What's the matter with you anyhow? Don'tcha like me or somethin'? What are you, anyhow, alienated?¹

I ain't never done nothing to you so what have you got to be alienated about anyhow? Don't you like the rest of us who ain't alienated? You're sick, sick, sick! Thank God I ain't sick. You're sick! You're sick and you're alienated? You just ain't like the rest of us who ain't alienated. We're all together—we all like each other and don't want to be separated and alienated like you. I'd rather be a nigger than alienated!²

AT LAST we have a name for them! And we have come up with just a peachy word to describe the miserable little creatures! “Alienated” is just perfect . . . alien, foreign, foreigner—it's like a generalized word to sum up all of them. The wops, the kikes, the polacks, the micks, the jickies, the niggers, the japs, the hun, the frogs, the canuks, the fattys, the skinneys, the cross-eyed, the scared, the gimps, the stupid, the clods, the scum, the stinking, the sick, the kooks, the looneys. Alienated, a perfect word that suggests to us all that we fear, much that we hate, so much of what we don't know.

And what makes it even better, alienated suggests that it's their fault. They are alien. It's something they have done to shut us out.

The Alienated

None of the other words have quite done the trick. School people originally didn't want to talk about such children at all. There was a time not too many years ago before we had any word to call them that we ignored them altogether. They were there, all right, driving nice clean-cut American teachers out of their minds, inhabiting school
office benches. We've seen them, like old men in a park, like pigeons on the wall who forgot to fly south sitting on window sills waiting for spring to come.

And the principal saying "Oh, no, we don't have any problems!"

They've been with us, all right. We've called them dumb, delinquent, bad boys, truants, Huckleberry Finn, emotionally disturbed, maladjusted, antisocial, slow learners, dropouts, disaffected—we've known them by many names. But now we've isolated them. We've pegged them, and we don't feel so bad. Because we've named them, we can talk about them and have conferences about them and not feel so guilty about them.

They're the alienated—no, he's not mentally retarded, they're in Room 114.—No, he's not emotionally disturbed, they're at the Pine Hill School.—No, he's not visually handicapped, they're at Sunnyside.—No, he's not criminally delinquent, they're at Happy Hour.—No, he's alienated and we haven't got a room for him yet, but we're working on it. We're thinking of the basement room at Brookdale, but we have to get someone specially trained in alienation—the special education department will send us a man pretty soon.

We've admitted our ignorance, purged our souls of guilt, visited our confessional and have washed our hands of the problem by assigning them to special education where we can experiment with the curriculum and not really be responsible. ("We just haven't got the answers yet, we've got a grant coming through, we're researching it.")

And, meanwhile, thousands of kids who don't know we have a name for them continue blissfully along their alienated little pathways unaware in their misery of their evolving distinction.

But in this paper we intend, almost hypocritically, to discuss how they got that way . . . how they got that way. As if we hadn't traveled the path ourselves. One must qualify the hypocrisy by pointing out that perhaps there is only hypocrisy with awareness—with the self-consciousness of our own alienation. For we have it. We've learned the lesson, if you will, too well.

Questions of Self

It is necessary to begin a long way back with what are basically philosophical questions. What are we? Who are we? How do we get to be ourselves? For when we speak of alienation we concern ourselves with questions of self.

There are, of course, numerous theories of personality which concern themselves with how we get to be what we are. Each theorist, beginning from his own bias, develops a position. One might suggest consideration of the work of the late G. H. Mead, the social psychologist at the University of Chicago. In the book, 'Mind, Self and Society,' Mead speculates on how an individual comes to selfhood.

It is difficult to think of Mead in behavioristic terms, yet essentially his theory has roots in a kind of S-R bond thinking. Individuals are confronted with stimuli in their environments. It would be theoretically possible for them simply to respond to the stimuli in a random fashion. Probably no organism, highly evolved or not, does, however. The pure behaviorist, Skinner, points
up the fact that organisms tend to build up complicated repertoires of responses. Modification of the behavioral responses resulting in changed behavior are what Skinner would term learning. Mead, however, chooses to qualify the nature of the response. He says that man develops mind as he learns to postpone his response to stimuli present in the environment until he has given consideration, if but instantaneous consideration, to alternative responses. When man has developed the ability to postpone response and adapt selectivity with respect to response, he has attained what Mead calls mind.

To Mead the attainment of mind must precede the attainment of self. To attain selfhood, it is necessary for an individual to objectify himself as he responds selectively to stimuli so that he can, in effect, see himself responding almost as a third person. This self-conscious view of responding selectively allows man to attain selfhood.

There is some question as to how many people come fully to the kind of selfhood described by Mead, for to do so would involve a fully conscious determination of self developed in an objectified behavioral response pattern controlled to a large extent by the person. It is important to note that the individual does not control the nature of stimuli presented to him, however. But neither does anyone else. If the stimuli present in any dynamic environment were to be controlled by him, he would have complete control not only of himself but of the total environment. He would be God.

