

*Alienation and Age: A Context-Specific Approach**

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ABSTRACT

A context-specific conceptualization of alienation is used to describe age-group differences. Traditionally, alienation has been treated in terms of specific modes (e.g., powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, self-estrangement). This research adds to each of these modes social structural contexts (e.g., polity, economy, education, religion, family) to produce a matrix of context-specific alienation. Age-group differentials on specific components of alienation are examined in a three-generation sample. The postulate that alienation is related to position in the social structure leads to the hypothesis that there is a curvilinear relation between alienation and age, the youth most alienated, the middle-aged least, and the elderly in between. The hypothesis is generally supported.

In the past two decades, there has been much social and psychological research on the concept of alienation. The concept is useful as it points to an important interface between the individual and his social system where feelings of estrangement (powerlessness, normlessness, meaninglessness) are correlates of marginal social status (loss of control over means of directing one's life, disaffection with goals of the broader society).

Past research has tended to investigate psychological modes of alienation while leaving unexamined, for the most part, issues concerning the social context. Hence there are some important sociological implications which have been little explored. To what extent is alienation differently related to the various sectors of the individual's social world? How is it related to the broader dimensions of social structure? Which groups in society manifest higher or lower alienation, and what are the underlying forces which cause such differences?

The literature treating problems specific to age-strata seems to justify a context-specific approach to alienation. Most young people in contemporary industrial societies must wait until they are well into their twenties before they enter adult systems of power and reward. Youth constitute a social group which has often been characterized as markedly alienated (see

Keniston, 1965; Whittaker and Watts, 1969). This estrangement is often manifest in political and educational disaffection (Friedenberg, 1969), which is related to broader social change (Bengtson, 1970). For example, the "alienated youth" of the 1950s have given rise to the "young radicals" of the 1960s; and if current seers of campus commitment are correct, the mood of the 1970s is apathy—an alienation born of a realistic assessment of powerlessness (e.g., Hitch, 1972). At the other end of the life cycle, those elderly who have "disengaged" from participation in many of the significant roles of mid-life have also been characterized as higher in alienation than their middle-aged counterparts (Cumming and Henry, 1961; Lowenthal, 1964). In short, age, as an index of participation in the central institutions of society, should be a significant predictor of levels of alienation.

This research has two aims. The first is to study alienation across various institutional contexts. The second is to test the proposition that differences in age (reflected in three generations) predict differences in alienation. We see age as an important correlate of type and extent of societal participation.

A CONTEXT-SPECIFIC MODEL: MULTIPLE MODES AND CONTEXTS

Alienation has been a recurrent theme in the media of contemporary society. It has emerged in popular art forms (e.g., *Easy Rider*, *Hair*, *I Am A Rock*). The refrain of one pop song says: "I am, I said, to no one there; and no one heard at all, not even the chair; I am, I

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cried, I am, said I, and I am lost and I don't even know why . . . leaving me lonely still." Alienation is often cited in scholarly literature as a cause or correlate of social problems: crime, delinquency, prostitution, and student unrest (see Etzioni, 1968).

Much thought and research has gone into examining the conceptualization, measurement, and operation of alienation. A bibliography compiled in 1969 by the National Institute of Mental Health cites 225 articles. Most of that research has focused on what may be called the *mode* of alienation: feelings of estrangement in reaction to the global sociocultural system (see Keniston, 1965).

Multiple Modes

In his classic review, Seeman (1959) noted five recurring components (or modes) of alienation. These are:

1. *Powerlessness*: the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behavior cannot determine the outcomes or reinforcements he seeks
2. *Meaninglessness*: the individual is unclear as to what he ought to believe; when minimal standards for clarity in decision-making are not met . . . a low expectancy that satisfactory predictions about future outcomes can be made
3. *Normlessness*: a high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviors are required to achieve given goals
4. *Isolation*: assignment of low reward value to goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued in the given society
5. *Self-estrangement*: a disjuncture between the degree of dependence of the given behavior upon anticipated future rewards.¹

