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Patterns of Alienation in Inner City Ghettos

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Although high rates of alienation are known to exist in inner city ghettos, it is not known whether that alienation is directed toward society as a whole or if individuals make distinctions between different sectors of the social system. Relationships between the levels of alienation directed toward four aspects of society are analyzed to determine if they are the result of a single underlying response to society or if they are the product of separate orientations. The findings show that individuals in low-income areas develop a generalized response to the bureaucratic aspects of urban society. They do not view society in terms of its component subsystems but instead treat each sector as a part of the whole. However, the orientation of a person to his neighborhood is independent of his orientation toward other aspects of society.

Urban societies have been characterized by a growth in the dominance of formal organizations. These organizations, or bureaucracies, are more capable of handling the large number of demands that emerge in large complex systems. This is possible because individuals are first categorized and then dealt with according to previously established rules of procedure. Categorization operates by responding to demands on the basis of their similarity while the uniqueness of each is ignored. The result is an increase in the efficiency of the organization, but, as a by-product, the individual may be left with the feeling that the system is unresponsive to his personal needs. This reaction has been termed alienation. It may be expressed in feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, or self-estrangement (Seeman, 1959). An individual may think that the system is out to cheat him, that it does not care about him, or that his efforts to accomplish anything through it are useless.

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The level of alienation is particularly high in low-income areas where the rewards of urban society are low and costs are high (Bullough, 1967; Ireland and Besner, 1966). Unemployment, crime, inadequate housing, and most other problems associated with urban life are worse in inner city ghettos than in other parts of the city. The advantages of good schools, clean parks, and frequent garbage collections are less available to people in these neighborhoods. Because residents are often poor, elderly, or members of a racial or ethnic minority, there is little chance of moving to another area. Faced with high costs, low rewards, and limited alternatives, they often develop alienation.

Although high rates of alienation are known to exist in inner city ghettos, it is not known whether that alienation is directed toward society as a whole or if individuals make distinctions between different sectors of the social system. By its nature alienation must have an object; that is, an individual is alienated from something. If society as a whole is the object of alienation, then the same feeling will be expressed toward all aspects of that system. A particular sector will not be judged by its own responsiveness but will be seen in the same light as the rest of society. On the other hand, if the individual views society as a cluster of independent subsystems, he may develop alienation toward one sector without his orientation toward other subsystems being affected. In place of a generalized response to society, a set of selective responses will exist. These attitudes will be based on the separate judgment of each sector and the relevant orientation brought forth only in reaction to that subsystem. This study seeks to determine if alienation among individuals in low-income neighborhoods is a response to society as a whole or if it is a response to particular sectors seen as unresponsive to personal needs.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Between July and September of 1971 a survey was conducted by the Institute for Metropolitan Studies of 506 residents drawn as a multistage probability sample of adults living in the Model Cities area of Cincinnati, Ohio. (Model Cities neighborhoods are low-income areas designated to receive special federal assistance.) At the time of the survey the average family income in the area was \$301 per month, with 76% receiving less than \$400. Most of these incomes were fixed, with 31% of the families drawing retirement pensions, 21% welfare benefits, and 14% disability payments. Thirty-four percent of the heads of households not retired or disabled at the time of the survey were unemployed; 74% of the respondents had failed to complete high school. Like low-income areas in other cities, the neighborhoods were predominantly nonwhite (70% Black).

Measures of alienation toward four different sectors of the social system were included in the survey. These subsystems were the consumer system, the political system, the police system, and the neighborhood. Because the study is a secondary analysis of the data, no control existed over the selection of subsystems. As a result, they vary in their degree of abstractness; e.g., the police system is a fairly definite organization, while the neighborhood is open to the subjective definition of the respondent. Still, the pattern of alienation toward these four sectors of society should help determine whether alienation is a response to the system as a whole or to the separate parts.

Questions to measure alienation from the different sectors were dispersed throughout the interview schedule, which averaged over an hour in length. The actual questions used are included here as an appendix. Responses reflect the extent to which the person felt the particular subsystem was responsive to individual demands versus the extent to which it was calloused toward people. They gauge whether the respondents perceived themselves as being able to exercise influence in each of the subsystems involved. Numerical values were assigned to responses and the values summed to form scales measuring alienation toward each of the four sectors. In each case, a high value indicated greater alienation. Intercorrelations between the levels of alienation expressed toward the subsystems are presented in Table I along with the mean, standard deviation, and reliability coefficient for each scale. Reliability was determined by calculating Cronbach's alpha and the Brown-Spearman prophecy formula (Cronbach, 1951; Schuessler, 1971, pp. 359-364).

