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Stokols, D

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Toward a Psychological Theory of Alienation

Daniel Stokols
University of California, Irvine

The experience of alienation is conceptualized as a sequential-developmental process which (a) develops in the context of an ongoing relationship between an individual and another person or group of people; (b) involves an unexpected deterioration in the quality of outcomes provided to the individual by the other(s); and (c) persists to the extent that the individual and the other(s) remain spatially or psychologically proximal. On the basis of two variable components, personal-neutral thwarting and salience-nonsalience of alternatives, a typology of estrangement experiences is proposed which includes four behavioral syndromes: isolation, reintegration, subjugation, and rebellion. Though in each of these syndromes the individual's appraisal of the situation leads to at least temporary disillusionment, the induction of persisting cognitive changes as a result of one's exposure to personal thwarting by another is viewed to be the central and unique feature of the alienation experience. Finally, research directions and policy implications of the proposed framework are discussed.

Although the term "alienation" has been associated with numerous connotations and used to describe a variety of phenomena, it nonetheless evokes specific images in relation to contemporary American culture. The ghetto riots and student demonstrations of the sixties, the hippie movement, the drug culture, and the recent rash of political kidnappings—all of these phenomena come to mind as manifestations of alienation; and all seem to involve segments of the population who are, in some sense, "alienated."

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Requests for reprints should be sent to Daniel Stokols, Program in Social Ecology, University of California, Irvine, California 92664.

Despite the fact that alienation represents a pervasive theme in American culture and connotes common meanings to many people, our understanding of the determinants and manifestations of alienation remains quite limited. Numerous conceptualizations of alienation have been proposed from historical, philosophical, sociological, and psychological perspectives; yet, very little empirical research concerning the phenomenology of alienation heretofore has been conducted.

The lack of such research seems largely attributable to the nature of previous theoretical perspectives. In general, alienation has been conceptualized as a static phenomenon rather than a dynamic one. Historical and sociological analyses (e.g., Bell, 1960; Blauner, 1964; Durkheim, 1897/1951; Marx, 1844/1964; Merton, 1938; Simmel, 1902/1950; Weber, 1958) typically focus upon social-structural factors which appear to be linked to conditions of widespread alienation within society; for example, automation, anonymity, bureaucratization, and economic inequality. Psychological and philosophical analyses (e.g., Camus, 1956; Keniston, 1965; Kierkegaard, 1959; Sartre, 1953; Seeman, 1959) place a greater emphasis upon the individual's experience and expression of alienation, but these conceptualizations also appear to be static ones;

alienation is viewed either as a personality disposition or an a priori condition of human existence.

The conceptualization proposed here emphasizes the experiential dimensions of alienation but extends earlier psychological approaches in attempting to identify and operationalize the determinants and core dynamic of this experience. The analysis incorporates three fundamental components: (a) a set of antecedent conditions, deriving from one's physical/social environment, which engenders (b) a specific psychological experience, having motivational overtones, and expressed as (c) a set of behavioral manifestations. Alienation is viewed, then, as a sequential-developmental process through which certain social and physical conditions within a particular environment evoke specific feelings and behaviors in its occupants.

The present discussion of alienation is focused primarily at the small-group level. Considering that previous analyses generally have been developed within a broader social context and, thus, have emphasized the relationship between sociocultural conditions and alienation, the small-group setting appears to be an atypical one in which to examine the phenomenon of alienation. The microcosm of the small group, however, offers an advantageous context in which to study alienation for it permits a dynamic, situational analysis and thereby facilitates the development of predictive theory from which experimental hypotheses can be derived and tested. An individual's relationship with society is of an almost abstract nature and certainly of great duration. By contrast, his/her interpersonal relationships which involve specific individuals are often initiated and terminated within a relatively short period of time. Therefore, it becomes more feasible to examine the onset and unfolding of one's alienation from other people rather than from society, since the temporal stages of alienation are more readily detected and delimited at the former level of analysis than at the latter.

An important assumption underlying the proposed theoretical framework is that there

are intrinsic similarities between interpersonal and sociocultural alienation, and that an investigation of the former has relevance for an understanding of the latter. This assumption in no way implies that the experience of alienation as it occurs within small-group settings is fully equivalent with the varieties of sociopolitical alienation discussed by Marx (1844/1964), Durkheim (1897/1951), and Merton (1938). Rather, it suggests that the psychological experience of alienation, in general, involves basic process features which are reflected at both interpersonal and societal levels of analysis.

Specifically, it is assumed that an individual's alienation develops within the context of an ongoing relationship between himself and some other entity—a person, group, society, or culture, for instance. The experience of alienation is brought about through a decline in the quality of one's relationship with a particular context, and this perceived deterioration evokes dissatisfaction with the present situation and a yearning for something better which has been either lost or, as yet, unattained.

The dynamic of disillusionment, suggested above, seems evident in earlier conceptualizations of alienation. In the Marxian analysis, the attainment of class consciousness among proletarian groups reflects a historical process in which objective conditions of exploitation are apprehended by certain segments of society and amended through protest and revolution.¹ Similarly, Merton's

¹ In the writings of Marx, alienation is discussed from both philosophical and ideological perspectives. In a philosophical context, alienation is understood in terms of social and historical forces which eventuate in the objectification of labor (i.e., the spiritual and physical separation of labor from its products; cf. Marx, 1844/1964). From an ideological perspective, conscious recognition of the objectification and exploitation of labor provides the basis on which class consciousness is attained and the forces of revolution are mobilized (cf. Marx & Engels, 1848). It is the ideological dimension of alienation which appears to imply a disillusionment process, though it should be noted that the Marxian analysis pertains to collective consciousness whereas the present one focuses upon the experience of the individual. It seems reasonable to assume that the attainment of class consciousness presupposes the shared estrangement of

portrayal of American society in terms of its "structural inconsistency" depicts a situation in which disadvantaged groups resort to violence as a means of achieving a more equitable distribution of material goods. Moreover, within philosophical and psychological analyses of alienation, a disillusionment process is reflected in the existentialist's feeling of abandonment, discussed by Sartre (1953), and the experiences of "Pyrrhic victory" and "loss of Eden" among alienated college students, as described by Keniston (1965).

The present analysis, then, begins with the assumption that the experience of alienation essentially involves a disillusionment process. From this perspective, Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) comparison level theory is particularly useful as a conceptual base from which to move toward an operational model of alienation. Comparison level denotes a criterion of outcome acceptability with which an individual evaluates the attractiveness of a situation in terms of what he expects or feels he deserves. Assuming that alienation involves a disconfirmation of expectations regarding the quality of a relationship, the comparison level construct is germane to a consideration of the circumstances under which disillusionment occurs and the behavioral concomitants of this experience.

