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> And these are the things that we remember
> of America, for we have known all her thousand
> lights and weathers, and we walk the streets,
> we walk the streets forever, we walk the streets
> of life alone.   - Thomas Wolfe

A society that is dominated by the forces of alienation stifles the creative forces. Fritz Pappenheim refers to alienation as one of the basic trends of our age.[1] Robert A. Nisbet in his book The Sociological Tradition, lists five essential unit ideas in sociology as follows: community, authority, status, the sacred, and alienation.[2] Robert Merton examines five types of individual adaptations: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion. In the Merton formulation, rebellion represents alienation.[3] Within a sociological framework alienation views man as rootless, estranged, anomic and separated from society and community. Alienation can include both individual components and societal components. Amitai Etzioni defines alienation as . . . a social situation which is beyond the control of the actor, and hence unresponsive to his basic needs.[4] Melvin Seeman postulates five basic ways in which the concept of alienation has been used: Powerlessness, Meaninglessness, Normlessness, Isolation and Self-estrangement.[5]

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[1]Fritz Pappenheim, The Alienation of Modern Man (New York: Modern Reader Paperbacks, 1968), p. 17.

[2]Robert A. Nisbet, The Sociological Tradition (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1966), p. 6.

[3]Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (New York: The Free Press, 1968), p. 209.

[4]Amitai Etzioni, The Active Society (New York: The Free Press, 1968), p. 648.

[5]Melvin Seeman, "On the Meaning of Alienation", American Sociological Review, Vol. 49 (1959), p. 783.

STUDY DESIGN

The purpose of the present study is to explore the relationship between client alienation and efforts by the social work profession to intervene in behalf of the welfare poor. Specifically, this investigation focuses on the ideas, proposals, and studies that have appeared in the social work literature that would indicate efforts by social workers to increase or decrease client alienation. Social work is practiced primarily in agency and organizational settings. Attention will be given to the nature of these structures to determine how they affect client alienation and prevent social workers from relieving alienation. The dimensions of client alienation will be discussed using Melvin Seeman's classification of powerlessness and meaninglessness. A further expansion of the concept of client alienation will be obtained by looking for ways to prevent alienation by combining social work concepts with the concepts of micro-macro society as suggested in the writings of Amitai Etzioni.[6]

POWERLESSNESS AND CLIENT ALIENATION

As defined by Seeman, powerlessness has a double aspect. It means first that the person has no confidence in being able to influence the events of his life. The external, outside environment, they, the establishment, are not responsive to his needs, and not changeable by his efforts. The second aspect of powerlessness is the effect it has upon the individual. These internal factors have been characterized in the literature as apathy, despair, hopelessness, constant depression, estrangement and lack of motivation. Factors that have to do with the outside environment are a lack of leadership ability, an inability to organize and an inability to solve the continuous crises that are said to be a part of the lives of the welfare poor.[7]

Seeman found in recent studies of learning tasks that, "a person will definitely learn less from experiences he conceives to be dominated by outsiders, or by chance,

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[6]Amitai Etzioni, The Active Society (New York: The Free Press, 1968), p. 648.
_____, Societal Guidance, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969).

[7]Francis Piven, "Participation of Residents in Neighborhood Community Action Programs", Social Work, Vol. 11, 1966, p. 75. See also: "Low Income Life Styles", edited by Lola M. Irelan, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Welfare Administration, 1966, p. 3.

which he feels he cannot influence".[8] In the welfare
system there is a growing recognition that the amount
of the grant, the offer of job rehabilitation and case-
work services have less significant impact on clients'
lives than do the accompanying restrictive controls, the
demeaning attitudes displayed toward recipients and the
humiliating psychological alienation involved in the
donor-donee relationship. Undoubtedly the close connection
between the old poor law residues and much of current wel-
fare thinking and practice perpetuates alienation.[9] Client
alienation is closely tied to the stigmatizing aspects of
the service. This is illustrated in the following quot-
ation:

> For the clients, fear, hatred, and distrust
> block the impulse toward self-betterment. Re-
> habilitation as a long-range objective is ham-
> pered. In the immediate experience, clients
> withhold information that may be helpful in id-
> entifying and articulating those needs for which
> resources are available in the community or the
> agency. Instead of openness and a sharing of
> concern with the agency, there is a guardedness
> that reduces the helping process to a game of
> outwitting "the welfare".[10]