Examples are plentiful of the diverse ways in which social philosophers and sociologists have viewed these modes of alienation. For example, Karl Marx saw the worker in industrial societies as alienated because access to the means of production or economic decision-making was dominated by the ruling entrepreneurs. Alienation for Marx was primarily a

characteristic of the economic sphere of society. Bottomore (1956:170–1) quotes Marx as follows:

The more the worker expends himself in work, the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in face of himself, and the poorer he himself becomes in his inner life, the less he belongs to himself. The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, takes on its own existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, and alien to him, and that it stands opposed to him as an autonomous power. The life which he has given to the object sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force.

The performance of work is at the same time its objectification. This performance of work appears in the sphere of political economy, as a vitiation of the worker, objectification as a loss and as servitude to the object, and appropriation as alienation.

This classical conceptualization of alienation emphasizes the worker as part of a whole category subject to similar alienating elements of a social structure (Kon, 1967). But the contemporary social-psychological conceptualization tends to fix on the individual's response to the total cultural system (Keniston, 1965; Schact, 1970). Cultural rejection may partly result from common age-category experiences, but it is basically an individual response (see Fromm, 1955).

Multiple Social Contexts

But to fix on the mode of alienation leaves unanswered an important question: Alienated from what? How may one characterize the several settings in which the above modes of alienation are experienced?

A statement of the context of alienation should be both inclusive and specific at the same time. Alienation has usually been thought of as a characteristic of masses, e.g., the proletariat, or minority groups or contemporary youth. Yet it is the individual who responds to alienating aspects of a society. Hence, we invoke the concept of social institutions which provides a compromise between breadth and specificity. The social system as a whole is seen as a complex of institutions—political, economic, educational, religious, and familial—in which people play socially prescribed roles. If such social interaction entails lack of power, or of values worth identifying with, or self-integration, then alienation may result.

Given an institutional perspective, it is possible to describe more specifically the perceived object of an individual's alienation. The model in Chart 1 represents an attempt to do

¹ More recently Seeman (1971) has redefined estrangement as a social isolation (loneliness) and added cultural (or value) estrangement to accompany self-estrangement (either a discrepancy between the ideal self and the real self, failure to live up to one's perceived potential, or doing unfulfilling or uncreative work). The five definitions in Seeman's 1959 paper were used as the basis for the operationalization of alienation in the present research.

	POLITY	ECONOMY	EDUCATION	RELIGION	FAMILY	Σ
	political powerlessness	economic powerlessness	educational powerlessness	religious powerlessness	familial powerlessness	POWERLESSNESS
	political meaninglessness	economic meaninglessness	educational meaninglessness	religious meaninglessness	familial meaninglessness	MEANINGLESSNESS
	political normlessness	economic normlessness	educational normlessness	religious normlessness	familial normlessness	NORMLESSNESS
	political social isolation	economic social isolation	educational social isolation	religious social isolation	familial social isolation	SOCIAL ISOLATION
	political self-estrangement	economic self-estrangement	educational self-estrangement	religious self-estrangement	familial self-estrangement	SELF-ESTRANGEMENT
Σ	political alienation	economic alienation	educational alienation	religious alienation	familial alienation	CONTEXT-SPECIFIC ALIENATION

Chart 1. A Model for Assessing the Perception of Context-Specific Alienation

just this, for it locates the specific social institutional context and modal expression of an individual's perceived alienation. (For another attempt at establishing a context-specific model of alienation, see Burbach, 1972.)

Each mode of alienation can be examined across institutions, and each institution can be examined across modes. Total alienation is represented in the lower right-hand corner. From this formulation, several different perspectives on alienation can be explored. For example, there are context-specific components of alienation, such as political powerlessness.²

The principal task of the following analyses involves between-age category comparisons of specific cell scores and scores summed across modes or across institutions. The total alienation score will also be examined.

