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The Alienation Syndrome: A Triadic Pattern of Self-Other Orientation. A Technical Report.

Oregon Univ., Eugene. Center for Advanced Study of Educational Administration.

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**THE ALIENATION SYNDROME
A TRIADIC PATTERN OF SELF-OTHER ORIENTATION**

Robert C. Ziller

**A Technical Report
July 31, 1969**

**Bureau No. 5-0217, Project 0001
Planning for Change
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**Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration
University of Oregon Eugene, Oregon**

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ABSTRACT

A social psychological theory of personality is presented which examines the crucial relationship between self and other as perceived by the individual and communicated by topological configurations of the self in relation to significant others. The inadequacies of self and social guidance mechanisms for social adaptation are assumed to be associated with the concept of alienation. The alienation syndrome is defined as low self esteem, low social interest, and high self centrality. This triadic pattern is shown to describe behavior problem children, neuropsychiatric patients, and to some extent, persons over 40 years of age and American Negro children. It is suggested that the processes leading from exclusion to the alienation syndrome may be a self fulfilling prophecy mediated by reduced social reinforcement.

The Alienation Syndrome:¹
A Triadic Pattern of Self-Other Orientation

Robert C. Ziller
University of Oregon

The present approach to alienation attempts to clarify the protean term by defining it in terms of the individual's perceptions mediated by self esteem and social interest and self centrality in interaction. Alienation is defined as an attitude of hopelessness resulting from an inability to structure the environment in terms of either a stable self orientation or a stable Other orientation, and a cessation in the individual's attempts to confront the social environment. Having no guidance mechanisms from self or Other, a sense of meaningless, powerlessness, and normlessness is generated. The alienated individual does not mediate environmental stimuli through the concept of self or the concept of Other. The alienated are not accepted as members within a significant subgroup and perceive themselves as unguided persons in an unchartered environment. Against this theoretical background it is proposed that alienation evolves under conditions which generate low self esteem and low social interest, and high self centrality.

Three studies will be described which demonstrate the relationship between alienation and a recurring triadic pattern of self-other orientation.

The subjects assumed to be alienated include behavior problem children, neuropsychiatric patients, the aging, and American Negroes. The self-other orientation tasks provided the measures of self esteem, social interest, and self centrality.

Self-Other Orientation Tasks

Self Esteem

Self esteem (Ziller, et. al., 1969) is usually defined as the individual's perception of his worth. In evaluating the self, however, few physical cues are available which provide a reliable basis for an estimate. Still, the individual has recourse to paired comparisons of the self and significant other ; that is, self evaluation evolves in terms of social reality (Festinger, 1954). Self evaluation, then, emerges largely within a social frame of reference.

It is now proposed that the person's response to the social environment is a function of self esteem. Self esteem mediates social stimuli and response (Social Stimuli ---> Self Esteem ---> Response). It is proposed here that self esteem is a component of the self system which regulates the extent to which the self system is maintained under conditions of strain, such as during the processing of new information concerning the self. Thus, for example, evaluations of either a positive or negative nature do not evoke immediate, corresponding action by the individual with high self esteem. New information is examined on the basis of its relevance and

meaning for the self system and is disregarded if its meaning tends to be tangential. In this way the organism is somewhat insulated from the environment or is not completely subject to momentary environmental contingencies.

Persons with low self esteem, on the other hand, do not possess a well-developed conceptual buffer for evaluative stimuli. In Witkin's terms (Witkin, et. al., 1962), the person with low self esteem is field dependent; that is, he tends to passively conform to the influence of the prevailing field or context. Since the individual's behavior is directly linked to immediate environmental circumstances and is not mediated or differentiated and integrated by the self concept, he is thereby inclined toward inconsistency.

Social Interest

Social interest (Adler) refers to the range of a person's affectionate interest and concern. A disruption in a person's affectionate ties was assumed to be related to his perception of the self as "different" and to the eventual isolation of the individual and the development of a "private view of the world."

In terms of self-other perception, social interest is assumed to involve inclusion of the self with Others as opposed to being apart from Others. Inclusion involves a willingness to be subject to the field of forces generated among Others and the self. This latter component suggests an association with social trust, a willingness to place one's fate in the hands of others. High social interest is associated with a knowledge and acceptance of the norms of a primary group.

