



Paranoia and the Structure of Powerlessness

Author(s): John Mirowsky and Catherine E. Ross

Source: *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (Apr., 1983), pp. 228-239

Published by: [American Sociological Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2095107>

Accessed: 28/09/2013 12:13

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



American Sociological Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Sociological Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

PARANOIA AND THE STRUCTURE OF POWERLESSNESS*

JOHN MIROWSKY CATHERINE E. ROSS
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Paranoia is an alienation from others that has gone beyond a sense of disconnection to one of persecution. Very little is known about the relationship of paranoia to sociodemographic variables. However, prior theory and research provide a basis for inference. We argue that social positions characterized by powerlessness and by the threat of victimization and exploitation tend to produce paranoia. Powerlessness leads to the belief that important outcomes in one's life are controlled by external forces and other persons, rather than by one's own choice and effort. This belief in external control interacts with the threat of victimization or exploitation to produce mistrust, which may then develop into paranoia. Using data from a community mental health survey of persons living in El Paso, Texas, and Juarez, Mexico, we find that belief in external control is directly associated with low socioeconomic status, Mexican heritage, and being female. Belief in external control interacts with low current socioeconomic status to produce mistrust, which in turn is the major factor directly associated with paranoia.

The belief that you have enemies who are plotting to harm you and are spreading lies and rumors about you behind your back represents a profound rift with others. It is alienation that has progressed from a sense of disconnection to one of persecution. Very little is known about the distribution of paranoid beliefs in community populations or about the factors that lead to such beliefs. However, sociological and social-psychological theory and research provide a firm basis for inference. A number of studies find predictable and meaningful relationships between the nature of certain sociodemographic positions and the beliefs and views common among persons in those positions (e.g., Kohn, 1973; Wheaton, 1980; Grabb, 1979). We build on this body of research, arguing that life in certain sociodemographic positions is characterized by powerlessness and by the threat of victimization and exploitation, and that these objective conditions stimulate the development of certain beliefs and assumptions about oneself and others that lead to paranoia.

Paranoia, Mistrust, and Belief in External Control

Paranoia is the belief that people are conspiring against you and deliberately trying to harm you.¹ How do such beliefs develop? One possibility is that they emerge from more general, and more common, beliefs of a similar nature. In particular, individuals may go from a general belief that important outcomes are determined by powerful external forces beyond their control to a more specific belief that people are manipulative and may harm them in the pursuit of goals, to an even more specific belief that they have been singled out as a target for abuse and persecution. Thus, belief in external control, mistrust, and paranoia may form a stairway of increasingly alienated conceptions of one's relationship to others. As we describe below, belief in external control and mistrust are associated with one's socioeconomic position and ethnicity, and may therefore explain similar variations in paranoid beliefs.

Alienation and the Belief in an External Locus of Control

According to Rotter (1966), belief in an external locus of control is a generalized expectation

* Direct all correspondence to: John Mirowsky and Catherine E. Ross, Department of Sociology, University of Illinois, Urbana, IL 61801.

We wish to thank Richard L. Hough and Dianne Timbers Fairbank for the use of the Life Change and Illinois Research Project data. The project was supported by grant R01-MH16108 of the Center for Epidemiologic Research of NIMH, by the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, and by the University of Texas at El Paso. We also thank J. K. Myers and Blair Wheaton for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

¹ The American Psychiatric Association (1980) has three diagnostic categories of paranoia: Paranoid Personality, Paranoid Personality Disorder, and Paranoid Schizophrenia. Although each category has a number of features, the sense of being persecuted and conspired against is the major element common to all three.

that outcomes of situations are determined by forces external to one's self, such as powerful others, luck, fate, or chance. Belief in an internal locus of control, its opposite, is a generalized expectation that outcomes are contingent on one's own behavior. In the former the individual believes that he or she is powerless and at the mercy of the environment, while in the latter the individual believes that he or she can master, control, or effectively alter the environment.

Belief in external control often represents an awareness of objective conditions. By continually experiencing failure in the face of effort, a person learns that his or her efforts are unlikely to affect the outcomes of situations (Jessor et al., 1968; Kohn, 1973; Wheaton, 1980). Sociological theory indicates that the prolonged and regular experience of failure and lack of control are inherent in conditions of powerlessness, structural inconsistency, and alienated labor. Each of these objective social conditions tends to elicit an awareness or world view that is its subjective image, providing a continuing stream of experience from which to infer external control. Powerlessness is the inability to achieve one's ends or, alternatively, the inability to achieve one's ends when in opposition to others. Seeman (1972) views the belief in external control as synonymous with an awareness of powerlessness. Structural inconsistency is a situation, common in the lower socioeconomic positions, in which society defines certain goals, purposes, or interests as legitimate and desirable and also defines the allowable procedures for moving toward the objectives, but does not provide adequate resources and opportunities for achieving the objectives through legitimate means. (Merton, 1938). Seeman points out that belief in external control is similar to Merton's concept of the anomie that results from structural inconsistency. (The major difference is that Merton's concept is based on the idea of a gap between desirable ends and *acceptable* means, whereas belief in external control is a perceived gap between desirable ends and *available* means.) Alienated labor is a condition under which the worker does not decide what to produce, does not design the production process, and does not own the product (Braverman, 1974). It leads to self-estrangement: the sense of being separate from that part of one's thoughts, actions, and experiences given over to the control of others. Belief in an external locus of control is a learned, generalized world view that encompasses a sense of powerlessness, strain, and self-estrangement. It is learned in the course of everyday life and is the first step in the descent to paranoia. The individual who believes in

external control is readily moved by events and experiences to the next step: mistrust.