Although it is true the welfare system creates some of the
characteristics of powerlessness, futility and apathy,
it is equally true that these are not permanent character-
istics. Since the early 1960's following efforts made
by the Mobilization for Youth in New York, there has been
a growing unrest by welfare recipients and organizations
have been created to eliminate, correct, or reform welfare
inequities.[11] This unrest culminating in the formation of
the Welfare Rights Organization has resulted in changes in
welfare recipients. Martin Rein explains this change by
his "energy displacement theory".[12] The experience of
meeting in groups, being involved in decision making,
participation in the organization's efforts to bring about

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[8]Melvin Seeman, "Antidote to Alienation - Learning to
Belong", Vol. 3, No. 4 (May/June, 1966), p. 36.
    [9]Lloyd Setleis, "Civil Rights and the Rehabilitation
of AFDC Clients", Social Work, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Apr. 1964),
p. 11.
    [10]Ibid., p. 6.
    [11]John L. Erlich, "Breaking the Dole Barrier: The
Lingering Death of the American Welfare System", Social
Work, Vol. 14, No. 3 (July 1969), p. 49.
    [12]Martin Rein, "Social Work in Search of a Radical Pro-
fession", Social Work, Vol. 15, No. 2 (April 1970), p. 23.

change enhances self image, creates new attitudes and mobilizes unused energies.[13] The growing power engendered by the Welfare Rights organization will not produce any radical changes as long as the welfare system and the political structure remain inflexible and intransigent. Nor will this change reduce client alienation. The central point is that what was once a stigmatized, apathetic, immobilized, alienated mass of individuals has become a major, organized collectivity. The solution to the problem of client alienation is not reform of individual welfare recipients, but a major reform effort needs to be made with the total collectivity of welfare recipients that would meet their needs, include their thinking and involve their participation.

Social Work Response to Client Powerlessness.

There are three aspects of professional social work response to client powerlessness:

1. The low level of actual power possessed by social workers available to decrease client powerlessness.
2. The conservative nature of social work has made social workers willing henchmen to those who do wield power.
3. The unfortunate nature of social service delivery systems in this country has emphasized coercive unresponsive bureaucratic ways of treating clients.

The amount of power social workers can exercise is dependent upon organizational structure. Social work is primarily practiced in agencies and large bureaucratic organizations. Brager remarked, "Social Welfare organizations are socially dependent. Since they are not financially self-supporting, they must accommodate to relevant publics. A relationship inevitably exists between an organization's fund-raising base and its willingness to press for institutional change."[14] The social worker works within organization and agency structure. He is not free to act on his own initiative.

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[13]Louis A. Zurcher, Jr., <u>Poverty Warriors</u>, (Austin, Texas: Univ. of Texas Press, 1970), p. 182. See also Helene Levens, "Organizational Affiliation and Powerlessness: A Case Study of the Welfare Poor", <u>Social Problems</u>, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Su 1968), pp. 18-32.
[14]George A. Brager, "Institutional Change: Perimeters of the Possible", <u>Social Work</u>, Vol. 12 (Jan. 1967), p. 61.

The conservative nature of the profession has been repeatedly discussed and documented recently by Irwin Epstein. In a survey of 1,020 New York City professional social workers he found that, "social workers revealed general disapproval of protest as a strategy of social action for groups representing the profession."[15]

In our society, social service delivery systems that deal with so-called pathological behavior and with clients from the lower classes are afforded low power status. This means low power status for welfare recipients, low power status for social workers and low potential to influence those who actually command power positions.

Elliot Studt examined this aspect in his "Field of Social Work Practice: Organizing Our Resources for More Effective Practice". He says:

> When we examine many fields of practice in the light of these questions, we observe that the organizational role provided for the client tends to institutionalize social degradation, diminish his status in other significant roles, segregate him from normal participation in his community, add unnecessary stress, expose him to conflicting expectations in subroles, and discourage joint action with his fellows to modify either the service organization or other commonly experienced problem areas.[16]

George Brager's angry comment on the 1968 version of the worst welfare bill in history illustrates this point. It reads, "For if we have learned anything at all, we know that welfare workers and administrators, wittingly and unwittingly, professionally trained or not, will inevitably respond to its repressive and punitive tone."[17]

The Prevention of Client Powerlessness.

