

THE INFLUENCE OF SIGNIFICANT OTHERS
ON POLITICAL PARTY PREFERENCE:
A REPLICATION AND EXTENSION

by

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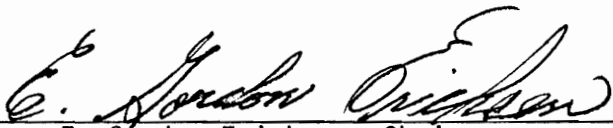
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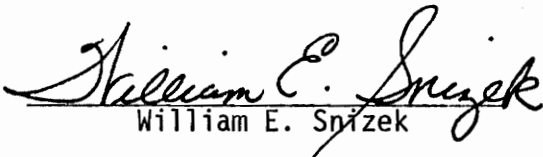
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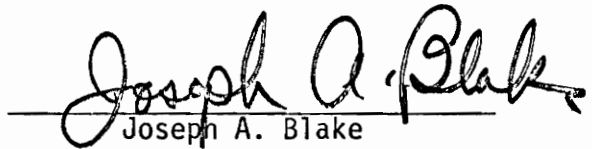
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CHAPTER I
THE PROBLEM

Introduction

In recent decades scholars in various disciplines have been interested in a set of problems revolving around the concept of "the self:" its development, maintenance, and functions. Much of the pioneering work in this area has been done by the symbolic interactionists and their predecessors. This school of thought comprises, among others, William James, Charles Horton Cooley, George Herbert Mead, and such later followers as Herbert Blumer and Manford H. Kuhn. James, Cooley, and Mead laid the basis for the general problem dealt with in this study, that of the self referring to the other, by demonstrating theoretically that the other is a necessary component of an extant self. As Webster (1975:379) aptly notes:

The interactionist view argues that the self is a consequence, primarily, of other's opinions and actions. The individual learns who he is and how good he is by observing the way others treat him and what they say. This means that self-concept is very much dependent on a social comparison process. The individual compares himself to other individuals or to objective standards and formulates a tentative hypothesis regarding his own level of abilities [or attitudes, feelings, thoughts, etc.]. Then he compares his opinion with the opinion of others to arrive at a more precise conception of his own abilities [*italics mine*].

Guided, in part, by the ideas and outcomes of an earlier study (Brooks, 1967) it is our intent to more fully explore the concepts surrounding the self's referral to others.

Nature and Origin of the Problem

Interest in the problem under investigation stems from the results of a study done by Richard S. Brooks, "Reference Group Influence on Political Party Preference," in which he finds that parents, conceptualized as "significant others," influence the political party preference of their children. Further, he cites fragmentary evidence that leads us to hypothesize that "significant others" and "reference group" are simply two terms emanating from the same conceptual framework.

Addressing the former point, we note that the idea of parental influence on offspring's political party preference is in no way novel. Many, such as James West (1945:85), have noted that, "A man is born into his political party preference just as he is born into probable future membership in the church of his parents." Hyman (1969:51-2), in what is probably the most often quoted work on political socialization, makes a similar observation when he says:

Formost among agencies of socialization into politics is the family . . . When children and their parents are measured independently and agreements in political views are established, it supports the inference that the family transmits politics to the children.

Still others, among them Robert K. Merton (1969:178), while not directly addressing the issue of political party preference at least lend credence to the proposition that parents, either directly or indirectly, inculcate certain norms in their children.

It is the family, of course, which is a major transmission belt for the diffusion of cultural standards to the oncoming generation [*italics mine*]. . . [T]he socialization [is not] confined to direct training and disciplining. The process is, at least in part, in-

advertent. Quite apart from direct admonitions, rewards and punishments, the child is exposed to social prototypes in the witnessed daily behavior and casual conversations of parents. Not infrequently, children detect and incorporate cultural uniformities even when these remain implicit and have not been reduced to rules.

Recent research, carried out in eight western nations, points out that one of these "cultural standards" might very well be political party preference (Dennis and McCrone, 1970).

There are, however, other studies such as Maccoby et al., (1954), Berelson et al., (1966), Eitzen et al., (1973), Knoke and Hout (1974), and Hyman (1969), which cite variables other than parental party preference as more pervasive determinants of offspring's political party preference. By and large, these other variables fall into two major categories: socioeconomic status, consisting of such items as income, education, and subjective social class; and, background information, consisting of age, sex, geographic mobility, and strictness of parental control. While these two categories of variables may be important in determining whether offspring will have the same political party preference as their respective parents, it is felt that by employing a direct measure of which groups or persons present the norms of conduct for the individual, more light can be shed upon political party preference. That is, if the parents are indeed significant others, under certain conditions, the offspring will, more than likely, express a political party preference identical to theirs. This relationship will not hold when the information regarding whether the parents are significant others is substituted for age, sex, income of parents, subjective social class, occupation of the head of household, or college class year. This

general hypothesis is based upon Brooks' demonstration of the insignificant effects of sex and age on whether the respondent had the same or different party preference as compared to his subjective report of parental party preference (1967:477).

Returning to the second issue raised, whether significant others and reference group are, in reality, the same concept, we note that Brooks hints at this notion without fully exploring the surrounding possibilities. In failing to do so, he is unable to elucidate the situational nature of the self's referral to the other. Basically, it can be shown that an interface exists between the general terms, significant others and reference group. This is due, in part, to their generic roots in the conceptual notion of "the other." In demonstrating this interface, terminology surrounding both of these ideas can be merged. That is, such notions as positive and negative reference group (Newcomb, 1950; Newcomb, 1958; Merton, 1957), orientational other (Kuhn, 1972), and role specific other (Denzin, 1972) can be merged into a meaningful systematization in order to demonstrate the dynamic role that "the other" plays in the development, and continued existence, of the self. It is expected that certain extensions and reinterpretations will be made in regard to Brooks' original findings. Accordingly, the next chapter will explore the hypothesized interface between the terms reference group and significant others.

CHAPTER II

SELF-OTHER SYSTEMS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE¹

Our intent in this section of the research is to review, in a detailed fashion, the pertinent literature surrounding the conceptualizations that have grown up around the notion of "the other." That is, we will endeavor to present a full and concise discussion of the development, meaning, use, and hypothesized interface with regard to the terms significant others and reference group. No attempt will be made to integrate this discussion with such other ideas as role theory. However, the reader should be aware of the congruence exhibited between the ideas set forth in this study and those involved in role theory. [For a more detailed discussion on this point, see: Newcomb, 1950; Merton, 1957; Smith, 1968; Borgatta, 1969; Levinson, 1969; and, Soloman, 1969.]

Significant Others: History and Development of the Concept

Eighty years ago, when the major writings of William James first appeared, American social psychologists began to adopt the notion that the individual's self-image is social in origin.

. . . the social self is, in James' terms, the recognition which one receives from his mates. The person's image of self, in other words, is taken over from the images of himself which others present to him, as indicated by their reaction of approval or disapproval. The individual learns to follow models of conduct which are suggested to him by others. . . (Coser and Rosenberg, 1969:271)

¹The title for this chapter is taken from Brim and Wheeler, 1966:7.

Cooley (1956:184), in a much more literary fashion, made observations similar to James' regarding his conception of the "looking-glass self:" "Each to each a looking-glass/ Reflect the other that doth pass." However, these early conceptualizations of the social or looking-glass self, when more closely examined, are found to be wanting. The self is too malleable and not firmly anchored in any developing pattern. It arises out of simplistic patterns of comparison. As Deutsch and Krauss (1965:183) point out:

What is lacking in both James' and Cooley's theories of the self is a detailed and systematic description of the process whereby the self develops as part of the maturational sequence of the organism. For this we are indebted to George Herbert Mead.

George Herbert Mead "modified and extended the ideas of Cooley" (Webster and Sobieszek, 1974:9) to encompass the notion of the developmental self. What is interesting about this improvement in the ideas of James and Cooley is that the latter did not even "realize the implications of his own concept [the looking-glass self]. . . until Mead offered his analysis" (Faris, 1970:96).

Mead's Notion of Self

For Mead (1934:135) the idea of the self can best be summarized in the following:

The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is [it] develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process. [See also, Mead, 1964:42; and, Miller, 1973:46-7.]

The ability of the self to develop in the context of a given set of social relations is based on its 'reflexive nature.' That is, the self

can be both subject and object to itself; it can reflect upon itself, or, as it is often put, it can be self conscious (Davis, 1949; Deutsch and Krauss, 1965). Mead (1938:445) sees the most fundamental character of the self in its ability to be an object to itself.

[The self] takes the attitudes of indicating to it-self things, persons, and their meanings. This attitude is attained by the individual assuming the role of another, or others, where the attitude is identical. It grows out of the more primitive attitude of indicating to others, and later arousing in the organism the response of the other, because this response is native to the organism so that the stimulation which calls it out in another tends to call it out in the individual himself. . . [*italics mine*].

Ostensibly, Mead's notion, not unlike those of Cooley and James, is that the person can view himself only from the standpoint of another, the only means for doing so is by taking the role of the other.

Taking the role of the other is equivalent to being aware of the response one's gesture will evoke in the other, which means that one's implicit response is functionally identical with the response that the gesture evokes in the other (Miller, 1973:48).

To be able to step outside oneself, that is, to take the role of the other, is not possible for the infant. In fact, in suggesting some general steps in learning to take others' roles, Mead was explicating the developmental notion of the self (Strauss, 1964). To be sure, the development of the self is noteworthy (not simply because it is here that he parts company with James and Cooley) since out of a two stage scheme he posits the conceptual idea of the generalized other.

In play, the first stage posited by Mead (1938:374), the reflexive nature of the self has not yet developed. That is, the ability to com-

pletely take the role of the other has not yet been established.

The child in one role addresses himself naively in another role. These roles are not at first organized into a personality, the child simply passing from the one into the other as the conduct in one calls out a response in the other. In more consecutive play, especially of two or more children, the tendency to take other parts comes in to stimulate and control the execution of the part assumed. Thus the child will stop and applaud himself and then resume his performance. If the play becomes a consecutive whole, the tendency to take all the parts at the appropriate moments is present in the attitude of the individual child, controlling his entire conduct. . .

The child, then, as he takes the role of the other in his play, learns to regard himself from an external point of view. He is, in a sense, organizing particular attitudes held by others toward himself in the context of the social acts he has explored in his play (Deutsch and Krauss, 1965; Davis, 1949). As Mead notes, this fundamental organization of attitudes necessarily precedes the second stage (in the development of the self), that of the game, in that in the game situation, the child must be ready to take the attitude of everyone else involved in the game. The different roles assumed in this situation must, of necessity, have a definite relationship to each other.

The nature of the game is such that every act in the game is determined and qualified by all the other acts. This is expressed by the rules of the game, and implies in each individual a generalized player that is present in every part taken. What takes place in this dramatic fashion in children's plays and games evidently goes on in the formation of the child's personality in the life of the family, and of other groups in which the child finds himself. Through assuming the roles of others, to which he has stimulated himself by his own conduct, he is organizing them into generalized attitudes and becomes a member of the family, of the school, of his set (Mead, 1938:374-75; Mead, 1934:151 passim) [*italics mine*].

To this point we have shown, using ideas from various of Mead's essays, that the self is social in origin, that through its ability to be both subject and object to itself, it can take the role of the other, and lastly, and most importantly for our purposes, as the self develops in a sequential fashion, an organization of attitudes with reference to others takes place. This is what Mead is alluding to when he mentions a "generalized player" in regard to the game situation.