Mistrust and the Loss of Common Faith

Mistrust is a loss of faith in other people. It is the cognitive habit of interpreting the intentions and behavior of others as unsupportive, self-seeking, and devious. How does someone lose faith and come to mistrust others? One possibility is prior victimization of the person or of others known to the person. We expect that mistrust is greatest where victimization is greatest. Studies show that persons in the lower social classes are more likely to be victims of assault, robbery, purse snatching, pocket picking, personal larceny, rape and attempted rape (Hindelang et al., 1978; Parisi et al., 1979). Life under such threatening conditions promotes mistrust. Persons in the lower social classes are more likely to worry about having their homes broken into and burglarized, being robbed at gunpoint, being raped, or being cheated by corporations, and they are more likely to fear walking alone at night near their homes and to have changed their activities because of a fear of crime (Parisi et al., 1979; Riger et al., 1981). Of course, outright crime is not the only way in which lower-class persons are victimized. As Kohn puts it, lower-class persons live "in an environment where one may be subject to diverse and often unpredictable risks of exploitation and victimization" (Kohn, 1973:78). Myers and Roberts (1959) note that lower-class neurotics are much more suspicious of people around them than middle-class neurotics are. The lower-class patients felt exploited, believed that society is organized against them, and have a deep mistrust of its institutional representatives. The association between mistrust and low socioeconomic status is not limited to mental patients. Community surveys show that mistrust is inversely related to education, occupational status, and income in the general population (Langner and Michael, 1963; Grabb, 1979; Campbell et al., 1976). Just as the belief in external control is understandable among those who are powerless, mistrust is understandable among those who are exploited and victimized.

Although it is possible to incorporate both mistrust and belief in external control in a single overarching construct, and thus to combine measures of each in a single index, we treat the two as distinct habits of interpretation. Although the theorists working within the authoritarianism tradition view both mistrust and belief in external control as aspects of a unified personality complex (Lipset, 1959; Gabennesch, 1972; Kohn, 1973), theorists

working in the alienation or social-learning traditions treat them as separate learned and generalized expectancies (Rotter, 1966, 1980). Practically speaking, the desirability of treating mistrust and belief in external control as two aspects of a unified world view or as distinct expectancies depends on the purposes of the study and the nature of the model being explored. We treat them as distinct habits of interpretation for three reasons. First, we view powerlessness and victimization as separate objective characteristics of life in the lower social classes having distinct subjective representations. Second, we view the development of paranoia as a series of increasingly specific and alienated cognitions, with belief in external control developing into mistrust and then paranoia. Third, it is possible that belief in external control does not in itself lead to mistrust. Someone who lacks a sense of personal efficacy but is not a target of victimization and exploitation may not tend to develop generalized mistrust. Thus, it is possible that belief in external control only develops into mistrust in the presence of victimization and exploitation, as indicated by low socioeconomic status. In order to explore these ideas we treat mistrust and belief in external control as distinct cognitive habits.

Previous Findings

Belief in external control is common, as well as understandable, where the individual has little power, is faced with a wide gap between means and ends, or often participates in alienated labor. A low socioeconomic position—marked by low income, education, and prestige—is a condition under which many people learn that powerful others and unpredictable forces control their lives. Several studies find that belief in external control is inversely related to social class (Kohn, 1973; Farris and Glenn, 1976; Wheaton, 1980). In addition, a culture may emphasize a collective or familistic orientation in which the individual's identity and welfare are derived from the family and pseudofamily and the individual's will is bound to that of the group, or it may provide comparatively little in the way of tools, skills, and information useful for mastery of the environment. In particular, Mexicans are often described as fatalistic (Madsen, 1964), and are more likely than Anglos to believe in external control (Jessor et al., 1968; Coleman et al., 1966: Table 10; Almond and Verba, 1963). However, belief in external control may not be a characteristic of Mexican culture per se, but may actually be due to the poor socioeconomic conditions under which many Mexicans and Mexican

Americans live (Farris and Glenn, 1976; Holmes et al., 1978).

Although there are few studies of the relationship between social class and paranoid beliefs, their results are consistent and in the direction we predict. In an aggregate-level analysis, Faris and Dunham (1939) find that the rates of treated paranoid schizophrenia in various parts of Chicago are negatively related to ecological indicators of social class. Myers and Roberts (1959) find that paranoid beliefs are far more common among low socioeconomic status mental patients than among higher-status patients, controlling for whether the patient is neurotic or psychotic. The Dohrenwends (1969) find a negative relationship between the number of years of formal education and the number of paranoid beliefs reported by respondents living in New York City. They also find some evidence that the correlation between paranoid beliefs and social position may be biased by response tendencies such as acquiescence and giving socially approved answers. In summary, all three studies find a negative relationship between social class and paranoia, although one study indicates that we should take response bias into account when testing our model.

Hypotheses

According to our model, paranoia develops from more general cognitions which in turn develop from the character of life in certain social positions. Two objective characteristics of low socioeconomic status are especially important in the development of the generalized beliefs that lead to paranoia: powerlessness tends to produce a belief in external control, and victimization and exploitation tend to produce mistrust. Once a belief in external control is established, it interacts with the threatening conditions of life in the lower social classes. Awareness of possible victimization, and of the dire consequences of victimization for an economically marginal person, combines with a belief in external control to produce mistrust. Although mistrust may actually help protect the individual from victimization, it tends to develop into paranoia. As a consequence, paranoia is more common in the lower social classes.

