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# The Significant Others of a College Population\*

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SOCIOLOGISTS have long recognized that man learns his self-definitions and the definitions of his subsidiary social objects through interaction with various generic classes of social others.<sup>1</sup> In the theoretical works of Mead, Dewey, Faris, and Sullivan, the term "other" occupied a central role, Sullivan coined the term "significant other" to refer to those others whose evaluation of his behavior and attitudes the individual held in high esteem.<sup>2</sup> It was through interaction with such others that the self, meaning, and thought arose.

In a recent attempt to explore the role the concept of other had in the theories of Mead, Sullivan, and Faris, Manfred Kuhn felt the need to make a distinction between the "social other" of Mead and the "significant other" of Sullivan and a class of social others which he felt occupied a role of more central importance to the individual.<sup>3</sup> This new category of other was labeled "orienta-

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<sup>1</sup> Harold A. Mulford, "The Significant Others of a General Population," paper presented at the Midwest Sociological Meetings, 1964. Various classes of social others that have been identified include Goffman's informer, shill, imposter, go-between, non-person and colleague. See his *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), pp. 141-66, for an excellent discussion of these discrepant roles. Other classes of others include Newcomb's positive and negative reference group others; see his text *Social Psychology*, (New York: 1950); those others contained in primary and secondary groups as discussed by Cooley in *Human Nature and the Social Order* (Glencoe, Ill.: 1956); those others contained in membership and reference groups as noted originally by Herbert Hyman, "The Psychology of Status," *Archives of Psychology*, vol. 38, no. 269 (1942), and later expanded by Merton and Kitt, in "Contributions to the Theory of Reference Group Behavior," in R. K. Merton and P. F. Lazarsfeld (eds.), *Continuities in Social Research: Studies in the Scope and Method of "The American Soldier"* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950); those others who contribute to the actor's "frame of reference" as discussed by Sherif and Sherif in *An Outline of Social Psychology*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956). For an excellent recent discussion of the concept "other" see also Everett C. Hughes, "What Other?" in Arnold M. Rose (ed.), *Human Behavior and Social Processes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), pp. 119-27.

<sup>2</sup> Manfred H. Kuhn, "The Reference Group Reconsidered," *Sociological Quarterly*, 5:5-24 (1964). There is some doubt as to whether Sullivan intended his term "significant other" to refer to those others responsible for socializing the actor or to all those persons the actor holds in high esteem. Recent usage has tended to employ the latter interpretation.

<sup>3</sup> Kuhn, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

tional other” and had four defining attributes: (1) the term refers to the others to whom the individual is most fully, broadly, and basically committed, emotionally and psychologically; (2) it refers to the others who have provided him with his general vocabulary, including his most basic and crucial concepts and categories; (3) it refers to 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) it refers to the others in communication with whom his self-conception is basically sustained or changed.<sup>4</sup>

The “orientational other,” as Kuhn introduced the term, was distinguished from the significant other or other of Mead in that the individual tends to have a history of relationships with the orientational others, whereas the relationships with the significant other tend to be more situationally determined. Thus Kuhn was making a distinction between those others who are significant for individuals in a highly role-specific sense (Mead’s social other) and those social others who are significant for the individual, regardless of the social role presently enacted or the social situation in which the behavior occurs.<sup>5</sup>

Kuhn’s term appears to have a great deal of heuristic appeal, but if it is to be useful at all for future theory and research, investigations must be undertaken to demonstrate (1) that such a class of others can be identified; and (2) that they operate differently for the individual than do the social others of Mead and Sullivan.

This paper reports a purely exploratory attempt to locate the role-specific-significant others (Sullivan’s significant others) and the orientational others of a small sample of college students enrolled in a large midwestern university.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> A recent paper by Carl J. Couch and John S. Murray, “Significant Others and Evaluation,” *Sociometry*, 27:502–9 (1964), did not make the distinction between role-specific and orientational others when asking their subjects for significant others. The authors note (p. 507) that “this variation in technique imposed limitations on comparisons between the two role groups studied.” The paper lends support to the importance of Kuhn’s distinction by noting that within complex organizations where roles are highly unspecific, actors will select significant others within the organization who facilitate the maintenance of social relationships, but where the role is highly specific the selection of significant others is not contingent upon maintenance of social relationships.

