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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes and integrates the findings from three separate studies, all of which had as their major objective the investigation of differences in small group behavior between children who have relatively high others-concepts and children who have relatively low others-concepts, as measured by the Paired Hands Test. Group sessions of four children each were taped while the children worked on tasks such as assembling a jigsaw puzzle or building something with Tinkertoys. The recordings were then coded blindly and analyzed statistically. All three studies showed a tendency for children who have high others-concepts to be more cooperative and friendly in small groups than children with low others-concepts. Some of the factors which were explored in these studies were sex of children, teachers' judgements of their socioeconomic status and intelligence, and variations in the group task. The data from all three studies demonstrate that the others-concept is predictive of group trends and therefore a significant theoretical construct for helping school psychologists to understand children's behavior. (Author/CJ)

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1975 APA CONVENTION

Symposium Title: The Others-Concept and Its Relevance for School Psychology

Title of Paper: The Influence of the Others-Concept on Children's Group Behavior

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The measurement aspects of identifying children with a high or low others-concept have been considered in more depth elsewhere (Zucker & Jordan, 1968; Barnett & Zucker, 1973; Barnett & Zucker, 1975; Zucker, 1975) but generally, allow children the opportunity to indicate their expectancies concerning ambiguous social situations interpreted along a friendliness-hostility dimension. The Paired Hands Test is an instrument designed to measure the others-concept and consists of twenty photographs or slides; each shows one black hand and one white hand in a relationship which implies an interaction between the hands. The pictures are shown one by one and the subject is asked to respond in terms of what he thinks the hands are doing by selecting one statement out of five presented for each slide. The statements describe possible interactions between people chosen from verbatim responses from children in response to the question "What do you think the hands are doing?" and scaled by a Thurstone type technique along a continuum ranging from extremely positive to extremely negative interactions between the hands.

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The basic premise of the research reported here is that children who perceive social interactions differently, for example, in a more friendly or more hostile manner, will exhibit different social behaviors. We have been exploring the relationship between PHT scores and social interactions through a systematic method of behavioral observations with more extreme scoring children. The general hypothesis that we have been testing in a series of experiments is that children with a more positive others-concept (those with high PHT scores) will interact in a small group situation in a more positive and task related manner than children with a more negative others-concept (low scorers).

Subjects

The subjects who participated in the series of experiments were all in the 4th through 6th grades and their ages ranged from 9 to 13. The majority were white and all of the studies took place in Terre Haute, Indiana, in the public schools. The total number of children whose behaviors have been studied in this manner to date are 276, approximately half being high scorers and half being low scorers.

The Small Groups

The behaviors of the children in the experiments were studied while the children participated on an assigned task in groups of three or, in several studies, four. The time allowed on the task was usually fifteen minutes. In one study, where an observation room was available, the groups were videotaped, but in other



studies, a system using tape recordings of individual children's comments through the use of a unidirectional microphone was found to work satisfactorily.

### The Tasks

The tasks themselves became a significant part of the study and I will give you two examples: one of a task that did elicit significantly different behaviors from children with a high others-concept than from children with a low others-concept, and one in which both groups of children worked in a positive and task-related way. In the first example, the following instructions were given:

You see in front of you some posterboard and some magic markers with all different colors. This is what we want you to do. First, decide upon a poster idea. It may be serious like for ecology or smoking, or it may be funny, or it may be just a design-- something attractive. It can be anything you want, but you all must decide what to do.

Now I am going to show you some slides of the results of the poster task. The first three are from the low scoring children, the last three are from the high scoring children.

*(Show Slides 1-3)*

Commentary: The fourth grade children scribbled with magic markers for the full time period, using both sides of the posterboard. The fifth grade group chased each other's hands over the posterboard. Also resulting in a scribbled design. The sixth grade group started in this manner, but stopped in the middle of the time period. The posterboard was turned over to the clean side, and three members of the group watched one member make a poster design warning against smoking.

The next three slides are from high scoring groups.

(Show Slides 4-6)

Commentary: All of the high scoring groups included a decision process as to what would be made. The fourth grade group made a picture of a circus, the fifth grade and sixth grade groups made a carefully constructed and artistic design.

Another task, which failed to yield significant differences was introduced as follows:

Today we have something different to do. It won't be hard, but you'll have to do some thinking and planning. You will have 15 minutes to arrange the dominoes so that similar faces will match. I'll show you -- to get started. Okay you can get to work. A hint is that it will help to work together.