The Generalized Other

Mead's notion of the "generalized player," or better known parallel term, the "generalized other," stands at the forefront of the entire conceptual scheme employed in this study. We have carefully led the reader through the basic steps that Mead outlines before the introduction of this, his most oft employed term. We feel the ideas behind the conception are important in that they are integrally linked to two terms to be introduced at a later point: significant others and reference group. In demonstrating this linkage, we will establish a groundwork which will allow us to show that an interface exists between these terms.

The generalized other is simply the "organized community or social group which gives the individual his unity of self. . . The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community (Mead, 1934: 154)." For Mead, the importance of the generalized other lies in its capacity for allowing the self to develop to its fullest. That is, the self, in the most complete sense, does not simply take the attitudes of the generalized other toward himself and others, it also must take these attitudes toward the various social activities and situations in which the self engages in a day-to-day basis. As Mead (1934:155)

points out, regarding this most heightened development of self,

Only in so far as he takes the attitudes of the organized social group to which he belongs toward the organized, co-operative social activity or set of such activities in which that group as such is engaged, does he develop a complete self or possess the sort of complete self he has developed.

Further, Mead (1934:155) sees complex society as possible only when the individual can take the general attitudes of others and direct his behavior accordingly. In this way, the community, or for that matter any social group, exercises some sort of control or influence over the individual.

It is in the form of the generalized other that the social process influences the behavior of the individuals involved in it and carrying it on, i.e., that the community exercises control over the conduct of its individual members; for it is in this form that the social process or community enters as a determining factor into the individual's thinking. In abstract thought the individual takes the attitude of the generalized other toward himself, without reference to its expression in any particular other individual; and in concrete thought he takes that attitude in so far as it is expressed in the attitudes toward his behavior of those other individuals with whom he is involved in the given social situation or act.

The generalized other, then, is an abstract notion of the other-- society's representative in the individual. This construct embodies the norms, values, and ideals that the self refers to in its abstract thought. The other, or what we shall herein term the categoric other, is the face-to-face concrete representative of some larger group, which the self refers to for its norms, values, and actions in a given social situation. Two of Mead's ideas are of crucial import here: the notion of the social origins of the self; and, the notion of control or influence mediated by the generalized or categoric other. That is

since the self arises within the context of social interaction, which the categoric or generalized other is of necessity a party to, and control of the individual must stem in part from the sanctions of the other ["the need for approval" cf. Davis, 1949], the self must accept a minimal number of attitudes, opinions, etc., so as to allow itself the capacity for existence. For it is that the self cannot exist apart from others. Therefore, in rejecting others' influence on the self, its very basis would be destroyed (Miller, 1973). Stated another way, the attitudes and opinions of others are important for the development and continued existence of the self. As Strauss (1959:35) succinctly puts it:

Validation and denial of validation by important other persons leads inevitably to reinterpretations of one's activity [*italics mine*].

But, who are these so-called important other persons that are necessary for the existence of the self? Mead spoke mainly of the generalized other, and in face-to-face situations, the categoric other. However, he did not give any clues as to which, or how many, individuals are to actually form the basis of these conceptualizations.

. . . it is not possible to be certain exactly how Mead conceptualized the generalized other--whether it is a weighted averaging of the attitudes of all the others with whom the individual interacts, or whether it requires a unanimous community opinion on the specific issue (Webster and Sobieszek, 1974: 11).

As some point out, Davis (1949) among them, there must be some selection of others whose opinions count most but, as noted above, Mead gave us no clues. Hence, we turn now to one of Mead's contemporaries who built upon his early work. In so doing, he helped to identify, more specifically, the others referred to by the self.

Significant Others²

Harry Stack Sullivan is probably best known for his ideas on the fusion of psychiatry with the social sciences. In point of fact, a series of his essays appears under just such a heading (Sullivan, 1964). However, we are most concerned with his elaboration and conceptual clarification of Mead's notion of the generalized other.

Sullivan, being quite concerned with the development and socialization of the infant and child, closely examined the relationships formed with others during this period in the life cycle. Naturally, this early period of life is one in which the child is exposed mainly to the influence of the parents, which Sullivan (1964:67) first termed "relevant others." In a series of later essays (Sullivan, 1953:16 ff.) he amended relevant others to read the "significant adult" or "significant other." What is important here is that the relationship between the significant other and the child is crucial for the remainder of the child's life. In fact, his entire conception of self rests upon the reflected appraisals of his significant others. As Sullivan (1953:20) points out:

As one proceeds into childhood, disapproval, dissatisfaction with one's performances becomes more and more the tool of the significant adult in educating the infant in the folk ways, the tradition, the culture in which he is expected to live. . . Gradually [the child] comes to perceive disapproving expressions of the mother, let us say; gradually he comes to understand disapproving statements.

²For a parallel discussion see, Berger and Luckman, 1966:131-33 ff. It should be noted that they, as do others, err in their attributing the term, significant other, to George Herbert Mead [cf. pg. 195].

Hence as the child develops, he refers to the significant other for approval or disapproval of his actions. For Sullivan, like Mead, the self arises out of this social process. However, Sullivan has restricted this process of referring to the other to the child's parents or others who are in charge of his early care. Clearly, this delimits Mead's notion of the generalized other to a select few who count most for the child.

The facilitations and deprivations by the parents and significant others are the source of the material which is built into the self dynamism. Out of all that happens to the infant and child, only this 'marked' experience is incorporated into the self. . . (Sullivan, 1953:21)

Because Sullivan places so much closure on who the other is (i.e., parents and those responsible for the early care of the child) he has moved away from explicating Mead's notion of the generalized other. Yet, his movement toward the categoric other (i.e., the other in the face-to-face situation) does not totally void the possibility of a link between the significant other and the generalized other. That is, the 'marked' experience fostered by the individual's significant other(s), which is incorporated into the self, implies not only a past history, but also points to the possibilities of an abstract association with these others. Viewed in this manner, Sullivan's significant other has some ties to Mead's generalized other.

Basically then, Sullivan sees the significant other as providing the fundamental basis of the individual's self-concept. However, another problem arises in that the restrictions placed on the term neglect the influence of others outside of those responsible for the individual's early care. That is, those others who effect one's self-concept in

his later life are not taken into account. Recent studies, such as Berger and Luckman, 1966; Brim and Wheeler, 1966; and, Clausen, 1968, have focused on this problem employing somewhat different terminology. They see the early life influence of others as primary socialization, and that of later life, secondary socialization. While we do not dispute either their ideas or terms, we note that there are others who operate in the same conceptual and terminological framework as ourselves. Hence, we turn to them for further elaboration on the notion of significant others.

Orientational Others

The late Manford H. Kuhn is responsible, at least in part, for the continued development and refinement of the conceptualizations surrounding the notion of the self's referral to the other.³ Basically, Kuhn recognizes that Mead, and others, have shown the other to be crucial in the development of the self. As the reader is quite aware, we have been careful to demonstrate this. However, Kuhn (1972:172) takes issue with how Mead treats the other, in that the other

is never attended to with the discerning and analytic interest which [he] give[s] the actor.

In fact, Kuhn asserts that for Mead, as well as others in his tradition

³It should be noted that Kuhn's research activity at the State University of Iowa sparked heated debates between those followers of Mead, principally Herbert Blumer, at the University of Chicago, and those followers of Kuhn. According to Meltzer and Petras (1970) this continuing debate rests, at base, upon the different methodologies employed by the two groups. However, even more basic is a differing philosophy between schools of thought which, in turn, dictates differing methodological techniques. Unfortunately, within the scope of this study, we cannot offer a more detailed discussion.

such as Cooley and Dewey, the other "is primarily a fact of the mind" (Kuhn, 1972:173).

Kuhn's indictment of how the other has been viewed does not stop with his criticism of Mead, Cooley and Dewey. It continues to Harry Stack Sullivan and his term, the significant other. According to Kuhn (1972:174), Sullivan, together with Mead, view the other as follows:

The other turns out to be the other as the actor sees him. But the actor's own view of himself is gained only through the image he imagines the other to have of him. His objects, his reality in short, derive from the same source of shared perspectives with imagined others.

What Kuhn appears to be revelling against is that the tradition, from Mead to Sullivan, places the other in a subservient position to the self. That is, the notion of the other and how it is selected, whether this selection process is regularized, and whether this entire notion can be observed is never attended to (Kuhn, 1972). However, in operationalizing the conceptual notion of the other, to a greater degree, this process, if it exists at all, can be documented. Kuhn's nascent term, the orientational other, is the outgrowth of just such a search for a regularized selection process. Kuhn (1972:183) sees the orientational other as referring to:

- 1) The others to whom the individual is most fully, broadly, and basically committed, emotionally and psychologically;
- 2) the others who have provided him with his general vocabulary, including his most basic and crucial concepts and categories;
- 3) the others who have provided and continue to provide him with his categories of self and other and with the meaningful roles to which such assignments refer;
- 4) the others in communication with whom his self-conception is basically sustained and/or changed.

Kuhn clearly meant this concept to be distinct from Mead's notion of the other and Sullivan's more restrictive significant other. It is felt that Kuhn's operationalization is noteworthy as it stands but is faulty on two fronts in that, at base, it is not clearly distinct from either Mead's or Sullivan's original ideas. With all due respect, we might note that had Kuhn lived to see the publication of his essay, he, too, might have seen these faults.

First, all Kuhn has done is elaborate upon Sullivan's notion of the significant other. That is, in the four points mentioned as comprising an orientational other, all seem to be derived from Sullivan's ideas of the significant adult's influence in the child's life. [Recall the fact that the marked experiences with the significant other are all that is incorporated into the self]. There is evidence that Kuhn realized this but because Sullivan's term was so enmeshed with Mead's notion of the other, he opted for a different name.

I should have preferred to call it by the name of significant other, but since that term has become so solidly entrenched in our usage as meaning something not basically different from simply "the other," in Mead's terms, I will suggest the rather less desirable name "orientational other" (Kuhn, 1972:182).

Nonetheless, the notion of the orientational other is not distinctly different from Sullivan's significant other. In his quest to choose a proper name for his term, Kuhn failed to see the similarity between concepts.

The second fault lies in Kuhn's seemingly interchangeable use of the categoric other with the generalized other. Because of this, we are never sure which 'other' the orientational other is supposed to be. It would appear, in merging the ideas of Kuhn, Sullivan, and Mead, that

the orientational other can be marginally linked to the generalized other and at the same time, intimately linked to the categoric other. That is, since Kuhn's orientational other is similar to Sullivan's notion of the significant other, there exists the possibility of the orientational other being an abstraction to which the self refers.⁴ Hence, its marginal link to Mead's generalized other. Yet, because the orientational other, in the same way as Sullivan's significant other, points directly to parents, or those responsible for the child's early care, the term more appropriately is an extension of the categoric other.

From the foregoing, it becomes apparent that both significant others and orientational others are, due to their specificity (i.e., parents or those persons to whom the individual is most basically committed), elaborations of the categoric other. Because both imply the possibilities of an abstract notion of the other, the inference can be drawn that a link, albeit a weak one, exists between the two terms and the generalized other. It becomes necessary then to introduce a final term which has no connection whatsoever to the generalized other.

