

Measuring Change in Social Interest in Community College Freshmen

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Adler believed that schools are an extension of the family and are responsible for assisting in the total development of the individual. He also felt that social interest is learned. So, schools should enhance the development of social interest. But, do they? If schools are important to the development of the individual, we should try to find out just how these schools are affecting students.

As Adlerians, we might say that the extent to which education can be considered successful could depend, in part, on its ability to promote the development of social interest, thus helping prepare the individual for fulfilling the life tasks. This study looks at the extent to which a community college affects its entering freshmen over one semester.

We felt that community college freshmen should show an increase in social interest after one semester since they would have the advantages of specialized admissions counseling, carefully selected faculty advisors, remedial coursework, and personal problem counseling. All these special services — although not necessarily presented from an Adlerian point of view — should promote the development of social interest since the services would help the students to become more aware of their ability to contribute and be useful.

According to our thinking, we believed that women would have higher social interest than men. Our reasoning here was that such a difference would have its base in society's stress on the masculine image of competition as opposed to a more feminine image of cooperation. For example, such things as power, being aggressive, winning and getting ahead, and personal superiority are considered more desirable characteristics for men than women. Although sex role expectations are changing rapidly, we felt that the students in our study were from more traditional, authoritarian-type homes, and would exhibit traditional sex role patterns.

Another thing we were interested in was the relationship of social interest to such factors as age, socioeconomic status, ACT scores, academic achievement

and class rank. If we view social interest as a non-intellective factor, then it should not necessarily be related to ACT scores, academic achievement and class rank. Also, if we expect that social interest can be fairly well developed by college age, then there should not necessarily be a relationship between age and social interest. Also, if one's economic state is not as important as the environment in the home, then socioeconomic status should not be related to social interest.

METHOD

The subjects were all students from the incoming class at a community college in the fall of 1971. All subjects were full time, first semester freshmen, and all attended freshman orientation.

At freshman orientation 344 students were available for pretest, and at the end of the semester, in early January, 1972, 228 students were available for post test.

Although it is always desirable to have a control group, this was not possible since a community college is open door and admits all who apply. However, we were able to have a small comparison group of 26 students from a four-year college.

The Social Interest Index (SII)¹ was constructed to measure social interest. The scale was developed since there appeared to be no instrument available that was specifically designed to measure social interest in the context of Individual Psychology. Scale development was fairly rigorous and the resulting 32-item instrument appears to be a good research tool. We also administered the California Personality Inventory and compared SII scores to the 18 scales on that test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION²

We found that women scored higher on social interest than men. This was true both for the community college and the four-year college students. The 121 women at the community college scored an average of 123 (out of a possible 160) on pretest, as opposed to the 107 men who scored an average of 111. The 16 four-year college women scored 129 on pretest while the 10 four-year college men averaged 118. It would appear from these averages that four-year college students have higher social interest than community college students. However, the 26 students from the four-year college were at various grade levels and were taken from a general psychology class. On this basis, we did not think it was

1. Scale development is reported in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 1973, Vol. 41, No. 3, 454-458. A copy of the scale or article can be obtained by writing to Kathryn Greever, 509 Allen Hall, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506.
2. A copy of the study which contains detailed analyses of the data is available by writing to Kathryn Greever, 509 Allen Hall, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506.

reasonable to compare our 228 community college freshmen to them.

The male students at the community college did change significantly in social interest over the semester. The male student average of 111 jumped to 116. This was not the case with the four-year college males who scored 118 both on pretest and post test. Again, these students were not first semester freshmen, so we don't know how college might have affected them.

The women did not change in social interest over the semester — either at the community college or the four-year college. This might well have been anticipated by us since the community college has several two-year programs such as nursing and dental hygiene. These professions would appear to attract women with high social interest. In fact, when we compared the scores of community college women who were enrolled in “helping profession” programs, they compared quite favorably with the four-year college sample.

When we looked at the social interest scores of the community college women by curriculum, we saw an increase in the scores on the part of the low-scoring women, but these increases were not large enough to be statistically significant.

When we compared social interest scores with scores on the California Personality Inventory, there was a significant relationship to those scales whose descriptions appear to tap some of the concepts of social interest.

Social interest scores were not significantly related to socioeconomic status, grades, class rank and ACT scores for either the men or women. There was no relationship between social interest and age on the part of the men, but there was a relationship on the part of the women. We felt this might be due to the fact that a number of older (e.g., from 20-50) students were enrolled in the nursing program. Such a relationship might not hold true in another sample.

Except for the failure of women to increase in social interest over the semester, the results supported the contentions of the authors. We might also speculate on the meaning of some of the results. For example, does the competitiveness in our society make it harder for men to develop social interest? Our results support this. Also, it appears that colleges can affect the development of social interest. We might wonder if schools have a “social interest norm” such that one school might promote high social interest while another might not.

Adler felt that social interest is learned and subject to change. The results of this study indicate that this is true. If we assume that the special services of the community college provided encouragement, then we would expect social interest would increase. Since many of these services are designed to assist the previously academically unsuccessful student, then we have a rationale for the males' increased social interest. Since the females had higher social interest, they were less in need of special services and would, on the whole, tend to remain at the same level of social interest.