Measuring Alienation Within a Social System
Author(s): John P. Clark
Reviewed work(s):
Published by: American Sociological Association
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2088574
Accessed: 28/05/2012 18:36

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
MEASURING ALIENATION WITHIN A SOCIAL SYSTEM *

JOHN P. CLARK
The Ohio State University

The concept alienation seems to have been assigned to the rank of "extremely-useful but loosely-defined" higher constructs along with such others as inauthenticity, anomie, and culture. The concept has proven useful to many contemporary sociologists, social philosophers, and social historians in describing and interpreting man's social behavior.¹

As the list of such authors has grown, however, so has the variety of definitions of the concept or fractions of it. The construct should prove even more helpful in social science if it becomes more clearly defined and if a tool for measuring it can be developed. It is the purpose of this paper to contribute to this end.

DEFINITION

Of the numerous definitions given to alienation—feelings of meaninglessness, powerlessness, belonginglessness, being-manipulated, social and self-isolation—an isolable feature in all of them is man's feeling of lack of means (power) to eliminate the discrepancy between his definition of the role he is playing and the one he feels he should be playing in a situation. Alienation is the degree to which man feels powerless to achieve the role he has determined to be rightfully his in specific situations. Those who feel their actions meaningless would make them meaningful if they could, those who feel they do not belong would cause themselves to belong if they could, those who feel manipulated would cease to be so, those socially or self-isolated would not be so if they were in position to change circumstances—provided that they have decided that their roles rightfully should be different.

MEASURE

A measure of alienation must be a measure of the discrepancy between the power man believes he has and what he believes he should have—his estrangement from his rightful role. It is necessary for man to consider himself deserving a role in the social situation before he can experience feelings of alienation within it, a fact that must be established for any population before it can be intelligently studied within an alienation frame of reference.

At the present time this requirement seems seriously to challenge any attempt to measure man's alienation within any such general construct as culture or society. Man is differentially involved in society and participates in varying degrees of intensity in different social situations.

Nettler has recently attempted to measure the dimension of estrangement from what he argues to be popular and favorable attitudes toward familialism, mass media and mass taste, current events, popular education, conventional religion and the telic view of life, naturalism, and the voting process—implying normative behavior in these areas.² Obviously this is not the same dimension with which we are concerned here. In defining the concept, Nettler has stated, correctly, I believe, that alienation is a psychological state of an individual. He describes an alienated person as "one who has been estranged from . . . his society and the culture it carries." This would seem to imply that at one time the now estranged person was not so or at least that he was not aware of the estrangement.

We are concerned here with the nature of that something that when present in the psychological make-up of man may result in his becoming estranged physically, mentally, or both, from aspects of social interaction. However, it may not result in separation from the social situation but in feelings of being manipulated and of meaninglessness. The individual can develop feelings of being socially isolated and even of being a different person in his behavior than the self he believes he should be were conditions different.

Dean has constructed scales to measure man's powerlessness, normlessness,³ and social isolation from selected items of social interaction to arrive at a total alienation score.⁴ As in the Nettler study, the situations in which man feels powerless, normless, and isolated are not specific nor possibly representative of total societal involvement. This characteristic is common to

³ Nettler excludes normlessness (anomie) from consideration within the alienation concept with considerable justification.

¹ Funds for this study were provided by The Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station Project Number, Title II, ES 453. The author acknowledges the invaluable advice of Wade H. Andrews, Everett M. Rogers, and Melvin Seeman.
² For an excellent review and analysis of the historical development of the alienation concept, see Sally C. Harris, "A Conceptual Analysis of Alienation," Unpublished Thesis, Columbia University, 1956. (And for a presentation of five alternative meanings of alienation in current usage, see Melvin Seeman, "On the Meaning of Alienation," pp. 783-791 of this issue of the Review.—The Editor.)
The present study of the Alienation System, as measured in the interview, is an attempt to establish a single, well-defined unit, for instance, a social system. The data below are presented in an attempt to illustrate the feasibility and utility of examining alienation in this context.

METHOD

The unit studied. The membership of an agricultural cooperative organization was studied as a social system. As in most agricultural cooperatives, this organization consists of producer-members acting jointly to accomplish a business function, in this case, the marketing of whole milk. Marketing through the organization is a vital economic consideration for the members since over two-thirds of them derive three-fourths or more of their income from dairying. Membership is completely voluntary and all members hold equal ownership and governing rights. This cooperative illustrates one of the most striking trends in cooperative organizations in recent years, namely, the rapid shift from a small, community-centered, personal organization to a large, sprawling, more complicated, and impersonal organization.

