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ALIENATION FROM SOCIETY AS A FACTOR IN LACK OF VOCATIONAL DECISION IN MALE HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between the degree of identification with society in male high school seniors and their willingness to state a vocational decision. Lack of identification with society was conceptualized in terms of alienation or the belief that one is estranged from society. In addition to alienation, five other variables were also included in the study. These variables were vocational maturity and scholastic ability as measured by standardized tests, school grades, social class membership, and degree of previous work experience. The boys in the study were divided into two groups on the basis of ability to state a post-high school decision. The characteristics of the no decision group were compared with the characteristics of the boys comprising the decision group.

The completion of the senior year or grade 12 in high school represents a terminal point in the education of young people. The high school years have ended, and a decision about what to do next is required. Katz (1963) refers to this period in the life of a young person as a choice-point. The options available are known, a decision has meaning, and the product of the decision will be observable. This stage in the development of young people is particularly well suited for the study of the variables influencing decision-making.

There is general agreement among vocational development theorists that the choice of a vocation is a process extending over time, characterized by a series of sequential decisions, rather than consisting of a single decision at a point in time. Theories of career development view the process of choosing an occupation as decision-making, and although various theories of career development emphasize different aspects of vocational development the mechanisms of decision-making are important to each of them. This is true whether it is personality factors which are crucial to the theory (Roe, 1956; Roe, 1957), Holland's career typology (Holland, 1966), the developmental stages of Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, & Herma (1951), psychoanalytic influences (Bordin, Nachman, & Segal, 1963), Super's developmental self-concept theory (Super, Starishevsky, Matlin, & Jordaan, 1963), or the vocational choice and decision emphasis of Tiedeman and O'Hara (1963). Studies relating to the variables influencing vocational decisions are lacking in vocational development literature. It is assumed that vocational development in the adolescent is mediated by an interaction between factors in the society and his psychological development. But the specific influence

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of an individual's attitudes toward society on his willingness to make a vocational decision has not been studied.

There are many factors within society which serve to make vocational decision-making difficult. In contemporary society sons often do not have the opportunity to observe their fathers or other men at work. The modern father may work away from home and his duties on the job may remain a mystery to his son. There is reason to believe that it may be difficult for boys growing up in our society to identify with a model of men as workers. Moreover, society restricts the opportunities of boys to learn about the existing occupations by limiting their work experiences while they are still in school. There are simply not enough jobs to go around so that all the boys who would like to work can be assured of a summer or after school job.

Another outcome of an industrialized society is the changing nature of the type of jobs available. Many jobs to be filled in the future have not yet been developed, but our expanding technology demonstrates that the new jobs will be available when today's youth are ready for full time jobs. Entire new industries similar to the electronic data processing industry of today can develop in such a short period of time that knowledge of the present job market may be of little assistance in evaluating the jobs of the future.

Finally, a young man's indecision about becoming involved in the process of choosing an occupation may account for a lack of vocational decision. Perhaps he feels powerless to influence his future. His situation appears to him akin to that of a leaf floating with the tide. Parents or other authority may be pushing for a particular decision and his indecision results from his unwillingness to accede to their demands. Or it might be that the choice of a vocation is irrelevant. Nothing in society is worth striving for. In the young person's view the validity of social values is in question.

DISCUSSION OF THE VARIABLES

The term alienation as used by sociologists to describe a state of estrangement between individuals and their society is at least as old as the beginning of industrialism in the nineteenth century in the western world. Karl Marx used the term to describe the separation of the worker from the product of his labor (Josephson & Josephson, 1962). Durkheim (1951) developed a theory of suicide based on his observations of the disruptions in society caused by rapid social change. Alienation today has been described as loss of self, anxiety, anomie, despair, depersonalization, rootlessness, apathy, social disorganization, loneliness, atomization, powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, pessimism, and the loss of beliefs and values (Josephson & Josephson, 1962). Alienation as used in this study describes a situation within society which results in some members feeling estranged.

Alienation from society manifests itself in at least two types of interaction between individuals and the society. Some individuals may feel alienated because they do not possess the characteristics conducive to integration in contemporary society. For example, they may feel overwhelmed by intellectual demands; they simply do not understand the events going on around them. Or, they are of a minority group and find that some avenues for participation are closed to them. Other individuals have physical disabilities which prevent them from complete participation in society. In any event, and for whatever reason, individuals similar to those just described

are prevented from total involvement with the result that they feel alienated from society. This response is in contrast to the response of another group typified by university students, individuals associated with the arts, or "hippies" who understand contemporary society and are capable of participation but who choose not to because they disagree with the values of society. The voluntary withdrawal from society is descriptive of the Harvard College students in the Keniston study (1967). These young men were from the upper middle social class, intelligent, and from some of the best high schools in the nation. Yet they were rejective of many of the values in contemporary American society. Another example of the voluntary withdrawal group would be individuals who are artistic, creative, or innovative and find the values of society restraining. In their view it is necessary to reject society in order to do their "thing."