The exercise of power is dependent upon the availability of power positions, the ability to maintain power positions and to have at least elementary knowledge about

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[15]Irwin Epstein, "Social Workers and Social Action: Attitudes Toward Social Action Strategies", Social Work, Vol. 13 (Apr. 1968), p. 107.
[16]Elliot Studt, "Fields of Social Work Practice: Organizing our Resources for More Effective Practice", Social Work, Vol. 10 (Oct. 1965), p. 162.
[17]George Brager, "Comments on Currents", Social Work, Vol. 13 (Apr. 1968), p. 121.

power strategies. Daniel Thursz suggests "Social workers must do more than provide information to the policy-makers. One of their professional functions must be to influence policies based on their best judgments as to the needs of the society."[18]

Social workers have seldom given much thought to client decision making. Decision making and access to the levers of change are the determinants of power and power relationships. Etzioni points out, "For an active society to be possible, consensus formation must be in part upward, allowing for the authentic expression of the members preferences and for a real, and not co-opted participation."[19] The distribution of power in a society is the key to the amount of alienation. When large segments of the population are disfranchized, alienation is high.

Repressive social work practices are a prime cause of client powerlessness. Etzioni suggests there are three kinds of power: persuasive power, utilitarian power and power backed up by force.[20] The application of persuasive power tends to be the least alienating, then utilitarian, and the most alienating type of power is repressive.

MEANINGLESSNESS AND CLIENT ALIENATION

In this context, meaninglessness is concerned with the individual's lack of understanding of the full dimension of problems. Meaninglessness involves restricted, partial understanding. Client alienation results when the individual is not able to satisfy basic needs through the service delivery systems set up to fulfill such needs. Client alienation comes about from the use of a restricted narrow clinical-therapeutic view of problem solving. Clients are alienated by a minuscule effort to solve problems with methods that have only limited application to the problems of the welfare poor. The cop shares with the social worker the dubious distinction of being the most hated person working in the ghetto areas. This hatred and alienation is brought about by programs that are peripheral to client needs, and by using individual approaches to problems that are not basically problems of the individual or problems of the community, but national problems that require a macro approach. Client alienation is caused by patching

[18]Daniel Thursz, "Social Action as a Professional Responsibility", Social Work, Vol. 11 (July 1966), p. 15.
[19]Sarajane Heidt and Amitai Etzioni, ed. "Societal Guidance", (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1969), p. 26.
[20]Etzioni, "The Active Society", p. 361.

up discredited programs, doing just one more government survey to discover an inadequate service really is inadequate, and calling for advocacy and then supporting business as usual. Programs have been based on palliation rather than prevention and method over structure change.

Social Work Response to Meaninglessness.

The knowledge base for social work has been gradually expanding outward from a concentration on Freudian casework to at least some recognition of the fact that something called either social action or social advocacy will more nearly extend into the area of change of institutions or change in social conditions. The current state of social work knowledge has deeply embedded three trends that operate to increase alienation among the welfare poor. The first trend has to do with the dilemma of whether or not social work will retain its clinical-therapeutic rehabilitation emphasis or whether it will concentrate on advocacy and societal change. The second trend has to do with a retreat of social workers from the welfare poor. The third trend is whether or not social work will insist on reducing much of the knowledge it possesses to the individual level and ignore the broader context of societal structure and social change.

The traditional focus of casework has been on the "man-in-the-situation" --- 90% man and 10% situation. That this narrow focus is inadequate is well known. Helen Perlman recognized the need for change in her article "Social Work Methods: A Review of the Past Decade", --- "On the other hand, when casework moves into dealing with other sorts of problems - for example, those of crisis situations - and with certain kinds of people - for example the socially antagonistic and alienated - and with new sorts of goals - for example that of prevention - its clinical model may well need radical change."[21]

One of the first projects funded by OEO and involving a collaborative approach of many public and private agencies to aid the poor, concluded that agency caseworkers had been concerned about the problems of the poor, but like the poor, felt powerless to help. A statement by one of the workers in the project explains her feelings, "I have changed my views of the poor radically and my over-all practice of social work. I am very impatient with psychoanalytic interpretation of all behavior and very critical