Role Specific Others

Denzin (1972), in one of the few attempts explicitly directed toward the problem of the categoric other, introduced the notion of

⁴Moore et al., (1973:509) lend support to this argument by operationalizing the orientational other as the other important in a "trans-role sense." That is the other important without regard to any specific situation. Implied then is an abstract notion of, as well as the possibility of a past history with, the orientational other.

the role specific other; defined as: ". . . those others who are significant for individuals in a highly role-specific sense. . . (Denzin, 1972:186). In conceptualizing role specific others, Denzin implies that Sullivan's conception of significant others, as well as Mead's conception of the other (neither categoric nor generalized other specified), are both enmeshed in his notion of the role specific other (cf. Denzin, 1972:186).⁵

Merging Denzin's role specific other with the others of Mead, Sullivan and Kuhn allows us to conceptualize the self's referral to the other in a more dynamic way. Schematically [see Figure 1], Mead's generalized other is an abstract conception of the other which implies a past, present and future involvement with untold numbers of others. Mead's other, or what we have herein termed the categoric other, serves as the opposite of the generalized other in that it implies the other that the self is presently involved with in a face-to-face situation.

Following directly from the above, we note that because Sullivan places so much closure on who the other is (i.e., significant others refer to parents or those responsible for the early care of the child), he is further elaborating the notion of the categoric other. Yet, since he speaks of a 'marked' life experience being incorporated into the self, he implies the possibility of a past involvement with, as well as an abstract association to, the individual's significant others.

⁵It should be stressed that Denzin does not mention Mead's generalized other. If, in fact, he was implying that the generalized other is part and parcel of the role specific other, we would find this to be incorrect.

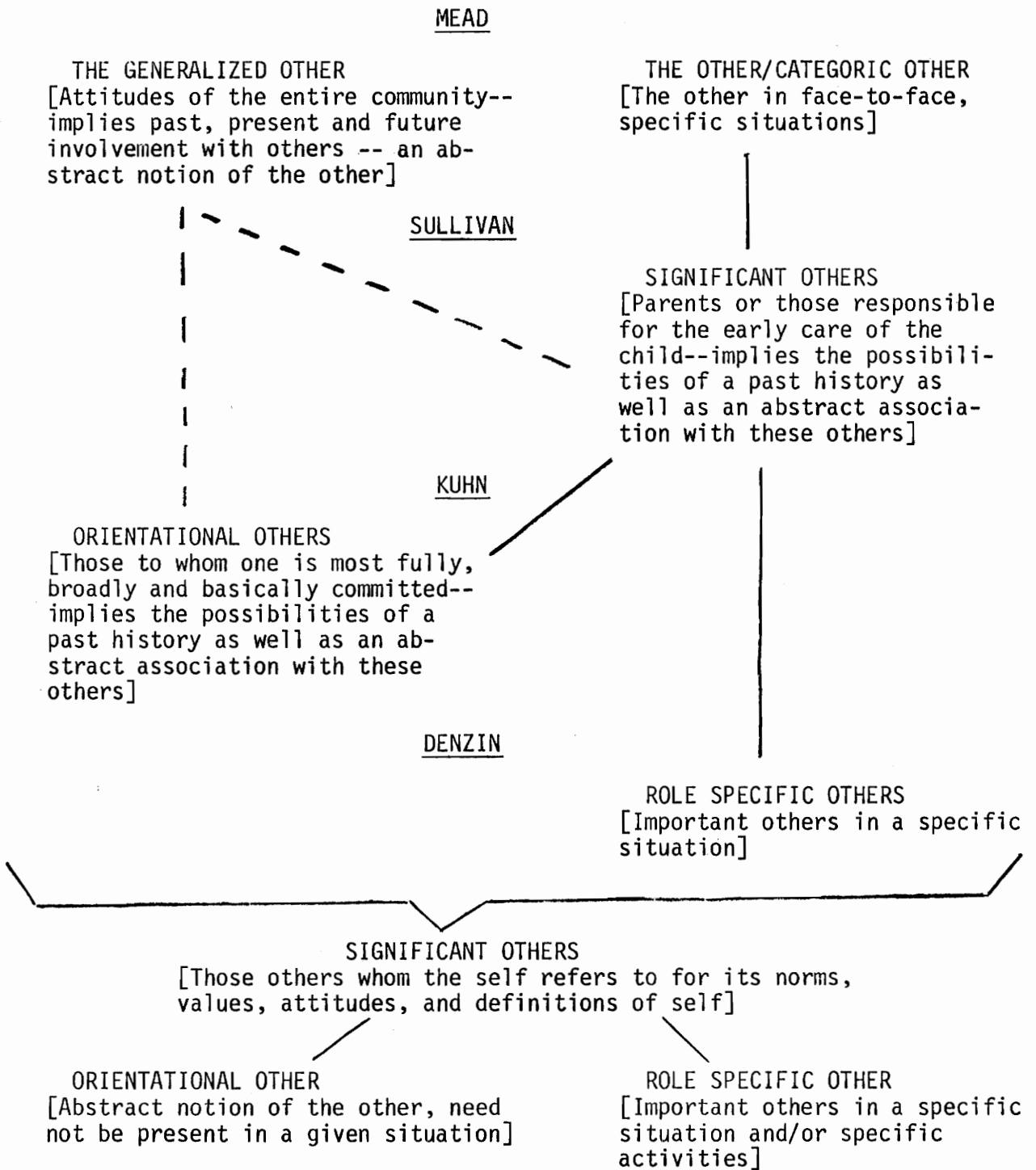


Figure 1. A Schema for the Development of the Concept Significant Others

These possibilities, then, serve as the link between his significant other and Mead's generalized other.

Kuhn's orientational other, in the same way as Sullivan's significant other, alludes to parents or those responsible for the early care of the child (i.e., orientational others refer to those others to whom the individual is most fully, broadly and basically committed). Because Kuhn's term seemingly points to parents, it serves as another elaboration of the categoric other. However, the orientational other, because it seems to imply a past history with, and abstract association to, these others can also be linked to the generalized other. The orientational other, then, is clearly in opposition to Denzin's role specific other (i.e., the other referred to in a specific situation). Accordingly, these two types of others (orientational and role specific) can serve as ideal-typical bifurcations of a general category of others to whom the self refers: significant others.

For our purposes, then, significant others are those others to whom the individual refers for his norms, values, attitudes and definitions of self. This general category can then be dichotomized to yield: orientational others, an abstract notion of others, they need not be present in a given situation; and, role specific others, important others in a specific situation and/or activity. It is in this manner that one step can be taken toward a more dynamic conceptualization of the self's referral to the other.

We could easily stop at this point and move to an empirical test of the problem at hand, i.e., offspring referring to their parents in regards to their political party preference. To do so,

however, would be to ignore a parallel body of concepts which, we feel, can be merged with that of significant others. Further, this second body of concepts, when coupled with significant other conceptualizations, will aid in the quest toward greater understanding of the self's referral to the other. Hence, we turn now to a fuller explication of what is commonly labeled reference group theory.

Reference Groups: A Brief History and Development of the Concept

Many scholars have noted, Kuhn (1970) and Shibutani (1972) among them, that the concept of reference group is wrought with unclear meaning and usage. Nevertheless the concept has continued to be utilized in a menagerie of studies (cf. Schmitt, 1972:10) seemingly without regard for this pointed lack of clarity. Our intent, then, is to clarify the concept by tracing its patchwork meaning and development since its inception in the early 1950's to the present.

Herbert H. Hyman is commonly given credit for the first operationalization of the reference group concept.⁶ In his 1942 study, The Psychology of Status, the concept is seen as a way of getting at an individual's subjective social status. That is, the concept is employed in ascertaining to whom the individual compared himself regarding his social status

⁶It should be noted that Roper and Wilks, approximately two years prior to Hyman's study, employ the term reference group. However, Hyman, due to his major focus on the term, is, for the most part, credited with its inception (cf. Hyman, 1942:8; Merton, 1957:284; and, Kuhn, 1972:175).

(Hyman, 1942:15).⁷ What is of import here is that in his conceptualization of reference groups, Hyman failed to specify how and in what manner the concept was to be used. It is quite apparent that Hyman understands the basic function of reference groups to be for the purpose of comparison. That is, the individual compares himself to others in order to arrive at a greater awareness of where he stands relative to these others. However, as it is stated, this basic function is too nebulous. Simply put, the concept lacks clear meaning which, sooner or later, will destroy any useful interpretation of it. As Sherif (1969:84) notes, "there are incipient signs of its becoming a magic term to explain anything and everything concerning group relations."

In an effort toward simplification and clarification of the reference group concept, three issues are crucial: (1) Are reference groups to be distinguished from membership groups? (2) Must reference groups serve only a comparison function? and, (3) Can an individual be negatively as well as positively oriented to a reference group?

Reference Groups and Membership Groups

It seems that Hyman (1942), in dealing with the concept of sub-

⁷A fact ignored by many is that Hyman also dealt with the concept of a "reference individual" which, in the same manner as the reference group, can be used as a frame of comparison for the individual (Hyman, 1942:15). While Hyman's results on this point are less than clear, it would nevertheless appear to be the case that in some instances a person's reference individual is a germane part of his larger reference group(s) (Hyman, 1942:23-29). It is felt that this idea lends some credence to the claim that an interface can be established between the reference group and significant other concepts. Hence, it will be more fully explored in that section of the paper.

jective social status, found great variability in the groups to which the subjects of his study oriented themselves. In many cases the subjects oriented themselves to groups in which they were not members.

Deutsch and Krauss (1965:191) point out that this led Hyman

. . . to distinguish between a "membership group" (the group to which someone actually belongs) and a "reference group" (the group which someone employs as a basis of comparison for self-appraisal). In some cases, the reference group is a nonmembership group; in other cases it is not.

If one accepts this distinction, it would appear that the self can orient itself to both membership groups and reference groups. In some cases, these two groups will be the same. Others, however, have interpreted Hyman's distinction in a somewhat different manner. According to Kuhn (1972:175), Hyman's conception of reference group

. . . assumes that people make fundamental judgements and self-assessments based on psychological identifications rather than on formal memberships in groups [*italics mine*].

Obviously, the two interpretations are different. While one maintains a distinction between the reference group and membership group, the other dismisses all membership considerations. Whether either one is "correct" remains a question for systematic empirical investigation above and beyond the scope of this research. Nevertheless, it would appear that Kuhn's interpretation, based on the following ideas, aids in the overall conceptual clarification sought.

According to Newcomb (1950:227):

All membership groups probably serve as reference groups for their members to some degree and in some ways. But not all reference groups are membership groups, most of us are influenced by the norms of some groups in which we are not recognized by others as belonging.

A direct conclusion would seem to be that to force a distinction between reference group and membership group introduces extraneous material since the information sought is to which group, or groups, the individual orients himself. Whether an individual holds actual membership in a group would seem to be of little consequence; what is important is the orientation he espouses. This conclusion tends to be confirmed in a broad spectrum of the literature on reference groups, in that many state that if the individual's reference groups can be identified very good predictions about his probable attitudes and behaviors can be made (cf. Shibutani, 1961; Sherif and Sherif, 1964; Sherif and Sherif, 1969; Sherif, 1969; and Webster, 1975). Clearly there is no distinction made regarding membership considerations.

Merton and Kitt (1950), dealing with studies of U. S. servicemen in World War II, find that in many instances men orient themselves to groups in which they are not members. Terming this orientation to groups other than their own (or nonmembership groups), "anticipatory socialization," they explain that the phenomenon is a function of the men's aspirations to become a member of the group (Merton and Kitt, 1950:87-95). Nevertheless, this documented orientation to nonmembership as well as membership groups can be viewed as further evidence that an individual's reference groups are based on an identification to, rather than membership in, them.