Although the tasks were originally chosen to be similar, it became apparent that there were differences between the tasks as to the interest and enthusiasm generated, the challenge presented, the group processes elicited and the frustrations involved:

### The Behavioral Criteria

After several tries we finally developed a system of categorizing the children's comments to provide behavioral observations that could be statistically analyzed in a reliable manner. As stated previously each response was judged on two dimensions. The first dimension was that of being task related (which we identified by a capital T) or non taskrelated (identified by a capital N). Task related items were defined as responses which have to do directly with the tasks. They were either instructions, questions, suggestions, or comments. Non taskrelated responses were those

considered to be irrelevant in relationship to the task; they were conversations, comments or noises which were not concerned with solving the problem or completing the task.

The second dimension required the judging of a statement as being either positive (+) or (-). A plus response was one that might be a helpful suggestion or which merited compliance such as agreement or support. It could be either task related (T) or non taskrelated (N). If non taskrelated, it would be a comment which was made in a non abrasive way. A negative statement was one which would typically evoke anger, or be generally abrasive or hostile in an actual or applied way. Here are some examples of statements and how they were judged.

*(Show Transparency of Comments)*

It's kind of hard	T+
They can see your white underwear	N-
Why don't you put the puzzle into the coke bottle?	T-
You love that guy?	N+
You better help me	T+
He can see us	N+
I'm scared	N+
We ain't going to have nothing done!	T-
That ain't how you do it (shout)!	T-
That piece is too little	T+
I've got three pieces, you big tub	T-
Come on now and get this done or I'll blast your heads off	T-

I'll take a bunch and you take a bunch T+

Let's put the red pieces over here T+

How would you like me to hit you in front of the TV! N-

In the first study, a transcription was typed of all comments for each child. Because of the high level of agreement, in a larger study, judges listened to the actual tapes and assigned each verbal comment to one of the categories of behaviors. When two judges listened to the tapes, the correlations were .99 for T+, .98 for N-, .96 for N+, and .93 for T-. The T+ and N- categories are less ambiguous and are, we feel, most important because they demonstrate opposite types of responses, while the T- and N+ combine dimensions. The N- category may be most influenced by social inhibitions and pressures to conform.

### Results

The results demonstrate a strong general trend for children with a high others-concept to be more task related and more positive than children with a low others-concept. In the largest study (n=209) there was a significant difference on the T+ dimension at the .001 level ( $F(1,416) = 28.94, p < .001$ ). As noted previously, however, and pointed out in the description of the domino task as an example, both high and low scorers may act in a similar way, and both may, at times, act in a task related and positive way. When differences are evident, though, there are usually quantitative as well as qualitative differences between the two groups. The quantitative differences are revealed by the

frequencies of comments especially in the T+ and N- categories of behaviors, and the qualitative differences, not measured but many times observed, were evident as in the poster task. High scoring children were usually involved in more group planning and were more cooperative. The low scoring children used much more abrasive language and more negative physical action than high scoring children.

*(Show Transparency of Results)*

TABLE 1  
Means of T+ Statements by High Others-Concept and Low Others-Concept Children During Five Different Tasks

	TASK I	TASK II	TASK III	TASK IV	TASK V
High Others- Concept (n=12)	32.9	50.5	26.6	44.3	41.0
S.D.	10.2	16.7	11.3	32.0	27.7
Low Others- Concept (n=12)	17.5	48.4	19.3	27.7	19.9
S.D.	11.7	21.6	11.8	27.2	11.0
t	2.06*	.78	1.27	1.43	2.53*

\*Significant at the .01 level

Table 1 is highly simplified and shows the results with the frequency of T+ statements by high and low scoring children. The same children met over a five week period of time to participate in the group tasks. Task II (dominoes) and Task V (poster) were



given earlier as examples. The other tasks involve assembling puzzles or tinkertoys. The table demonstrates two points: the trend for high scorers to be more task related and positive (significant in the 1st and 5th tasks), and also the possibility for high and low scorers to behave in a very similar way (as in Task II--dominoes).

### Summary and Conclusions

In summary, the basic research methods which were used to test the relationship between the others-concept and actual social interactions were described. The results of three similar studies show a significant trend for children with a positive others-concept to be more task related and more positive in their interactions with others than children with a more negative others-concept. Although the results were significant, there are dangers in making inferences or predictions as to either small group behavior or individual behavior because of the possible influences of such factors as the task or situation, a need to conform, and personal inhibitions. The study of cooperative, task oriented behaviors and their relationship to the others-concept are important considerations that school psychologists can use both in terms of a theoretical framework, and also in terms of understanding everyday behaviors that are observed in school aged children.

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