The measure of alienation in this study is the Alienation Scale of Neal and Rettig (1963). The scale is made up of sub tests measuring normlessness (the expectancy that socially unapproved behaviour is necessary for success), meaninglessness (the extent to which national and international events are believed to be overwhelmingly complex, chaotic, and unpredictable), social isolation (the experiencing of a separation between oneself and one's fellow man), and powerlessness (the low expectancy that events can be controlled by oneself or collectively by persons like oneself). Thirty-six paper-pencil items make up the *Alienation Scale*.

The major relationship investigated in this study was the relationship between alienation and vocational decision-making. The literature on decision-making is extensive (Edwards, 1954). One aspect of decision-making which has attracted the attention of vocational choice theorists is the consideration of factors relating to the act of choosing (Dilley, 1967; Clarke, Gelatt, and Leiene, 1965; Gelatt, 1962; Hilton, 1962; Thorensen & Mehrens, 1967). Tyler (1969) has described the fundamental concepts underlying decision theory as considerations of *utility* (the chooser's values, desires, wishes, or goals) and *expectations* (the chooser's estimate of the likelihood that the desired outcomes will be achieved). Utility of a decision will depend upon the sum of previous experience, attitudes, or orientation which make up the substances of an individual's view of the world. The individual carries with him ideas about the relative importance of elements in society. Expectations for the outcome of a decision will be influenced by the information the individual possesses. His view of the probability of a stated outcome will depend upon his conception of reality. Both utility and expectations operate to determine the nature of the ultimate decision.

The traditional view of decision-making has stated that the individual gathers information, then processes the information to reach a decision. The role of the counselor is assumed to be the presentation of the information (or to suggest where the information may be found) and to discuss the probabilities of certain outcomes. It is further assumed that the counselee balances the utility of the decision with his expectations about the outcomes. Thorensen and Mehrens (1967) challenge the accuracy of this model:

While it may be convenient and comfortable to assume that individuals will, as a result of information presented, balance their desires and motivations with information, this assumption seems most questionable (p. 166).

They go on to say that the crucial point in a model for decision-making is the individual's perception of the probability that a stated decision will come to pass. His decision to act in a certain direction is influenced by his view of how applicable the objective information (reality of the situation) is to him. It might be that individuals who see themselves as without effective control over events effecting them would behave differently than individuals who do not feel powerless. Furthermore, individuals who have voluntarily rejected the dominant values of society might not engage themselves with vocational decision-making at all. It is the influence of lack of identification with society on decision-making that the study sought to investigate.

Subjects were classified into the no decision or decision group on the basis of their response to a questionnaire which asked them to indicate their plans for the period immediately after high school was completed. The choices included enrolment in a post-high school education program, enlistment in the military service or the seeking of a job. In order to be classified in the decision group, a boy had to state his decision and the steps he had taken to implement the decision. For example, if a boy checked "go to work," he had also to indicate the name of his employer or the type of work he was seeking.

TABLE 1
Post-High School Decision for Male Seniors

	Number	Percent
Four year college	52	32.2
Two year college (community college)	33	20.3
Military service	26	16.2
Job	10	6.1
Vocational, technological, business school	2	1.2
Undecided	37	22.8
Other	2	1.2
	162	100.0%

In addition to alienation; vocational maturity, scholastic ability, school grades, social class membership, and the degree of previous work experience were included in the study in order to investigate their relationships with ability to state a vocational decision. Vocational maturity is assumed to be a stage in development during which the individual is increasingly goal directed, independent from others, and realistic in his decisions. Crites (1961) has developed a fifty item paper-pencil test to assess vocational maturity in adolescents, and his *Vocational Development Inventory* was used in the present study. Scholastic ability was measured by the *Cooperative School and College Ability Test*. School grades consisted of the grades in all subjects taken in high school through grade 11. Social class membership was determined by the boy's statement of the occupation and level of education of his father (or family breadwinner which there was no father in the family) (Reiss, 1961). The degree to which male high school seniors had work experience was determined by a questionnaire. Work experience was defined as a summer job where the boy was employed for at least six weeks at a salary of at least \$1.25 per hour. If the job was held during the school year the subject had to have worked at least 15 hours a week.