<sup>6</sup> The research design employed was cross-sectional, but because students in all phases of the college career were sampled, it was possible to treat the data as approximating the longitudinal or “simulated before-after” type. Such a decision is of course beset with limitations, not the least of which is the assumption that the groups under consideration are similar in all relevant background and social characteristics.

## METHODS

DATA were gathered from 67 college students enrolled in an introductory sociology class at a large midwestern state university. Twenty-six of the subjects were males and 41 were females. Forty-three were between the ages of 18 and 20, and 27 were over 20. Three were enrolled in the school of business, 19 in nursing, 10 in education, 4 in music and 31 in the liberal arts and sciences. Forty were freshman and sophomores, 18 were juniors and 9 were seniors.

Two open-end questions were asked in an attempt to locate empirically role-specific significant others and orientational others. The question designed to operationalize *role-specific significant others* was a version of Mulford's Significant Others Test (SOT) and read as follows:

Would you please give me a list of those persons or groups of people whose evaluation of you as a *student* on the \_\_\_\_\_ campus concern you the *most*. (You need only give the relationship of these persons to you and not their names.)<sup>7</sup>

The following was employed to operationalize orientational other:

Would you please give me a list of those persons or groups of people whose evaluation of you as a *person* concern you the *most*.

The question designed to tap orientational other is a highly abstracted version of Kuhn's original definition of the concept. It was felt, however, that to ask a question consisting of the four attributes listed by Kuhn would be too cumbersome and difficult to communicate to the respondent. The question employed is however, only one of many which could be used to operationalize the concept.<sup>8</sup>

## FINDINGS

*Role Specific Significant Others*

In answer to question one, our attempt at operationalizing role-specific significant other (RSO), we obtained 271 discrete responses from the 67 subjects with a mean of 4.04 responses from each per-

<sup>7</sup> Mulford, *op. cit.*, p. 1; see also Mulford's original formulation of the instrument in "Toward an Instrument to Identify and Measure the Self, Significant Others and Alcohol in the Symbolic Environment: An Empirical Study," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, 1955.

<sup>8</sup> Two questions are in order at this point. The first deals with the role we placed our respondents in when they answered the role-specific question. The role of student is very encompassing and perhaps overlaps with the role of "person." Future investigations should test the hypothesis on roles that are more narrowly defined as Couch and Murray, *op. cit.*, did. Furthermore the fact that all respondents answered both

son. A total of nine discrete categories of others were listed (see Table 1). The three most frequently appearing classified others were faculty, 84 per cent mentioned, friends mentioned by 69 per cent, and family members mentioned by 43 per cent. Students were mentioned by barely a third of the subjects, only 39 per cent. Thus, while there appeared to be consensus among the respondents on the importance of faculty, friends, and family, there is little agreement among the choices of the remaining five categories of others. We find that one-fifth mention members of social organizations (i.e., fraternities and sororities), 15 per cent mention persons related to their work, or future employers, 12 per cent mention persons related to religious organizations, and 13 per cent mention university administration as well as a category of other coded simply as "other" (i.e., self, people of Iowa City, Doctor). There appears to be a large residual category of RSO which occupy differential roles of importance for only a small portion of the students. It remains for further analyses to identify which types of students pick others from this rather large residual category.

#### *Oriental Others*

In answer to question two, 273 discrete responses were given, with a mean of 4.07 per subject. A total of 10 discrete categories of others were given with the only new category being a class of other coded as "campus deviant." Others coded under this category consisted of persons defined as "art crowd," "beatniks," and "long hairs."

A consideration of the most frequently appearing categories again reveals a skewed distribution, with three categories of others receiving the most choices and a large residual category remaining. The most popular orientational other was friend, mentioned by 79 per cent; this was followed closely by family, 62 per cent and then faculty, not quite 50 per cent mentioned. As can be seen in Table 2 there is a definite shift in the choice pattern of orientational others. For example, 84 per cent of the students mentioned faculty as RSO but only 48 mentioned them as orientational others (OO). Further, while less than half selected family as RSO, nearly two-thirds selected family as OO. It is also of interest to note that while only 12 per cent selected religious persons as RSO, 21 per cent se-

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questions may have led to contamination in the categories of others given (i.e., mention of one class of other in question one may have led the respondent's not mentioning that class of other on question two). Future studies should either divide the sample into two groups and administer one question to each or at least reverse the order of questioning if both questions are to be answered.

lected such persons as OO. Another interesting switch in ratings is that given to students. On question two only 12 per cent mentioned students as compared to 39 per cent on question one. Statistical analysis conducted to assess the significance of the change in preference patterns for social others between questions one and two confirms the observation that significant switching did occur ( $P < .001$ , Wilcoxon test).