FINDINGS

Data in the correlation matrix in part support the argument that the level of alienation expressed toward a particular sector of society is part of a generalized response pattern directed toward the total social system. The intercorrelations between alienation from the consumer system, the political

Table I. Relationships Between Measures of Alienation Toward Four Sectors of Society

Sector of society	Intercorrelations			Principal component loading	\bar{X}	SD	Rel
	Neighborhood	Business	Political				
Neighborhood				.19	4.92	1.18	.350
Business	.105			.51	9.16	2.57	.850
Political	.162	.387		.76	5.56	2.00	.817
Police	.025	.232	.343	.47	4.58	1.62	.363

system, and the police indicate that similarities exist among an individual's attitudes toward these different subsystems. These correlations range from a low of .232 to a high of .387. Thus the level of alienation directed toward one subsystem is about the same as that directed to another. This lack of differentiation between the different parts of the social system indicates that the individual is responding to the system as a whole and not making distinctions between the different parts.

Some distinction seems to exist between the neighborhood and other aspects of the social system. Compared to the above intercorrelations, the correlations obtained between alienation from the neighborhood and alienation from other sectors of society are relatively low, ranging from .025 to a high of .162. The neighborhood seems at least partially excluded from the generalized response pattern an individual uses to orient himself to much of society.

To measure the strength of the consistency between alienation toward the consumer system, the political system, and the police system, and to measure the strength of the distinction between the neighborhood and other aspects of the social system, the correlations were subjected to factor analysis. Factor analysis is a technique that reduces a correlation matrix to a smaller number of underlying variables, or factors, which produce the interrelationships between the items. The correlations between each item and a factor indicate the strength of an underlying variable in producing the observed response. If alienation is a generalized response to society for an individual, all items will correlate with the underlying factor. If alienation toward the consumer, the political, and the police systems are produced by a generalized response pattern that does not affect an individual's feelings about the neighborhood, factor analysis will show that alienation from the neighborhood does not correlate with the underlying factor. Because of the number of items involved in the analysis, it is not possible to actually test how many factors underlie alienation toward the different aspects of society. However, the four items are sufficient to test for the existence of a single factor (Schuessler, 1971, p. 88).

Column 4 of Table I shows that the principal component, which accounts for 27% of the total variance in alienation, is related to consumer alienation, political alienation, and alienation toward the police. The correlations between the factor and these objects of alienation range from a low of .47 to a high of .76. This indicates that a common pattern underlies feelings about these sectors of society. An individual who feels alienated toward one sector is likely to feel alienated toward others as well.

The evidence, from both the correlations matrix and factor analysis, indicates that the individual reacts to each of these sectors of society as if they were part of the same system. He does not form opinions about the

police independently of his feelings about political officials, and he does not form opinions about the consumer system that are unrelated to his feelings about the police. Instead, the individual makes a generalized response to the system. This response is then directed toward each sector that is a part of the larger system.

An urban society can be very complex. The different agencies, organizations, and aspects of society a person deals with are innumerable. To manage this diversity, the individual must develop a generalized perception to be applied in every situation. This orientation to the system as a whole reduces the complexity of society from a set of independent sectors to a single system with many parts. Because all the sectors are seen as part of the same system, an individual's orientation to each sector can be the same. Thus, an opinion is not formed about each sector of society based on its own merits. As a matter of expediency, one relies on a generalized orientation that can be used in every situation, irrespective of its objectivity.

Stores, government, and police are bureaucratic organizations representative of many systems that typify contemporary urban life. In dealings with people who work in these bureaucracies, interaction takes place on a secondary rather than primary level. That is, the individual responds to others only in terms of their positions and roles. He is sold something by a clerk, helped or arrested by a policeman, and seen in an office or agency by a person who just works there. The bureaucracy reacts in the same fashion. The individual is a client, a customer, a suspect, or a person wanting something. For both parties the relationship is governed by rules of procedure that limit the nature of the interaction. Because these relationships are characteristic of the contact the individual has across different subsystems, he can lump the various sectors together and develop a single overall reaction relevant to much of society.