While previous conceptualizations of alienation share certain continuities, their dissimilarities are readily apparent. First, each analysis reflects a characteristic concern with either a societal/cultural or personal/social context of alienation. Historical and sociological perspectives typically focus on the relations among groups within society, whereas psychological and philosophical approaches generally examine the individual's experience in relation to other persons.

A second dissimilarity among earlier analyses concerns the type of disillusionment and behavioral response suggested by each. The proletarian revolutions predicted by

individual workers from the capitalist system of production. Reference to Marx in this discussion, though, is in no way intended to equate sociological and psychological notions of alienation, but merely to suggest a possible parallel between elements of disillusionment in both.

Marx (1844/1964), and the structural inconsistency discussed by Merton (1938), exemplify situations in which segments of society come to recognize their inferior or disadvantaged position vis-à-vis other groups. To the extent that such conditions are prolonged and the sources of inequity are identifiable, the estrangement of the downtrodden tends to intensify and provoke angry protest. In comparison with the analyses of Marx, Durkheim, and Merton, those of Keniston, Sartre, Simmel, and Weber focus upon a qualitatively different set of alienating social conditions. The alienation discussed by the latter group appears to be more passive and less hostile in nature and results from a generalized dissatisfaction with one's milieu. The sources of such dissatisfaction are abstract and impersonal rather than specific and intentional.

To account for the divergent patterns of alienation suggested in previous discussions, the present analysis develops an extension of comparison level theory which incorporates the dimensions of personal-neutral thwarting and salience-nonsalience of alternatives. The interaction of these components suggests a typology of behavioral patterns which seems consistent with earlier analyses.

It should be emphasized that the theoretical perspective developed in the ensuing paragraphs is concerned specifically with interpersonal phenomena. The concepts introduced, by providing a possible link between the psychological experience of individuals and their collective action in response to mutually alienating conditions, may prove to be applicable to an analysis of intergroup relations—the traditional concern of sociological perspectives on alienation. Explicit consideration of the interface between interpersonal and intergroup phenomena, however, is beyond the purview of this discussion.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF ALIENATION IN THE SMALL GROUP

The analysis begins at a general level and subsequently turns to a more specific consideration of the small-group situation. The

initial stages of the analysis provide a recapitulation of certain ideas introduced earlier, whereas the latter stages develop those ideas more fully in terms of social psychological theory.

As noted above, the proposed conceptualization of alienation includes three basic components: a constellation of antecedent conditions, a specific psychological experience, and a set of behavioral manifestations. Each component includes a unique set of dimensions. It is useful to focus first upon the psychological experience of alienation since an analysis of this component leads quite naturally to a consideration of its antecedents and consequences.

The experience of alienation. Alienation can be viewed as a form of dissatisfaction resulting from one's perceived association with a negatively valued activity, person, group, or culture. This preliminary definition suggests two important aspects of the alienation experience. First, it develops with reference to some particular context in which a person, P, feels embedded and toward which he feels negative sentiment. The spatial scale of the context may vary along a continuum ranging from the personal, to the social and cultural levels. Second, the experience of alienation persists over time and remains salient to P as long as he feels constrained to the undesirable context. As P becomes aware of his simultaneous proximity to, yet dislike of, a particular contextual referent, his recognition of this discrepancy will lead to frustration. The persistence of frustration, arising from one's constraint to an unsatisfactory context, should result in specific motivational overtones—for example, the desire to dissociate oneself from the context, the inclination to search for alternatives, or tendency to injure some person or object.

It is evident that the above definition does not permit a clear distinction between alienation and other psychological phenomena. The conditions specified would be applicable, for example, to the general experience of dissatisfaction as described by Thibaut and Kelley (1959), psychological reactance as discussed by Brehm (1966), or cognitive imbalance as portrayed by Heider (1958).

In order to distinguish alienation from other theoretical constructs, its spatial and temporal dimensions must be considered more fully.

The antecedents of alienation. Within the personal, social, and cultural contexts of alienation, a common configuration of elements is found: (a) an object, O, with which P feels associated; (b) a type of thwarting, with respect to a given set of outcomes, having a particular source, direction, and either high or low intentionality; the thwarting, whether emanating from O or not, leads to either a temporary or a permanent devaluation of O by P; and (c) a set of forces which constrains P to his association with O; these forces may result directly from O's actions toward P, or through the unavailability of better alternative relationships.

The object of P's alienation, within a personal context, may be represented as an activity in which P is engaged. The worker, for example, becomes alienated from his work as a result of its monotony and impersonality. Within a cultural context, P may perceive himself to be associated with a particular country through formal citizenship yet extremely dissatisfied with certain aspects of citizenship, such as having to serve in the army and participate in an unjust war. Finally, in the context of a small-group situation, P's alienation may derive from an inequitable distribution of opportunities for participation, or certain pre-interaction constraints (e.g., group size) which impair his integration into the decision-making process. Although P is unhappy with his present situation, he is forced, for lack of a better alternative, to remain associated with or proximal to the group.

In terms of Heider's (1946, 1958) balance theory, each of the above examples reflects a similar configuration of circumstances in which P's unit and sentiment relations with a particular object, O, are discrepant. According to Heider, P's relationship with O is balanced to the degree that his perceived linkage with O coincides with favorable feelings toward O (or conversely, P's removal from O is consistent

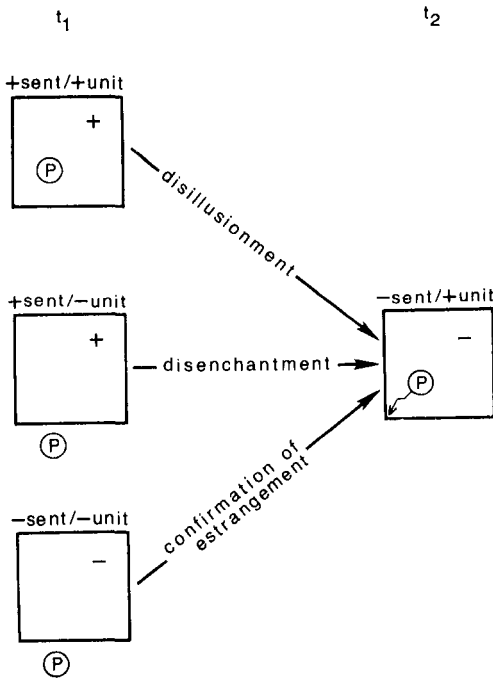


FIGURE 1. Sentiment/unit combinations and the sequential patterns of alienation. (The inclusion of P, an individual, in the square denotes a unit relation, whereas P's presence outside the box designates the absence of one. The plus or minus sign within the square denotes P's sentiment toward the context or object, O. The arrows represent the developmental paths leading to the configuration of alienation.)

with a negative evaluation of O). It follows, then, that in the three examples discussed above, a state of imbalance between P and O exists. Yet, the characterization of alienation as a simple state of imbalance sheds little light upon the specific ways in which the experience develops, the parameters of its intensity, or the form of its manifestation. To gain some understanding of these issues, the temporal, or developmental, nature of alienation must be explored further.