HYPOTHESES FOR APPLICATION OF THE PARADIGM TO GENERATIONAL GROUPS

The basic postulate of this research is that a sense of alienation varies with the extent of participation in the social structure. This argument is evaluated by examining levels of alienation in three groups, each representing differential involvement in the social structure. Hypotheses for testing will be stated on three levels of generality.

Level I Hypothesis

Differential involvement of age-strata leads to a general hypothesis: the middle generation (G2) is most involved in the social structure and will be lowest in feelings of alienation; the youth generation (G3) is least involved in the total social structure and will be most alienated; the old (G1), in the process of disengaging from the social system, will be in between. Thus, a curvilinear relation between the total alienation score and age is hypothesized.

Level II Hypotheses

Seven curvilinear hypotheses have been generated for the five specific modes and two of the specific contexts. These are derived from age-specific contrasts in social participation. In the case of religious alienation, it is predicted that G3 will be highest and both G1 and G2 will be lower. The religious experiences of the present cohort of young people deemphasize the institutional church, while the experiences of the middle and older generation do not. This represents an exception to the general curvilinear hypothesis. It is difficult to make a clear prediction for the educational institutions. Keniston's (1965) analysis would predict that value isolation and self-estrangement will be highest for G3 in all contexts, but the youth are much more involved in the educational process than the aged and the aged are still burdened by the taxes supporting education. It is also difficult to make a prediction for the family. Perhaps the dominance of primary re-

² Originally there were 75 items in the alienation scale, 3 for each cell. Pretesting and questionnaire size limitations resulted in the reduction of the scale to 25 items. See Dean (1961) for a discussion on the measurement of alienation.

relationships within the family will produce a lower level of alienation in all three generations than in the other contexts (Acock *et al.*, 1974).

Level III Hypotheses

It would be possible to generate 25 hypotheses (one for each cell of Chart 1), but this would be highly speculative. However, for most of the 25 cells the curvilinear prediction is appropriate. Rather than pose specific hypotheses, we will do an *a posteriori* analysis of the data in Table 3.

MEASUREMENT, SAMPLING, AND STATISTICAL PROCEDURES

Measurement

Alienation was operationalized by applying each of Seeman's definitions of alienation modes to each institutional context. A 25-item questionnaire was designed, one question for each of the cells in the context-specific paradigm.³ Responses to each question were scaled from 1 (little alienation) to 6 (high alienation). The key elements of Seeman's definitions were incorporated in each of the 25 items. Response options were alternatively reversed to minimize response-set.

Reliability and validity of a scale must be demonstrated in attempting to measure such a complex social-psychological construct as alienation. Pretesting of the 25-item scale demonstrated its verbal adequacy, reliability, and validity. The scale was administered to over 300 different individuals prior to the research. Each time feedback was requested as to the intent and understandability of the questions. Reliability (tested on an *n* of 40) was indicated by a test-retest *r* of .64 (two-week interval). This is comparable to measures reported on other social-psychological concepts. Rotter (1966) reported similar test-retest *r*s for his locus of control instrument. Though feelings of

alienation may vary with the daily news, present job or marital satisfaction, etc., the reliability level indicates considerable continuity. Tests for internal consistency (item to item and item to scale) resulted in *r*s in the .40 to .70 range, indicating neither complete unidimensionality nor complete orthogonality of the items.

Pretesting with "known groups" was carried out to estimate the predictive validity of the items. The questions were administered to a group of incarcerated juvenile delinquents (*n*=40), college students (*n*=38), and suburban, middle-aged service organization members (*n*=28). The mean total alienation scores and the mean individual item scores varied in the predicted direction, the delinquents being highest and the service organization members being lowest. A *t*-test on the difference of the means indicated statistical significance at the .05 level for 19 of the 26 comparisons (the 25 individual items, plus the total alienation scores). Only one comparison (educational meaningfulness) was not in the predicted direction. There was a .67 point biserial *r* between delinquents—service organization members and alienation score.⁴

Research Sample

These data are from a larger study exploring the nature and extent of intergenerational continuity (see Bengtson and Lovejoy, 1973). The present analysis used 182 males who were members of three-generational lineages. We began by attempting to find grandfathers who had living children and grandchildren (age 15–26). This was done by getting in touch with male subscribers to a Southern California medical plan. Of the 840,000 members, 58,328 fit this category. From these a systematic sample (every eighth case) was drawn, yielding 7,112 men. These were sent a one-page questionnaire to determine if they had three-generation families as specified by the research design (i.e., with a grandchild age 15–26). There were only 585 who reported having such families based on a 70 percent return from the 7,112.