Vocational maturity was included in the study to provide a means to assess the readiness of the individual to make a vocational decision. It also

provides an indication of the individuals stage in vocational development (Super, 1957). One of the expected tasks in vocational development is the ability to make choices at the age level when to make a decision is expected behavior.

Scholastic ability was included in order to assess the relationship between school learning potential and decision-making. The ability to acquire information in school might be related to decision-making since the possession of information is thought to be an essential component of making a decision. High test scores would indicate good information gathering ability.

School grades are an indication for a high school student of how well he is managing in the school system. The successful completion of high school might reinforce for a student his ability to handle other tasks involved in growing up. One of these is vocational decision-making.

The social class variable was included as another way to view the relationship between decision-making and identification with society. It might be that lower social class status inhibits decision-making since opportunities for lower class individuals to participate completely in the society are generally restricted.

Finally, the study proposed to investigate the relationship between decision-making and previous work experience to determine what, if any, the effect of working while in school might have on the ability to state a decision. It might be hypothesized that work experience would supply a boy with a glimpse of the world of work and thus supply him with information and experiences encouraging to the making of a vocational decision.

PROCEDURES

The sample for this study consisted of 162 male high school seniors from a coeducational, comprehensive, 2,200 student high school in Portland, Oregon. The data was collected by questionnaire, interview, and inspection of school records. Ninety-four percent of the available male seniors in the school participated. The group of 162 was divided into two groups based on their response to the question, "What do you plan to do after you finish high school?" There were 40 students in the no decision group and 122 in the group who were able to state a decision.

- Hypothesis 1: There is no difference between the mean score on the Alienation Scale for the no decision and for the decision group.
- Hypothesis 2: There is no difference between the mean score on the *Vocational Development Inventory* for the no decision and for the decision group.
- Hypothesis 3: There is no difference between the mean score on the *Cooperative School and College Ability Test* for the no decision and for the decision group.
- Hypothesis 4: There is no difference between the mean score on the school grades for the no decision and for the decision group.
- Hypothesis 5: There is no difference between the mean score on the social class membership for the no decision and for the decision group.
- Hypothesis 6: There is no difference between the degree of work experience for the no decision and for the decision group.

RESULTS

The results of the study indicated that alienation was not a significant factor in ability to state a vocational decision. Vocational maturity, scholastic ability, school grades, and social class were all significantly related to decision-making ability.

TABLE 2
Mean Score Comparison of the No Decision and the Decision Group

	No Decision N = 40	Decision N = 122		
	M ₁	M ₂	t	p
Alien	56.6	54.2	1.10	.13 (ns)
Voc Mat	30.9	34.1	-4.1	.000
SCAT	43.9	51.2	-3.9	.000
GPA	1.8	2.4	-5.1	.000
Soc Class	34.3	42.5	-2.1	.02

Previous work experience was not significantly related to the ability to state a vocational decision.

TABLE 3
Number in each Group with Work Experience

	No Decision N = 40	Decision N = 122	x ²	p
Previous Work	28	94	.80	.36 (ns)

DISCUSSION

Even though the no decision group did score higher on the *Alienation Scale* than did the group able to state a decision, the difference was not statistically significant. The absence of a more pronounced difference is somewhat surprising in view of the assumptions upon which the alienation concept is based. It would be expected that negative attitudes toward society would relate to lack of vocational decision. A lack of identification with society might be expected to inhibit willingness to make decisions based upon the assumption that the alienated individual views himself as unable to control events or as uninterested since participation in society has little value for him.

A rather strong relationship does appear to exist between decision-making and measures of vocational maturity, scholastic ability, and school grades. Individuals who state a decision are also vocationally mature, scholastically able, and receive good grades. They appear to possess the scholastic ability to obtain satisfactory grades in school, and they are typical of their age group in their score on the *Vocational Development Inventory*. These characteristics suggest that they should be prepared to make decisions, and the results of the study support this view.

The social class variable does distinguish between the no decision and the decision group. It may be that lower social class status inhibits vocational decision-making. The reason for this relationship is not clear, particularly since the alienation variable does not distinguish between the two groups. This study did not test directly for the relationship between alienation and

social class, although other researchers have found a high relationship between lower social class membership and alienation (Bell, 1957; Lane, 1967).