Considering P's relationship to O, four combinations of sentiment/unit relations are possible:

1. positive sentiment/positive unit,
2. negative sentiment/negative unit,
3. positive sentiment/negative unit,
4. negative sentiment/positive unit.

In Figure 1, each of these combinations is represented in diagrammatic fashion. In the present analysis, it is proposed that the fourth possibility, namely, the negative sentiment/positive unit combination, describes the pattern of circumstances reflected in a situation of alienation. Furthermore, each of the other three combinations denotes an initial state of affairs from which the configuration of alienation may be reached. Three developmental patterns or paths, leading to the conditions of alienation, are posited: (a) "disillusionment" or reversal, (b) "disenchantment," and (c) "confirmed estrangement." The path traveled depends upon which of the three initial sets of sentiment/unit relations precedes the configuration of alienation ($-sent/+unit$).

Each of the four possible sentiment/unit combinations can be characterized with respect to two dimensions, namely, the degree of P's *involvement* in his relationship with O, and P's *expectation* of either positive or negative outcomes from his association with O. In the context of this discussion, the dimension of involvement refers specifically to those variables which concern the amount and immediacy of P's experience with O (e.g., the duration of the P-O relationship, or P's spatial proximity to O), rather than P's subjective orientation toward O (e.g., his commitment or enthusiasm toward O). Expectation, on the other hand, relates to the quality and stability of outcomes anticipated by P on the basis of his experience with O. From the above, it follows that close and continuous involvement with O could eventuate in either positive or negative expectations, depending upon the quality of P's cumulative experience with O. Moreover, little or no direct contact with O might set the stage for either positive or negative expectations, depending upon the information P receives about O through others.

In the $+sent/+unit$ situation, P's involvement and expectations are both high. This pattern is reflected, for example, in the case where one has been an active member of a group and has experienced consistently favorable outcomes throughout the term of

his membership. The +sent/-unit situation reflects low involvement but high expectations on the part of P regarding his potential relationship with O. The case in which a freshman attends the rush of a highly desirable fraternity is an example of this pattern. The -sent/-unit situation involves low involvement and low expectations; P is neither related to O at present nor does he wish to become associated with O in the future. Finally, the -sent/+unit pattern of alienation reflects high involvement and low expectancies for favorable outcomes, on the basis of P's present dissatisfaction with O.

It is apparent that the dimensions of involvement and expectation provide a basis for considering the determinants of the intensity of alienation and the form of its manifestation over time. From an extension of Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) comparison level theory, it is expected that P will experience the greatest degree of comparison level discrepancy when his experience of alienation arises through the process of disillusionment or reversal. For, it is along this path that P begins with high involvement and expectations only to arrive at, or be jolted into, an extremely unfavorable situation. To determine why this turn of events sets the stage for the most intense experience of alienation, the relationship between the dimensions of involvement and expectations must be considered more fully.

Any situation in which P has experienced consistently favorable outcomes from O should promote the development of P's commitment to O (cf. Horwitz, 1954; Thibaut, Friedland, & Walker, 1974). That is, P comes to "believe in" O as a reliable source of positive outcomes. Somewhat related to this proposition is Jones and Gerard's (1967) concept of "basic antinomy" which posits that an individual's attributions about a particular entity are most amenable to change during the early stages of exposure to the entity but become progressively more inflexible as the duration of exposure or interaction increases. Thus, as a favorable relationship continues, P should become increasingly committed to O and resistant to

any information which might disconfirm his belief in O. However, once the evidence of O's sudden inadequacy or betrayal exceeds P's "threshold of disconfirmation," the resulting dissolution of P's commitment and expectations should induce a level of disillusionment whose intensity is magnified by the extent of P's prior involvement with O.

In the process of disenchantment, P begins with high expectations but with a minimal amount of previous exposure and commitment to O; and subsequently finds himself in a worse-than-expected relationship. The freshman who has been invited to join the initially desirable fraternity realizes his mistake and entertains the thought of depledging. However, as yet he feels unable to do so because of certain social pressures. This situation provides the basis for a moderate degree of comparison level discrepancy and accompanying alienation, since the reversal of P's expectations does not also involve an obliteration of earlier commitment to O.

The pattern of confirmed estrangement creates the lowest level of comparison level discrepancy for P. He begins with minimal expectations and prior involvement, only to have his predictions confirmed through unavoidable association with O. Consider, for example, the black student living in a predominantly white school district. He is forced by his residence to attend a white school. If he expects, prior to his enrollment, to encounter racism and prejudice at the school and later finds his predictions to be accurate, he will experience alienation. However, it is expected that the intensity of his experience will be less than what it could have been had he entered the school anticipating favorable outcomes.

The involvement and expectation dimensions offer only a partial basis for predicting the intensity of alienation. Other factors may interact with these dimensions to modify their impact on P. Specifically, more information is required concerning the factors which instigate the processes of disillusionment, disenchantment, and confirmed estrangement. A consideration of those thwartings which lead to a deterioration in

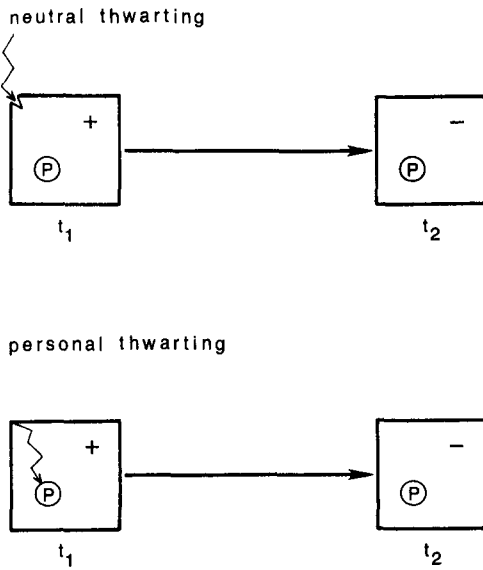


FIGURE 2. Neutral and personal processes of disillusionment. (The inclusion of P, an individual, in the square denotes a unit relation whereas the presence of P outside the box designates the absence of one. The plus or minus sign within the square denotes P's sentiment toward the object or context, O. The arrows represent the developmental paths leading to the configuration of alienation.)