If belief in external control, mistrust, and paranoia form a developmental sequence of cognitive traits, then we expect to find that belief in external control and paranoia have a smaller correlation with each other than each has with mistrust (which is the link between them); that belief in external control has a direct effect on mistrust, controlling for social class and Mexican heritage; that mistrust has a

direct effect on paranoia, controlling for class, heritage, and belief in external control; and that mistrust has the strongest direct effect on paranoia of any variable, controlling for the others, so that most of the effect of other variables on paranoia is indirect through mistrust.

If powerlessness and victimization are the conditions of social life that set the developmental sequence in motion, then we expect to find that belief in external control, mistrust, and paranoia are each negatively correlated with social class (with the size of the correlation decreasing in sequential order); that low social class and belief in external control interact in their effects on mistrust, so that either alone has little or no effect but the two in combination have a powerful effect on the development of mistrust; and that mistrust and paranoia are more common among persons of Mexican heritage primarily because of lower socioeconomic status and greater belief in external control.

SAMPLE

Data were collected by means of a survey questionnaire administered in El Paso, Texas, and Juarez, Mexico, companion cities on opposite sides of the border separating Mexico and the United States. The survey was a comparative cross-sectional study of social stressors and psychological and physical symptoms among Mexican, Mexican-American, and Anglo adults age 18 to 65. Blacks, Orientals, American Indians, Jews, and Persons not raised in the U.S. or Mexico were excluded from the survey. In El Paso, dwellings were randomly selected from the city directory and one adult between the ages of 18 and 65 was then randomly selected from each household. Of the 693 dwellings selected from the city directory, 173 contained ineligible respondents. Among the remainder, there were 142 refusals, 48 noncontacts, and 330 completions. The unadjusted response rate in El Paso is 63 percent. If it is assumed that the proportion of ineligible respondents was the same among noncontacts and refusals as among persons who were contacted and did not refuse, then the adjusted response rate is 73 percent. In Juarez a multistage area sample based on aerial photographs was used because of the absence of accurate information on which to base a sampling frame. There were 8 ineligibles, 32 refusals, 14 noncontacts, and 133 completions. The unadjusted response rate is 74 percent and the adjusted response rate is 75 percent. The total number of cases is 463.

The questionnaire was written in English and then translated into Spanish by a sociologist with a medical background. It was reviewed by

two native speakers of Spanish, revised, and reviewed again by a native speaker who holds a master's degree in social work. The questionnaire was administered in Spanish or English, depending on the respondent's preference.

MEASUREMENT OF THE VARIABLES

The variables in our analyses fall into two broad classes: sociocultural and social-psychological. The sociocultural variables include social class (parental social class, years of formal education, and current social class), ethnicity (Mexican heritage), minority status, sex, and age. The social-psychological variables include belief in external control, mistrust, paranoia, and two factors that might lead to response bias: acquiescence and the tendency to give socially desirable responses. The measurement of each variable is described below.

There are three social class variables. The first is parental social class, which is measured as the unweighted sum of three standardized components: the prestige of the father's or primary breadwinner's occupation, as measured using Duncan's Socio-Economic Index (Reiss et al., 1961); the father's years of formal education; and the mother's years of formal education (alpha reliability = .77). The second social class variable is the respondent's years of formal education. The third is the respondent's current socioeconomic status, which is measured as an unweighted sum of five standardized components: the occupational prestige, as measured by Duncan's Socio-Economic Index, of the respondent's current or most recent job (nonemployed women are assigned a score based on their husband's occupation); the respondent's annual family income, including bonuses, tips, commissions, public assistance, welfare, social security, property sale, interest, dividends, pensions, veteran's payments, alimony, child support, and additional income from others living with the family (before standardization, income was measured in dollars, with pesos converted to dollars according to the exchange rate at the time of the survey); and the interviewer's Likert-scale ratings of the social class of the respondent, the respondent's neighborhood, and the respondent's home (alpha = .86).

Mexican heritage is measured as the unweighted sum of six variables: surname (Spanish = 1, other = 0); the country in which the respondent's father was born (Mexico = 1, Central or South America or Spain = .5, others = 0); the country in which the respondent's mother was born (same coding as above); the country in which the respondent was born (Mexico = 1, U.S. = 0); the dominant country

in which the respondent was raised (same coding); and whether or not the respondent ever lived in Juarez (yes = 1, no = 0) ($\alpha = .93$).²

The effects of ethnicity may be confounded by the fact that persons of Mexican heritage living in the United States constitute a minority group. It is therefore necessary to measure minority status as well as Mexican heritage. Minority status is a dichotomous variable that equals one if the respondent lives in El Paso and has either a Spanish surname or a Mexican father or mother. Otherwise it equals zero. Thus, persons of Mexican heritage living in the United States have minority status. Persons of Mexican heritage living in Mexico and persons not of Mexican heritage living in the United States do not.

The respondent's sex is coded 1 for females and 0 for males. Age is coded in number of years.

Turning to the social-psychological variables, belief in external control is measured using a modified form of Rotter's (1966) internal-external locus of control scale (Holmes et al., 1978).³ Nine of the statements are worded so that endorsement indicates belief in internal control (e.g., "What happens to me is my own doing.") and eleven of the statements are worded so that endorsement indicates belief in external control (e.g., "I have often found that what is going to happen will happen."). The internally worded items are coded 0 = strongly agree, 1 = agree, 2 = undecided, 3 = disagree, and 4 = strongly disagree. Externally worded items are coded in the opposite way from 0 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. An individual's score is the sum of responses divided by the number of items answered ($\alpha = .65$).