When we compare the responses from the two questions it becomes apparent that (1) approximately the same number and general categories of others are chosen for each question, but (2) the order of preference for the categories changes, depending on the situation in which the student finds himself. It appears that university students have a limited set of others which they regard as important when their behavior and attitudes as *students* and *persons* are under consideration. These others seem to occupy a hierarchical pattern for the student, with university-related persons occupying uppermost positions when the role of college student is salient. When their situation is changed, and the role now becomes non-specific, the relative ordering of others shifts and friends and family members occupy primary positions with university-related persons given more secondary roles.<sup>9</sup>

We turn now to the effects of the respondent's sex and year in college on the choice patterns for the two types of significant others.

### *Sex and Choice of Role-Specific Significant Others*

Table 1 presents the choice patterns of males and females for RSO. It can be seen that males and females appear to be in agreement as to the importance of faculty, students, and university administration. They disagree, however, when choice of friends is under consideration; only one-half of the males select friends, whereas 81 per cent of the females make this selection. Choice of family members also indicates a *slight* sex difference; 38 per cent of the males select family related others, while 46 per cent of the females makes this selection. Males appear to be more closely tied to social

<sup>9</sup> This finding appears to be similar to Stouffer's finding in "An Analysis of Conflicting Social Norms," *American Sociological Review*, 14:707-17 (1949), that obligations to various classes of others are contingent upon the social situation. See also the paper by W. W. Charters, Jr., and Theodore M. Newcomb, "Some Attitudinal Effects of Experimentally Increased Salience of a Membership Group," in Eleanor E. Maccoby, Theodore M. Newcomb, and Eugene L. Hartley (eds.), *Readings in Social Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt, 1958), pp. 276-80; Newcomb found that the effect of religious member groups upon attitudes was "a function of the relative momentary potency of his relevant group memberships."

organizations than are girls, 27 per cent selected social organizations, while only 17 per cent of the girls mentioned them. We find another sex disagreement on choice of religion: 17 per cent of females mention religious-related others, but only 4 per cent of males.

Thus the analysis by sex discloses some interesting differences in choice patterns of the RSO. For example, females appear to be more prone to mention family-related others. It is now becoming

TABLE 1. ROLE-SPECIFIC SIGNIFICANT OTHERS REPORTED BY A SAMPLE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS: FREQUENCY BY SEX AND YEAR IN COLLEGE

ROLE-SPECIFIC SIGNIFICANT OTHERS	PERCENTAGE WHO MENTION									
	Total		Male		Female		Fresh/Soph		Jun/Senior	
	67 %	N	26 %	N	41 %	N	40 %	N	27 %	N
Faculty	84	(56)	77	(20)	89	(36)	85	(34)	81	(22)
Friends	69	(46)	50	(13)	81	(33)	68	(27)	70	(19)
Family	43	(29)	38	(10)	46	(19)	33	(13)	59	(16)
Students	39	(26)	35	(9)	41	(17)	35	(14)	44	(12)
Soc. Organ.	21	(14)	27	(7)	17	(7)	25	(10)	15	(4)
Work	15	(10)	15	(4)	15	(6)	18	(7)	11	(3)
Univ. Admin.	13	(9)	19	(5)	10	(4)	15	(6)	11	(3)
Other	13	(9)	8	(2)	17	(7)	5	(2)	26	(7)
Religious	12	(8)	4	(1)	17	(7)	15	(6)	7	(2)

clearer who is accounting for the mentions of the six residual categories of others. Females account for the most mentions of religion, students, and family. Males are more likely to mention social organizations.