If the stimuli present in the environment were controlled by an outside source, we would have, in a Skinnerian view, behavior control; for if the stimulus environment were to be controlled, behavior would be controlled. In Mead's frame of reference, however, the self-conscious man would still maintain a considerable degree of self-determination in his ability to respond selectively to even a controlled set of stimuli.

One can only assume that there is a kind of unconsciously determined selfhood also, for Mead talks in terms of what he calls "significant others." Significant others are people who provide models in the environment to whom individuals respond selectively.

This is a conscious or unconscious wish: "I want to be like X when I grow up." The fully conscious self tends to be rather deliberate in his selection of significant others. The less conscious individual perhaps responds in a less determined way. In any event, in their coming to conscious or unconscious selfhood, people strive to find identity.

The response of individuals to stimuli determines this identity. Their response influences and is influenced by their values. Value commitment is really little more than the quality of response individuals make to stimuli present in their environment. The pattern of response influences and is influenced by the nature of selfhood. Values are characteristic of the nature of response and provide criteria for a subjective evaluation of self.

Hence, an individual either chooses to respond relative to a value commitment or simply to respond. He is in the first instance, deliberate. He is in the second instance, indeliberate.

The sum total of his responses determines the nature and character of his selfhood.
Presentation of Self

Departing from Mead for the moment, we turn to Erving Goffman and a volume entitled *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.*

Goffman indicates that the manner in which people present themselves in life provides new stimuli in search of response. In effect, each self cries out for response.

Look at my presentation, my role, if you will! How do you like it? How do you like me? Do you believe it? Do you believe me? I'm suave, I'm a lady-killer, I'm handsome, I'm clever, I'm wicked. Don't you believe me? Substantiate my image of myself. Believe me. Yes, it's me, suave, handsome, wicked!

And the respondents do, or they don't. Some do, some don't. If the particularly significant respondents believe, so much the better. If some, perhaps, not so significant believe, better than nothing. Needless to say, they will become more significant.

Look at me! I'm shy, I'm coy, I'm pretty, if not beautiful. I'm loving, I want to be loved. Please believe, please believe, believe!

Most don't at all. *None* do, *none* do. You're dumb, you're obvious, you're a beast. You're hateful, who could love you? *Believe that!*

Try another role, another projection of self in a repertoire of roles? Perhaps.

But what if there is no developed repertoire? What if this person for reason of low intelligence, inflexibility or determination refuses to manifest another version of self? What if no one believes in the role he chooses to project?

There are two possibilities.

1. He will maintain the self-image and be alienated, or . . .
2. He will accept the image of the respondents as new and vital stimuli and will believe and be alienated.

*We are all alienated.* Nobody has everyone accepting his presentation of self. Nobody! We all know degrees of alienation.

What of movie stars, you ask? Clark Gable projected a role that everyone believed—except his several or more wives who knew him in a different dynamic gestalt.

What of the jazz artist who after a magnificent presentation of himself through an 11-chorus solo and thunderous adoration is confronted by a customer who asks for a polka?

Most of us find a presentation of self we can either believe in or live with. But what of those who can't?

Try it out instead of sticking the pin in the bag of hot air you encounter at your next party, respond to him in terms of the presentation of self he is seeking and gain a probably unwanted friend.

Seek out the fantasy self of the shy girl who works in the office and respond in terms of this image. Watch the result.

Every unhappy interpersonal relationship existent has its roots in conflicts of self-presentation. This is true in individuals and in nations. Why do we have trouble with France and Charles De Gaulle? Why does Russia have problems with Red China? Why is our foreign policy so fouled up? We don't believe the projected self-image of Cuba, of Canada, of nearly every Latin American country. They are alienated
because we don't believe them in their presentation of self. Or we have helped to convince people of a self-image which they temporarily accept or pretend to, and they are alienated.

We are all good teachers of alienation. This is probably not deliberate in most cases but the effect is the same.

Most of us who are schoolteachers are particularly good at teaching alienation.

Face up to it, kid. You're not much good, and here's an F to prove it. Just so you'll really get the message, I'll write it in red ink.

And so the kid says:
To hell with you. I'll find somebody who doesn't think I'm dumb, or ugly, or dirty. I'll find someone who will believe in the self-image I have. Keep your damned school!

So the kid does, and he gets a job and a girl and a cheap car and an outboard motor boat, and he lives.

But some don't. Because nobody believes them, and man they're alienated. And so they make it rough for everyone else to believe in themselves.

You're a real great teacher, mister, ain'cha? You didn't teach me nothin'!

Or they live on the fringes of the society socially, or antisocially, or they hate with a passion, or they kill, or they are killed, or they kill themselves, and man that's really alienation! 

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