P's relations with O should provide the needed information.

The remaining discussion will focus upon the process of disillusionment for two reasons. First, it is necessary to assume that a relationship exists between P and O in order to examine the impact of various types of thwarting on that relationship. This assumption is possible only with respect to the disillusionment pattern of alienation, in which a formerly satisfying relationship with O (even one which only recently has been established) turns sour. Second, the reversal of P's feelings toward O from commitment to disillusionment represents the most typical characterization of alienation, as described in the historical, sociological, philosophical, and psychological literature.

As stated earlier, P's experience of alienation arises from a specific thwarting which strains his relationship with O. A thwarting may be characterized with respect to three basic dimensions: (a) its *source*, (b)

direction, and (c) *intentionality*. The first refers to the origin of the force; that is, whether it emanates from O or from the extraneous environment. The second relates to the target of the force; for example, whether or not it is directed specifically at P. And the third concerns P's attribution of intentionality to the source of the force. These dimensions may be combined in a variety of ways to yield different types of thwartings.

The psychological impact of a particular thwarting will be mediated by many contextual variables. A highly directed and intentional thwarting, for instance, could be interpreted differently by P depending upon the information he has concerning the norms or situational pressures which explain O's actions. When O's actions are interpreted as reasonable in view of the particular situation (e.g., when it becomes necessary for P to accept an undesirable role for the good of the group), less dissatisfaction and alienation should be aroused in P than when O's actions appear to be arbitrary and unjustified (e.g., P is unfairly chastised or insulted by O). In a similar vein, an undirected and unintentional thwarting might arouse divergent emotions in P depending upon his prior experience with O. To the extent that the relationship has been unfavorable in the past, P may assimilate even an unintentional thwarting to the characteristic deficiencies he ascribes to O.

Two types of disillusionment processes are represented in Figure 2. Each results from a different kind of thwarting. The first case involves a *neutral thwarting*—that is, one which does not emanate directly from O, is not specifically directed at P, and is perceived by P as being unintentional. Spatial constraints, information overload, and large group size represent neutral thwartings at the small-group level. Each constraint hinders P's relationship with O in some sense. Assuming, for example, that P desires to participate in group discussion and decision making, this need may be thwarted by environmental circumstances which make it difficult for him to interact meaningfully with the group. Lack of avail-

able space impairs the coordination of P's activity with that of other group members; and the presence of too many members reduces P's opportunity to participate in group decision making.

The second type of disillusionment process involves a *personal thwarting*—that is, one which stems directly from O, is specifically directed at P, and is perceived by P as reflecting O's intentions. A hostile or inequitable action represents an example of a personal thwarting. The intentional relegation of P to tedious and low-status roles is likely to be perceived by him as unfair discrimination, exclusion, and rejection by the group.

In view of the differences between the neutral and personal patterns, it is expected that P's disillusionment will be more bitter and irreversible in the latter case than in the former one. In both processes, P experiences a reversal in his feelings from high commitment and expectations to unanticipated frustration. As suggested earlier, such reversal results in comparison level discrepancy and puts a strain on P's commitment to O. In the personal pattern, though, the source of P's frustration is more specific, and its intentions more visible and malevolent. The sudden communication of unnecessary insult or injury by O introduces the element of "rejection" into P's experience of disillusionment. Thus, the "gain-loss" element (Aronson & Linder, 1965) arising from P's rejection by O, when coupled with the frustration of P's expectations regarding favorable outcomes, should promote a more intense and irreversible experience of alienation than when comparison level discrepancy operates alone. Moreover, rejection, by definition, implies a low correspondence between the outcomes of P and O (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959); as well, there is a tendency on the part of P to reciprocate O's rejection (Berscheid & Walster, 1969). Hence, the possibilities for salvaging a satisfactory relationship with O are minimal, and the probability that P will dissolve his commitment to O is high.

In the neutral process of disillusionment, however, the source of P's frustration is

vague and less personal in nature. Because there is no ready source to which P can impute foul play, the commonality of interest between P and O is greater than in the personal case. And because there is more basis for cooperation in the neutral case than in the personal one, P will be more amenable to an eventual reconciliation with O in the former instance. Thus, although a neutral thwarting may at first seem unjustifiable to P in view of O's previous reliability as a source of positive outcomes, the strain in P's commitment to O should soon dissipate as long as evidence of O's malevolent intent continues to be lacking.

The term, "thwarting," has been interpreted in the present analysis as a force which provokes a reversal in the quality of P's relationship with some object, O. The reversal has been characterized as a progression from a satisfactory state of affairs, endorsed by P, to an unsatisfactory situation involving his disillusionment. Hence, the term thwarting, as used above, refers to a type of force which provokes P's experience of alienation and partially determines the intensity of that experience.

In order to arrive at a more adequate representation of the alienation experience, however, we must consider the impact of a particular thwarting in the context of those "restraining forces" which enforce P's continued association with O once the reversal process has occurred. For, without P's prolonged proximity to or association with the object of his disillusionment, there would be no basis for his experience of alienation. He would merely dissociate himself from the alienating context, and its aversive salience would thereby decrease.

The -sent/+unit configuration of alienation, thus, reflects a "nonvoluntary" relationship (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). In such situations, P is forced, over time, to remain at an infra-comparison level state of outcome quality. A variety of restraining forces may operate to enforce P's association with the object of his alienation; physical pressures emanating directly from O, or P's lack of more desirable alternative relationships, for example. In the small-group

situation, P may be forced by social pressures against "copping out," to continue his membership with some group; or he may decide to continue his association with the group for want of a better alternative. In either case, P perceives that desirable alternative relationships are unattainable and consequently remains in an unsatisfactory situation.

The behavioral manifestations of alienation. The behavioral component of alienation can be considered in terms of its *form* and its *effects*. The form of response to felt alienation can be characterized as aggressive or nonaggressive, active or passive, and directed or nondirected. The hostility, intensity, and directionality of a person's behavior would convey the quality and strength of his feelings. Regarding its effects, behavior can be viewed as either adaptive or maladaptive; that is, as an action which alleviates or intensifies P's experience of alienation.