Self Centrality

Inner as opposed to outer orientation of the self has been a perennially controversial personality construct. A review of the literature (Carrigan, 1960) indicates that the evidence concerning the correlates of the construct are unclear. In the present approach, the question of the inward-outward directionality of the self is recast in terms of whether the individual defines the self in terms of Others or defines Others in terms of the self. Either the self or significant Others may be perceived as the figure or ground. Thus, self centrality is defined as the perception of the social environment largely from the point of the perceiver rather than from the point of view of significant Others.

Previous research concerning the measurement of the self concept has not only often failed to consider the social origin of the self system, but also relied almost exclusively upon self reports. The approach used here involved a method of communication requiring topological representations of self and Others. The approach derives in part from DeSoto and Kuethe (1959) and Kelly (1955). It is assumed that the human organism finds it useful to order and categorize the multitude of self-surrounding stimuli. Some of the ordering processes include the extent of separation between objects (Kuethe, 1962), number of objects in a category, and ordering of objects (DeSoto, London and Handel, 1965).

The most relevant ordering process with regard to self esteem is what DeSoto, et. al. (1965) refer to as "spatial paralogic" and "linear ordering." It is observed that people are prone to place elements in a linear ordering to the exclusion of other structures, and that they handle linear ordering more easily than most other structures. Indeed, DeSoto, et. al. note that serial ordering proceeds more readily in a rightward direction than in a leftward direction. The tendency to attribute greater importance to the object placed at the extreme left position in a horizontal display has been noted by Morgan (1944).

The measure of self esteem used here utilized the left to right serial ordering predilection of the subjects within a social context. The measure involves presenting a horizontal array of circles and a list of significant others (including the self) such as used by Kelly (1955). The task requires the subject to assign each person to a circle. The score is the weighted position of the self. In accordance with the cultural norm, positions to the left are associated with higher self esteem.

The six items which constitute the self esteem measure include the following sets of significant others: (1) doctor, father, friend, mother, yourself, teacher; (2) someone you know who is a good athlete, someone you know who is a good dancer, someone in your class who is funny, someone in your class who gets good grades, yourself, someone you know who is unhappy; (3) an actor, your brother or someone who is most like a brother, your best friend, the principal of your school, yourself, a salesman; (4) someone you

know who is cruel, your grandmother, a housewife, a policeman, yourself, your sister or someone who is most like a sister; (5) someone who is flunking, the happiest person you know, someone you know who is kind, yourself, someone you know who is successful, the strongest person you know; and (6) doctor, father, a friend, a nurse, yourself, someone you know who is unsuccessful. In support of the left-right serial ordering paralogic across cultures, it has been found that the more clearly defined low status social elements in the sets are located most frequently in the extreme right position. (Ziller, et. al., 1967).

In scoring the items, the six circles in the horizontal array are weighted from one to six starting from the left side. The location of the self in terms of this left to right scale provide the score for each item. The total score across the six items provides the self esteem score.

By way of validation of the procedure, it has been found that sociometrically unchosen children tend to show lower self esteem than highly chosen children (Ziller, Alexander and Long, 1964) and depressed patients in comparison with other neuropsychiatric patients show lower self esteem (Ziller, Megas and DeCencio, 1964). Also, neuropsychiatric patients who participated most frequently in a group discussion were found to have higher self esteem than those who participated less frequently (Mossman and Ziller, 1967). Finally winning political candidates for state legislatures were found to increase in self esteem, whereas losing candidates decreased in self esteem (Ziller, et. al., 1968).

The six items designed to measure social interest were similar to the item shown in Figure 1. In the other five items the three significant others were simply rotated or were shifted to the other side of the rectangular field. Location of a circle representing the self within rather than without the imaginary societal triangle with apexes representing parents, friends, and teacher is presumed to be related to social interest. In a sense, the person who locates the self outside the three points of reference is not delineated as completely in terms of these points of reference; that is, his self concept is to some degree independent of the particular Others.

In scoring the six items, location of the self inside the imaginary societal triangle is given a weight of one, outside a weight of zero. The sum of the six scores provides the score of social interest.

Figure 1 about here

In a study involving children ranging in ages from 7 to 14, it was found that children locating themselves topologically within the peer dominated group as opposed to outside the group preferred to take part in group activities rather than solitary activities (Long, Ziller and Henderson, 1966). Asian Indian adolescents (members of a relatively closed and cohesive family group) in comparison with a matched sample of American adolescents showed higher social interest (Ziller, et. al., 1967). Finally, among American children in grades one through six, social interest increased with age. (Long, Henderson, and Ziller, 1967).