Still more evidence for simply focusing on the relatedness of the individual to the group, without regard for membership status, is seen in the Sherifs' work (1964; 1969). Their conceptualization of the reference group is simply that group, "with which the individual identifies

or aspires to belong" (Sherif and Sherif, 1964:54-5).⁸ Even in the most recent research, the idea of a conceptual distinction between reference groups being either membership or nonmembership is eluded to as being superfluous. As Webster (1975:127) notes:

Reference groups need not be membership groups
(and vice versa) -- that is a fundamental principle in using the concept reference group. A person may become a member of a group and not care at all what the other members think of his behavior or his attitudes. . . More frequently we see cases where individuals orient themselves to groups of which they are not members.

It would seem then, that to make a distinction as to whether an individual's reference groups are of a membership or nonmembership nature provides one with little information over and above that gained by simply ascertaining to which group he refers himself. Further, to focus only upon the individual's identification to groups aids in the clarification of what a reference group is, in that the reference group concept becomes a means to assess the self's referral to others in society regardless of whether the individual is in actuality a member of a group to which these others belong.

Functions of Reference Groups

In explicating the previous section, all complications concerning the functions that reference groups serve were excluded. As noted, Hyman (1942) sees that reference groups serve a comparison function for the individual. They allow the individual to compare himself to others so as to have a better understanding of himself. However,

⁸On this point see also, Sherif and Sherif, 1969:418; and, Sherif, 1969:285.

others have been inclined to feel that reference groups can serve not only as points of comparison but also as control mechanisms for the individual. That is, they can foster a set of norms or behavioral prescriptions for the individual. There are those who feel these two functions exist independently of one another. The notion herein espoused is that these functions exist simultaneously within the context of any given reference group. In demonstrating this, further simplification of the reference group concept will be gained.

According to Kelley (1968:78-9), in his classic study on the function of the reference groups, there are two kinds of relationships between the individual and the group.⁹

The first usage has been to denote a group in which the individual is motivated to gain or maintain acceptance. To promote this acceptance, he holds his attitudes in conformity with what he perceives to be the consensus of opinion among the group members. . . The second usage of "reference group" has been to denote a group which the person uses as a reference point in making evaluations of himself and others.

The former usage is termed the normative and the latter, the comparative function of reference groups. As they are defined, however, it would seem that these functions, of necessity, should occur together.¹⁰ When the individual employs a group as a checkpoint (i.e., the comparative

⁹In this discussion, any third function that reference groups might serve has been ignored. The reasoning behind this decision is that there is much disagreement as to what the third function is or if it even exists (cf. Shibutani, 1972:163; and Merton, 1957:283).

¹⁰Hyman and Singer (1968:8), although stating the fact less emphatically, concur that the two types of reference groups may not always be distinct.

function) in making evaluations of himself or others, his judgement must rest on some normative perspective held in concert with others. The converse follows, then, that when the individual utilizes a group for certain attitudes, beliefs, and/or behaviors (i.e., the normative function) he must make a comparison between what he perceives to be the group norm and his own norms, or between the norms of his own group and those of other groups.

An example of the normative and comparative functions existing simultaneously can be seen in the following. X is a graduate student. X is said to be a "good" graduate student by others whose opinions on the subject of "good" versus "bad" graduate students Y accepts. Y accepts these opinions of others because these others are important to him. They are his reference group, at least in the matter of who is a "good" graduate student. Yet, because Y needs to know where he stands on the continuum of good to bad, as a graduate student, he compares himself to X and formulates a final opinion of not only X, but of himself too. Because his reference group holds that X is a good graduate student, Y will probably surmise the same; in doing so, he will compare himself to X based upon the normative criteria that he understands his reference group takes into account in deciding whether X is a "good" graduate student. Hence, the normative functions served by his reference group helped him to formulate his opinions toward X as a "good" graduate student and the comparative function, operating simultaneously, allowed him to come to a greater understanding of where he stands relative to other graduate students and to X in particular.

In seeking answers to the first two questions, we have arrived

at a more simplified conception of what a reference group is and what function it serves. In the last issue discussed, concerning the ability of an individual to orient himself to his reference group(s) in either a positive or negative manner, no such simplification will be made. Simply put, it is felt that this distinction is crucial in that it allows one to assess, to a greater degree, the situational nature of the individual's relation to the group.

Negative and Positive Reference Groups

In his research at Bennington College, Newcomb (1943) finds that while some individuals adopt the more accepted attitudes of the general college community, others, while fully aware that these opinions exist, hold attitudes largely divergent from the community at large. The tentative answers that Newcomb (1943:161) formulates point to certain aspects of personality or "personality variables" as somehow influencing "conformity with the mores" of the college community. Clearly, Newcomb seems puzzled as to why the differences in attitude should be so marked by individuals who had all experienced the same, rather closed, environmental influences of the Bennington community.

In a later work, Newcomb (1950) posits, in connection with the reference group concept, the idea that an individual has the capacity to be either positively or negatively (or both, simultaneously) oriented to his reference group. According to Newcomb (1950:226),

. . . a positive reference group is one in which a person is motivated to be accepted and treated as a member (overtly or symbolically), whereas a negative reference group is one which he is motivated to oppose, or in which he does not want to be treated as a member.

In short, the possibility of negative and positive reference groups

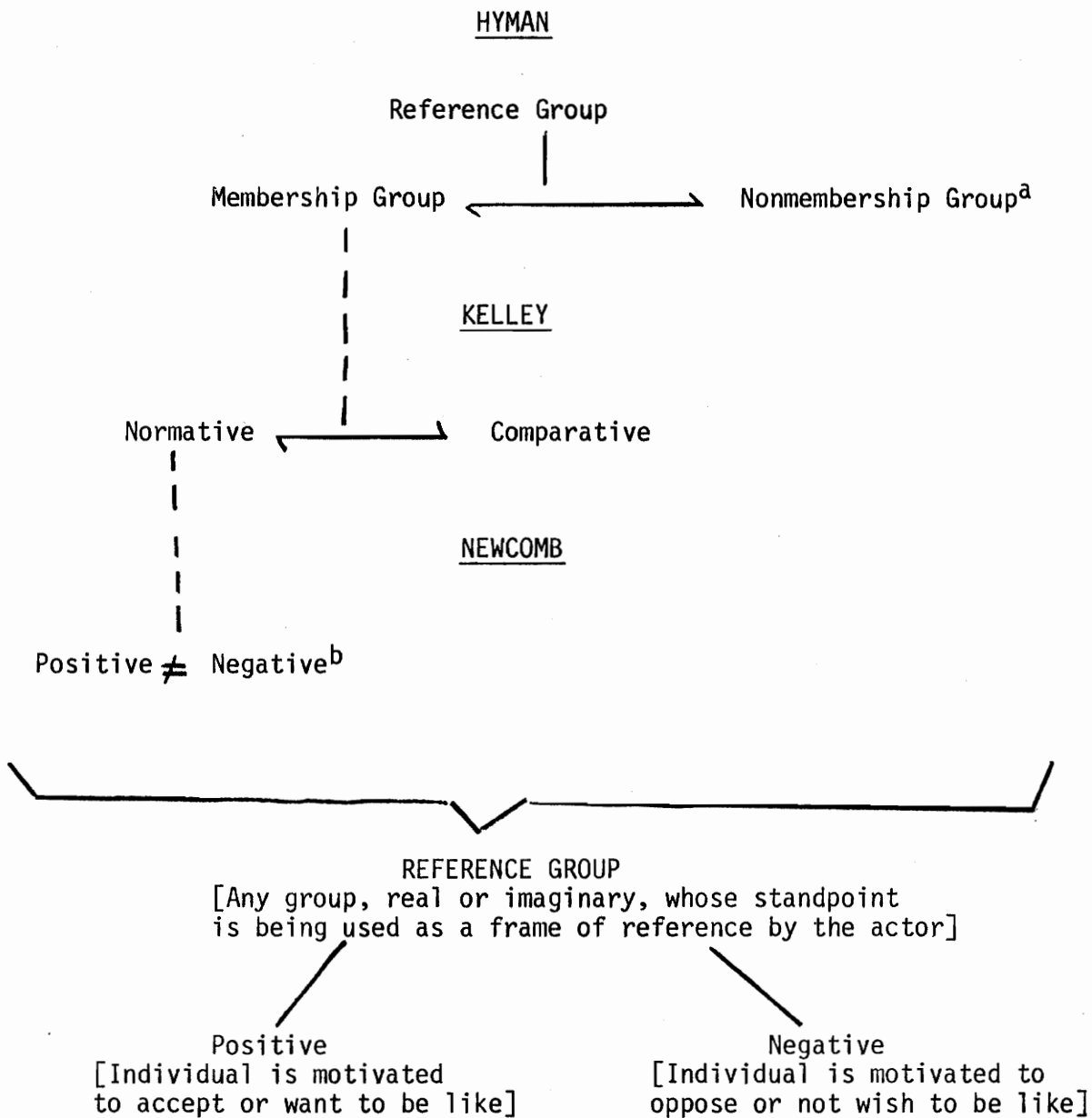
allows one to more fully comprehend the wax and wane present in the individual's relations to the group (cf. Merton, 1957:301). Newcomb (1958), returning to the still unclear results of the Bennington study, finds that in utilizing the concept of positive and negative reference groups, new light is cast on why some individuals hold one set of opinions while others hold another.

. . . attitudes, however, are not acquired in a social vacuum. Their acquisition is a function of relating oneself to some group or groups, positively or negatively (Newcomb, 1958:275).

Clearly then, attitude formation, or any other purpose that the reference group might serve, is a function of the way in which the individual relates himself to the group. Coupled with the fact that individuals relate themselves to several groups, this process is, at the very least, complex. Regardless of the complexity, to fully assess the individual's espoused attitudes, norms, and the like, which reference group theorists hypothesize can be done if a person's reference groups are known, information regarding in what manner (either positively or negatively) these groups are held must be obtained.

A Reference Group Schema

Thus far, it has been shown that both the membership and functional considerations surrounding the conceptualization of reference group can be dismissed. On the other hand, the regard in which the reference group is held, either positively or negatively, has been demonstrated to be crucial in comprehending the situational nature of the individual's relation to the group. This overall process of simplification can be shown pictorially. [See Figure 2].



^aThe linking symbol implies that the two are inseparable.

^bThe symbol linking the two implies that they are not equatable.

Figure 2. A Schema of the Major Developments and Subsequent Simplification of the Concept Reference Group

As seen in Figure 2, Hyman fostered an unclear notion of the concept by distinguishing between reference group and membership group. To our way of thinking, a reference group becomes such through an individual's identification with it. Whether the individual is a member of the group or not seems to be a less than noteworthy issue. This same thinking follows in conjunction with Kelley's (1968) distinction between normative and comparative reference groups. That is, since the functions would most likely occur within the same reference group context, it is useless to make the distinction. This leads to an overall simplification of the entire reference group concept. Shibutani's (1961:257) definition of a reference group reflects a similar simplified derivation.

The concept of reference group may be used to designate that group, real or imaginary, whose standpoint is being used as a frame of reference by the actor.

While engaged in the simplification of what a reference group is, Shibutani does not ignore the relative importance of the distinct notion of the operation of positive and negative reference groups. In stating that, "There is a selective sensitivity to others, men are not equally responsive to the opinions of everyone. . . (Shibutani, 1961:257) he implicitly confirms the dynamic underpinnings of the individual's relation to the group. That is, not only can one group be more important than another, but also the group can be held in a positive or negative regard by the individual.

