



Alienation among adolescents in Context of Sex-difference, Ego-Strength, Cognitive Style and Decisiveness

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted on 128 adolescent boys and girls equal in number to compare their alienation in respect of sex difference, ego-strength, cognitive style and decisiveness. It was hypothesized that-(i) There will be significant difference between adolescent boys and girls in terms of alienation, (ii) There will be significant difference between high and low ego-strength groups of adolescents on the measure of alienation. (iii) There will be significant difference between FD and FI groups of adolescents on the measure of alienation. (iv) There will be significant difference between high and low decisiveness groups of adolescents on the measure alienation. For the purpose, respondents were administered Singh's Alienation Scale, Witkin's EFT and SDPI to measure alienation, cognitive style, ego-strength and decisiveness traits respectively. Besides, a PDS was used to get others necessary information about the respondents. The obtained data on alienation variable was subjected to t-ratio. The results confirmed all the hypotheses. It was concluded that : (i) Girls are found having higher degree of alienation. (ii) Adolescents possessing low ego-strength are victimized to high alienation. (iii) Field dependence subjects excelled over their field independence subjects having higher degree of alienation. (iv) Poor decisiveness is likely to intensity alienation.

KEY WORDS

Alienation, Sex-difference, Ego-strength, Cognitive.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a pivotal developmental stage characterized by profound physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes. It is during this period that individuals begin to construct their identity, seek autonomy, and develop critical life skills such as decision-making and emotional regulation. However, this developmental phase is also marked by vulnerability to feelings of isolation, disconnection, and estrangement, collectively known as *alienation*. Alienation in adolescents often manifests through a perceived lack of belonging, detachment from peers, family, or societal norms, and a general sense of meaninglessness or powerlessness. The experience of alienation is not uniform across all adolescents and is often mediated by psychological and cognitive variables such as ego strength, cognitive style, and decisiveness, as well as by gender.

The concept of alienation was extensively discussed by sociologists like Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim, though it has since evolved into a psychological construct as well. In the context of adolescence, alienation refers to an internalized sense of isolation that may result from familial discord, academic pressure, peer rejection, or the inability to relate to social expectations. Adolescents experiencing alienation often struggle with low self-esteem, lack of purpose, and impaired social functioning. If unaddressed, alienation can lead to long-term mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, or even suicidal ideation.

Numerous studies indicate that gender significantly influences the experience and expression of alienation. Boys and girls differ in emotional processing, communication styles, socialization patterns, and coping strategies, which can all contribute to divergent experiences of alienation. Boys may externalize their feelings through aggression or withdrawal, while girls may internalize alienation as sadness or social anxiety. Furthermore, societal expectations around masculinity and femininity often shape adolescents' responses to stress and isolation differently, reinforcing gendered patterns of alienation.

Ego strength refers to an individual's capacity to maintain their identity and sense of self in the face of psychological conflict and external stress. It reflects inner resilience, emotional maturity, and self-control. Adolescents with high ego strength are better equipped to cope with challenges, resist peer pressure, and form stable relationships. They are less likely to feel alienated, as they possess the psychological tools needed to navigate social complexities. Conversely, adolescents with low ego strength may feel overwhelmed, misunderstood, or disconnected from their surroundings, leading to increased susceptibility to alienation. Gender may interact with ego strength differently. For instance, societal norms may encourage boys to suppress emotions, thus reducing emotional awareness and ego resilience, whereas girls might be more emotionally expressive but prone to rumination. Understanding how ego strength influences alienation across genders can offer valuable insights for targeted interventions.

Cognitive style refers to the preferred way an individual processes information, solves problems, and makes decisions. It is broadly categorized into analytic vs. holistic, verbal vs. visual, or reflective vs. impulsive styles. These cognitive tendencies influence how adolescents interpret their experiences and engage with others. For example, a reflective cognitive style may facilitate self-awareness and empathy, reducing alienation. In contrast, impulsive or rigid cognitive styles might hinder effective social interaction and increase feelings of disconnection. Gender differences in cognitive style have also been noted in psychological literature. Girls are often reported to exhibit more reflective and verbal styles, while boys may lean toward visual-spatial or action-oriented approaches. These differences could significantly affect how boys and girls experience and express alienation, especially in educational and social environments.