*Year in College and Choice of Role-Specific Significant Others*

The sample was divided into two groups: freshmen and sophomores as one group and juniors and seniors in the other group. Table 1 presents the results of this analysis. It can be seen that there is approximate agreement between these two groups on the choices of faculty, friends, and students. There is disagreement on choice of family members. Juniors and seniors are twice as likely to mention family related others as compared to freshmen and sophomores. Freshmen are more likely to mention religious others and others in social organizations than are juniors and seniors (25 per cent to 15 per cent, and 15 per cent to 7 per cent).

Analysis by year in college indicates that juniors and seniors appear to be more family oriented in their choices than are freshmen and sophomores; furthermore, upperclassmen are more likely to mention fellow students as RSO, whereas freshmen and sopho-



mores will more likely mention members of social organizations, religious related others, faculty, and friends.

### *Sex and Mention of Orientational Other*

From Table 2 it can be seen that approximately the same number of males and females select family members and faculty but that two-thirds of the males select friends while scarcely one-half of the

TABLE 2. ORIENTATIONAL OTHERS REPORTED BY A SAMPLE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS: FREQUENCY OF MENTION BY SEX AND YEAR IN COLLEGE

ORIENTATIONAL OTHER	PERCENTAGE WHO MENTION									
	Total		Male		Female		Fresh/Soph		Jun/Senior	
	67 %	N	26 %	N	41 %	N	40 %	N	27 %	N
Friends	79	(53)	69	(18)	56	(35)	83	(33)	74	(20)
Family	62	(41)	62	(16)	61	(25)	58	(23)	67	(18)
Faculty	48	(32)	50	(13)	46	(19)	50	(20)	44	(12)
Religious	21	(14)	19	(5)	22	(9)	28	(11)	11	(3)
Social Organ.	21	(14)	15	(4)	24	(10)	30	(12)	7	(2)
Other	16	(11)	35	(9)	5	(2)	10	(5)	22	(6)
Students	12	(8)	12	(3)	12	(5)	5	(2)	22	(6)
Univ. Admin.	9	(6)	4	(1)	12	(5)	5	(2)	15	(4)
Work	9	(6)	19	(5)	2	(1)	5	(2)	15	(4)
Campus Deviants	4	(3)	...	...	7	(3)	8	(3)	...	...

females make this selection. Males and females appear to agree on the choice of religious related others (19 per cent as compared to 22 per cent). Females account for all of the mentions of campus deviants and males account for the majority of the mentions of work related others. From this analysis, it is apparent that males are more likely to select friends than are females (nearly 3 to 1), that girls will select campus deviants, and that both sexes agree on the importance of the roles of family members and faculty.

### *Year in College and Choice of Orientational Other*

Freshmen and sophomores are more likely to mention friends, faculty members, religious-related persons, and persons from social organizations. On the other hand, juniors and seniors make more references to "others" (i.e., self, people of Iowa City, etc.), students, work-related, and family-related others. The mention of family-related others more frequently parallels the finding from question one, where it was determined that upperclassmen mentioned family-related persons as RSO more frequently than underclassmen.

While the investigation of the effects of sex and year in college



upon the choice patterns of RSO and OO yield interesting results, the crucial test of the relationship between these variables comes only after we have simultaneously controlled the effects of both upon the choice patterns. We now turn to this analysis.

*Role-Specific Significant Others by Year in College and Sex*

Table 3 presents the results of this analysis. When we look at males only, by year in college, we note a very interesting *inverse* relation-

TABLE 3. ROLE-SPECIFIC SIGNIFICANT OTHERS BY YEAR IN COLLEGE AND SEX

ROLE-SPECIFIC SIGNIFICANT OTHERS	PERCENTAGE WHO MENTION								
	Freshman/Sophomore (40)				Junior/Senior (27)				Total 67
	Male		Female		Male		Female		
	14 %	N	26 %	N	12 %	N	15 %	N	
Faculty	93	(13)	81	(21)	67	( 8)	93	(14)	(56)
Friends	57	( 8)	73	(19)	42	( 5)	93	(14)	(46)
Family	57	( 8)	19	( 5)	42	( 5)	73	(11)	(29)
Social Organ.	29	( 4)	27	( 7)	25	( 3)	...	...	(14)
Students	21	( 3)	46	(12)	58	( 7)	27	( 4)	(26)
Univ. Admin.	21	( 3)	12	( 3)	17	( 2)	7	( 1)	( 9)
Work	14	( 2)	19	( 5)	17	( 2)	7	( 1)	(10)
Religious	7	( 1)	19	( 5)	17	( 2)	...	...	( 8)
Other	...	...	12	( 3)	17	( 2)	27	( 4)	( 9)

