

This Week's Citation Classic

Dean D G. Alienation: its meaning and measurement. *Amer. Sociol. Rev.* 26:753-8, 1961. [Denison University, Granville, OH]

Alienation was conceptualized as having three major components: powerlessness (P), normlessness (N), and social isolation (SI). Constructed scales intercorrelated .41 to .67 (N 384). A low but significant correlation was found between P, N, and SI and occupational prestige, education, income, and rural background; there was a small positive correlation with advancing age. [The Social Sciences Citation Index® (SSCI™) indicates that this paper has been cited over 220 times since 1966.]

Dwight G. Dean
 Department of Sociology and
 Anthropology
 Iowa State University
 Ames, IA 50011

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"My interest in studying political apathy as a dissertation area was stimulated by the potential of the concept of alienation as an explanatory variable, which was suggested by my major professor, Melvin Seeman (then at Ohio State and at UCLA for many years). He conceptualized alienation as a syndrome consisting of five sub-types: powerlessness, normlessness, social isolation, meaninglessness, and self-estrangement. I developed scales for only the first three components, since the latter two seemed to me really to be a form of powerlessness. The scales intercorrelated from .41 to .67 (Columbus, Ohio, stratified sample of 384 respondents). A low but significant correlation was found between these three scales and occupational prestige, education, income, and rural background; a small positive one between alienation and advancing age.

"In another article,¹ I reported that the hypothesized negative correlations between the alienation components and non-voting

in a presidential election were not sustained. I suggested that (1) alienation might be related to 'protest' voting, and (2) whereas the scales referred to society as a whole, alienation more likely would be experienced in more personal circumstances, e.g., work, home,² etc.

"While the 'worth' of these articles was not at the outset recognized by journal editors (may younger authors be encouraged), the eventual publication of these studies dealing with the measurement of alienation coincided with a period of intense interest in the subject. For some years attention to the topic increased and a plethora of articles appeared, most of them empirical and utilizing one of two or three scales in existence. Then for a period of time scholarly interest waned to such an extent that an 'obituary' article appeared in the literature. Recently there has been a renewed interest in the area, and an international journal devoted to alienation is being established. Other than the good fortune of publishing an article dealing with the measurement of a popular concept, I suspect scholars have sensed an advantage in using a common scale in order to compare results across a wide range of social circumstances.

"As to difficulties: I remember the struggle to reduce the theoretical abstractions to the empirical level, the search for key ideas which could become questionnaire items, the validation of these by independent judges/experts, the pretesting—but I suppose this process is always the most difficult part of research.

"Since graduate days my research and teaching interests have been in the field of the family, and I have only occasionally utilized the concept of alienation. We have recently reported one study³ which found a negative correlation between alienation and emotional maturity—a subject that I hope to pursue in the future."

1. Dean D G. Alienation and political apathy. *Soc. Forces* 28:185-9, 1960.
2. Lee G R. Marriage and anomie: a causal argument. *J. Marriage Fam.* 36:523-32, 1974.
3. Dean D G & Lewis A K. Alienation and emotional maturity: a preliminary investigation. *Psychol. Rep.* 42:1006, 1978.