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[21]Helen Harris Perlman, "Social Work Method: A Review of the Past Decade", Social Work, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Oct. 1965), p. 177.

of practice that eliminates the majority of the poor from benefiting from services because of worker biases and agency practices."[22]

The dominant emphasis in social work education has been training geared to helping students understand individual behavior and a disproportionate emphasis on methods --- casework, group work and community organization.[23] Herbert Bisno has proposed a theoretical framework that eliminates the three traditional methods and expands to nine methods.[24] The difficulty with expanding methods and the curriculum, would be the probable necessity of increasing the MSW to a three-year degree with some specialization, and the doctorate degree to specialize at least partially.

The concentration of the social work profession on individual-oriented methods, and the retreat from the poor are related phenomena. At a very early date (1934), the Federal Relief Administration eliminated all money payments to private agencies for cash payment to the needy. This started an extensive referral of those in need to public agencies and a retreat of social workers from the welfare poor. This retreat has been well documented in the literature.[25] Scott Briar declares:

> One new element is the complaint that the casework method, the very method that caseworkers worked so hard and long to perfect, systematically excludes many of the persons most in need of attention from caseworkers . . . And the proportion of such persons is greatest among the poor and

[22]Alline del Valle and Felton Alexander, "Effects of the Project on Family Service Agencies and Urban Leagues", Social Casework, Vol. XLVIII, No. 10 (Dec. 1967), p. 636.

[23]Aaron Rosen and Ronda S. Connaway, "Public Welfare, Social Work, and Social Work Education", Social Work, Vol. 14, No. 2 (April 1969), p. 94.

[24]Herbert Bisno, "A Theoretical Framework for Teaching Social Work Methods and Skills, with Particular Reference to Undergraduate Social Welfare Education", Journal of Education for Social Work, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Fall 1969), pp. 5-17.

[25]Richard A. Cloward and Irwin Epstein, "Private Social Welfare's Disengagement from the Poor: The Case of Family Adjustment Agencies", in Meyer N. Zald, ed., Social Welfare Institutions (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1965), pp. 623-644. See also Alvin L. Schorr, "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall . . ." a review of "Girls at Vocational High", Social Work, Vol. 10, No. 3 (July 1965), pp. 112-113.

disadvantaged, groups to whom the profession has an historic commitment.[26]

Perhaps the most persistent trend in social work is an attempt to avoid analysis on all levels from micro to macro, but to take concepts from one level and reduce them to the individual level. This reductionistic trend or psychological explanation for all phenomena has done much to help perpetuate the other trends. Implicit in most of the man-in-the-situation theories, interaction theories and balance between demands of the social environment and people's coping efforts theory is a marvelously simplistic explanation that sooner or later gets back to social works preoccupation with problem solving at the individual level. Harriet Bartlett's new pamphlet, "The Common Base of Social Work Practice", substitutes methods for a variety of "interventive measures and techniques". The concept rests on the idea of interaction between people and environment.[27]

Ann Hartman states in her article "Anomie and Social Casework", "If we take the position that anomie is purely a societal state, the concept of anomie has only limited usefulness with regard to individuals. If we take the opposite position, that anomie is purely a psychological state, we have gained no theoretical advantage, and the term anomie simply becomes a synonym for apathy or depression or sociopathy."[28]

A great deal of social science analysis has followed this penchant to move toward psychologistic reductionism. Inasmuch as a great many of the problems and solutions to social problems lie at the macro-analysis level, social work needs to expend some effort in this direction.

The Prevention of Client Meaninglessness.

The more knowledge the social worker possesses about the causes, structure and broad societal context of social problems the greater will be his capacity to treat problems. There is a tendency for the knowledge base in any profession to become fossilized. The more stable and unresponsive

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[26]Scott Briar, "The Casework Predicament", Social Work, Vol. 13, No. 1, (Jan. 1968), p. 6.

[27]Harriett M. Bartlett, "The Common Base of Social Work Practice", (New York: NASW 1970), p. 116.