ship between choice of faculty members, friends, and family. It will be noted that males in the freshman and sophomore years of college choose a very high number of faculty members as RSO (93 per cent) but by the time they are juniors and seniors this identification with faculty has decreased substantially as evidenced by the fact that only 67 per cent make that selection at this point in their college careers. A similar pattern holds for choices of friends and family. An interesting question arising at this point may be phrased, "Who do the males select as RSO when they are juniors and seniors?" Table 3 also presents evidence which bears on this question for it may be observed that males begin to identify with the following classes of others as they progress through their college careers: students, religious others, and "others." For example, while only 21 per cent of the freshmen and sophomores mentioned students as RSO, nearly 60 per cent of them made this mention when they were juniors and seniors. Similarly, while only 7 per cent selected religious others as freshmen, 17 per cent selected them as juniors and seniors. Thus it seems that college males have a history

of relationships with their RSO and that as they appear in different phases of their careers as students, different RSO become more salient and other RSO become less salient.

If we turn now to females by year in college, Table 3 presents the results of this analysis. Several points are at once noticeable: (1) the longer females are in college, the more likely it is they will mention family-related RSO (i.e., we note an increase from 19 per cent mentioned as freshmen and sophomores to 73 per cent mentioned as juniors and seniors); (2) we note also the increase in mention of friends by year in college, an increase of from 73 to 93 per cent. Furthermore, it is clear that females display fewer choices of students, social organizations, religion-related and work-related others, the longer they are in college. Females, as do males, appear to have careers with their RSO, and as they move through college, different RSO appear and others drop out. A vivid example of this point is mention of religious others by year in college. Nineteen per cent mention religious others as freshmen and sophomores but by the time they are seniors *not one* female mentions religious others.

#### *Orientational Others by Year in College and by Sex*

The results of this analysis are contained in Table 4. If we look at males first it can be seen that the same inverse relationship between choice of family and friends holds as we observed for choices of RSO in Table 1. It can be seen however, that choice of faculty member has changed. Now the same number of males select faculty members as OO when underclassmen, as they do when upperclassmen. The choice pattern of students is similar to that for RSO, only

TABLE 4. ORIENTATIONAL OTHERS BY YEAR IN COLLEGE AND BY SEX

ORIENTATIONAL OTHERS	PERCENTAGE WHO MENTION								Total 67
	Freshman/Sophomore (40)				Junior/Senior (27)				
	Male		Female		Male		Female		
	14 %	N	26 %	N	12 %	N	15 %	N	
Faculty	50	( 7)	50	(13)	50	( 6)	40	( 6)	(32)
Friends	86	(12)	81	(21)	67	( 8)	80	(12)	(53)
Family	79	(11)	46	(12)	58	( 7)	73	(11)	(41)
Univ. Admin.	...	...	12	( 3)	8	( 1)	13	( 2)	( 6)
Religious	7	( 1)	38	(10)	25	( 3)	...	...	(14)
Work	7	( 1)	12	( 3)	8	( 1)	7	( 1)	( 6)
Social Organ.	7	( 1)	35	( 9)	17	( 2)	12	( 2)	(14)
Campus Deviants	...	...	12	( 3)	...	...	...	...	( 3)
Students	7	( 1)	4	( 1)	33	( 4)	12	( 2)	( 8)
Other	29	( 4)	8	( 2)	25	( 3)	12	( 2)	(11)

slightly lower, now the shift is from 7 per cent as freshmen to 17 per cent as juniors and seniors.

It is interesting to note that choice of religious others and others in social organizations increases as the male moves through college (i.e., religion goes from 7 per cent to 25 per cent and social organizations from 7 per cent to 17 per cent). Choice of work-related others is relatively low with only an increase of 1 per cent from the first year to the last year (7 to 8 per cent). The category of "other" is chosen by a relatively large percentage of males when they are underclassmen (29 per cent) but when they are juniors and seniors this percentage decreases to 25 per cent. Thus we note from this analysis that as males move through college, friends and family members are less frequently chosen as orientational others and fellow students, religious organizations and social organizations begin to account for more of their choices.