The six items designed to measure centrality were distributed throughout the test booklet. The six items were identical, and required the subject to draw a circle to represent the self and another circle to represent a friend within a large circular area. Again a one-zero scoring system is used. Location of the self as more central is given a weight of one. Location of the other as central is given a weight of zero. The sum of the scores represents the self centrality score.

The placement of the self rather than Other closer to the center of the circle was assumed to depict greater self centrality; the self is perceived as the exposure of the constellation of self and Others. Supporting the validity of this assumption are the findings that sociometric isolates in comparison with sociometric stars placed the self in a central position more frequently (Ziller, Alexander and Long, 1964), as did children who had moved frequently between communities than those who had lived in but a single community (Ziller and Long, 1964), as well as Asian Indian adolescents (who are the family's "reason for being") in comparison with a sample of American adolescents (Ziller, et. al., 1967).

Intercorrelations of the three measures has failed to show any significant relationships. Split-half reliabilities of the measures for a sample of American children in grades 6 to 12 (n=99) were .80 (self esteem), .84 (social interest), and .58 (self centrality).

Behavior Problem Children²

Paralleling Adler in his description of physically handicapped children, it is proposed the institutionalized behavior problem child finds it difficult to feel that the meaning of life is contribution. Unless there is someone who can draw attention away from themselves (self centrality) and interest them in Others (social interest), they are likely to occupy themselves largely with their own sensations. Later on, they may become discouraged (self esteem) and their feelings of inferiority stressed through ridicule and avoidance on the part of their fellows. "These are all circumstances in which a child may turn in upon themselves, lose hope of playing a useful part in our common life and consider themselves personally humiliated by the world (1927:80)."

Berkowitz (1962:312) for example concludes that persistent lawbreakers feel alienated and apart from other people. Consistent with the alienation syndrome framework, Berkowitz describes behavior problem children in terms of parental rejection leading to non-adaption of societal moral standards and lack of development of ego controls. The present study seeks confirmation of these hypothesis in terms of social interest and self esteem.

Finally, Josephson and Josephson (1962) particularly refer to juvenile delinquents as among the social groups who have been described as alienated in some degree.

A group of 30 boys and 27 girls from the Governor Bacon Health Center, Wilmington, Delaware, constituted the sample (all the subjects available on a given day) of severe behavior problem children. School officials and the child's parents had recommended that the child be institutionalized in order to maintain closer supervision. The institutionalized sample represented a wide variety of behavior disorders including delinquency, neurosis, and psychosis. Their intelligence as measured by the Terman-Sinet range from 75 to 180. The subjects were matched for sex and age. The age range was 10 to 16. The matched control group was drawn from a sample of 420 adolescents from a neighboring school community. The self-other orientation tasks were group administered.

The means with regard to the three measures of self-other orientation are reported in Table 1. The results are statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence or better in each case. Behavior problem children were found to indicate lower self esteem, lower social interest, and higher self centrality than the control group.

A cause and effect relationship between institutionalization and alienation is not suggested. A longitudinal study of institutionalized children is suggested, however. The results strongly support the self-other orientation framework as a basis for describing the alienated under conditions of institutionalization or conditions leading to institutionalization. It remains to be demonstrated, however, that the approach is useful across situations.

Table 1 about here

Neuropsychiatric Patients and the Aging

In an earlier study (Ziller and Grossman, 1967), it was stated that two findings with regard to age of the adult subjects, low self esteem, and low social interest, were similar to findings with regard to the neurotic personality. It was assumed that the results reflected "social isolation deriving from membership in a minority collective (the neurotics and the aging), and the perception of the self by Others and the self as different or outside the social frame of reference of the members of the majority collective." In addition it may be noted that old age and institutionalization because of severe problems of adjustment are associated with social isolation and social stigma, conditions associated with alienation (Cuming and Henry, 1961; Josephson and Josephson, 1962).

The subjects in the study were 90 acute male neuropsychiatric patients from the Veterans Administration Hospital, Elsmere, Delaware, and 87 male employees of the same hospital, the latter served as subjects on a volunteer basis. The patients represent the total population of neuropsychiatric cases in the hospital over a period of five months. Each of the samples involved 10% Negroes. The average years of education for the neuropsychiatric patients and normals were 11.8 and 11.6 respectively.

All patients were administered the Self-Other Orientation Tasks within the first week of admission to the hospital. The hospital staff (the comparison group) completed the tasks during their monthly staff meetings. All subjects completed the tasks in 15 to 30 minutes.