Individuals in a random sample of 361 of the 3000 members were personally contacted by interviewers using a prepared schedule. Items pertaining to members' alienation, satisfaction, participation, and knowledge composed the body of the schedule. Scales were constructed to measure each of these dimensions.

Construction of Scales. The degree of alienation felt by individual members within the cooperative organization was measured by obtaining a composite alienation score, using the following items:

a. Interviewee's statement of who actually owns the cooperative. Farmer-members (0), Non-farm businessmen and others (4).

b. Interviewee's statement of how much influence he feels he has in the cooperative. Very much (0), Quite a bit (1), Some (2), Very little (3), None at all (4).

c. Interviewee's statement of how much "say" he feels members should have about how the cooperative is run. Less say (0), About the same (2), More say (4).

d. Interviewee's statement of the extent to which he feels a part owner of the cooperative. Very much (0), Quite a bit (1), Some (2), Not very much (3), None at all (4).

e. Interviewer's rating of the interviewee's feeling of belonging to or identification with the cooperative. Very much (0), Quite a bit (1), Some (2), Little (3), None at all (4).

The possible range of total scores is from 0 to 20, with higher scores indicating a greater degree of alienation. A rather high degree of internal consistency is indicated by item-total score correlations of .62, .82, .64, .80, and .74, respectively. The coefficient of reliability, computed by the split-half method, is .70. A reproducibility coefficient, computed by the Guttman method, is 93.4 per cent. These figures provide some evidence that the scale measures a single dimension.

Satisfaction is the degree to which the expectations of the cooperative are perceived by the member to have been accomplished. The coefficient of reliability for the eight-item satisfaction scale is .90. These items concern the interviewee's satisfaction with the kind of job the cooperative is doing, the success of the cooperative in keeping its members informed, how much influence the cooperative has in setting the price of milk, the amount of money deducted from the milk check by the cooperative, the advantages the member has over non-members, the method by which directors are chosen, the kind of people who work for the cooperative, and whether or not the cooperative is a good thing for the farmers. The coefficient of reproducibility is 91.2 per cent. As a measure of validity, the relationship between scale scores and the interviewee's rating of the interviewee's satisfaction with the cooperative is obtained.

Additional details concerning the sample are presented in the writer's Unpublished Thesis, "Alienation in a Milk Marketing Cooperative," The Ohio State University, 1957.

Numerical values assigned to each answer appear in parentheses. "Not sure" and "don't know" answers, which were extremely rare, were given the value of 2.
The correlation between the satisfaction score and this item is .65.

**Participation** is the degree to which the member meets the role expectations of the organization. The coefficient of reliability for the eight-item participation scale is .89. These items concern attendance at the district meetings any time in the past, attendance within the past year, serving on the nominating committee or advisory council or board of directors, reading the printed matter sent by the cooperative, reading the cooperative's house organ, discussing the cooperative with other members, trying to get other farmers to join the cooperative, and contacting cooperative fieldmen when a pertinent dairy problem arose. The coefficient of reproducibility is 91.9 per cent.

**Knowledge** is the degree to which a member is informed about his organization. The coefficient of reliability for the eleven-item knowledge scale is .81. These items concern knowledge of the identity of the fieldman, president of the cooperative, pertinent director, and manager (who owns the cooperative), how much is deducted from one's check by the cooperative, the existence of the cooperative's advertising program, how directors are chosen, content of the contract with the cooperative, the existence of a federal marketing order on the milk market. The coefficient of reproducibility is 91.0 per cent. The correlation between the knowledge scores and the interviewer's rating of the member's knowledge is .65.

**FINDINGS**

Alienation scores were found to vary widely among members, ranging from 4 to 20, with a mean score of 11.12 and a standard deviation of 3.10.

Alienation is highly related to the member's satisfaction with his organization \((r = -.62)\). Lower relationships exist between alienation and participation \((r = -.37)\), and alienation and knowledge \((r = -.30)\). All of these relationships are significantly different from zero.

There is no relationship between alienation scores and member's age, size of dairy herd, and years of membership. Significant relationships do exist between alienation scores and the number of other members known \((r = -.17)\), the number of memberships in other organizations \((r = -.21)\), and the number of visits by organization officials \((F = 8.79)\).

**DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

Admittedly, the alienation scale used in this study is far from being completely adequate, although it was found to be unidimensional, internally consistent, and fairly reliable. A more acceptable scale might contain more items, exhausting the possibilities of the expression of power in the organization, such as the member's influence in other related organizations or on other members (indirect influence), and member's feeling of power in specific situations—for example, voting for officers, discussion at meetings, and writing to officials.