Previous work experience did not differentiate the no decision from the decision group. Vocational development theory would suggest that actual work experience is important to boys because it provides a means for the assessment of oneself in relation to work. In view of this assumption, one would expect that a lack of vocational decision would be associated with no work experience. The observation that this was not the situation in this study is unexpected. One possible explanation is that for this group of boys previous work experience was so universal an experience that it failed to distinguish the no decision from the decision group. Seventy-five percent of the boys in the sample had previous work experience. Another possibility is that work is not perceived by boys as preparation for a career or as a source of information for vocational decision-making. Rather, work while in high school may serve as a way to earn money for immediate purposes. Examination of the type of jobs these boys obtained, indicated that they were typified by restaurant work or by unskilled jobs in retail stores. Dish-washer and busboy were the most common jobs in restaurant work; whereas, stock boy, wrapper or packer, and clean-up boy were the most common jobs in retail stores. It seems likely that boys would obtain this type of job for the money they could earn, rather than to try the occupation as information-providing for a future career.

A final look at the alienation variable suggests some possible explanations for its lack of significance in distinguishing between the no decision and the decision group. A visual inspection of the group with high scores on the *Alienation Scale* (scores greater than the 80th percentile) revealed some possible explanations. Some of the 50 boys in this category had atypical scores in scholastic ability and school grades.

There were eight boys with low scores in scholastic ability and eleven with low school grades and there were seven boys with high scholastic ability test scores and six with high grades (in all cases exceeding the mean by plus or minus one standard deviation). There were a larger number of boys in the alienated group with high scholastic ability and good grades who were able to state a decision than was true for the remaining boys in the alienated group who had low scores in scholastic ability and school grades. In other words, there appeared to be tendency for some alienated boys to be able to state a decision. High scholastic ability and good grades were associated with this ability. Whereas, no decision was also associated with alienation, but with poor scholastic ability and poor grades in addition. These incomplete data suggest the possibility that the alienation measure is identifying two diverse groups of alienated individuals—one group with evidence of success in school and one group without success. It might be that these categories would correspond to the various types of alienated individuals previously discussed, namely the individuals who can function successfully in society but choose to opt out, and the group cannot manage because of social or psychological reasons. In the first case, the individuals would be able to make decisions on a practical level (i.e., immediate vocational plans), while philosophically they would express alienation (mark a questionnaire). The other group might be more truly alienated, since their lack of success in school would restrict their future opportunities and be reflected in an unwillingness to state a post-high

school decision. For this group there is not much available from which to choose. In addition their lack of past success might inhibit their willingness to state a decision. The fact that there was a significant relationship between decision-making and social class suggests that lack of perceived opportunity may be a factor in unwillingness to state a decision.

As is true for so much research, this study suggests more questions than it answers. The inability of the study to find a relationship between post-high school decision-making and alienation leaves the issue in doubt. While it may be that the two concepts are truly unrelated, this conclusion would seem to fly in the face of vocational development theory. A more likely explanation might be that the *Alienation Scale* is not suitable for this purpose. A different measure of alienation has been suggested by Seeman (1967a) who contends that feelings of powerlessness govern attitudes toward society.

With the *Powerlessness Scale* (Seeman, 1959) it might be possible to determine if an individual who believes himself to be unable to influence the events occurring around him is less vocationally mature, has lower scholastic ability, and poorer school grades; and is less able to make a vocational decision. It could be hypothesized that feelings of powerlessness would inhibit vocational information gathering ability, and result in the individual possessing less knowledge against which to assess current information. Thus, he could be expected to fall farther and farther behind his peers in background knowledge for decision-making and be unable to make a vocational decision at the appropriate period in his vocational development. Seeman (1967b) has reported evidence to support the hypothesis that individuals with high powerlessness scores have inferior knowledge in control-relevant areas of their experience. The demonstration of a relationship between alienation and knowledge important to the decision-making task in high school seniors could provide a more direct link to the relationship between decision-making and attitudes toward society.

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L'HOSTILITE DE LA SOCIETE, UN FACTEUR DE RETARD DANS
LES PRISES DE DECISIONS VOCATIONNELLES CHEZ LES
ETUDIANTS AGES DES ECOLES SECONDAIRES

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Cent soixante-deux (162) étudiants du cours secondaire furent divisés en deux groupes en posant pour base leur possibilité de prendre une décision immédiate les engageant après leur école secondaire et cela dans le but de déterminer si l'identification ou le désengagement avec la société était un facteur dans le manque de décision professionnelle à la fin de l'école secondaire.

En plus de ce premier facteur, on ajoute comme moyens de discrimination entre les deux groupes, la maturité professionnelle, les succès scolaires, le degré de scolarité, le niveau social et l'expérience au travail.

Les résultats indiquent que les liens avec la société et l'expérience au travail sont peu significatifs. La maturité professionnelle, les succès scolaires, le degré de scolarité, le niveau social furent vraiment discriminatoires.

Quelques explications de ce manque de corrélation furent discutées et on proposa un plan de recherches.