The form used in the present study only involved a single item for each self-other construct. The self-esteem task was similar to that used in the previous studies. In this case, however, a vertical array of 10 circles (rather than 6 horizontal circles) was presented which were described as representing important people in their life. In contrast to the earlier form, however, the important people were not listed. The subjects were required to choose any one of the circles to stand for themselves and place an S within it. The higher position was assumed to depict higher self esteem. The circles in the array were weighted from ten to one beginning with the circle at the top. Again the score for self esteem was the weighted position of the self.

In a subsequent reliability study, the correlations between the left-to-right location of the self and the up-down placement of the self was .50 (n=82). The vertical item however may be more "visible" than the horizontal item, for adults at least (Ziller, et. al., 1969).

The social interest item was the same in form as that used with children but two of the circles of reference were changed for the adults. "Parents" was changed to "family," and "teachers" was changed to "work group." The "friends" reference remained the same. The same rating was used, one for inside the societal triangle and zero for placement outside the triangle of significant others.

The centrality item was identical with the item used in the previous studies. The results are indicated in Table 2.

The analysis involved a 2 X 3 analysis of variance design comparing the Self-Other Orientation Tasks responses of neuropsychiatric patients and normals according to three age categories, 22 to 39, 40 to 45, and 46 to 64. In forming the age categories, it was necessary for purposes of analysis to include an equal number of subjects within each cell but maintaining critical age classifications. A cut-off point of 40 years of age was assumed to be perceived as a significant division of the life span and associated with a deceleration of some aspects of human development (Hurlock, 1968: 672-766). A second cut-off point between 45 and 46 was dictated by the distribution of the subject's ages and the requirement of an equal number of subjects in each cell. A total of 120 subjects comprised the resulting sample and included 20 subjects per cell. The mean age of the subjects in each of the age categories were 33.2, 42.4, and 51.1.

Earlier investigations of the process of aging (Cuming and Henry, 1961; Cuming, et. al., 1960) have proposed the term "disengagement" to indicate tendencies of detachment and depression accompanying increasing age, particularly with regard to persons 60 and older. Cumings, Dean, Newell, and McCaffrey propose that disengagement begins with a shift in self perception which reflects withdrawal. This shift in perception is accompanied by a reduction of interaction and time spent with others. The result is a

"more self-centered and idiosyncratic style of behavior." The results of the present investigation suggest that the term "disengagement" may be subsumed under the concept of alienation and expressed in terms of the triadic pattern of self-other orientation.

It must be noted that two of the findings with regard to age, (self esteem and social interest) are similar to the findings with regard to the neurotic personality. This suggests, that there may be a common base for the psychological and sociological approaches to deviant behavior, and that the self-other orientation approach offers promise in the search for further commonalities.

The results are presented first with regard to the comparisons between neuropsychiatric patients and normals, followed by the results with regard to the three age categories (Table 2). None of the interactors were statistically significant and were eliminated in the earlier report (Ziller and Grossman, 1967).

Table 2 about here

The results again support the alienation-self-other orientation framework. Neuropsychiatric patients in comparison with normals indicate lower self esteem, lower social interest, and higher centrality of the self in relation to friend.

The results with regard to age indicate decreasing social interest with increasing age (.7, .3, .3, $p < .01$) and decreasing self esteem (3.7, 3.8, 5.0, $p < .05$). The results with regard to self centrality were not statistically significant.

The American Negro³

The American Negro who is often socially stigmatized by virtue of skin color and socially isolated in many ways, provides a unique subgroup to examine the alienation syndrome hypothesis. Those who have investigated the sociological sources of alienation (Meier and Bell, 1959; Bell, 1957; Killion and Gregg, 1962; Mizruchi, 1960; Srole, 1959) have found that alienation is most characteristic of those individuals who are deprived of full and equal participation in American society. Consistent with the social psychological theory of alienation presented here, the low self esteem, the tendency to withdraw, and the general attitude of hopelessness of the American Negro has been cited frequently (Pettigrew, 1964; Drake and Cayton, 1962; English, 1957; Hammer, 1953; Mussen, 1953). Again, however, the previous approaches to the measurement of the self concept must be seriously questioned. Moreover, no study has previously focused on the three variables which are assumed here to be the crucial components of the alienation syndrome.

The subjects were 43 Negroes and 83 White boys and girls from the sixth grade of 10 schools in Delaware and Maryland. The original sample involved an equal number of boys and girls by race, but due to incomplete forms the ratio varies slightly for each of the three measures. Seventy-four percent of the original Negro sample were students in segregated schools. Seventy-nine percent of the original White sample were in integrated schools. The data were collected in May, 1965.