[28]Ann Hartman, "Anomie and Social Casework", Social Casework (March 1969), p. 134.

the knowledge base becomes the more difficult it becomes
to accomplish wide spread changes.[29] It is evident that
the profession of social work is slowly expanding outward
to include larger and larger units. Alfred Kahn illustrated
this trend in the following way:

> Certainly it is new preoccupations that have
> moved social work, in its relationship to
> behavioral and social science, from its early
> and major reliance on psychiatry to its increased
> post-World War II borrowings from cultural
> anthropology, role and stratification theory,
> and small group theory; then its concern with
> organizational theory (as it shed light on the
> therapeutic milieu); to the present interest
> in political science, political sociology,
> theory of planned change, urban sociology, and,
> after long neglect, economics (while the psy-
> chiatric-psychological focus, still the major
> one has moved toward the ego psychologies).[30]

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[29]Heidt and Etzioni, op. cit., p. 33.

[30]Alfred J. Kahn, "The Societal Context of Social Work
Practice", Social Work, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Oct. 1965), p. 154.

The overall framework to explain the components
of social work practice are shown in figure 1.

FIGURE 1

SOCIAL WORK AS A PROFESSION

within a

SOCIO-CULTURAL MILIEU

operating through

ORGANIZATIONAL AND ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITIES

confronts

PROBLEMS IN SOCIAL FUNCTIONING FROM MICRO TO MACRO LEVELS

with a goal of

RESOLVING, MAINTAINING, OR CHANGING THE FUNCTIONING
AND/OR ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES OF INDIVIDUALS,
FAMILIES, GROUPS, ORGANIZATIONS, COMMUNITIES
STATES, REGIONS OR SOCIETAL SYSTEMS

expressed through social workers

occupying a variety of

OCCUPATIONAL ROLES AT THE

VARIOUS LEVELS

AND WORKING WITH BROAD BASE,

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL,

INTERCONNECTED PROBLEMS

by use of multiple methods

and techniques

EMPLOYED IN INTERACTION
WITH CLIENTS AND ALL
OTHER LEVELS AND SYSTEMS
SUBJECT TO ANALYSIS
AND EVALUATION

A theoretical model aimed at the expansion of the social work knowledge base is shown in figure 2.

FIGURE 2

THE METHODS AND MICRO-MACRO LEVELS

Methods

Levels	Consensus-Conflict	Resource Mobilization	Education, Teaching, Supervision	Research-Evaluation	Therapy, Casework, Group Work, Counseling	Social Planning Societal Guidance Social Activeness	Power Management Project Management Prevention of Alienation

Macro

Society

Region

State

Community

Organization

Micro

Group

Family

Individual

Conflict and Consensus. These methods have to do with differences of opinion and the creation either of control mechanisms or the resolution of differences. At the societal level there is a direct relationship between structure and the amount of consensus. The more sensitive the sub-units are to the needs of all other units, the easier it is to establish consensus. The more fixed positions, the less communication and the fewer shared goals, the more conflict.

Resource Mobilization. At the society level there is an increasingly restricted use of resources and consequent mobilization of poorer collectives to reverse the imbalance. Societal projects aimed at equitable distribution of resources automatically reduces alienation.

Education, Teaching and Supervision. These methods relate to the transmission of the knowledge base to others. The wider the knowledge base and the more flexible, the more nearly the material taught will benefit students and client populations.

Research and Evaluation. Societal units differ in their capacity to collect, process and use knowledge. There is a tendency to invest highly in collecting information and display less ability to process and evaluate information. At all levels there is selective use made of information. Knowledge that flies in the face of tradition may have only limited usefulness.

Therapy, Casework, Group Work, Counseling. These methods should involve a wide base of practice, a variety of functions and multiple skills and techniques. There should be less concern about adjusting clients to impossible situations and at least some effort expended toward changing damaging social situations.

Social Planning, Societal Guidance and Social Activeness. The emphasis on social planning is not one problem at a time but broad base multilevel planning. High activeness between sub-units leads to consensus and greater use of symbolic exchanges, less prescriptive control and lower levels of alienation.

Power Management, Project Management and Prevention of Alienation. The application of coercive power rather than persuasive power increases the amount of alienation. Projects set up at all levels that do not fulfill client needs, do not involve client planning or participation, increase conflict and alienation. Projects are like catalysts, even if they fail they set up chain reactions throughout the sub-units and cause at least partial changes and new foundations upon which to operate.