Of these 585 families, 84 had direct linkage between (and supplied addresses for) three male members. That is, they were related along the male line, grandfathers, one father, and one grandson. Thus, 84 individuals from each generation received a questionnaire, making a total of 252 potential respondents in the male

³ Following are three examples of the items used:

1. (political powerlessness) How much influence do you feel you have over the policies and decisions the government (federal and state) makes?
2. (economic meaningfulness) Are the things that happen in the American economy often confusing to you?
3. (familial self-estrangement) Is your own family life or activity personally enjoyable to you in and of itself?

(The complete scale and its scoring will be sent upon request made to the first author.)

⁴ More complete data on reliability and validity are available upon request.

three-generation family sample. Of these, 182 returned completed, usable instruments (a 72 percent return rate).

The 182 males comprising the sample had an age range of 15–81; the average age for the three generations was 76, 44, and 18, respectively. As to current marital status, over 90 percent of the middle and older generations were currently married; over 90 percent of the youth generation were not. The sample was 95 percent white. Thus, nonwhites and unmarried adults are underrepresented in the sample. There was heterogeneity on the variables of education, occupation, income, and religion. (See Martin, 1971.)

Statistical Procedures

Several statistical procedures were used in the analysis of these data. The first approach was to examine means for each generation. Means were computed on total alienation (summing means over all cells), on the five modes of alienation, and on the five institutional contexts. These are reported in Table 1 and will be used in testing Level I and Level II hypotheses.

A second approach used in testing Level II hypotheses involved dichotomizing each of the 25 items into “alienated” or “not alienated.” If an individual checked scale point 1, 2, or 3 in response to an item he was considered to have given a not alienated response (in contrast to responses at scale points 4, 5, and 6). The dichotomizing was done to determine how generalized alienation is for each generation within each mode and within each institution. For ex-

ample, toward how many institutions does the average G1 feel alienation within the mode of powerlessness? Is this level of generalization greater or less than it is for the G2s? The data appear in Table 2.

Level III hypotheses were explored by comparing subcell means. Table 3 presents means for each generation within each cell.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The general hypothesis that the most alienated would be the youth followed by the elderly and that the middle-aged would be the lowest was strongly supported by their total alienation score means. Table I shows that the average total alienation score for G3 was 82.8 followed closely by the mean for G1 of 76.3. By contrast, the G2s had a significantly lower mean of 69.4 ($p < .05$). The most general alienation score (produced by summing over modes and contexts) does vary by generation in the manner predicted from the general postulate. The Level I hypothesis was supported—there was a curvilinear relation between alienation and age.

A major purpose of this study was to go beyond the general hypothesis and determine context-specific variations in alienation and see if these are predictable on the basis of age-related position in the social structure. The curvilinear predictions in the Level II hypotheses received clear support in five out of the seven cases (see Table 1). The exceptions in terms of modes of alienation were social isolation and self-estrangement, where the oldest generation was less alienated than expected. Even with these exceptions, however, the youth were higher than the middle-aged in all five modes of alienation. The data supported the predictions for contexts of alienation as well. In addition, as Table 1 indicates, the educational context followed the curvilinear relation with the qualification that the aged are the highest. For the family context we found a relatively low level of alienation for all three generations. The aged are surprisingly low.

