive

B. Sexual behavior problems:

_____ masturbation
 _____ homosexuality
 _____ exhibitionism (nude)
 _____ promiscuity (sexual relationship)
 _____ normal sex behavior

IV. RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES

Reflected in: WORSHIP SUNDAY SCHOOL DEVOTIONS DAILY LIVING

Positive _____
 Negative _____
 Indifferent _____

Comments: _____

V. SPECIAL INTERESTS _____

VI. SPECIAL PROBLEMS _____

VII. REMARKS _____

APPENDIX B

Sample of Disturbed Self Conception Statements

APPENDIX B

Sample of Disturbed Self Conception Statements

<u>Egocentric Statements</u>	<u>Inadequacy Statements</u>	<u>Derogatory Statements</u>
Conceited	Sensitive person	Hard to please people
Spoiled	Get mad fast	Awful
Selfish		Selfish
Brat		Crazy
		Clumsy
Disrespectful	Person with bad temper	A dumb person
Cocky	Inferiority complex	Not easy to get along with
Self-confident	Very changeable person	Steal a lot
Mouthy	Moody	(Profane) curse a lot
	Confused	Terrible person
	Short-tempered	Bad boy
	Touchy	Not eager in school
	Bashful	Girl crazy
	Self-critical	Stubborn
	A temper	Resent authority
	Self-conscious	Hard to get along with
	Quiet	Prejudice
		Nuts
	High temper	Angry

Egocentric
StatementsInadequacy
StatementsDerogatory
Statements

Mixed-up person

Two-faced

Cruel

Bothered by what
others think of me

Silly

Snap judgment

Inconsiderate

Nosey

Dislike people

Not smart

Misleading, misin-
formed

Sorry mess

Bad sportsmanship

Impatient

Hard time getting
along with othersLike everybody but
mother

Greedy

Jealous

Don't like school

Trouble keeping
friends

Stupid

No personality,
fighting

APPENDIX C

Scalogram Analysis Data

MENTION OF FATHER AS A SIGNIFICANT OTHER (continued)

Resp. No.	Item No.							
	6	7	3	8	5	4	2	1
22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	X
24	0	0	X	0	0	0	0	0
9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
23	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	23	23	28	28	31	34	37	40

$$C.R. = 1 - \frac{\text{no. of errors}}{\text{no. of total possible errors}} = 1 - \frac{36}{376} = .910$$

MENTION OF MOTHER AS A SIGNIFICANT OTHER

Resp. No.	6	7	8	3	4	2	5	1
2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
27	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
30	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
38	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
40	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
47	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
48	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
3	X	0	X	X	X	X	X	X
9	0	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
12	0	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
31	0	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
32	0	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
41	X	X	0	X	X	X	X	X
42	0	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
44	X	0	X	X	X	X	X	X
10	0	0	X	X	X	X	X	X
11	0	0	X	X	X	X	X	X
13	0	0	X	X	X	X	X	X
14	X	0	X	0	X	X	X	X
15	0	X	0	X	X	X	X	X
16	0	X	X	X	X	0	X	X
17	0	X	0	X	X	X	X	X
18	0	0	X	X	X	X	X	X
29	X	0	0	X	X	X	X	X
34	0	0	X	X	X	X	X	X
35	0	X	X	0	X	X	X	X
39	X	X	X	0	0	X	X	X
1	0	X	0	X	X	0	X	X
4	X	0	X	0	X	0	X	X
7	0	0	X	X	X	X	X	0
8	0	X	X	0	X	0	X	X
19	X	0	X	X	0	X	0	X
26	0	0	X	X	X	X	0	X
28	0	0	0	X	X	X	X	X
37	0	0	0	X	X	X	X	X
43	0	0	0	X	X	X	X	X
46	0	X	0	X	0	X	X	X
49	0	X	0	X	0	X	X	X
25	0	0	X	0	X	X	X	0
33	0	0	0	X	X	0	X	X
45	0	0	X	0	0	X	X	X
23	0	X	0	0	0	0	X	X
24	0	0	0	X	X	0	0	X

MENTION OF MOTHER AS A SIGNIFICANT OTHER (continued)

Resp. No.	Item No.							
	6	7	8	3	4	2	5	1
36	0	X	0	0	0	X	0	X
5	0	0	X	0	0	0	0	0
6	0	0	X	0	0	0	0	0
22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	X
	15	24	32	35	37	37	40	43

$$C.R. = 1 - \frac{\text{no. of errors}}{\text{no. of total possible errors}} = 1 - \frac{39}{376} = .897$$