The tendency of the individual to react to the different sectors of society in the same way may be further supported by a belief that those different sectors are in fact organized into a single subsystem. Evidence of the existence of those interrelationships are all around him. When persons lose their jobs they go to a government agency to get another. Stores are patrolled by police. Police are paid by governments. Governments often make decisions attractive to industry. Consequently the individual may believe that these different sectors are alike not only in terms of their styles of organization, but as parts of one underlying system. Whether the individual is right cannot be determined by these data, nor is it particularly important. Once people come to see the different sectors as part of a single whole, they act as if the existence of one system is an established fact.

A person who is alienated from other sectors of society may, or may not, be alienated from the neighborhood. The factor that accounts for re-

sponses to the consumer system, the political system, and the police system is relatively unrelated to feelings about the neighborhood. The neighborhood is a different type of system from other sectors of society studied in this report. Interaction is more frequently of a primary instead of secondary nature. This means that neighbors respond to each other on a personal level and not as positions. Thus, the generalized expectations that apply to other sectors of society are inappropriate here. The interaction is broad enough that an opinion is formed about people based upon their own characteristics. A set of responses derived from these judgments is then developed. The result is that attitudes toward the neighborhood are independent of attitudes toward other sectors of society.

CONCLUSIONS

The data analyzed in this report indicate that individuals subjectively group the bureaucratic aspects of society together and treat these different subsystems in much the same way. This single framework takes the place of separate attitude sets directed toward each part of the social system. Attitude sets take time to form and crystallize about an object. If the individual developed a unique set for each aspect of society with which he came into contact, he would be able to deal with only a few sectors of the system. However, the complexity of an urban social system requires a person to interact with many different others who represent positions in different parts of society. A single orientation to society as a whole simplifies the system and permits the individual to respond to situations on the basis of their similarity. This clustering of sectors in the mind of the individual produces an economy of effort and makes it possible to function in a complex urban system.

However, responses based on the bureaucratic aspects of subsystems become modified by responses based on more personal relationships. In particular, attitudes toward the neighborhood are affected. Neighbors are people one sees every day. They share a common life style and have many of the same problems. The generalized response directed toward the more bureaucratic aspects of the social system is inappropriate in dealing with them. It is not possible to relate to them as positions and group them with strangers who work downtown.

APPENDIX

The following questions were used to measure alienation toward the four sectors of society included in this report. Except where otherwise

noted, respondents were asked to indicate whether they strongly agreed, mildly agreed, mildly disagreed, or strongly disagreed with each statement.

Alienation Toward the Consumer System

1. Store owners are out to cheat you any way they can.
2. It makes me mad when I think about how much money people make on second-rate products.
3. The bigger businesses get, the less they care about little people.

Alienation Toward the Neighborhood

1. In general, what do you think of the future of this community? Do you think things are going to get better, going to stay the same, or get worse?
2. People have different ideas of how they, themselves, fit into their neighborhoods. How would you say you fit into this neighborhood? Are you a person who contributes to neighborhood decisions; is active, but not one of the decision makers; is just an ordinary neighbor; or not really a part of this neighborhood at all?

Alienation Toward Political Officials

1. It doesn't really matter which party wins an election in Cincinnati, the interests of the little man don't count.
2. People who go out for public office in Cincinnati are usually out for all they can get.

Alienation Toward the Police

1. Policemen often carry a grudge against men who get in trouble with the law.
2. Police have a tough job, but they do the best they can.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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Organizational Activism and Its Relation to "Reality" and Mental Imagery

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The paper explores some of the attributes of organizational activists, in terms of their personality types, their characteristic behaviors, and their imaging styles when personally confronting their own futures. It was found that activists prefer intangible imagery to the tangible sensible world; are intuitives rather than sensors; are internally rather than externally oriented; are somewhat compulsive; are self-generative in terms of their identity; and are diversity generators rather than diversity regulators. The study provides a significant bridge between (a) Lewin's little-recognized formulation of the life-space notion in terms of 'degrees of reality/irreality'; (b) the intuitive-sensing dimension of Jung's theory of psychological types; and (c) the internal-external dichotomy of Rotter and others. The overall aim of the paper is to contribute to the integration of the conceptual foundations of the social sciences, in order to create an eventual theory of social change. A redefinition of planning and change is presented, in terms of the interaction between the two kinds of reality discussed in the paper: Reality-1, the finite sensible material reality, and Reality-2, the limitless world of symbols and imagery.

You see things as they are . . . But I dream things that never were; and I ask "Why not?"

G. B. Shaw

Nearly anyone who has worked in a living organization will, at some point, have noticed an ongoing struggle between two seemingly opposing viewpoints. The first viewpoint is one of conservation, preservation, and maintenance of the currently existing system, and the second is one of changing

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