The measures of self esteem, social interest and self centrality were the same as those used in the study of behavior problem children. The tests were group administered.

The results with regard to social interest and self centrality support the theory. The Negro subjects expressed lower social interest and higher self centrality than the White subjects, but the results with regard to self esteem were opposite to those predicted, although they were not statistically significant.

Table 3 about here

The alienation of the Negro may be in the process of change and the data with regard to self esteem may reflect this change. Unfortunately longitudinal data are not available.

Among behavior problem children, neuropsychiatric adult patients, and to some extent, among males above 40 years of age and among American Negro children, a recurring pattern of self-other orientation is found. This triadic pattern includes low self esteem, low social interest, and high self centrality and may be associated with the concept of alienation.

Persons with low self esteem have no recourse to a stable guidance system in social situations. They are incapable of imposing a personal structure on social situations. Persons with low social interest have no recourse to a social guidance system such as group norms. The self centered person is presumed to reflect withdrawal from social contacts. In these terms the minority groups studied here may be assumed to lack self and social

guidance mechanisms and are inclined toward social withdrawal. The member of an unorganized and oft-times stigmatized minority collective (especially the behavior problem children, neuropsychiatric patients, and older males) may simply receive a low ratio of social reinforcements to positive reinforcements. The reduced rate of social reinforcement is now presumed to be the basis of self esteem. Persons with high self esteem have been found repeatedly to identify closely with their parents. (Ziller, et. al., 1969).

Assuming the critical nature of social reinforcement in the etiology of the alienation syndrome, the alienating process may be attributable, in part at least, to exclusion from a significant group. If the significant group also controls the reward system, exclusion which tends to be associated with self devaluation and self centrality, becomes a self fulfilling prophesy. Through exclusion, the degenerative alienation syndrome may be precipitated, thereby justifying to the excluder the initial exclusion.

It was noted that American Negro children did not express the crucial characteristic in the alienation syndrome, low self esteem. The recent reorganization and recognition of the Negro culture in the United States excludes this group from the other unorganized and somewhat stigmatized minority collectives studied here.

FOOTNOTES

¹The program of research which is represented in part by this report was supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation and by the Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, University of Oregon through a grant from the Office of Education, Washington, D. C. I am also indebted, as usual, to Dr. Barbara H. Long, Goucher College, who has contributed continuously to the development of this program of research.

²From an unpublished report by John Bankes, Governor of Bacon Health Center, Wilmington, Delaware; Barbara H. Long, Goucher College, Towson, Maryland, and Robert C. Ziller.

³I am indebted to Dr. Charlotte P. Taylor, University of Delaware, who provided me with the data from her dissertation (1967). The results reported here are based on a reanalysis of the data using t-tests rather than the chi-squared technique reported in the original work.