In the simplification of the reference group concept, the seldom explored dimension of orientation to the group has emerged. One might recall that in the simplification of the significant other concept, the end products were likewise characterized in a 'dimensional' (or situational)

manner. Accordingly, upon reaching a parallel juncture regarding both reference group and significant other concepts, it is appropriate to consider the interface which is felt to exist between them.

Two Terms, One Concept: The Evidence for Interface

In merging the notions of reference groups and significant others, it becomes quite apparent that both concepts are, in reality, enmeshed in one concept -- the notion of the other. This follows directly from the final formulations of each term. Significant others are those others whom the self refers to for its norms, values, attitudes, and definitions of self. And, reference groups are seen as being composed of that group, real or imaginary, whose standpoint is being used as a frame of reference by the actor. The norms, values, attitudes and definitions of self would seem to constitute the standpoint that is used as a frame of reference by the actor. But, a problem arises in that the focus of each definition is on a different entity. The former is seemingly concerned with the individual's relation to other individuals while the latter focuses on the individual's relation to others who constitute a group. This is distinctly different from Brooks' (1967:474-75) interchangeable use of the terms.

. . . the terms "significant other" and "reference group" [can be] used synonymously. They may be defined as a group or person "with which an individual feels identified and to which he aspires to relate or maintain his identify."

The fact that the two terms point to different entities allows us to discount Brooks' idea that the terms are interchangeable. This leaves the question as to whether an interface, between the terms, exists. The

literature suggests that the evidence sought centers in the following three concerns: (1) The empirical clarification that reference group theory brought about in Meadian hypotheses; (2) The direct influence of Mead and others in the symbolic interactionist tradition on reference group theory; and, (3) The similarity in character of Hyman's (1942) reference individual and significant others.

Empirical Clarification

An important point, ignored in the discussion of Kuhn's orientational other, is that his concept is a by-product of a greater systematic and empirical treatment that the entire notion of the other receives in reference group theory. As Kuhn (1972:180) remarks,

One cannot help acknowledging the debt symbolic interaction theory has to reference group theory, if only in the demonstration that the problem of the other may be approached systematically and empirically.

Others, such as Deutsch and Krauss (1965) and Coser and Rosenberg (1969), confirm Kuhn's statement in that they feel that reference group theory (because it involves systematic empirical testing) is a logical extension of Mead's early work on the notion of the other. The outgrowth of reference group theory can be seen in a more refined understanding, by both schools of thought, of the process of the self referring to others. Realizing that refined conceptualizations of the other, stemming directly from reference group theory, are being utilized by those in the Meadian tradition, it must be assumed that the ideas surrounding the use of the concepts are of a parallel nature. Upon arriving at this conclusion, the first point of the interface is established.

Mead's Influence on Reference Group Theory

As Shibutani (1972) notes, there is actually nothing new in reference group theory. The reason for this is that Mead, and others in the symbolic interactionist tradition, made similar observations concerning the process of the self's referral to others years before the term reference group was coined. Kuhn (1970:76) confirms this influence stating that, "the notion of reference group is obviously closely related to the whole problem of the other as dealt with by Mead and Sullivan. . . ." Moreover, Schmitt (1972) in his book, The Reference Other Orientation, has documented, in more detail than anyone else, the pervasive influence of the symbolic interactionists in general, and Mead in particular, upon reference group theory and concepts. A summary of his points follows.

According to Schmitt, many of the underlying assumptions of symbolic interactionism have influenced and anticipated such ideas as normative and comparative reference groups. In this regard he notes,

It was the emphasis of the early school of symbolic interactionism upon the role of the other in the individual's self-appraisals that foreshadowed the comparative reference group concept. . . [Further] the generalized other, Mead's concept, is a precursor of what Kelley later referred to as a normative reference group (Schmitt, 1972:17-19).

The influence is not simply upon the ideas surrounding the concept, it is on the concept itself.

Symbolic interactionism both anticipated and directly influenced the development of the reference group concept through its emphasis on the symbolic other (Schmitt, 1972:17).

In serving as the most important forerunner of the reference group concept, it becomes even more apparent that the hypothesized interface can be demonstrated. In point of fact, it would appear that the terms

reference group and significant others are, as Brooks (1967) states, synonymous. However, in explicating the last issue concerning the similarity of reference individuals and significant others, it will be shown that this is not the case.

The Reference Individual and the Significant Other

Hyman's original conception of a reference individual follows directly in line with that of the reference group. That is, the reference individual is used for purposes of comparison by the individual. But the question arises as to whether reference individuals and reference groups are one in the same. If Hyman's (1942:23-29) unclear results are followed, we might conclude in the affirmative. However, Merton (1957), since he distinguishes between reference groups, reference individuals, and role models, might be less inclined to agree. At any rate, it is impossible to be sure one way or the other, since "Research and theory have tended to focus on reference groups to the relative neglect of reference individuals" (Merton, 1957:302).

It would seem, adding together much of what has been stated thus far, that a reference individual is, in reality, a significant other. It follows then that since both terms point to individuals rather than to groups that more likely than not, they (significant others or reference individuals) will be part of an individual's larger reference group. Again, this would confirm that the terms reference group and significant other cannot be used interchangeably. Yet, our notion that significant others (or reference individuals) are part and parcel of an individual's reference group can be seen in Webster's (1975:115) conception.

[A reference group is] a set of significant others with whom the individual may compare his attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

Given that significant others are part of a person's reference groups it becomes apparent that an interface between the terms exists [see Figure 3].¹¹ The very existence of this interface allows us to merge other ideas surrounding the terms. That is, since significant others are part of a reference group, they can be held in both a positive or negative regard. Further, since significant others can be either orientational or role specific, we can conceive of positive and negative orientational others, and positive and negative role specific others. It is in this way that the dimensional or situational nature of the individual's relation to the other can be ascertained.

Significant Others: Their Relation to the Problem
of Political Party Preference

As we pointed out in the previous section, the Brooks' study erroneously treats reference groups and significant others as synonymous terms. Another flaw exists, however, in that the situational nature of the individual's referral to the other, in the context of political party preference, is never attended to. Such questions as, what types of others does the individual refer to for his party preference, either orientational or role specific, and how these others are regarded, either positively or negatively, are not considered. By employing the

¹¹An important point to note is that the reference group concept, because it points to both real and imaginary groups, defies any ideal-typical classification as an elaboration of either Mead's generalized other or the categoric other. Evidentially it can be both. Therefore, in order to simplify the schema as much as possible, we did not include this complicating factor.

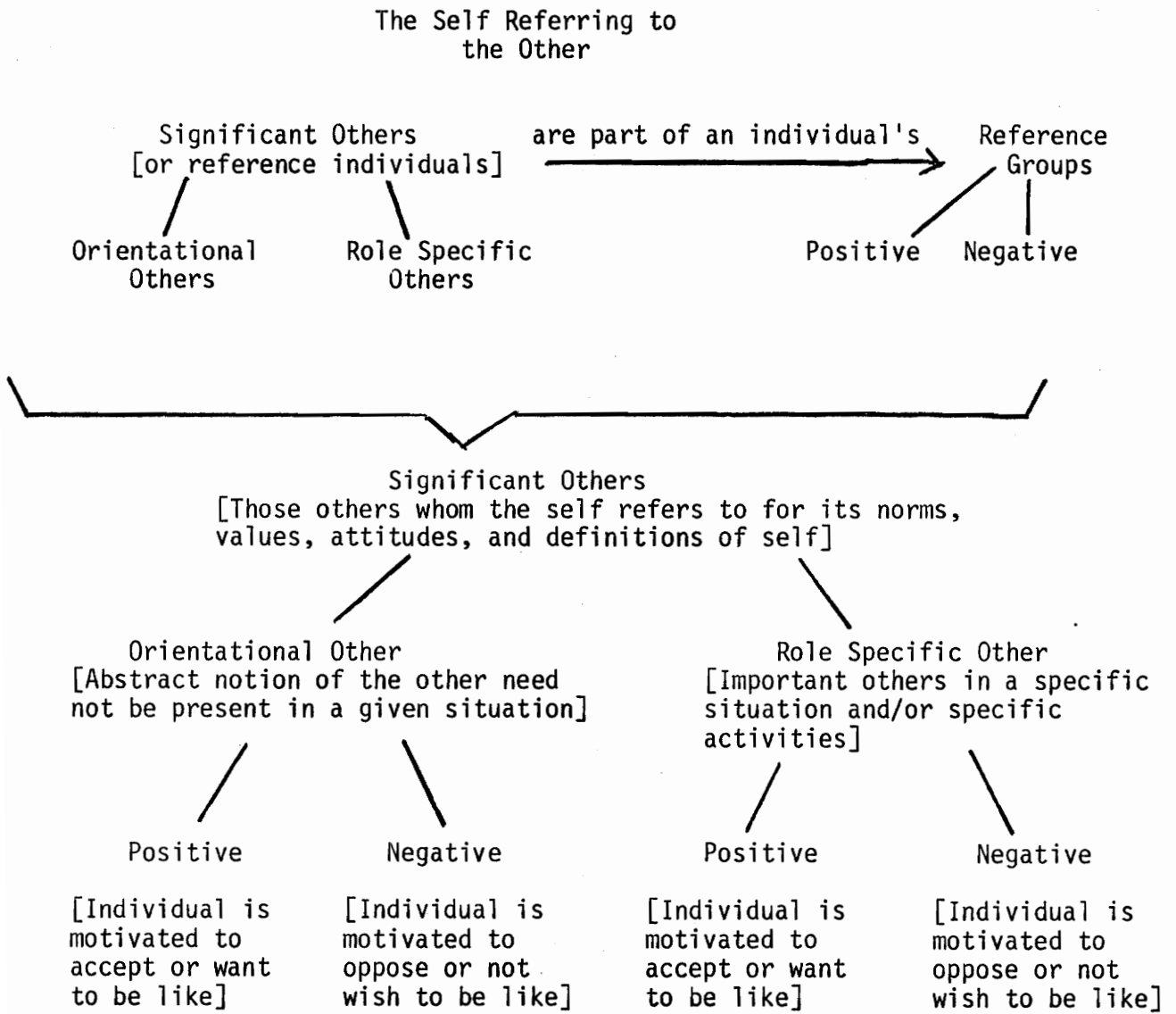


Figure 3. The Interface and Resulting Merger of the Terms Reference Group and Significant Others

previously formulated distinctions, regarding both the types of significant others as well as the manner in which they are held, a more complex understanding of the self's referral to the other, for his espoused political party preference, will result.

The Assumptions and Problems of the Brooks' Study

Brooks, not unlike others before him, assumes that political party preference is a hereditary characteristic of the individual.¹² Further he postulates that background variables will have no effect on whether parents and offspring express similar party preferences.¹³ These assumptions give rise to the idea that if parents have not been displaced as an individual's highly salient significant others, then the party preference expressed will be, in many cases, identical. The means for ascertaining whether the parents are significant others is simply by asking a general question concerning to whom the individual refers himself "when confronted with a problem, or in order to support or justify [his] actions" (Brooks, 1967:475). Whereupon the determination of the saliency (either high or low) of these others is made based upon the position in which the parents are listed in answering the above question.

Brook's assumptions and eventual outcomes seem plausible. However,

¹²Along these same lines, recall West's (1945:85) comment that, "A man is born into his political party preference. . ." It should be noted, however, that sociologists would refer to political party preference as being an ascribed characteristic rather than hereditary.