It is proposed that P's behavior will be most active, directed, and aggressive in response to a personal thwarting, where the source of one's frustration is specific and intentional. Furthermore, the gain-loss element provokes a clear conflict of interest between P and O; hence, minimal opportunity exists for salvaging the damaged relationship. This situation, then, which elicits frustration and provides cues for hostility (manifested in O's rejection of P), as well as a specific target for P's counteraction, is highly conducive to aggressive behavior (cf. Berkowitz, 1965; Buss, 1961).

The neutral pattern of reversal, by contrast, provides a greater range of behavioral options for P. Since the event leading to P's frustration is unintentional and its source vague, a basis for cooperation between P and O exists. Thus, P's response to a neutral thwarting will be of a problem-solving nature. His behavior may assume a variety of forms over time. In response to spatial constraints, for example, P may initially attempt to improve the coordination of his activity with that of the group. If his efforts are ineffective, he may withdraw temporarily into passive isolation. Pro-

longed frustration, however, may eventually lead to some form of hostility or permanent isolation.

The form of P's response to a particular thwarting will also be influenced by the salience of desirable alternative relationships. The present conceptualization presupposes the existence of a positive unit relation between P and O. That is, P perceives himself to be linked to O through spatial proximity or the expectation of future proximity. Moreover, this perceived linkage is unpleasant and nonvoluntary to the degree that P finds O unattractive and presently feels unable to improve their relationship or establish an alternative one. Although for the time being he is temporarily and unwillingly constrained to O, it is quite possible that he may expect to achieve a more satisfactory relationship in the near future. Regardless of whether viable alternatives are actually available to P, the anticipation of an improved relationship with O or an available substitute should markedly affect the intensity and overt aggressiveness of P's response to either a personal or neutral thwarting.

P's behavior may be viewed in the context of four situational configurations:

1. neutral thwarting/perceived lack of alternatives,
2. neutral thwarting/salient alternatives,
3. personal thwarting/perceived lack of alternatives,
4. personal thwarting/salient alternatives.

The combinations are ordered with respect to the degree of frustration each evokes in P. The perception of available alternatives in the context of a neutral thwarting should engender the least amount of frustration, whereas a personal thwarting, in the face of salient alternatives, would evoke the most. Hence, the instigation to aggression should be strongest in the latter situation and weakest in the former.

Four ideal types of response, to the various combinations of restraints, are suggested:

1. neutral thwarting/perceived lack of alternatives → isolation
2. neutral thwarting/salient alternatives → reintegration
3. personal thwarting/perceived lack of alternatives → subjugation
4. personal thwarting/salient alternatives → rebellion

Assuming that P is, for the time being, constrained to an unsatisfactory relationship with O, either by force or current lack of alternative situations, what are the behavioral options open to P in each of the above configurations? Thibaut and Kelley (1959) propose two means by which an individual can reduce his frustration in a nonvoluntary relationship: (a) lower the comparison level, or (b) find some way to achieve the presently unattained level of outcome quality. Each behavior represents an adaptive response to felt alienation.

The lowering of one's standards regarding the quality of outcomes he deserves would be most likely to occur in situations where desirable alternative relationships were perceived to be unattainable. In contrast, continued search for a way of meeting current standards of outcome quality would be more characteristic of situations in which favorable alternatives were viewed as potentially available.

To predict the degree to which P's behavior will be adaptive in the context of either salience or nonsalience of alternatives, it is necessary to consider further the behavioral implications of personal and neutral thwartings. Where alternatives are perceived to be unavailable, a personal thwarting would make it more difficult for P to accept presently unsatisfactory outcomes than would a neutral thwarting, since the rejection and arbitrary insult conveyed by the former would frustrate P's hope for a future improvement in his relations with O. Thus, the frustration resulting from subjugation to an unreformable situation would be greater than that stemming from temporary isolation in a situation which may subsequently improve.

Similarly, in situations where more desirable alternatives are salient, P's potential

for effective adaptation would be greater in the context of a neutral thwarting, as compared to a personal one. Given that P is currently constrained to O, his range of options in dealing with an unintentional thwarting by O would be greater than those associated with a personal rejection by O. The first situation offers P the possibility of deferring judgment on O and actively attempting to improve the present relationship, before endeavoring to reach external alternatives. A personal thwarting by O, however, reduces P's opportunities for reintegration and increases his potential for frustration resulting from an unrelievable discrepancy between his negative feelings toward, yet proximity to, O. Hence, until imposed proximity with O was somehow reduced, the likelihood of P's rebellion against O in the form of overt protest and aggression would be great.

Recent research literature on social psychological stress (cf. Lazarus, 1966; Levine & Scotch, 1970; McGrath, 1970) would suggest that when P is unable to alleviate his experience of alienation, and this experience extends over a prolonged period of time, two general syndromes of stress may ensue: psychophysiological stress as reflected in certain physical disorders (e.g., Wirth, 1938), and self-destructive or anti-social behavior as manifested in P's self-disparagement or aggression toward others (e.g., Durkheim, 1897/1951; Merton, 1938).

Differentiation of Alienation from Related Psychological Constructs

Having discussed the situational, experiential, and behavioral components of alienation in greater detail, it is now essential to specify the dissimilarities between alienation and other psychological phenomena. An important question in this context is whether or not the proposed conceptualization of alienation is so broad as to embrace any form of disaffection. An excessively general framework would shed little light on the distinctive aspects of alienation.

The phenomenology of alienation, as described earlier, does include elements of dislike, dissatisfaction, imbalance, frustration,

and reactance. As P becomes disillusioned with O, he develops a dislike of O and feels dissatisfied with the inferior (infra-comparison level) quality of his present outcomes. Moreover, P's embeddedness in a negatively valued context should promote cognitive imbalance and frustration, as well as feelings of preemption and infringement which might be characterized as reactance.

Although the experience of alienation subsumes the above-mentioned elements, it can be distinguished from them on the basis of its etiology, psychological impact, and behavioral consequences. According to the present analysis, P's alienation results from a deterioration in his formerly satisfactory relationship with O. Moreover, P expects to remain proximal to O even after the reversal has occurred. This developmental pattern does not apply necessarily to feelings of dislike, dissatisfaction, imbalance, or reactance. P's dislike of or dissatisfaction with O does not presuppose an originally pleasant relationship between himself and O. In the case where P is blindly prejudiced or has extremely high expectations, for example, he may adopt a negative or skeptical orientation toward O, even before meeting him. And the constraint to remain in a negatively valued situation is not a necessary condition for the arousal of reactance. Reactance can occur even when P is forced to do what he wants or say what he wants to say (Worchel & Brehm, 1970).

