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OBJECTIVE MEASURES OF ALIENATION

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A plurality of theoretical conceptions of alienation exists (Durkheim, 1964; Israel, 1971; Marcuse, 1960; Marx, 1981; Ollman, 1971; Sartre, 1973; Seve, 1978.) Empirical investigations of alienation, some of them incorporating objective scales, flourished in the United States in the 1950's and 1960's. (Clark, 1959; Davids, 1955; Dean, 1961; Dean & Reeves, 1962; Erbe, 1964; Hajda, 1961; Middleton, 1963; Neal & Rettig, 1963; Neal & Seeman, 1964; Nettler, 1957; Nettler, 1959; Pearlin, 1962; Rotter, Seeman & Liverant, 1962; Seeman, 1963; Seeman & Evans, 1963; Sommer, 1958.)

These evaluations represented attempts to move away from conceptual theoretical levels to the empirical level. Nevertheless, due to the naivete and restrictions implicit in such undertakings, the full complexity of the epiphenomenon of alienation was never sufficiently investigated. Nettler (1957) devised a 17-point scale based on personal interviews with 'alienated or estranged' Americans. Alienation in this study correlated with creativity, mental disorder and general deviance. The results were confused, the study having dealt with estrangement rather than alienation. In our terms, the phenomenon dealt with was social isolation, this being

restricted to only one of the five indices of alienation as presented below.

Dean (1961) delineated powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation as components of alienation. This was an academic study which failed to operationalize any of the three components of what he terms the concept of alienation. Concentrating on measuring alienation in the micro-scale context of a food cooperative, and dealing with powerlessness as the only index, Clarke (1959) provided an atomistic view of alienation removed from its embeddedness in capitalist political economy.

These early American verisions failed to recognize the complexity of alienation. They were reductionist in their quantification. Operationalization, when attempted, equated components of alienation with the total process. For example, social isolation (Nettler, 1957) and powerlessness (Clarke, 1959) were seen as comprehensively representing alienation. American studies provided a conception of alienation amenable to statistical measurement, rather than one directed at accounting for alienation as it exists in the lives of those who experience it. These measures cannot claim status as objective measures of alienation as it exists within the capitalist mass societies of the twentieth century.

To lend some clarity and provide redirection this definition of alienation is proposed:

- * Alienation is fundamentally based within capitalist political economy.
- * It is manifest within the workplace, and proceeds to and is expressed in the world in general, the community, the family and the individual.
- * Important, though not exclusive indices of this state are: powerlessness, normative inversion, social isolation, meaninglessness and access to information.

In order to develop a measure of alienation for use in Newlands East - for the purpose of evaluating the impact and outcome of the Newlands East Self-Survey of Needs (Basckin, 1983) - the indices of alienation were operationalized as follows.

Powerlessness: individuals in the mass societies of the twentieth century are inevitably involved in public affairs. **Powerlessness** refers the helpless inability ordinary people feel when confronted with changing, influencing or even understanding those events and affairs upon which their lives depend.

Normative inversion: the term "normlessness" has often been considered when dealing with indices of alienation.

(Durkheim, 1964; Dean, 1961; Seeman, 1963). Further American studies based on Durkheim's (1964) notion of the state of *anomie* are once again atomistic in equating such a state with alienation. (Middleton, 1960; Srole, 1956). However, whatever one's norms, every individual does have such things. Thus, a much more useful way of measuring this index is with reference to *normative inversion*. Due to the fragmented and confounded existence imposed by alienation, norms may become inverted so that meaning can be made of the state of confusion characterizing everyday existence. Previously 'unacceptable' standards of behaviour are no longer adequate and 'unacceptable' behavioural standards come into operation as coping mechanisms.

Social isolation: this index refers, in Durkheimian terms, to a sense of estrangement, separation from the group, or isolation from group standards.

Meaninglessness: this refers to the degree of chaos the individual perceives in his/her social world. That is, the partial or complete lack of direction, goal or meaning in general felt by the alienated individual. In its most severe form, this leads to non-ambitious feelings of futility and apathy, reflected in all areas of influence in the individual's life. For example, those unemployed do not have the initiative or energy to seek new forms of employment.

Access to information: This refers to the individual's knowledge relating to his/her life and the society in which he/she lives. Lack of access to information leads to the individual developing a sense of self in which his/her understanding of life and the alternatives ways by which to act are constrained.

In attempting to understand the processes and consequences of alienation apparent in their effects on all spheres of the individual's life, the following areas were investigated: work, religion, family, personal, Newlands East, South Africa and political. The alienating consequences of productive activity point to the workplace as a significant area in which alienation is manifest. The religious and familial institutions refer similarly to a Marxist analysis of alienation. Existential concepts, and Marx's concept of self-alienation are considered in the context of personal alienation. At the wider level of the community - Newlands East - and South Africa, together with associated political processes, alienation is institutionalised. It is possible that separation into areas will result in specifying areas in which alienation is more intensely experienced and which require attention at the base of reality.

Abstracting alienation from the real world, the American researchers cited remained faithful to the conception of alienation as a phenomenon quantifiable within a positivist

framework. The present definition however, takes fuller cognisance of alienation as it exists within the capitalist political economies, and more specifically within Newlands East, Durban, South Africa. Such objective quantification - in combination with qualitative research - provides for a more integrated and simultaneously reality-based understanding of the processes of alienation in operation.

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