¹³Brooks hints at, but does not test, the notion that socioeconomic variables have no effect on whether parents and offspring express similar party preferences.

when examined in light of the individual's day-to-day dealings with others, the study appears to have two problems. First, Brooks has coupled what might very well be a role specific instance -- political party preference -- to the other important in a "transrole" sense (i.e., the orientational other, cf. Moore et al., 1973). Admittedly, this criticism appears to contradict much of the literature reviewed, in that parents supposedly transmit political preferences to their offspring, and they are also the most likely candidates for being the individual's orientational others. Therefore, if the parents serve as the individual's orientational others, their political party preference and that of their offspring should be similar. However, it is possible that at certain points in the life-cycle, the individual, in attempting to establish an identity of his own, might turn away from his parents to support or justify his daily actions. His parents, then, may become important only in specific situations or in certain activities.¹⁴ For one reason or another, the individual, while referring to peers in his day-to-day activities, may still refer to his parents in regards to his political party preference. Viewed in this context, parents serve as role specific others.

It would seem that a second problem of the Brooks study is that

¹⁴Floyd and South (1972), working with subjects from the sixth to the twelfth grades, support this line of reasoning. They find that in general, as age-grade level increases, there is an increase in one's overall orientation to peers. Thus, the possibility arises that peers might become a more important source, than parents, of referral when confronted with a problem or in order to justify one's actions in a transrole sense. It follows, then, that parents, at least during this period of the life-cycle, would serve as points of referral only in certain situations.

the examination of the saliency of an individual's significant others ignores the manner in which these others are held. It may be that the manner in which the individual's role specific others (i.e., parents) are held, either positively or negatively, effects to a much greater extent than the high-low saliency dimension whether he will espouse a political party preference similar to theirs.¹⁵ On the other hand, it may be the case that if the individual's role specific others are highly salient, they will also be held in a positive regard. This would then lead us to conclude that the high-low saliency dimension is another way of ascertaining positive or negative orientations to these others. However, due to problems in coding responses, neither of these ideas can actually be subjected to statistical testing. A detailed discussion of the coding problems, and an elaboration of the above ideas will be presented in the next chapter.

Hypotheses

From the previous discussion, the following null hypotheses are offered:

- 1H₀ There is no relationship between socioeconomic variables and similar political party preference between parents and offspring.
- 2H₀ There is no relationship between background variables and similar political party preference between parents and offspring.
- 3H₀ There is no relationship between orientational others and similar political party preference between parents and offspring.

¹⁵In speaking to the issue of political party preference, we have ignored the idea that orientational others can also be held in a positive or negative regard.

4H₀ There is no relationship between role specific others and similar political party preference between parents and offspring.

CHAPTER III

METHODS OF STUDY

On the one hand, this study represents an extension of an earlier work. On the other hand, it is, in large measure, a replication of this earlier work. Due to the replicative function of this research, it is necessary, wherever possible, to stay within "the boundary conditions" of the original study (Dubin, 1969:145). In general, these boundary conditions represent the overall methods of study. That is, the operationalization of variables, sample parameters and data analysis are to be as similar to Brooks' study (1967) as possible. Any differences that exist, and any problems that these differences might cause, will be fully dealt with as each of the aforementioned issues is addressed.

Operationalized Variables

This study employs three general categories of independent variables. Each of these categories is composed of several individual items designed to ascertain: socioeconomic status; background characteristics; and, the individual's significant others. One dependent variable, similar political party preference of respondent and parents, is employed. In actuality, the dependent variable is tested against items subsumed within the three independent variable categories. In the sections which follow each of these items, for both independent and dependent variables, will be elaborated upon.

Socioeconomic and Background Variables

As mentioned previously (cf. Chapter I) there are two ideas concerning the origin of an individual's political party preference. One argument suggests that parental party preference is a pervasive factor in the resultant party preference of the individual. Contrary to this is a segment of the literature which supports the argument that an individual's political party preference is predicated more upon socioeconomic or background factors than on parental party preferences. While Brooks' results are consonant with the former argument, they are seen as somewhat incomplete. That is, Brooks employs only two variables, age and sex of respondent, in an effort to discount their influence on similar political party preference between parents and their offspring. It should be noted that both age and sex are background characteristics of an individual. Socioeconomic variables, then, have been completely ignored.

In an effort toward a more conclusive demonstration of the non-effects of socioeconomic and background factors on similar party preference, three variables from each category are employed. The three background items consist of: sex of the respondent; age of the respondent, in years; and college class year. The three socioeconomic items consist of: parents' combined (both mother's and father's) yearly income, measured in six intervals ranging from under 6,000 to 25,000 dollars and above per year; occupation of respondent's father (or head of household where respondent grew up), classified according to Hollingshead's Occupational Index (1959); and respondent's assessment of his social class standing, measured in four intervals (upper

class, middle class, working class or lower class).¹

Significant Others

Following directly from the notion that parents influence their offspring's political party preference, the Brooks' study conceptualizes significant others as parents. With certain modifications, aimed at establishing the situational nature of an individual's referral to others, this study parallels the original.

The way in which we can ascertain whether an individual's parents serve as his significant others is by administration of a Significant Other Test [or SOT] (cf. Mulford, 1955). The SOT is an open-ended question which is used to establish the persons to whom the individual refers himself. The persons that are listed are taken to be the individual's significant others.

Due to the possibilities of two types of significant others (i.e., orientational and role specific) the SOT, as employed by Brooks, is modified in the following manner. First, because of the need to administer two SOT's to every respondent, the total number of entries possible is reduced from twenty to ten.² This helps to keep the time needed to administer the questionnaire minimal. Second, the

¹For the precise wording and exact ordering of the questions refer to the questionnaire which appears in the Appendix.

²It should be noted that Mulford (1955), the original designer of the SOT, employs only ten entries. Some, such as Denzin (1972), adhere to Mulford's original design. Others, however, such as Brooks (1967), and Moore et al., (1973), employ twenty spaces. What effects these varying numbers of possible entries might have on the overall pattern of responses is unknown.

original SOT is restructured so as to ascertain both the individual's orientational and role specific significant others (cf. Denzin, 1972). The SOT, designed to ascertain the respondent's orientational others, is placed toward the beginning of the questionnaire, accompanied by the following instructions:³

In the spaces provided please list those persons to whom you positively or negatively refer yourself, either directly or in your thinking, when confronted with a problem, or in order to support or justify your actions. Do not list individuals by name, but instead identify them by some relationship to yourself.

Following Brooks (1967:475-76):

On the basis of this test each student [is] placed in a category determined by the saliency of mention of parents or family. Those who mention parents or family in first or second positions [are] assigned to the "high saliency" group, and those who mention parents or family in third place or lower, or did not mention family anywhere on the test [are] assigned to the "low saliency" group.

However, this placement into high or low saliency categories ignores our concern with the individual's orientation to his significant others (i.e., positive or negative). In an effort toward demonstrating the possibility of this orientation the respondent is instructed to do the following:

Beside each listing you made [on the SOT] put a plus (+) sign next to those groups or persons who you would most want to be like, and a negative (-) sign next to those groups or persons who, while

³This ordering follows Denzin's (1972) recommendations to place the orientational SOT before the role specific.

having had a profound effect on you, you would not want to be like.⁴

With minor changes, concerning who the respondent refers to for his political party preference, this entire procedure is repeated at the end of the questionnaire. At that point, because the responses are based upon a specific situational context, we are ascertaining the respondent's role specific significant others.

One point that should be addressed is the high-low saliency versus the positive-negative classification of significant others. Unfortunately, due to the use of a joint coding procedure, no direct test, concerning which method of classification effects the dependent variable to a greater extent, can be undertaken.⁵ Nevertheless, it may be the case that the saliency classification is tapping the information which is quite similar to an individual's positive or negative orientation to his orientational or role specific significant others. That is, if an individual holds his parents in a negative regard (i.e., he wishes to be unlike them), he may still list them on the SOT but in a very low position. Hence, his parents would fall within

⁴The idea for constructing the questionnaire in this manner comes from Mulford (1955). In his study, after the respondents had made certain responses about themselves, they were instructed to return to these statements and rate them as being either favorable (+), unfavorable (-), or neutral (o) personal attributes.

⁵The following is an example of a joint coding procedure. If parents are highly salient (i.e., they are placed in the first or second position on the SOT) and if they are held in a positive regard, a single code is given which identifies both conditions. In this case the code is #06. If parents are highly salient and held in a negative regard the code given is #07. Due to the fact that both the saliency and the regard in which the other is held are merged into a single code, no test involving a direct comparison of the two upon similar political party preference can be undertaken.

the low saliency group and, at the same time, in the negative orientation group. Conversely, if the individual's parents fall into the high saliency group, he might very well hold them in a positive regard. By comparing results obtained in each of the separate conditions, it will be possible, by inference, to affirm or reject this speculation. This will be done in the following chapter.

Political Party Preference

The dependent variable, similar political party preference between respondent and parents, is a combination of three items adopted from an earlier study (Maccoby et al., 1954). The respondent is given a choice of four party preferences (Republican, Democratic, Independent, and Other) and asked to indicate which he "likes best."⁶ In a similar manner the respondent indicates, in separate questions, which party his father and mother like best. Following Brooks (1967: 475), if the respondent reports that his father's party preference is identical to his mother's, the questionnaire is subjected to further data analysis. If the father's party preference is different from the mother's, further analysis of the questionnaire is suspended. In this manner the respondent's party preference can then be compared to his parents' preference.

In general, then, if the parents serve as positive or highly salient role specific significant others, the party preferences of

⁶We are not sure of the exact wording of these questions in the Brooks study. However, since he, too, cites Maccoby et al., (1954) we assume that he uses the basic format of their question. It should also be noted that unlike Brooks, we employ a fourth possibility (i.e., Other). This is employed to ascertain any third party preferences.

the respondent and his parents should be similar. When any other independent variable is utilized, in place of knowledge of the respondent's role specific significant others, this relationship should not hold. That is, knowledge of either the respondent's socioeconomic status, background characteristics or orientational significant others should have no effect upon whether the respondent and his parents hold similar political party preferences.

The Sample

The data for this study represents a random selection of two classes, from the universe of all Sociology classes, taught at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in the fall of 1975. Due to the brevity of the instrument, little time was required to gather the responses (the questionnaire can be answered in a fifteen to twenty minute period) and complete the entire data collection process. Verbal instructions were kept to a minimum and no help was to be given. Strict adherence to these principles is thought to be of utmost importance so as not to suggest responses.

Restrictions, concerning which cases have to be eliminated from the total sample follow directly from the Brooks study (1967:475). First, only unmarried, undergraduate students are to be included in the analysis. Second, the respondent's father and mother must be reported as having identical party preferences. Lastly, although not addressed by Brooks, the three items concerning political party preference must be complete.

Incorporation of the above restrictions yields the following

parameter comparisons between this sample and Brooks'. After "a few exclusions" the Brooks' sample size is 243. The total sample size, before exclusion, of the present study is 224. After exclusions, which represent 33.5 per cent (N = 75) of the total, 149 cases remain. In round figures: 2 per cent (N = 4) must be excluded because they are married; 26 per cent (N = 58) must be excluded because the reported party preference of the father is different from the mother's; and, 6 per cent (N = 13) must be excluded because their questionnaires are so incomplete as to be useless.