The present analysis of alienation relies heavily on the distinction between personal and neutral thwartings. While differences between these constructs were discussed earlier, it is important here to emphasize their similarities and uniqueness in relation to other types of thwartings for purposes of conceptual clarification. The notion of thwarting implies the arousal of frustration in P resulting from an interference in the gratification of a previously aroused motive (Cofer & Appley, 1964; Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939). The context in which frustration occurs can vary from transitory encounters to ongoing relationships. Both personal and neutral thwartings, as defined here, however, occur

within a previously pleasant relationship and, as such, both promote some degree of disillusionment in P with regard to O. P's disillusionment derives from his prior commitment to O and the unexpected but suddenly apparent possibility that his commitment may no longer be tenable.

The unexpectedness of personal and neutral thwartings, in view of O's previous reliability as a source of positive outcomes, should lead P to perceive either type of reversal as unjustifiable. The unjustifiable aspect of these thwartings renders them conceptually similar to Pastore's (1952) notion of arbitrary frustration, though the latter construct has typically been confined to personally, rather than impersonally, delivered thwartings (cf. Burnstein & Worchel, 1962; Cohen, 1955; Rothaus & Worchel, 1960). While both types of thwartings should arouse frustration, the personal process should initiate more hostility due to the evidence of O's malevolence and the insult this conveys to P (cf. Buss, 1961). Thus, personal and neutral thwartings can be identified, among other types of thwartings, as involving an element of perceived unjustifiability, and in the personal case, as implying O's insult of P.

The present emphasis on personal and neutral thwartings is based upon widespread reference to the element of disillusionment, above and beyond frustration and hostility, found in most discussions of alienation. As noted earlier, disillusionment involves a strain in P's commitment to O. Whether or not this strain leads to a dissolution of commitment depends upon P's assessment of the future viability of his relationship with O.

The outcome of P's appraisal will depend largely on the presence or absence of cues which signal the future unreliability of O and an unresolvable "lack of fit" between the attributes, interests, and goals of O and P. In this regard, Etzioni (1968) characterized alienation as a social situation which is "beyond the control of the actor and unresponsive to his basic needs" (p. 879). It seems reasonable to assume that the clearest forewarning of O's continuing unresponsive-

ness or malevolence would be communicated by personal thwartings which pose a threat to P's physical safety, ideology, or self-concept, and imply an irreducible conflict of interest between him and O. On the other hand, the least amount of information suggesting O's future unreliability would be provided by neutral thwartings which are basically unintentional, nondirected, and minimally threatening to P's security.

In situations of neutral thwarting, the ambiguity of O's future orientation would necessitate the adoption of an exploratory set on P's part. That is, he would tend to withhold judgment regarding the viability of his relationship with O until additional, relevant information was obtained. P's search for more information might take the form of active protest, quiet observation, or a pattern involving both elements of protest and contemplation. At any rate, as long as P remained in an exploratory set, his disillusionment with O would not eventuate in a final dissolution of commitment to O.

Under conditions of personal thwarting, however, the jeopardization of P's safety or self-concept would provide clearcut evidence of O's potential unreliability. Such evidence should ultimately provoke P's decision that the psychological distance between himself and O is insurmountable. Once this decision has been reached, P's commitment to O should be withdrawn, his perceptions of O altered, and in some cases, his self-concept modified (as reflected, for example, in P's generalized reluctance to approach others similar to O). These cognitive changes in P are likely to be accompanied by some form of angry retaliation against O for his original insult of P. Because of the postthwarting undesirability of any material or benefits previously provided by O, P's aggression would remain noninstrumental (Buss, 1963) or expressive in nature, and as such (because of its minimal reinforcement value) should dissipate subsequent to an initial display of hostility.

The foregoing discussion provides not only a delineation of personal and neutral thwartings in the context of frustration-aggression theory but also a sketch of the

distinctive experiential features of the alienation syndrome. Three basic stages of the alienation experience can now be summarized: (a) the *sense of disillusionment* resulting from an unexpected thwarting which strains P's commitment to O; (b) a postthwarting *process of appraisal* by which P evaluates the future viability of his relationship with O on the basis of circumstantial information—this stage may involve instrumental aggression by P aimed at clarifying or rectifying the unsatisfactory situation; and (c) P's *decision that his relationship with O is no longer tenable*—this decision will result in *irreversible cognitive changes* in P which may be manifested through sporadic bursts of aggression.

Whereas stages of disillusionment and appraisal are associated with neutral as well as personal thwartings, the induction of irreversible cognitive changes in P is viewed in this analysis as the unique and central feature of the alienation experience. All instances of alienation would seem to involve the general perception that one's self-image or identity is highly discrepant with others' perception of him. This realization could provide the foundation for any number of attitudinal changes regarding others (i.e., "They are unfair" or "irrelevant") as well as oneself ("I don't need them," "I don't enjoy the activities they do." "My values are basically different from theirs," etc.). To the extent that P's disillusionment with O effects attitudinal changes along several interrelated dimensions, P's alienation from O should become increasingly irreversible over time.

Referring to alienation as an irreversible syndrome is not to imply that cognitive changes associated with disillusionment are totally resistant to modification. Indeed, reliable evidence of O's postthwarting reforms may well promote a rapprochement between P and O at some time in the future. Rather, the description of alienation, as irreversible is meant to distinguish its phenomenological features from those of other psychological phenomena which are relatively more transitory in nature (e.g., momentary frustration or dissatisfaction).

The main contention here, then, is that the cognitive changes associated with P's estrangement from O extend (both in a qualitative and temporal sense) beyond feelings of frustration, imbalance, dissatisfaction, and dislike, and are not predicted on the basis of theoretical constructs pertaining to these feelings.