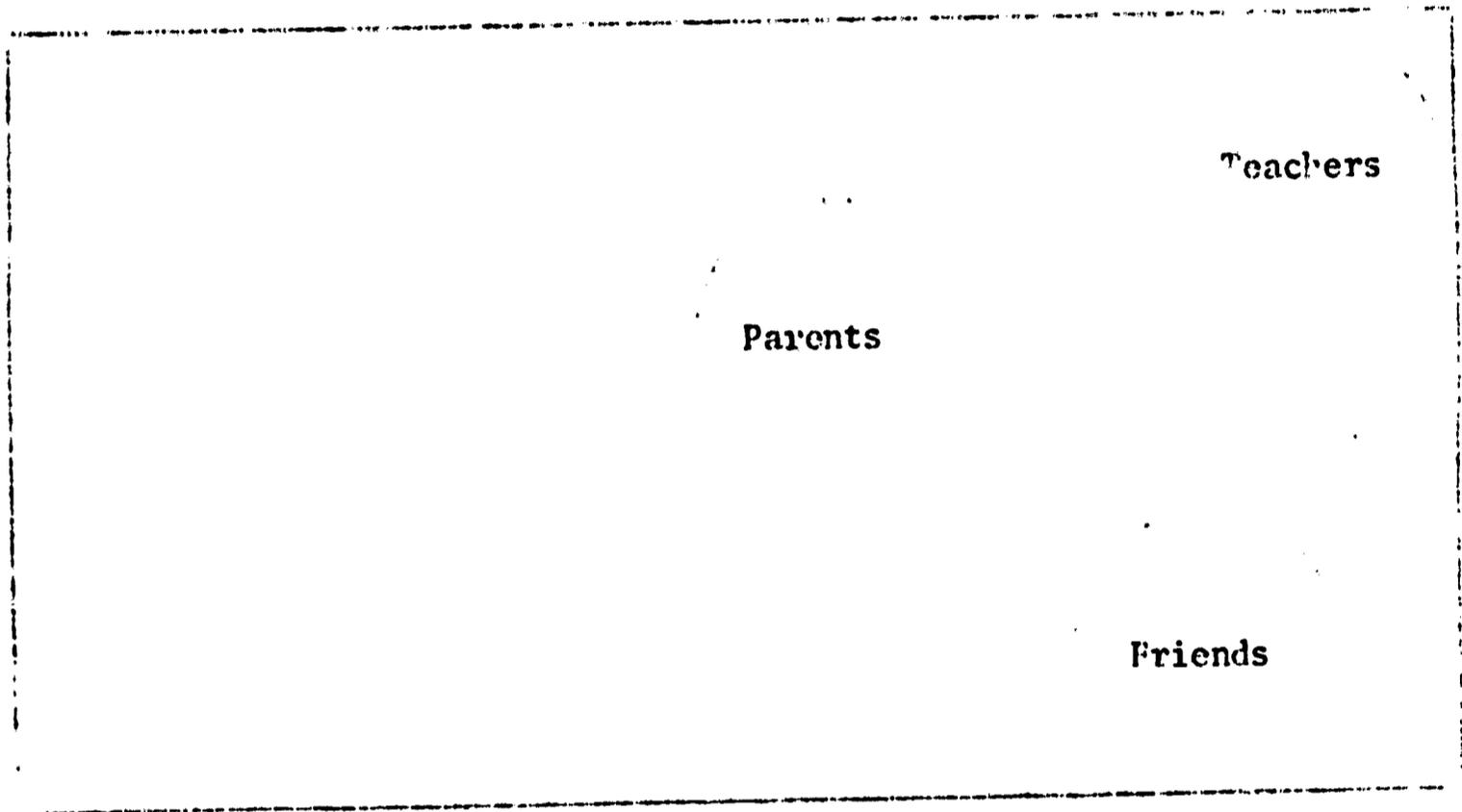
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Directions: The circles stand for your Parents, Teachers, and Friends.
Draw a circle to stand for yourself anywhere in the given space.

Figure 1: Example of an item designed to measure social interest.

Table 1

Means and t-Tests of Self Esteem, Social Interest, and Self
Centrality with Regard to Alienated Subjects and Control Groups

Self-Other Orientation	Behavior Problem Contrast		t	p
	Children(N=57)	(N=57)		
Self Esteem	2.9 ^a	2.3	2.34	<.05
Social Interest	.55	.70	2.37	<.02
Self Centrality	.38	.20	3.33	<.01

^aA low score indicates high self esteem. With regard to social interest and self centrality scores, a high score indicates high social interest or high self centrality.

Table 2
Means and Significance Levels of the Analysis of Variance of the
Self-Other Orientation Tasks Responses of Normals (N)
and Neuropsychiatric Patients (NP) and
with Regard to Age^a

Self-other orientation	Normals (N)			Age			F	df	P
	N (n=60)	NP (n=60)	P	22-39 (n=40)	40-45 (n=40)	46-64 (n=40)			
Self Esteem	3.6	4.7	6.04	3.7	3.8	5.0	3.66	2/114	<.05
Social Interest	.6	.4	6.00	.7	.3	.3	8.00	2/114	<.01
Self Centrality	.3	.6	6.64	.4	.5	.4	--	--	<N.S.

^aThe results in this table are those reported by Ziller and Grossman (1967, p. 20). Again, a low score indicates high self esteem, whereas with regard to social interest and self centrality scores, a high score indicates high social interest or high self centrality.

Table 3
Means and t-Tests of Self-Other
Orientation Task Responses of Negro
Compared with White Subjects

Self-Other Orientation	Negro (N=45)	White (N=83)	t	p
Self Esteem	2.3 ^a	2.4	3.25	N.S.
Social Interest	2.6	3.9	3.25	<.01
Self Centrality	2.8	1.7	3.44	<.01

^aAgain, a low score indicates high self esteem, whereas with regard to social interest and self centrality scores, a high score indicates high social interest or high self centrality.