Mistrust is measured as the subject's aver-

age response to two questions that were each asked twice, using different formats in different parts of the interview. In the first format, the respondents are asked, "How often has this happened to you in the last 12 months?" The two mistrust items are, "In the past year, how often have you felt it is safest to trust no one?" and "How often have you been very suspicious, didn't trust anybody?" The response categories are never (coded 0), almost never (1), sometimes (2), fairly often (3), and very often (4). In the second format, the respondents are told, "I'm going to ask you about certain kinds of people. Some of them may be like you and others may not be like you. I will describe a certain kind of person, and then ask you to tell me whether that person is not at all like you, very little like you, somewhat like you, much like you, or very much like you. Think of a person who . . ." The items of interest are, ". . . feels it is safer to trust no one," and ". . . is very suspicious and doesn't trust anybody." The response categories are coded from 0 to 4 respectively ($\alpha = .79$).

Paranoia is measured with four questions. The respondents are asked, for the period of a year before the interview, "How often have you believed you were being plotted against?"; "How often have you felt that people were saying all kinds of things about you behind your back?"; "How often have you felt you had enemies who really wished to do you harm?"; and "How often have you been sure that everyone is against you?" The response categories are never (0), almost never (1), sometimes (2), fairly often (3), and very often (4) ($\alpha = .75$).

The tendency to acquiesce is measured by the tendency to agree or strongly agree with items in the external control index irrespective of their content. Agreeing with 9 of the items indicates an internal locus of control while agreeing with the other 11 indicates an external locus of control. Agreeing with both types of statement indicates acquiescence. This index meets the criteria of a yeasaying index as discussed by Carr (1971): the items are positively worded, they don't have right answers, and they are practically clichés about social and interpersonal issues. Yeasaying is measured as the number of "agree" or "strongly agree" responses to the 20 items ($\alpha = .69$).

The tendency to give socially desirable responses is measured by a shortened 15-item version of the Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scale (Crowne and Marlowe, 1964). The items in the index constitute a sample drawn from a universe composed of behaviors that are socially desirable but relatively uncommon or socially undesirable but relatively common. Only items that have face validity as

² Although ethnicity is often treated as a categorical attribute, we choose to measure Mexican heritage as a sum of indicators for several reasons: (1) No single component or combination of components is completely satisfactory as a basis for deciding who is and who is not of Mexican heritage. (2) The larger number of scale points is a more accurate reflection of the true diversity of background in El Paso-Juarez. (3) The more refined scale with its greater variance allows a more precise and complete estimate of the effects of Mexican heritage than a dichotomous indicator does.

³ The original forced-choice format is changed to a Likert-scale format, one of each pair of forced-choice items is selected at random, filler items and school-oriented items are deleted, and some statements are made less extreme, since the extremity appropriate for forced-choice is not necessary in the Likert-scale format. Copies of the items are available from the authors on request.

conventional values in both Anglo and Mexican societies are included. Any item that might be culture specific or irrelevant in Mexican society is dropped. For example, items that appear in the original Marlowe-Crowne index concerning voting and checking the car before a long trip are eliminated. Items that could be confounded with psychopathology (e.g., "There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things"), or internal-external locus of control (e.g., "When people have a misfortune they only get what they deserve.") are also eliminated ($\alpha = .70$).

PROCEDURE

In order to test our hypotheses, we develop a structural equation model relating the sociocultural and social-psychological variables. Modeling proceeded in four steps, each of which is described below.

We begin by making a set of causal-order assumptions. There are six levels in our model. Beginning with the exogenous variables, which we call the highest level, and moving sequentially to the final dependent variable, which is the lowest level, we assume that each variable at a higher level may have a direct effect on any of those at a lower level, but the variables at lower levels have insubstantial effects or no effects on those at higher levels. The exogenous variables, at the first and highest level, are the respondent's sex, age, ethnic heritage, minority status, and parental socioeconomic status. The number of years of the respondent's formal education is at the second level; current socioeconomic status is at the third; belief in external control, acquiescence, and the tendency to give socially desirable responses are at the fourth; mistrust at the fifth; and paranoia at the sixth and lowest level. This order reflects our belief that the unequal distribution of paranoia is structured by the sociocultural position in which a person is born and raised, which influences the individual's current social status, which conditions the individual's sense of efficacy, which encourages or inhibits mistrust, which predisposes the individual to paranoid thoughts.⁴ Because our

data are cross-sectional they cannot be used to demonstrate the validity of our causal-order assumptions. However, the data could fail to substantiate our theory if, given our causal-order assumptions, we fail to find the hypothesized chain of effects. In this sense, the data in combination with the assumptions provide a test of the theory.

We begin our data analysis by estimating an unrestricted model. Each lower-level variable is regressed on all of the higher-level ones. Next we restrict the model by eliminating from each equation any variable with a standardized coefficient of less than .10 and a t-test probability level greater than .10 (one-tailed test). If multicollinearity creates a situation in which the members of a set of variables have insignificant t-values when placed in a regression together but have significant values when placed in the same equation individually, then we choose that member of the set on the closest causal level to the dependent variable and restrict the effects of the other members of