The relative irreversibility of the alienation experience is perhaps its most distinctive quality vis-à-vis similar psychological phenomena. Many theories describe adaptive mechanisms which enable P to reconcile his relationship with an initially unfavorable entity. From the perspective of balance theory (Heider, 1958), for instance, P's perception of a unit relation between himself and O should promote positive sentiment toward O over time. Similarly, cognitive consistency theory posits processes of denial, differentiation, and transcendence (Abelson, 1959) which operate to resolve the discrepancies in P's sentiment and unit relations with O. Thibaut and Kelley (1959), in their discussion of nonvoluntary relationships, suggest that P may reduce his dissatisfaction with O by lowering the comparison level. And Dollard et al. (1939) propose that frustration can be reduced through cathartic aggression. The present analysis, however, contends that P's alienation, when brought about through a personal thwarting by O, will tend to remain unresolved as long as he remains proximal to O, even after the objective frustrations (e.g., loss of status, salary) associated with the original thwarting have been removed. Only by withdrawing from or obliterating his relationship with O can he reduce the weight and salience of his acknowledged separateness, unengagement, and estrangement.

As indicated earlier, the potential for P's reconciliation with O will be considerably greater when his alienation results from a neutral thwarting. In view of the temporary and reversible nature of "neutral" alienation, it is perhaps more fruitful to characterize this experience as a transitory state of disaffection rather than a form of alienation. In certain respects, such disaffection is qualitatively closer to the experi-

ence of psychological reactance (Brehm, 1966) than to that of alienation. According to Brehm, reactance is evoked in P when his freedom is directly or implicitly eliminated and prompts efforts on his part to reestablish the lost or threatened freedom. In the present context, P's experience of a neutral thwarting provokes dissatisfaction with O, largely because he is no longer free to enjoy the rewarding outcomes which previously emanated from O. He is motivated, though, to explore possibilities for improving his relationship with O as a means of regaining his freedom to enjoy satisfactory outcomes.

When P's alienation results from a personal thwarting, however, the importance of receiving positive reinforcement from O is diminished. Despite the absence of favorable alternative relationships, P is presumably more willing to surrender his freedom to enjoy rewarding outcomes than to attempt a satisfactory reconciliation with O. Thus, although the experience of "personal" alienation involves feelings of reactance and the motivation to recover the quality of one's outcomes, the specific freedom preempted by O may be devalued and eventually replaced by the "freedom to be one's own man." This substitution of freedoms may account for the behavior of alienated individuals who withdraw from or rebel against O, rather than attempting to salvage the relationship.

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

The conceptualization of alienation presented above provides the basis for developing a predictive theory which can be empirically examined in the context of intra-group conflict situations. An empirically validated theory would have important implications for the formulation of intervention strategies designed to reduce conditions of alienation within the community.

Toward Empirical Assessment of the Proposed Framework

From certain assumptions concerning the situational antecedents, psychological ex-

perience, and behavioral expression of disillusionment, two dimensions were derived which permit a delineation of the spatial and temporal features of the alienation experience: personal-neutral thwarting and salience-nonsalience of alternatives. On the basis of these variables, alienation was conceptualized not only as a particular psychological state or configuration of relations between O and P but also as a chronological process involving a pattern of emotional reactions and behaviors.

A typology of behavioral patterns based upon the thwarting and alternative dimensions was proposed which included four ideal types of response: isolation, reintegration, subjugation, and rebellion. Each pattern was examined in terms of three experiential stages: a postthwarting period of disillusionment, a process of appraisal, and eventual reaffirmation or dissolution of commitment. The levels of estrangement and aggression associated with these stages provided a basis for distinguishing among qualitatively different syndromes of response to alienating conditions.

Specific predictions pertaining to the behavioral impact of the thwarting and alternatives dimensions can now be advanced:

1. The intensity and duration of an individual's estrangement will be greater under conditions of personal thwarting, than under those of neutral thwarting.

2. A personally thwarted individual will experience more intense and prolonged hostility than one who has been neutrally thwarted.

3. (a) During the early stages of disillusionment, individuals for whom alternative relationships are salient should exhibit more aggression than those who perceive alternatives to be unavailable. (b) Subsequent appraisal of a thwarting as "neutral" should eventuate in reduced aggression and a higher rate of reintegrative behavior, especially among persons for whom alternatives are salient. (c) Appraisal of a thwarting as "personal," however, should result in a sustained level of hostility and a continuance of aggression, especially among individuals for whom alternatives are salient.

- (d) Following a decision to dissolve one's commitment to O, overt aggression should decline to the extent that prior aggressive actions have been ineffective in reducing proximity with O.

These predictions, which assume P's perceived or actual proximity with O, are represented diagrammatically in Figure 3. As a function of the thwarting and alternatives components, the response variables of estrangement, hostility, and overt aggression have been plotted over time to depict the "behavioral profiles" of isolation, reintegration, subjugation, and rebellion.

The graphic portrayal of each profile suggests that any attempt to assess the validity of the proposed typology of behavioral syndromes would require a series of repeated measurements taken simultaneously along three different dimensions of response. Only a time-series approach would permit a qualitative distinction between temporary states of estrangement, as reflected in neutral thwarting conditions, and the process whereby personally thwarted individuals come to feel irrevocably alienated.

Whereas the behavior associated with neutral forms of estrangement would be more reflective of transitory motivational states (e.g., frustration, reactance), the sustained hostility and estrangement accompanying personal alienation would reflect stable dispositional and cognitive changes in P. The distinction between "motivational" (neutral) and "attitudinal" (personal) forms of estrangement implies that the former would subside following the removal of certain objective thwartings (e.g., low salary, status) while the latter would persist despite subsequent overtures by O to restore P to his original position.

Support for the previously stated predictions comes from a recent experiment (Stokols, 1973). In the context of a "Group Productivity Study," each subject worked with three other individuals (actually experimental accomplices) on a series of tasks. The 2-hour experimental sessions incorporated three basic phases which together were designed to create a reversal in the subject's outcomes.

sion during the final phase of the experiment. Perhaps most interesting were the changes in subjects' attitudes not only toward other group members but also about themselves—for example, their position on certain ideological issues—as a result of having experienced a personal thwarting.

*Development of Conceptual Linkages
Between Alienation and Other Social
Psychological Phenomena*

The present analysis of alienation is relevant to a consideration of those conditions under which persons are willing to repudiate their prior commitments to individuals or social systems. Most theories of attitude change, especially the consistency theories of Heider (1958), Festinger (1957), and Bem (1967), emphasize the forces which prompt people to remain attitudinally consistent with their previous behavior or public commitments. These formulations, however, generally have not addressed those situations in which individuals refuse to ignore or justify the deterioration of a relationship to which they were previously committed.