When viewed from the standpoint of a single organization, the concept of alienation can be examined in an environment about which we are more adequately informed than with the "whole of society." The present findings indicate that the more powerless the members of an organization feel, the more likely they are to be dissatisfied with its operations. If one assumes a degree of causality in this relationship, it illustrates a dilemma not only for agricultural cooperatives, but for other organizations that are growing in membership, degree of complexity, and bureaucratization.

This development presents a particularly vital problem in the case of agricultural cooperatives. In order to become an effective competitor on the market, a cooperative organization must represent a sizable portion of the suppliers of that market. As market areas have grown, management has felt the need for enlarging cooperatives by merger or by soliciting membership in order to maintain and increase their position of power on the market. Farmer-members, who since the early nineteenth century have been suspicious of "big business," are quick to realize that their individual shares of power are being steadily diminished. Although still believing that they should have a power position in the organization, many apparently feel they have little or no control over the organization's activities.

The relationships between alienation and both participation and knowledge are surprisingly low. It would appear that merely participating in and obtaining knowledge about the organization are only slightly related to alienation. On the basis of these data one might question the value of attempting to increase member satisfaction in this organization by encouraging participation and knowledge. Conversely, keeping members satisfied and less alienated seems to give scant assurance of member participation and knowledge, long considered to be cornerstones of the successful operation of cooperatives.

By studying alienation in a single social system, we have been able to measure both the extent of member alienation and the relationships among alienation, satisfaction, participation, and knowledge of that social system. With
appropriate modification, the present alienation scale may be used in the study of other social systems. Researchers will need to devote further efforts, however, to the development of a measure of the more general dimension of alienation within society.

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND AND HIGHER EDUCATION *

Helmut R. Wagner    Kathryn Doyle
Bucknell University    Boston College
Victor Fisher
Pennsylvania State University

In the Protestant Ethic, Max Weber advanced the thesis that the "innerworldly asceticism" of the early Protestants was a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for the development of the "spirit" of modern capitalist enterprise. 1 Traditional Catholic social ethics, he stated, at best tolerated capitalist activities 2 and, on the whole, rather hampered as advanced the development of the modern economic system. He and his students demonstrated that, in southern Germany at the turn of the century, Catholics were grossly under-represented in the modern business and industrial occupations. Their average income was considerably below that of Protestants, and they participated relatively little in higher education, preferring schools that concentrated upon classical languages and the humanities. Protestants, in contrast, favored institutions which prepared their students for business activities and technical careers. 3

Weber revealed a pattern of differential attitudes of Catholics and Protestants toward both capitalist activities and higher education, a pattern which seemed to be related to the official social-ethical teachings of their respective churches. This differential pattern presumably existed wherever larger sections of Protestants and Catholics lived together within the same society.

* Revised version of a paper read by the senior author at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Society, 1958.


THE PROBLEM

Catholics in the United States historically have been associated with relatively lower-class status 4 and relatively little participation in the money-making vocations; and with a relatively low amount of higher education, 5 one of the prerequisites for the more profitable modern professions.

The study reported in this paper was designed to explore certain aspects of the participation of Catholics in American higher education. Its central purpose was to find a preliminary answer to the question as to whether the study-interests of young American Catholics differ from the academic preferences of the Protestant majority. Casting Weber's suggestions in this form, we were able to focus on the up-and-coming rather than the socially established generations. If, as various observers have stressed, Catholics have been becoming increasingly "Americanized," this trend should manifest itself clearly among the present college generation.

THE SAMPLE

The study was carried out at a medium-sized eastern university with a relatively balanced

4 See, e.g., Hadley Cantril's study of the "Educational and Economic Composition of Religious Groups," American Journal of Sociology, 47 (March, 1943), pp. 574–579. Cantril's findings are based on various opinion polls administered to a total of 14,000 persons in 1939 and 1940. He found that seventeen per cent of American Protestants outside the South belonged to the upper, and 29 per cent, to the lower classes. Only nine per cent of the Catholics, however, were classified as upper class, in contrast to 40 per cent who were designated as lower class.

5 Cantril, op. cit., found that the percentage of college graduates among Protestants outside the South is almost twice that of Catholics. Pope, op. cit., gives figures for individual denominations, showing that seven per cent of all Catholics in the whole of the United States were college graduates, as compared with six per cent of all Baptists, eight per cent of Lutherans, but twelve per cent of Methodists, 21 per cent of Congregationalists, and 22 per cent of Presbyterians and Episcopalians.