phrenia and Paranoid Disorder—are very rare. Because they are rare they can account for only a tiny fraction of the variance in paranoia found in the community, and they are not likely to appear in a sample of less than five hundred persons. Leaving them out of the model is unlikely to influence the results. Paranoid personality is a third diagnostic category recognized by psychiatrists, and is essentially the type of paranoia that we are investigating. (Psychiatrists diagnose it as a mental disorder only when it interferes with social or occupational functioning or results in subjective distress.) Organic Brain Syndrome is a fourth psychiatric cause of paranoia. It is associated with aging and with the intoxication and withdrawal produced by amphetamines, alcohol, and other drugs. Its major features are clouded consciousness and the loss of intellectual abilities—particularly memory impairment. Organic Brain Syndrome is likely to be the most common cause of paranoia other than the social-psychological factors explored in this study. To see if leaving it out of the model distorts our results we computed an index of five items: mental confusion, loosing one's train of thought, difficulty concentrating, trouble remembering things, and feeling one's mind does not work as well as it used to ($\alpha = .75$). Although the index has a fairly large correlation with paranoia (.41), it has a much smaller one with mistrust (.15) and is essentially uncorrelated with belief in external control (.02). As a consequence, leaving Organic Brain Syndrome out of the present model does not substantially bias the results. We estimated several reciprocal-effects models that use the Organic Brain Syndrome index as an instrument for paranoia. Although the models are somewhat preliminary, they indicate that there is no effect of paranoia on the belief in external control and that the results presented in this study do not change in any substantive way with the alternative model specification. Additional information is available from the authors on request.

⁴ The direction of causality that we assume is consistent with a sociological point of view: certain social-structural positions produce increasingly alienated beliefs and cognitions that eventually develop into paranoia. However, psychiatric theory might argue for the opposite direction of causality: organic or intrapsychic processes that are not social or social-psychological in nature cause paranoia, which then produces mistrust and belief in external control. According to the American Psychiatric Association (1980) the two most serious psychiatric illnesses that involve paranoia—Paranoid Schizo-

Table 1. Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations (N = 463)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	6 × 7	9	10
1. Sex (Female)	1.000										
2. Age	.024	1.000									
3. Parents' SES	-.077	-.085	1.000								
4. Mexican Heritage	.024	-.042	-.569	1.000							
5. Years of Formal Education	-.051	-.132	.631	-.655	1.000						
6. Respondent's SES	-.081	.062	.555	-.637	.721	1.000					
7. Belief in External Control	.187	.064	-.363	.421	-.470	-.455	1.000				
8. Socially Desirable Response	-.012	.091	-.295	.251	-.241	-.227	.078	1.000			
6 × 7. External × Respondent's SES	-.067	.033	.562	-.633	.727	.986	-.419	-.233	1.000		
9. Mistrust	.129	-.028	-.297	.307	-.366	-.380	.329	.038	-.384	1.000	
10. Paranoia	.104	-.135	-.122	.151	-.172	-.222	.148	-.109	-.229	.482	1.000
Mean	.611	37.422	-.041	3.652	10.426	-.013	1.983	10.075	-.143	1.032	.372
Standard Deviation	.488	10.988	.844	2.843	4.862	.792	.320	2.457	1.555	.956	.555

the set to zero. After reestimating the equations we restrict to zero any effect with a t-test probability level of less than .05 (one-tailed test).⁵ As a final step, we test all possible two-way interactions of variables in the restricted equations predicting mistrust and paranoia. Each interaction term is entered into the equation separately. Any interaction that significantly increases the R² (p ≤ .05) is included in the final equation. As the final step in our analysis, we interpret the model in terms of its support or nonsupport for our hypotheses.

RESULTS

The results of our data analysis are given in Tables 1 and 2 and in Figure 1. Table 1 gives the mean and standard deviation of each variable and the correlation between each pair of variables. Table 2 gives the regression equations of the final model, including the unstandardized regression coefficients, the standard error of each unstandardized regression coefficient, and the R² of each equation. Figure 1 illustrates the model and gives standardized coefficients. Minority status and acquiescence response style do not appear in the figure or tables because they are significantly related to belief in external control, mistrust, or paranoia when social class, ethnicity, sex, and age are controlled.

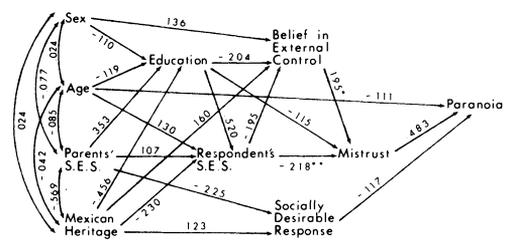
Belief in External Control, Mistrust, and the Development of Paranoia

Our first hypothesis is that belief in external control, mistrust, and paranoia form a devel-

opmental sequence of cognitions. The zero-order correlations show the predicted pattern: Belief in external control and paranoia have a small correlation with each other (.148), but each has a larger correlation with mistrust (.329 and .482, respectively). Thus, mistrust appears to be the link between them.

The path model also supports our hypothesis that belief in external control, mistrust, and paranoia form a developmental sequence of cognitions. As illustrated in Figure 1, belief in external control has a direct, positive effect on mistrust, controlling for social class, Mexican heritage, sex, age, and the tendency to give

Figure 1. Path Model (Standardized Coefficients) Relating Belief in External Control, Mistrust, and Paranoia to Socioeconomic Status, Mexican Heritage, Age, and Sex



*This is the multiple regression coefficient representing the effect of belief in external control on mistrust if the respondent's socioeconomic status is average (SES = -.013), multiplied by the ratio of belief in external control's standard deviation to that of mistrust.

**This is the multiple regression coefficient representing the effect of the respondent's socioeconomic status on mistrust if the respondent's belief in external control is average (belief in external control = 1.983), multiplied by the ratio of the standard deviation of respondent's SES to that of mistrust.