Comparison on age and sex parameters, however, suggest that aside from disparate N's there is little overall difference between the samples. Concerning the ages of the respondents, the Brooks study reports 48.1 per cent (N = 117) 16-18 year olds compared with 69.1 per cent (N = 103) 17-18 year olds in this study. However, concerning the sex of respondents, there is a reversal between studies with this study exhibiting a more even break between categories; 48.3 per cent (N = 72) females versus Brooks' 66.7 per cent (N = 162) females. Because there can be no further comparison between samples, since Brooks reports no other parameters, we assume that any other differences that exist might be balanced (much like the age and sex parameters) between the two studies.

Data Analysis

We have briefly mentioned that the dependent variable, similar political party preference, as well as the independent variables dealing with orientational and role specific others are dichotomized.

Following Brooks all other variables are dichotomized based upon the most even numerical split possible. That is, the categories of each variable should represent as close to a 50-50 split of cases as possible.⁷

This bifurcation of variables renders all data nominal. Yules Q, a special case of Gamma appropriate for two-by-two nominal-nominal data designs, serves as the measure of the degree of association between the independent and dependent variables. To test the statistical significance of the relationships we utilize a 95 per cent confidence limit for Q (cf. Davis, 1971).⁸ In general, if the two confidence limits have the same sign we can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that Q is statistically significant at the .05 level. If, however, the two confidence limits have opposite signs or if one of them is .00, we must fail to reject the null hypothesis ($P > .05$). Further, Davis (1971) suggests that in this case Q should be interpreted as if its value were really .00 (no association between variables).

⁷Because of a highly skewed distribution, one independent variable, respondent's assessment of his social class, is deleted from bivariate analysis. It should be noted then, that only two socioeconomic variables remain in the analysis.

⁸The confidence limit estimate takes the form:

$$Q_{xy} \pm (1.96) \sqrt{\frac{(1.00 - Q_{xy}^2)^2 \left(\frac{1}{A} \frac{1}{B} \frac{1}{C} \frac{1}{D} \right)}{4}}$$

Where A, B, C, and D are the respective cell frequencies; and, where 1.96 represents the critical value of Z for a two-tailed test of significance at the .05 probability level.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter is divided into two major sections. The first section deals with the distribution of responses on the dependent and independent variables. Some reiteration of ideas accompanies the presentation of each frequency distribution. In the second section, each of the four hypotheses, presented at the conclusion of Chapter II, is tested.

The Distribution of Responses

The Dependent Variable

Table I summarizes the results of tabulating the percentage of respondents who express a political party preference either similar to, or different from, their parents. It is interesting to note that a rather large proportion of all respondents (81.2%) express a party preference similar to their parents. This leaves only a small number (18.8%) who express a party preference different from their parents. With such a vast majority of respondents holding party preferences similar to their parents, there must be some factor or factors held in common by many of the respondents, which effect the similarity in party preference between parents and offspring. Toward this end each of the following independent variables is utilized.

The Independent Variables

Table II summarizes the result of tabulating the percentage of

TABLE I

A FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS
HAVING POLITICAL PARTY PREFERENCES SIMILAR TO,
OR DIFFERENT FROM, THEIR PARENTS

Political Party Preference of Respondent

Same as Parents

81.2%

(N = 121)

Different from Parents

18.8%

(N = 28)

TABLE II

A FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS
ON SOCIOECONOMIC VARIABLES

Parent's Yearly Income		Occupation of the Head of Household	
20,000 and over	Less than 19,999	Business Managers and Higher Executives	All Others
58.9%	41.1%	61.5%	38.5%
(N = 86)	(N = 60)	(N = 83)	(N = 52)

respondents falling within categories on each of the socioeconomic variables. Similarly, Table III reports the percentage of respondents falling within categories on each of the background variables. Examination of both tables reveals that only two variables, sex and parents' yearly income, approximate a 50-50 split. Nevertheless, the distribution on the other variables is felt to be adequate enough to test whether either of the two major categories (socioeconomic or background) has any consequence upon the relationship of similar party preference between the respondent and his parents.

Following from Brooks' (1967) study, the aforementioned independent variables are seen as having no effect upon whether the respondent's political party preference will be similar to his parents'. Brooks notes that, in general, it is the persons or groups that present the everyday norms of conduct, or attitudes, who have a bearing upon the individual's espoused political party preference. If the parents are the individual's highly salient significant others, then he will very probably express a party preference similar to theirs. Recalling that this study bifurcates significant others as orientational and role specific, both types of others are employed to test this notion.

Table IV summarizes the results of tabulating the percentage of respondents whose parents are high or low saliency and positive or negative orientational others. Two things are important to note. First, there is a rather large difference (14.1%) in the proportion of respondents who place parents in a high saliency position (70.5%) compared to those who regard their parents positively (84.6%). This difference seems to cast some doubt on the speculation that the

TABLE III

A FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS
ON BACKGROUND VARIABLES

Sex of Respondent		Age of Respondent		College Class Year	
Female	Male	17-18	19-23	Freshmen	All Others
48.3%	51.7%	69.1%	30.9%	73.0%	27.0%
(N = 72)	(N = 77)	(N = 103)	(N = 46)	(N = 108)	(N = 40)

TABLE IV

A FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS
WHO HOLD PARENTS AS ORIENTATIONAL OTHERS BY
THE SALIENCY OF MENTION AND REGARD IN WHICH PARENTS ARE HELD

Saliency of Mention		Regard Held	
High Saliency	Low Saliency	Positively	Negatively
70.5%	29.5%	84.6%	15.4%
(N = 105)	(N = 44)	(N = 110)	(N = 20)

saliency of mention is another way of ascertaining the regard in which these others are held. Second, and more importantly, the vast majority of respondents indicate that their parents serve as either highly salient or positive orientational others. Coupling this with the finding that a large proportion of respondents express a political party preference similar to their parents leads us to conclude that there may be some relationship between orientational others and similar party preference.

In contrast to the above line of reasoning, it may be that this period of the life cycle is characterized by a turning away from parents as points of reference for everyday attitudes or norms of conduct. That is, the parents will be referred to more in specific situations or for specific attitudes. An example of this situational context might very well be the individual's referral to his parents in regards to his political party preference. In this case parents would serve as the individual's role specific others.

Table V summarizes the results of calculating the percentage of respondents whose parents serve as high or low saliency and positive or negative role specific others. As in the orientational other case we find an overwhelming proportion of respondents placing parents in a high saliency position (75.2%) or holding them in a positive regard (82.3%). Unlike the orientational other case, there is little difference (7.1%) in the proportion of respondents who hold parents, as role specific others, in a positive regard and as highly salient. However, other than this narrowing of the difference in the proportion of respondents who place parents in high saliency and positive regard cate-

TABLE V

A FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS
WHO HOLD PARENTS AS ROLE SPECIFIC OTHERS BY THE
SALIENCY OF MENTION AND REGARD IN WHICH PARENTS ARE HELD

Saliency of Mention		Regard Held	
High Saliency	Low Saliency	Positively	Negatively
75.2%	24.8%	82.3%	17.7%
(N = 112)	(N = 37)	(N = 102)	(N = 22)

gories, the conclusions are similar to those drawn from the distribution of responses in the orientational other case. That is, based upon the large number of respondents who hold parents, as role specific others, in a positive or highly salient manner and the large proportion of respondents who express a party preference similar to their parents, there may be some relationship between the two variables.

Testing of Hypotheses

The Effect of Socioeconomic Variables on Similar Party Preference

Table VI summarizes the results of calculating Yule's Q and its confidence interval for the relationship between the two socioeconomic variables -- parents' yearly income and occupation of the head of household -- and those respondents who hold a political party preference similar to their parents. We find no significant difference between categories in the percentage of respondents who espouse a party preference similar to parents when either income or occupation are utilized as determinants of this relationship. In other words, there exists no statistically significant difference between respondents differentiated on the basis of either parental income or occupational status in the proportion who express a political party preference similar to that of their parents. Based upon these results the null hypothesis which states that:

H_0 There is no relationship between socioeconomic status and similar political party preference between parents and offspring

cannot be rejected at the .05 probability level.

TABLE VI

A COMPARISON OF THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO HOLD
POLITICAL PARTY PREFERENCES SIMILAR TO PARENTS, BY SOCIOECONOMIC VARIABLES

Respondents with Political Party
Preferences Similar to Parents^a

By Parents' Yearly Income		By Occupation of the Head of Household ^b	
20,000 and Over	Less than 19,000	Business Managers and Higher Executives	All Others
81.4%	81.7%	83.1%	78.8%
(N = 70)	(N = 49)	(N = 69)	(N = 41)
Q = -.01		Q = .14	
N.S.		N.S.	

^a All calculations are based on N = 149 unless otherwise noted.

^b N = 135.

The Effect of Background Variables on Similar Party Preference

The relationship between respondents who hold party preferences similar to their parents by their sex, age, and college class year are presented in Table VII. Consonant with the previous section, we find no significant difference in the percentage of respondents who espouse a political party preference similar to parents when either sex, age, or college class year are utilized as determinants of this relationship. There exists, then, no statistically significant difference between respondents differentiated on the basis of their sex, age, or college class year in the proportion who express a political party preference similar to their parents. Based upon these results the null hypothesis which states that:

$2H_0$ There is no relationship between background variables and similar political party preference between parents and offspring

cannot be rejected at the .05 probability level.

In the failure to reject the first two null hypotheses the stage has been set for the consideration of the two alternative hypotheses. The first alternative, whether orientational others influence similar political party preference, follows directly from the Brooks study. The second, whether role specific others influence similar party preference, is a product of the expressed goal of this study to examine the individual's referral to others in a more dynamic way.

The Influence of Orientational Others on Similar Party Preference

Summarized in Table VIII are the results of calculating Yule's Q and its confidence interval for the relationship between orientational

TABLE VII

A COMPARISON OF THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO HOLD POLITICAL PARTY PREFERENCES
SIMILAR TO PARENTS, BY BACKGROUND VARIABLES

Respondents with Political Party
Preferences Similar to Parents ^a

By Sex of Respondent		By Age of Respondent		By College Class Year ^b		
Female	Male	17-18	19-23	Freshmen	All Others	
80.6%	81.8%	79.6%	84.8%	81.5%	82.5%	
(N = 58)	(N = 63)	(N = 82)	(N = 39)	(N = 88)	(N = 33)	
Q = -.04		Q = -.18		Q = -.03		
N.S.		N.S.		N.S.		

^a All calculations are based on N = 149 unless otherwise noted.

^b N = 148.

TABLE VIII

A COMPARISON OF THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO HOLD POLITICAL PARTY PREFERENCES
SIMILAR TO PARENTS, BY SALIENCY OF MENTION AND REGARD
HELD ON THE ORIENTATIONAL OTHER SOT

Respondents with Political Party
Preferences Similar to Parents ^a

By Saliency of Mention of Parents By Regard in Which Parents are Held ^b

High Saliency	Low Saliency	Positively	Negatively
83.5%	75.0%	81.8%	80.0%
(N = 88)	(N = 33)	(N = 90)	(N = 16)
Q = .27			Q = .06
N.S.			N.S.

^a All calculations are based on N = 149 unless otherwise noted.

^b N = 130.

others and similar political party preference. Unlike Brooks' results, we find no statistically significant difference in the percentage of respondents who express a party preference similar to parents when information regarding the saliency of mention of parents, as orientational others, is utilized. Likewise, when knowledge of the regard in which the orientational others are held is employed, there exists no significant difference in the percentage of respondents who espouse a party preference similar to parents. Based upon these results we can not reject, at the .05 probability level, the null hypothesis which states that:

3H₀ There is no relationship between orientational others and similar political party preference between parents and offspring.