Aronson's (1968, 1969, 1972) restatement of dissonance theory suggests that high-esteem persons will feel the most need to justify their behavior when its consequences threaten the integrity of their self-concept or esteem. The present discussion, though, predicts that high- versus low-esteem people, for whom viable alternative relationships are characteristically salient, will be most likely to renounce their association with O, especially when O's actions threaten and insult their self-concept.

An interesting direction for future research would be to explore systematically the conditions under which people will defend or dissolve their earlier commitments in the face of disconfirming evidence regarding the appropriateness, viability, or value of those commitments. The willingness of P to break off with O may well stem from the apparent futility of the situation, as conveyed by the arbitrariness of O's behavior, and the passive (nonvolitional), rather than active (voluntary), exposure of P to O's

insult. In any event, the critical variables in this context can only be ascertained more fully through subsequent research.

Another important direction for future research pertains to the manner in which aspects of the physical and social environment combine to induce stress in the occupants of a particular behavior setting. In the foregoing discussion, various syndromes of extrangement have been viewed as the result of *either* personal *or* neutral thwartings. Interesting extensions of this discussion relate to (a) the circumstances under which impersonal thwartings will be misattributed to personal sources and intentions, and (b) the processes by which personal thwartings become associated with certain aspects of the physical environment, so as to mediate the behavioral and psychological impact of physical stressor variables (e.g., noise, density, pollution).

Assuming that ecological pressures can place strains on the relations among members of a social system, it becomes important to specify the conditions under which neutral thwartings are perceived as personal ones, since such misattribution is likely to result in a more intense, irreversible syndrome of stress than that which would arise from a seemingly unintentional thwarting. Specification of these conditions may prove to be quite valuable in formulating social planning policies amenable to a variety of environmental settings, for example, oversized classrooms and high density neighborhoods.

Moreover, an elucidation of the processes by which physical features of the environment acquire cue value in the context of social thwarting situations should enhance our understanding of human response to environmental stress. For instance, crowding has been characterized as a psychological experience in which an individual's demand for space exceeds the available supply (Stokols, 1972). An interesting parallel can be drawn between this characterization of crowding and the proposed conceptualization of personal alienation: The experience of a personal thwarting should sensitize P to the need for more space as a means of

reducing his proximity to O. Thus, continued exposure to personal thwartings, especially in the context of a high density situation (e.g., a crowded home, classroom, or work environment) would heighten P's sensitivity to density or proximity constraints and lower his resistance against crowding stress; the negative cue value of density might even extend to situations in which O is not present.

Most recent analyses of human crowding do not suggest the circumstances under which specific density constraints (e.g., restriction of movement, stimulus overload, infringement on privacy, or proximity with threatening others) will be more salient than others or the particular psychological and behavioral concomitants of each. An advantage of the personal-neutral thwarting dimension, though, is that it suggests a criterion for determining the intensity, duration, and potential reducibility of various crowding experiences.

On the basis of the proposed thwarting dimension, a distinction can be drawn between "neutral" and "personal" experiences of crowding (Stokols, Note 2). The former variety of crowding would involve increased sensitivity to space as a result of the frustrations associated with neutral constraints (behavioral restriction, stimulus overload). The latter variety of crowding would stem from the security concerns made salient by proximity with hostile or unpredictable persons. Since feelings of crowding in the latter case would relate to the individual's beliefs about the potential dangerousness of others, this type of experience would tend to be more intense, of greater duration, and more generalizable across various situations than would transitory experiences of impersonal density constraints.

Policy Implications

Previous studies have noted the relationship between alienation and a variety of social problems. Forward and Williams (1970), Gurin and Gurin (1970), and Ransford (1968) have discussed the association between feelings of powerlessness and racial violence. Also, in the context of

contemporary concern over the population crisis, Groat and Neal (1967) have examined the relation between social isolation (Seeman, 1959) and the motivation to bear children as "compensation" for feeling isolated.

Despite the recognized relationship between alienation and social problems, little progress has been made toward the development of ameliorative strategies. The lack of such progress may be attributable to the static nature of previous analyses which place a greater emphasis on the measurement of alienation as a personality disposition than upon an analysis of its environmental origins and process features.

Some writers have utilized the concepts of powerlessness and isolation as a guide for developing policies aimed at alleviating alienation among the poor. Gurin and Gurin (1970), for example, suggest that structural changes in the social system, leading to increased opportunities for experiencing success, provide a means of raising the expectancies of low-expectancy people. Similarly, Sarbin (1970), analyzing the "culture of poverty" (Lewis, 1961) in terms of role theory, concludes that society must create opportunities for the poor to realize achieved statuses which permit the exercise of choice, the experience of social praise, and the development of increased self-esteem.

The above recommendations, however, appear to be too general, undifferentiated, and, therefore, of limited value in approaching social problems related to alienation. The increased provision of roles associated with achieved statuses within the system will be ineffective as a means of reducing alienation if the disaffected individuals see themselves as highly competent and powerful in the first place but ideologically unable to participate in any reciprocal relationship with O. Under these circumstances, it may be more fruitful for the system to eliminate cues which signal an enforced relationship between itself and P and to facilitate P's actual or symbolic withdrawal from the relationship as well as his freedom to "do his own thing" outside of the system.

The present analysis suggests that a di-

verse set of interventions may be necessary in dealing with social problems related to alienation. Whether an individual attributes his dissatisfaction with society to personal factors (such as racial discrimination) or to neutral circumstances (e.g., congestion, information overload, and anonymity arising from high densities) will affect the intensity of his alienation, the manner in which it is expressed, and its amenability to ameliorative strategies. Similarly, the salience of desirable alternatives will probably influence his decision either to seek a reconciliation with the system or protest actively and perhaps violently against unsatisfactory social conditions.

Where P has been personally thwarted, the most effective intervention policy from O's point of view would be one which provides evidence contrary to P's attributions. Rather than trying to impose a forced relationship on P, O would attempt to eliminate P's justification for attributing malevolent intent to O. The willingness of City Hall to facilitate community organization and self-government within the ghetto, for instance, would probably serve to reduce the estrangement of its residents.

In situations where P is unable to attribute a deterioration in his outcomes to malevolent forces, he will be more amenable to cooperating with O as a means of achieving a mutually satisfactory resolution of their joint problems. Under these conditions, P will be more receptive to compromise solutions initiated by O. Increased opportunities for participation in the system, then, would be particularly appealing to low-expectancy individuals who previously have been isolated from achieved statuses.

The above speculations are derived from basic assumptions concerning the phenomenology of alienation. These assumptions have been stated throughout this discussion and remain to be validated more fully through future research at both the small-group and sociocultural levels.

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