⁵ None of the effects fixed to zero in the final model had a P-value smaller than .15 in the unrestricted regressions.

Table 2. Regression Equations for the Restricted Path Model

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable					
	5 Education	6 Current SES	7 External	8 Soc. Des. Response	9 Mistrust	10 Paranoia
1. Sex (Female)	-1.096 ^a (.318) ^b		.089 (.027)			
2. Age	-.053 (.014)	.009 (.002)				-.006 (.002)
3. Parents' SES	2.032 (.225)	.101 (.038)		-.655 (.160)		
4. Mexican Heritage	-.781 (.064)	-.064 (.012)	.018 (.006)	.107 (.047)		
5. Years of Formal Education		.085 (.007)	-.013 (.004)		-.023 (.013)	
6. Respondent's Current SES			-.079 (.025)		.324 (.321)	
7. Belief in External Control					.578 (.151)	
8. Socially Desirable Response						-.027 (.009)
6 × 7. External × Current SES					-.296 (.163)	
9. Mistrust						.281 (.024)
10. Paranoia						
Intercept	16.007	-1.009	2.001	9.658	-.026	.560
R ²	.554	.590	.277	.097	.193	.261

^a Unstandardized regression coefficients.

^b Standard errors in parentheses.

socially desirable responses. There is an interaction between belief in external control and socioeconomic status: the lower one's current socioeconomic status the more belief in external control leads to mistrust (this interaction is described in more detail below). Figure 1 shows that, at the average level of current socioeconomic status for the total sample, belief in external control has a standardized effect of .195 on mistrust. This corresponds to an unstandardized coefficient of .582. Mistrust is the key to paranoia. As shown in Table 2, paranoia is directly influenced by three variables: older persons are less inclined towards paranoia ($b = -.006$), persons who tend to give socially approved answers report less paranoia ($b = -.027$), and persons who are mistrustful are inclined toward greater paranoia ($b = .281$). The standardized coefficients in Figure 1 show that mistrust has, by far, the greatest impact on paranoia: the standardized effect of mistrust is .483, compared to $-.111$ and $-.117$ for age and the tendency to give socially approved answers, respectively.

Mistrust and Paranoia in the Lower Social Classes

Our second hypothesis is that mistrust and paranoia are more common in the lower social

classes, largely or entirely because belief in external control is more common in the lower social classes and interacts with low socioeconomic status to produce mistrust. Table 1 shows that belief in external control is inversely related to all three social class variables. The correlations with parental socioeconomic status, education, and current socioeconomic status are $-.363$, $-.470$, and $-.455$, respectively. Similarly, mistrust is correlated with the three social class variables $-.297$, $-.366$, and $-.380$, respectively, and paranoia is correlated $-.122$, $-.172$, and $-.222$, respectively. Thus, belief in external control, mistrust, and paranoia are all negatively associated with socioeconomic status, with the degree of association diminishing sequentially.

Table 2 shows that there is an interaction between current SES and belief in external control, such that the impact of each depends on the level of the other: the higher the current SES the less that belief in external control leads to mistrust, and the higher the belief in external control the more that low socioeconomic status increases the expected level of mistrust. One interpretation of the interaction is that neither belief in external control nor low SES alone are sufficient to produce mistrust. Both must be present for either to have an effect. The person who believes in external

control who might otherwise come to mistrust people is not inclined to do so if he or she has a high current socioeconomic status. Likewise, the person currently in a low socioeconomic position who might otherwise come to mistrust people is not inclined to do so if he or she does not believe in external control.

Because of the interaction between belief in external control and the respondent's current socioeconomic status it is not possible to say that the relationship between mistrust and social class is largely explained by belief in external control in the sense that is usually meant in path analysis. Nevertheless, in the absence of belief in external control, education has only a small impact on mistrust and current SES has little or none. Current SES has a strong relationship with mistrust only when belief in external control is present. In this sense, belief in external control explains most of the relationship between socioeconomic status (past and present) and mistrust.

As expected, mistrust and paranoia are more common among persons of Mexican heritage, primarily because Mexicans tend to have low socioeconomic status and to believe in external control. Table 1 shows that Mexican heritage is correlated with mistrust .307 and with paranoia .151. Mexican heritage is strongly and negatively correlated with parental socioeconomic status, education, and current socioeconomic status ($r = -.569, -.655, \text{ and } -.637$, respectively), and it is positively correlated with belief in external control ($r = .421$).

Mexican heritage is related to the expected level of mistrust indirectly through its effects on both belief in external control and current socioeconomic status. As illustrated in Figure 1, Mexican heritage decreases the expected current socioeconomic status directly (path coefficient = $-.230$) and indirectly through its association with parental socioeconomic status and education (compound path = $-.569 [(0.353)(.520) + .107] + (-.456)(.520) = -.165 - .237 = -.402$). Similarly, Mexican heritage increases belief in external control directly (path coefficient = $.160$) and indirectly through its association with parental SES, education, and current SES (compound path = $-.569 [(0.353)(-.204) + (.107)(-.195)] + (-.456)(-.204) + (-.230)(-.195) = .053 + .093 + .045 = .191$). By simultaneously increasing belief in external control and decreasing current socioeconomic status, Mexican heritage increases the expected level of mistrust.

As Figure 1 illustrates, the relationship between Mexican heritage and paranoia is largely explained by the greater levels of mistrust among persons with low socioeconomic status who believe in external control, since Mexican

heritage has no direct effect on the expected levels of paranoia. Although Mexican heritage increases the expected level of paranoia through its relationship with low socioeconomic status and belief in external control, it also tends to decrease the reported frequency of paranoid ideas because it is associated with a greater tendency to give socially approved responses. For the average Mexican, this tendency is more than counterbalanced by the effects of low SES and belief in external control.