The second approach to analyzing Level II hypotheses was to ask how generalized alienation is across modes within each context and across contexts within each mode. The appropriate data appear in Table 2. The results are similar to those shown in Table 1. However, it is interesting to observe the considerable variation in how generalized alienation is. For example, the average number of contexts of powerlessness for the aged was 3.4. In contrast

Table 1. Mean Alienation Scores for Each Generation

	G1	G2	G3
a. Total alienation	76.3*†	69.4*	82.8†
b. Modes of alienation			
powerlessness	22.6*†	18.4*†	21.0†‡
meaninglessness	20.3*†	17.5*	17.9†
normlessness	12.2*	9.6*†	12.6†
social isolation	10.9†	11.7†	16.3†‡
self-estrangement	10.3*†	12.2*†	15.1†‡
c. Contexts of alienation			
polity	19.2*	17.2*†	19.8†
economy	17.1*	15.2*†	18.2†
education	15.0*	13.3*	14.5
religion	15.8†	15.4†	17.8†‡
family	8.6†	8.4†	12.4†‡

* G1 and G2 means statistically significant in their difference ($p < .05$).
 † G1 and G3 means statistically significant in their difference ($p < .05$).
 ‡ G2 and G3 means statistically significant in their difference ($p < .05$).

Table 2. Mean Number of Categories of Alienation for Each Mode and Context by Generation

Mode	Mean Number of Contexts		
	G1 (Old)	G2 (Middle)	G3 (Young)
Powerlessness	3.4*	2.6	3.1
Meaninglessness	3.2	2.6	2.5
Normlessness	1.4	0.9	1.4
Social isolation	0.9	0.8	1.9
Self-estrangement	0.9	1.1	1.6

Context	Mean Number of Modes		
	G1 (Old)	G2 (Middle)	G3 (Young)
Polity	2.8	2.4	3.0
Economy	2.4	1.9	2.4
Education	2.0	1.4	1.6
Religion	2.1	1.9	2.4
Family	0.4	0.4	1.1

* Values are for the mean number of contexts and modes in which members of each generation gave an alienated response. For example, a 3.4 for G1 on powerlessness means that the average G1 gave a response indicating alienation in 3.4 contexts of powerlessness.

the aged expressed social isolation and self-estrangement in an average of less than one context.

Inspection of Table 2 indicates that powerlessness and meaninglessness were much more generalized across contexts for all three generations than the other modes. It is also clear that the young had much more generalized social isolation and self-estrangement than either the middle or oldest category.

The data for the very specific hypotheses (Level III) are presented in Table 3. Only 9 of the 25 means exactly follow the curvilinear pattern. However, in 16 of the 25 cells, the mean of youth alienation was highest, as predicted. Also, in 15 of the 25 cells, the middle-aged mean was lowest, as predicted. In the

educational context, the elderly expressed greatest alienation in terms of power (control) and meaninglessness; but youth expressed greatest value isolation and self-estrangement.

DISCUSSION

The data presented above suggest two general conclusions. First, when one examines the total alienation scores (summed over all items, representing the five modes and five institutional contexts) the prediction of a curvilinear relationship between age and alienation was confirmed. This suggests support for the general postulate of an inverse relationship between an individual's integration into the social structure and the level of alienation he exhibits. Second, when one explores the more specific

Table 3. Mean Context-Specific Alienation Scores for Each Generation

		Polity	Economy	Education	Religion	Family
		Powerlessness	G1 4.86*	5.10*	4.71*	5.46*
	G2 4.17†	4.44	3.62	4.63	1.60†	
	G3 5.05	4.75	3.65‡	4.98‡	2.61‡	
Meaninglessness	G1 4.60*	4.73*	4.98*	3.87	1.97	
	G2 3.90	4.00	4.00†	3.86	1.90†	
	G3 4.12‡	3.91‡	3.30‡	3.85	2.61‡	
Normlessness	G1 3.65*	3.30*	1.73	2.25*	1.19	
	G2 3.15†	2.65†	1.46†	1.40†	1.14†	
	G3 3.79	3.07	1.95	2.18	1.56‡	
Social isolation	G1 2.95*	2.52	1.48*	2.03*	1.80	
	G2 2.45†	2.43†	2.28†	2.50†	2.08†	
	G3 3.44‡	3.25‡	2.80‡	3.55‡	3.26‡	
Self-estrangement	G1 3.16*	1.48*	1.97	2.33*	1.35	
	G2 3.71	2.02†	2.04†	2.90	1.48†	
	G3 3.51	3.23‡	2.81‡	3.28‡	2.33‡	

* G1 and G2 means statistically significant in their difference ($p \leq .05$).