Turning to females we note from Table 4 that family others are chosen by nearly one-half of the freshmen and nearly three-fourths of the juniors and seniors. The friend choice pattern remains about the same throughout college for females (81 per cent as freshmen and 80 per cent as juniors and seniors). It can be seen that choice of faculty members declines as females move through college (50 to 40 per cent). The choice of religious others also decreases with time in college. Whereas females account for nearly all mentions of religious others in the total analysis, it is disclosed by the partial analysis that this choice occurs only in the freshman years, for juniors and seniors make no mention of this category.

#### INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

WHILE the predictive power of the significant other concept has only recently begun to be realized, it promises to occupy a central role in any social psychological formulations which attempt to link individual behavior and attitudes to social groupings.<sup>10</sup> The present investigation has attempted to conceptually distinguish two related dimensions of the familiar term significant other. Following Kuhn's formulation, we suggested that there exist for every individual two

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<sup>10</sup> See Couch (*op. cit.*), Mulford (*op. cit.*), Kuhn (*op. cit.*), and Hughes (*op. cit.*), for recent uses of the concept. In addition to these recent formulations it is only sufficient to note the central role this concept has occupied in the self theory of Carl Rogers, the person perception studies of Bruner, the career studies of Hughes, Strauss, Becker, and Goffman, the reference group research of Merton and Kitt, Hyman, Erlich, Newcomb, Sherif, Kelly, and Turner, the social exchange theories of Homans, Thiabuat and Kelly and Blau, and also the more recent social structural formulations of the Parsonians.

classes of significant others: those significant for him when he enacts his many special roles and those significant for him in a transsituational, trans-role sense (i.e., his orientational others). We suggested that individuals have longer histories of relationships with orientational others than they do with role-specific others, and hence it is to the orientational other that we must turn if we are to learn anything about the more basic, underlying dimensions of an individual's personality. It is these persons who provide the individual with his basic vocabularies and his conceptions of role and self.<sup>11</sup>

The data gathered in this exploratory study support the contention that these two classes of significant others exist for individuals. We noted for example, that for females the mention of family members as orientational others provided one of the more consistent patterns in all of the choice patterns observed. This is consistent with the observation that females are socialized into family roles early in childhood and that such roles provide the basis for their social identities throughout adult life.<sup>12</sup> The autonomy of the male in middle class American society is brought out in the data presented in Tables 2 and 4.<sup>13</sup> Here we noted that males are very unlikely to mention family members as sources of orientational others. Rather, they mention persons who appear in their life-cycle of interactive relationships at various crucial points. Thus we note the appearance of fellow students as orientational others, and we note that this choice increases as the male progresses through college. Furthermore, the male appears to add others from religious and social organizations as he moves through college, all the while he is breaking away from the influence of the family as well as the omnipresent faculty. Thus, very dramatically with the male, do we observe the disjuncture of interactive relationships with orientational others. He begins selecting a high percentage of friends, family, and faculty (up to 90 per cent) and by the time he is a junior or senior, these choices have decreased drastically and he has now added others from the previously mentioned areas.

Thus, the data seem to support Kuhn's hypothesis that individuals do have histories of relationships with their orientational others.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Kuhn, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-21.

<sup>12</sup> See Talcott Parsons, "Age and Sex in the Social Structure of the United States," *American Sociological Review*, 7:604-17 (1942).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> We can only infer that actors have longer histories of relationships with their orientational others than they do with their role specific others. Because of limitations

If we turn to the selection of role-specific significant others, we note that for females, family members, friends, and faculty occupy stable roles throughout the college career. Fellow students are not prominent and religious choices begin at a high point and decrease to zero. This is also the case with mention of social organizations, work-related others, and university administration.

In the case of males we note that faculty and friends do not occupy central roles at the end of the college career, although they do in the beginning. Students are acquired as RSO later in the college career, as are religious others.