Sex and Age

Before turning to the discussion we will summarize our findings concerning two sociodemographic control variables: sex and age. As illustrated in Figure 1, females believe in external control more than males. Sex has both a direct effect on belief in external control ($.136$) and an indirect one via education ($-.110 \times -.204 = .022$). This means that the effect of low current socioeconomic status on mistrust and paranoia is greater among females than among males. Figure 1 also shows that age has a direct negative effect on the expected level of paranoia. (It should be remembered that the sample was restricted to persons age 18 through 65.) This is counterbalanced slightly by the fact that older people tend to have lower education, which leads to belief in external control and thus to mistrust and paranoia, but it is also reinforced by the fact that age is associated with higher current socioeconomic status, which reduces the expected level of mistrust and thus of paranoia. In summary, females tend to be more mistrusting and paranoid than males, and older people tend to be less mistrusting and paranoid than younger people.

DISCUSSION

Paranoia is a profound form of social alienation. The belief that you have enemies who are conspiring to harm you is not simply a sense of detachment from relations with others, it is a sense of antagonism and hostility in one's relations. Fischer (1973) points out that alienation exists when the individual senses powerlessness over, lack of benefit from, dissociation from, or negative relationship with a particular object or referent. In the case of paranoia the person senses a negative relationship with a set of persons in the social environment. The perception may be correct or it may be a delusion, although it seems likely that such a delusion has self-fulfilling tendencies (Kohn, 1973; Lemert, 1962). In either case, the perception

itself is real and represents a deep alienation of the person from at least some of the people in his or her social world.

There is little prior information about the distribution of paranoia in a community population or about the factors that might mediate and explain the relationship between social-structural variables and paranoia. However, past research provides a strong theoretical and empirical basis from which to infer both the relationship of paranoia to social position and the factors that account for the relationship. Powerlessness and victimization are objective conditions of life in social positions characterized by low income, education, and status. These objective conditions constitute a stream of experience for the individual and his or her friends, family, and neighbors, and thus provide a base of information from which the person develops an understanding of his or her relation to the world and to people in the world. These understandings are the connection between social position and paranoia:

Belief in external control is the individual's sense of personal powerlessness. We find that it is associated with low current socioeconomic status, low education, being female, and being of Mexican heritage. These results underscore Fischer's observation that the factors producing a sense of powerlessness "are varied but largely reduce to the actual lack of power, such as being black or poor" (Fischer, 1976:170). One possible exception to this rule is the relationship of Mexican heritage to belief in external control, which is not entirely explained by the low socioeconomic position of many Mexicans. It is possible that Mexican culture encourages belief in external control, or, conversely, that Anglo culture discourages it, through purely cultural mechanisms such as the content of stories, songs, proverbs, and so on. However, it is also possible that there are effective skills and resources not transmitted through or associated with education and socioeconomic status that are not as widespread in Mexican society as in Anglo society. In either case, the major sources of explained variation in the belief in external control are social-structural positions of comparative powerlessness.

Mistrust is the individual's sense of being a potential target of victimization and exploitation. We find that it is most common in positions of low socioeconomic status, where victimization and exploitation are most common. Interestingly, the threat of victimization posed by life in the lower classes is not sufficient in itself to produce mistrust. Individuals who have low socioeconomic status yet have a sense of being effective forces in their own

lives are not inclined to develop mistrust.⁶ As with the belief in external control, mistrust is a learned and generalized expectancy that arises from the objective conditions of life in lower socioeconomic positions.

If the threat of victimization and exploitation turn belief in external control into mistrust, what conditions turn mistrust into paranoia? Lemert's (1962) microdynamic study indicates that paranoia emerges in groups of people who depend on each other to achieve their goals and whose cooperation requires trust. In such a situation failure is readily and reasonably attributable to others. When an untrusting member suffers a failure or loss of status and begins to question and test the loyalty and support of the group, and to demand explicit statements of its informal rules, the others respond with collusion and progressive exclusion of the individual. Thus, where adaptation and success depend on the help of others, the belief that others cannot be trusted evolves into hostile relations and paranoid beliefs.

There are many reasons to think that belief in external control, mistrust, and paranoia have important consequences for the individual's emotional state. Studies show that the belief in external control is an important factor in the development of depression (Wheaton, 1980), while emotional and instrumental social support discourage the development of depression (Williams et al., 1981). These two findings may be connected. Mistrust and paranoia may interfere with the development, maintenance, and use of social support networks, and thus form a link between belief in external control and depression. The mistrusting or paranoid individual may not seek social support when in need, may reject offers of such support, and may be uncomfortable with any support that is given. Studies of university students find that suspicious individuals are less trustworthy themselves, are considered untrustworthy by others, have fewer friends, and are not as happy or well adjusted as trusting individuals (Rotter, 1980). As Rotter (1980:1) puts it, "Common sense tells us that interpersonal trust is an important variable affecting human relationships at all levels . . . as distrust in-

⁶ Although low education and socioeconomic status are associated with belief in external control, some low-status persons do not feel as powerless as others do. Besides random variation, there may be a number of reasons for this: some (especially the young) may feel that their condition is temporary, some may delude themselves about their effectiveness and control, and some may find real means of effectiveness and power in friendship groups or political, religious, and social organizations.

creases the social fabric disintegrates." One result of that disintegration may be a greater susceptibility to depression.