† G2 and G3 means statistically significant in their difference ($p \leq .05$).

‡ G1 and G3 means statistically significant in their difference ($p \leq .05$).

manifestations of alienation—examining scores in the five modes and five institutional contexts—some exceptions to this overall pattern emerge. Hence the importance of a context-specific approach to alienation.

For example, the grandparents (G1) exhibited the highest total alienation scores of the three age groups with respect to powerlessness and meaninglessness (see Table 1). This is apparent in the economic, educational, and religious institutional contexts (Table 3). Moreover, the highest alienation levels for the youth (G3) can be seen in powerlessness in the political and familial settings, in their social isolation, and self-estrangement.

Age and Alienation. These specific findings provide additional support for the general theme that there are age differences in levels of alienation. There are two explanations that can be advanced for such age-group differences (Riley *et al.*, 1972). The first is a *maturational* explanation: alienation is a correlate of contrasting levels of psychological or social age. Age-grading represents an institutionalized progression through various positions in the social structure. In most spheres of social activity, the middle-aged are the “command” generation, in control of many of the resources of the social system. That they exhibit less feeling of alienation as a function of greater participation in and control over various systems within society is consistent with these data. One implication, then, is that as youth move into positions of the adult social structure, their level of alienation may decrease. Indeed, alienation may be an example of the developmental stake each generation has in the social system (Bengtson and Kuypers, 1973). The stake of the middle-aged in the future involves continuing the established order and transmitting its best features to the young. Implied is a lower level of skepticism, less alienation from social systems, than among youth. By contrast, the developmental tasks of youth center on the establishment of identities: by questioning, experimenting, and exploring, they seek to establish viable alternatives to the established institutions of the older cohort (see Mannheim, 1952; Ryder, 1965). This suggests a second implication: that the psychological consequences of high levels of alienation may vary by age. For youth, alienation from the present political order, for example, may be a constructive force in the forging of a new and more humane political ideology (see Keniston, 1968). For the

alienated middle-aged, it may take on the form of despair and stagnation the obverse of ego-integrity and generativity (see Erikson, 1964).

But there is a second interpretation of the age-group difference in alienation exhibited in these data: a *cohort-historical* perspective (Ryder, 1965). The contrasts observed between generations may be due to sets of different life experiences as they relate to the institutions involved. Mannheim (1952) observed that cohorts are uniquely shaped by the historical events impinging on members as they achieve adulthood. Heberle (1951) has suggested that these are particularly evident in political orientations, a view substantiated in recent research by Cutler (in press). The middle generation in the present research has been characterized by Reich (1970) as a cohort with consistent faith in rational contracts, organizational processes, and privacy; while the emerging generation evidences much less reliance on established institutions. One implication, then, is that the youthful cohort may maintain their higher alienation scores into adulthood, despite increasing involvement in the social structure.

Viewed from either a maturational (age-grade) or cohort (historical) interpretation, the research supports two more specific observations in the literature concerning alienation, age and social structure. The first is Keniston's (1965) argument that youthful alienation is a rejection of the values and goals that presently prevail in the social structure. The social (value) isolation scores of G3 were consistently higher in all contexts than those of G1 or G2 (Table 3). Extrapolating to the future, either youth will accept the dominant value-goal structure when they inherit the means of control (a maturational explanation) or they will make selective changes in it based on their unique cohort experiences (see Bengtson, 1970). This suggestion can only be tested by cohort-sequential studies on social change and generational continuity.