Kuhn would hypothesize that as the student role moves through periods of transition (from freshman to senior year) he would be responding to new sets of RSO and consequently we would expect changes in choice patterns. The data from males and females seem to support this contention, and the females seem to be more stable than the males.

One possible reason why choice patterns of orientational others appear to vary to such a large extent may be due to the fact that college students are in fact going through a crucial period in their lives, in which they try out new social identities and social roles.<sup>15</sup> The variations in choices of orientational others may well reflect this fundamental change process which is occurring for the student. Further research would do well to focus on changes in orientational others in other age periods of the life cycle. Another avenue of future research suggested by the present investigation is the degree to which orientational others continue to serve as role-specific others

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of sample size and phrasing of the questions, the analysis was not able to determine the exact point in time when all the various categories of others such as friends were added to the actor's previously existing set of "relevant others." We can say with some assurance, however, that mention of campus social organizations, fellow students, faculty members, and family members are categories of others added at specific points in time (i.e., either before or after coming to the college campus).

<sup>15</sup> See especially the following: Manford H. Kuhn, "The Relation of Critical Experiences and of Certain Characteristics of Self-Attitudes to Subsequent Changes in Self-Attitudes," paper read at the American Sociological Society Meetings, 1958; Walter L. Wallace, "Institutional and Life-Cycle Socialization of College Freshmen," *American Journal of Sociology*, 70:303-18 (1964).

Perhaps the classic study in the area of changes in self-other relationships during college is that of Newcomb, *Personality and Social Change* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1943), which examines in great detail changes in reference groups of college students throughout their entire college histories. For a briefer report of the Bennington study see also Newcomb's "Attitude Development as a Function of Reference Groups: The Bennington Study," in Maccoby, Newcomb, and Hartley *op. cit.*, pp. 265-75. An excellent review of studies explicitly examining the experiences of college students is *The American College: A Psychological and Social Interpretation of Higher Learning*, Nevitt Sanford (ed.) (New York: John Wiley, 1962). Particularly relevant sections in this context are Parts 4-6.

for the actor as he proceeds through his career of interactive relationships. In the present study it can be noted that friends and parents appeared under both categories of others. This suggests that certain highly salient categories of others operate for individuals in dual roles. The isolation of *those* categories of others which serve this dual function for *which* types of actors would contribute to our knowledge of the vicissitudes of socialization and personality change in late adolescent and early adulthood. It does not seem unreasonable to assume that role-specific others may take over many of the socialization functions served by earlier orientational others for the actor. In fact it appears that certain of ego's orientational others may be such that no history of relationships is needed. One's role-specific others may indeed *at times* become one's orientational others. Questions which arise on this point include the extent to which role-specific others provide the actor with new vocabularies, new role models, new self-attitudes and new frames of reference with which to judge his own and others behavior.<sup>16</sup>

It seems reasonable to conclude that Kuhn's concept, the "orientational other" has more than heuristic use to the sociologist. The data support the contention that individuals have different types of interactive relationships with role-specific significant others and orientational others and that changes in these interactive relationships can be linked to specific points in the individual's college career. The present investigation was only exploratory in nature, but suggestions for future research would seem to involve a need for studies dealing with variations in choices of orientational others at various points in the age cycle, studies linking conceptions of orientational others with conceptions of self and further investigations highlighting more vividly than the present study was able to do, the difference between role-specific significant others and orientational others and the consequences of this difference for continuities and discontinuities in individual behavior.

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<sup>16</sup> Recent studies which have dealt with the influence of immediate or role-specific others on changes in personality include Newcomb (*op. cit.*), Wallace (*op. cit.*), and the career studies of Becker. See his recent work in this area: "Personal Change in Adult Life," *Sociometry*, 27:40-53 (1964), which reviews the literature on studies dealing with changes in adult life. Also important is the recent work of Barney G. Glaser, "Variations in the Importance of Recognition in Scientist's Careers," *Social Problems*, 10:268-76 (1964); also Fred Reif and Anselm Strauss, "The Impact of Rapid Discovery upon the Scientist's Career," *ibid.*, 12:297-310 (1965). Goffman's discussion of the effects of mental hospital staff upon mental patients illustrates the influence role-specific others can have upon self-attitudes and even the basic vocabulary of patients. See his *Asylums* (Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday: 1961).