The question remains whether belief in external control, mistrust, and paranoia are adaptive for persons in low socioeconomic positions, even though the adaptation may have an emotional cost. Although selective caution is probably beneficial (Fischer, 1976), there is little evidence that mistrust and paranoia provide actual security and there are good reasons to think they are counterproductive. Experimental studies of university students find that trusting individuals are not more gullible than suspicious individuals when there is reason to think that caution may be warranted. The difference between trusting and suspicious individuals is that the former assume a person can be trusted unless there is evidence to the contrary, and they are more aware of information that allows them to make such distinctions (Rotter, 1980). This allows pairs of trusting individuals to establish cooperative relationships whenever doing so is mutually beneficial (Deutsch, 1960). In contrast, people who are suspicious or paranoid may help create and maintain the very conditions that seem to justify their beliefs (Lemert, 1962). Their preemptive actions may elicit hostile responses, and their diminished ability to participate in networks of reciprocity and mutual assistance may have several consequences: without allies they are easy targets, when victimized or exploited they cannot share their economic or emotional burden with others, and by not providing aid and assistance to others they weaken the community's power to forestall victimization and exploitation and to limit its consequences. Although mistrust and paranoia are understandable, and in a sense reasonable, under conditions of powerlessness and the threat of victimization and exploitation, their effectiveness as adaptive strategies is questionable.

Belief in external control, mistrust, and paranoia form a stairway of deepening alienation. The individual descends from a sense of powerlessness or lack of control, to one of being used and abused and, finally, to one of being attacked. When other people in one's life have become a hostile army, social alienation is at its deepest.

REFERENCES

- Almond, Gabriel and Sidney Verba
1963 *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- American Psychiatric Association
1980 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental*

- Disorders (Third Edition)*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association.
- Braverman, Harry
1974 *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse and Willard L. Rodgers
1976 *The Quality of American Life: Perceptions, Evaluations, and Satisfactions*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Carr, L.
1971 "The Srole items and acquiescence." *American Sociological Review* 36:287-93.
- Coleman, James S. et al.
1966 *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Crowne, Douglas P. and David Marlowe
1964 *The Approval Motive*. New York: Wiley.
- Deutsch, Morton
1960 "Trust, trustworthiness, and the F Scale." *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*. 61:138-40.
- Dohrenwend, Bruce P. and Barbara Snell Dohrenwend
1969 *Social Status and Psychological Disorders (Third Edition)*. New York: Wiley.
- Faris, Robert L. and H. Warren Dunham
1939 *Mental Disorders in Urban Areas*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Farris, Buford E. and Norval D. Glenn
1976 "Fatalism and familism among Anglos and Mexican Americans in San Antonio." *Sociology and Social Research* 60:393-402.
- Fischer, Claude S.
1973 "Alienation: trying to bridge the chasm." *British Journal of Sociology* 27:35-49.
1976 *The Urban Experience*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Gabennesch, Howard
1972 "Authoritarianism as world view." *American Journal of Sociology* 77:857-75.
- Grabb, Edward G.
1979 "Working-class authoritarianism and tolerance of outgroups: a reassessment." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 43:36-47.
- Hindelang, Michael S., Michael R. Gottfredson and James Garafalo
1978 *Victims of Personal Crime*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger.
- Holmes, Malcolm D., Dianne T. Fairbank and Richard L. Hough
1978 "The effects of ethnicity and socioeconomic status on perceptions of control in a cross-cultural setting." Los Angeles: Life Change and Illness Project Working Paper #18.
- Jessor, Richard, Theodore D. Graves, Robert C. Hanson and Shirley J. Jessor
1968 *Society, Personality, and Deviant Behavior*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Kohn, Melvin
1973 "Social class and schizophrenia: a critical review and reformulation." *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 7:60-79.

- Lemert, Edwin M.
1962 "Paranoia and the dynamics of exclusion." *Sociometry* 25:2-20.
- Langner, Thomas S. and Stanley T. Michael
1963 *Life Stress and Mental Health*. New York: Free Press.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin
1959 "Democracy and working-class authoritarianism." *American Sociological Review* 24:482-502.
- Madsen, William
1964 *The Mexican Americans of South Texas*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Merton, Robert K.
1938 "Social structure and anomie." *American Sociological Review* 3:672-82.
- Myers, Jerome K. and Bertram H. Roberts
1959 *Family and Class Dynamics in Mental Illness*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Parisi, Nicolette, Michael R. Gottfredson, Michael J. Hindelang and Timothy J. Flanagan
1979 *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics—1978*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Reiss, Albert J., Jr., Otis D. Duncan, Paul K. Hatt and Cecil C. North
1961 *Occupations and Social Status*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Riger, Stephanie, Robert K. LeBailly and Margaret T. Gordon
1981 "Community ties and urbanites' fear of crime: an ecological investigation." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 9:653-65.
- Rotter, Julian B.
1966 "Generalized expectancies for internal vs. external control of reinforcement." *Psychological Monographs* 80:1-28.
1980 "Interpersonal trust, trustworthiness, and gullibility." *American Psychologist* 35:1-7.
- Seeman, Melvin
1972 "Social learning theory and the theory of mass society." Pp. 395-404 in Julian B. Rotter, June Chance, and E. Jerry Phares (eds.), *Applications of a Social Learning Theory of Personality*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Wheaton, Blair
1980 "The sociogenesis of psychological disorder: an attributional theory." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 21:100-24.
- Williams, Ann W., John E. Ware and Cathy A. Donald
1981 "A model of mental health, life events, and social supports applicable to general populations." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 22:324-36.