The second age-related postulate supported is the Cumming and Henry (1961) statement that the elderly disengage from the social structure. The G1 respondents expressed highest powerlessness and meaninglessness of the three generations. The elderly relinquish positions of influence to the middle generation (which had the lowest powerlessness and meaninglessness scores). In all five institutional contexts, the old scored higher in alienation than the middle generation; in three of the five alienation modes they are higher. Again, longi-

tudinal designs are necessary to test for the expected increase in alienation scores between middle age and old age, as individuals move from the functional positions of adult life to the less "productive" positions of retiree, widower, grandparent, or retirement community occupant.

Multiple Modes and Contexts. The second major implication of these data is that alienation manifests itself in a variety of modes. As suggested by Seeman and others, alienation must not be considered unidimensional. In general, powerlessness and meaninglessness were the modes of alienation expressed most frequently by the sample. Not only did total alienation scores vary by generation (e.g., youth uniquely high in social isolation and self-estrangement), but the modal patterns of alienation were differentially manifest. Similarly, as implied in the conceptualization of this research, alienation manifests itself in a variety of social structural contexts. Political and economic alienation were most pervasive in the sample, but each generation had a different contextual pattern of alienation. The youth were noticeably high in familial and religious alienation. Alienation is a multidimensional concept: two individuals may have equal total alienation scores but vary dramatically in both mode and context of their alienation.

Primary relationships within an institutional context may have the net effect of reducing (or limiting the development of) alienation. In these data, scores on familial alienation were consistently low for the three generations. Although G3 had a significantly higher familial alienation mean than G1 or G2, this context was still G3s lowest mean. Of the five institutional contexts, the family is the one with the highest probability of primary relationships. The implication is that pervasive primary relationships in the other institutional contexts would reduce alienation.

SUMMARY

This research, using a multiple mode and multiple institutional context approach to alienation, focused on the variable of age-generation membership as an indicator of involvement in the social structure. The basic theoretical rationale was that alienation varies by the degree of structural integration of individuals, and that age is an indicator of such structural involvement.

Two findings emerged from the data. First,

there were consistent age differences in alienation, many following the postulated curvilinear relation. That is, it was consistently found that youth were most alienated, the middle generation least alienated, and the older generation in between.

Second, the exceptions as well as the manifestations of this pattern highlight the multidimensional nature of alienation. This underscores the importance of conceptually separating the multiple modes and institutional contexts of alienation. Thus, the concept of context-specific alienation proved, on the whole, to be theoretically relevant and empirically discriminating.

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Alienation: An Organizational-Societal Comparison*

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ABSTRACT

Comparable composite measures of powerlessness felt toward the work organization and toward society were related to a modified version of Blauner's occupational typology using data from four companies. These analyses indicate that (1) degree of powerlessness workers felt in their work organization and in their society was not related to their type of work, and (2) there were no significant differences in the degree of powerlessness which workers felt in their work organization and in their society.

Melvin Seeman (1959:783) once asserted: "In one form or another, the concept of alienation dominates both the contemporary literature and the history of sociological thought." This is equally true today.

Three of the most basic issues posed by studies of alienation in contemporary social science are: its correlates, its dimensionality (internal consistency), and its level of focus (the immediacy of objects from which one is

alienated: the person himself, the immediate work group, the total work organization, the society).

Much research has dealt with the correlates of alienation (see Lystad (1969; 1972). There is also a large body of literature dealing with the dimensionality of alienation (Anderson, 1971; Bonjean and Grimes, 1970; Dean, 1961; Seeman, 1959; etc.).

Research on the correlates or dimensions of alienation has usually taken one of two positions, implicitly or explicitly, about the level of alienation. The first is to assume that alienation from the organization and from society are interchangeable (Blauner, 1964; Bonjean and Grimes, 1971; Josephson and Josephson, 1962). Yet, while this may simplify the investigation, it is only an *assumption* (see Anderson, 1971; Dean, 1961; Smith, 1968). Some (Clark, 1959; Hughes, 1967; Neal and See-

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