At this juncture two of our previous ideas are important to review. First, it was stated as a possibility that the high-low saliency dimension may be tapping information roughly equivalent to the positive-negative regard in which the other is held. Further examination of Table VIII suggests that this may indeed be the case. This conclusion is based upon the fact that there is little difference in the percentage of respondents who express a party preference similar to their parents when either knowledge of the saliency of mention or regard in which held is utilized. Second, the failure to reject the aforementioned hypothesis lends some support to the argument that parents, at this stage of the life-cycle, are not perceived by the individual as points of reference in his daily (or transrole) activities. To more completely assess the merit of these speculations, we turn to an examination of the final

hypothesis.

The Influence of Role Specific Others on Similar Party Preference

Table IX summarizes the results of calculating Yule's Q and its confidence interval for the relationship between role specific others and similar party preference between parents and offspring. There exists a statistically significant relationship between the proportion of respondents who espouse a party preference similar to parents and either knowledge of the saliency of mention or the regard in which parents as role specific others are held. That is, when parents serve as either the individual's highly salient, or positive, role specific others, the political party preferences of his parents and himself will often times be similar. Based upon these results the null hypothesis which states that:

H_0 There is no relationship between role specific others and similar political party preference between parents and offspring

can be rejected at the .05 probability level.

The findings indicate that neither socioeconomic nor background variables has any significant effect upon similar political party preference between respondents and their parents. Moreover, orientational others, or what Brooks terms significant others, have no significant influence upon similar party preference. We do find, however, that if the respondent's parents serve as his highly salient, or positive, role specific others, he will very likely express a political party preference similar to theirs. This last finding seems to lend support to two speculations voiced throughout this

TABLE IX

A COMPARISON OF THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO HOLD POLITICAL PARTY PREFERENCES SIMILAR TO PARENTS, BY SALIENCY OF MENTION AND REGARD HELD ON THE ROLE SPECIFIC SET

Respondents with Political Party Preferences Similar to Parents ^a

By Saliency of Mention of Parents		By Regard in Which Parents are Held ^b	
High Saliency	Low Saliency	Positively	Negatively
84.8%	70.3%	84.3%	68.2%
(N = 95)	(N = 26)	(N = 86)	(N = 15)
Q = .41		Q = .43	
p ≤ .05		p ≤ .05	

^a All calculations are based on N = 149 unless otherwise noted.

^b N = 124.

research. First, the similar results on both the saliency and regard dimensions seem to confirm the notion that the former is another means of ascertaining the latter. That is, if the saliency of mention of the orientational or role specific other is known, a fairly good guess as to whether the other is held in a positive or negative regard can be made. And second, the finding that orientational others have no significant influence on similar party preference while role specific others do, seems to support the contention that this period of the life-cycle is characterized by a turning away from parents as concerns one's general attitudes. The individual, in turn, refers to his parents only in certain situations or for certain attitudes. Political party preference would appear to be one of these attitudes.

CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Restatement of the Problem

The problem structuring this investigation is the determination of the extent to which parents, operationalized in a general sense as significant others, influence their offspring's political party preference.

Overview of Study

The idea that parents influence their offspring's political party preference is in no way new or different. However, a slightly different approach to this problem is found in the study done by Richard S. Brooks (1967). His interest in the problem of political party preference centers on explaining why so many people espouse a party preference similar to their parents. What is different about his approach is that it draws heavily upon literature concerned with the self's referral to others. That is, he rejects the argument that socioeconomic or background variables have any effect upon similar party preference between parents and offspring. Instead he focuses upon those persons or groups who set the standards of conduct for the individual in the belief that they are responsible for the eventual political party preference of the individual. In this regard, Brooks finds that if the individual's parents serve as his highly salient significant others (i.e., those most responsible for setting

his standards of conduct) then his political party preference will, in many cases, be similar to theirs.

Upon closer examination the Brooks study appears faulty on three crucial dimensions. First, the alternative argument, whether socio-economic and background variables effect similar political party preference between parents and offspring is never fully tested. Until a more complete test of the alternative argument is made, it cannot be discounted as a possibility. Secondly, Brooks, in treating significant others and reference group synonymously, ignores a fundamental distinction between the terms. That is, the terms point to different entities; reference group to groups, and significant others to individuals. However, because both reference group and significant others are cast within the same conceptual framework -- the self referring to the other -- an interface between the terms seems plausible. This interface, since ideas surrounding both terms can be merged, allows for a more dynamic conceptualization of the self's referral to others. Thus we can conceive of positive and negative orientational others (i.e., the other referred to in a general or transrole sense) and positive and negative role specific others (i.e., the other referred to in specific situations or in specific activities).

The last criticism follows directly from the above in that, in the Brooks study, there is a tendency to cast the individual's referral to his parents too statically. Basically, his study casts parents as being always and everywhere the individual's orientational others. Contrary to this is evidence which supports the

contention that parents may not always be referred to in general, everyday, situations. That is, at the stage of the life-cycle where the individual is attempting to assert his independence, he may turn away from his parents as transrole points of referral. It follows, then, that if parental party preference is such a pervasive determinant of the individual's party preference, he may, at this period in his life, refer to them in this role specific context. In other words, while parents may, for a time, cease to function as the individual's orientational others, it may be the case that, in the context of political party preference, they might serve as his role specific others.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Research

The results obtained from the analysis of data collected support the conclusion that neither socioeconomic nor background variables has any significant effect upon similar political party preference between parents and offspring. Moreover, orientational others are found to have no significant influence upon similar party preference while role specific others do. In general, then, if the individual's parents serve as his highly salient, or positive, role specific others, then his political party preference will, very often, be similar to theirs.

Two issues which follow directly from these conclusions, are seen as crucial for future research. First, because a joint coding procedure was utilized, no direct test concerning whether or not saliency of mention is similar to regard in which others are held could be under-

taken. The results are anything but clear-cut. Examination of the overall distribution of responses in the orientational other case produced disparate results between the two dimensions. In the role specific case, this difference, to some extent, disappeared. Moreover, in the bivariate cases, particularly the relationship between role specific others and similar party preference, there was little, if any, difference in results when either knowledge of the saliency of mention or regard in which others are held is utilized. Nevertheless, until the relationship between the two dimensions is documented, its existence remains purely speculative.

The last, and by far most important, issue for future research stems from the finding that role specific others significantly influence the political party preference of their offspring while orientational others do not. It would seem to be the case that at this period of the life-cycle parents have been replaced as the individual's orientational others. Parents, then, have become the individual's role specific others, at least in the context of political party preference. In arriving at this conclusion, we have moved away from a static vision of the individual always and everywhere referring to his parents as orientational others. That is, the self not only refers to different ideal-types of others (i.e., orientational and role specific) but also, under conditions such as different stages in the life-cycle, variously classifies these others; at one time the parents may serve as his orientational others, at a later time, his role specific others, and at still a later time, they may again become his orientational others. However, because of the small sample size and narrow range in the ages

of respondents, this notion awaits future empirical investigation. To further assess this dynamic interchange between self and other, future studies should make every effort to maximize the overall variation in the ages of respondents. This task can be facilitated by drawing a much larger sample representative of the general population.

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APPENDIX

October, 1975

Dear Student:

The attached questionnaire is part of a study sponsored by the Department of Sociology here at V.P.I. and is intended to learn more about those persons who influence each of us in our day-to-day behavior. It is not a test or anything of that nature so there are no "right" or "wrong" answers to any of the items. We are simply interested in your opinions and experiences concerning those persons whom you feel have had the most influence upon you. All responses received will be machine processed and the results presented in summary-tabular form; so please, be completely candid in your responses to all items since no attempt will be made to identify your particular answers.

Thank you for your time and help in my behalf.

Sincerely,

Randall P. White
Masters Candidate
Department of Sociology
VPI & SU

Part (1)

- 1. Sex Male Female
- 2. Age at last birthday (in years) _____.
- 3. Class year Fresh. Soph. Jr. Sr.
- 4. Marital Status Single Married Other

Part (2)

1. In the spaces provided please list those persons or groups of persons to whom you positively or negatively refer yourself, either directly or in your thinking, when confronted with a problem, or in order to support or justify your actions. Do not list individuals by name, but instead, identify them by some relationship to yourself.

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

2. RETURN TO PART (2) #1. Beside each listing you made put a plus (+) sign next to those groups or persons who you would most want to be like, and a negative (-) sign next to those groups or persons who, while having had a profound effect on you, you would not want to be like.

Part (3)

1. In general, which political party do you like best:
 - A) Republican
 - B) Democratic
 - C) Independent
 - D) Other
2. In general, which political party does (did) your father like best:
 - A) Republican
 - B) Democratic
 - C) Independent
 - D) Other
3. In general, which political party does (did) your mother like best:
 - A) Republican
 - B) Democratic
 - C) Independent
 - D) Other
4. Your parents' (both Father and Mother) approximate yearly income:
 - A) under \$6,000
 - B) \$6,000 to \$9,999
 - C) \$10,000 to \$14,999
 - D) \$15,000 to \$19,999
 - E) \$20,000 to \$24,999
 - F) \$25,000 and above
5. Occupation of your Father (or head of the household) where you grew up:

6. Do you consider yourself as being:
 - A) upper class
 - B) middle class
 - C) working class
 - D) lower class

Part (4)

1. In the spaces provided list those persons or groups of persons to whom you have positively or negatively referred yourself, either directly or in your thinking, in formualting your political party preference. Do not list individuals by name, but instead, identify them by some relationship to yourself.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

2. RETURN TO PART (4) #1. Beside each listing you made put a plus (+) sign next to those groups or persons who have served as a positive influence in your political party preference, and put a negative (-) sign next to those groups or persons who, while having had an effect on your selection of a political party preference served to turn you "away" rather than "toward," a particular party.

Thank you for your cooperation

VITA

Randall Phillip White was born June 5, 1952 in Sacramento, California. In June of 1970 he was graduated from Bishop McNamara High School located in Forestville, Maryland. In May of 1974 he received his A.B. in Sociology from Georgetown University.

In September of 1974 he was admitted to the graduate program in Sociology at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Presently, he is a candidate for the Master of Science degree in Sociology.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Randall Phillip White". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

THE INFLUENCE OF SIGNIFICANT OTHERS ON
POLITICAL PARTY PREFERENCE:
A REPLICATION AND EXTENSION

by

Randall Phillip White

(ABSTRACT)

The problem structuring this investigation is to determine the extent to which parents influence political party preference in their offspring, thus accounting for those individuals expressing a party preference similar to their parents.

The conceptual framework for this study follows that of an earlier investigation (Brooks, 1967) in which the conclusion is drawn that if parents serve as the individual's highly salient significant others, then his political party preference will be similar to theirs. Issue is taken with three points in the original investigation. First, there is a failure to completely test the alternative argument that similar party preference between parents and offspring is dependent not upon parental preference but upon socioeconomic and background factors. Second, the terms significant others and reference group are treated synonymously, thus obscuring any distinction between them. Lastly, the individual's referral to his parents, as significant others, is treated in a static, unchanging, fashion.

A detailed review of the literature supports the contention that an interface exists between the terms significant others and reference group. The establishment of this interface allows for a more dynamic conceptualization of the individual's referral to parents within the

context of political party preference.

A questionnaire is administered to a random sample of sociology classes. Results suggest that no statistically significant relationship exists between socioeconomic or background variables and similar political party preference between parents and offspring. A statistically significant relationship exists, however, when knowledge of the individual's role specific others is utilized as a determinant of similar party preference.