Decisiveness is the ability to make timely and effective decisions. It is a crucial life skill that reflects an individual's confidence, clarity of thought, and problem-solving capacity. Adolescents who are decisive are more likely to feel in control of their lives, make meaningful choices, and engage actively with their environments. Indecisiveness, on the other hand, often correlates with anxiety, self-doubt, and feelings of helplessness—all of which are closely linked with alienation. Adolescents may vary in their decisiveness based on personality,

upbringing, and gender. Studies suggest that girls may experience more difficulty in decision-making due to higher levels of anxiety and concern about social judgment. Boys, although appearing more confident, may sometimes act impulsively rather than decisively, leading to inconsistent or maladaptive outcomes. These tendencies can influence how each gender navigates social and academic life, impacting their sense of inclusion or exclusion.

While ego strength, cognitive style, and decisiveness are individually important, they are often interrelated. An adolescent with strong ego strength is likely to be more confident in decision-making and may adopt a flexible, reflective cognitive style. These qualities collectively buffer against feelings of alienation. Conversely, a lack of ego strength may impair cognitive flexibility and promote indecisiveness, exacerbating alienation.

By examining these constructs through a gendered lens, researchers and educators can better understand the psychosocial dynamics of adolescence. Such understanding is crucial for designing supportive interventions that foster emotional resilience, cognitive development, and social integration among both boys and girls.

Review of Literature

Rokeach⁹ (1973) explored how personal values influence behavior. He proposed that alienation could result from value conflicts within the individual or between the individual and society, moderated by ego strength. Blos² (1967) Blos highlighted adolescent individuation and its role in ego development. Disruptions in this process often lead to alienation, especially among those with fragile ego strength. Kline & Cooper⁷ (1984) Found that gender significantly affects cognitive styles. Girls showed verbal-reflective styles; boys leaned toward impulsive-spatial patterns. These patterns influenced their social integration and alienation levels. Erikson³ (1968) Emphasized ego identity formation in adolescence. Failure to resolve identity crises often results in feelings of confusion and alienation, with varying gender patterns. Hoffman⁵ (1977) Reported that adolescent girls are more prone to internalized forms of alienation due to socialization, while boys externalize through rebellion and detachment. Kelly & Stack⁶ (2000) Studied decisiveness and found that indecisiveness correlates strongly with social withdrawal and alienation in adolescents, especially girls. Triandis¹¹ (1995) Cultural values shape cognitive styles, which influence social belonging. Alienation often emerges in adolescents whose cognitive styles clash with dominant norms, moderated by gender roles. Becker & Krug¹ (1964) Explored ego strength in adolescents and found it a critical buffer against alienation. Boys scored lower on emotional resilience, increasing their alienation risk in social conflicts. Schmeck¹⁰ (1983)

Linked cognitive styles with academic success and social adaptation. Reflective learners felt less alienated, particularly among adolescent girls. Hill & Lynch⁴ (1983) Explored gender socialization, showing that girls internalize societal expectations more, leading to increased anxiety, indecisiveness, and feelings of alienation. Marcia⁸ (1980) Expanded on Erikson's theory, emphasizing identity status. Adolescents in identity diffusion or foreclosure stages are more prone to alienation, often influenced by gender and ego strength. Studies connecting these variables with alienation are limited in number in Patna (Bihar). This justifies undertaking of the problem.

Objectives

Adolescents' alienation is to be compared in terms of (i) sex-difference (ii) ego-strength, (iii) cognitive style and (iv) decisiveness trait respectively.

Hypotheses

- (i) There will be significant difference between adolescent boys and girls in terms of alienation.
- (ii) There will be significant difference between high and low ego-strength groups of adolescents on the measure of alienation.
- (iii) There will be significant difference between FD and F1 groups of adolescents on the measure of alienation.

(iv) There will be significant difference between high and low decisiveness groups of adolescents’.

Method of Study

Sample

The study was conducted on incidental-cum purposive sample of 128 adolescent boys and girls equal in number. They were selected from among undergraduate student population from colleges of Patna. In other respect they were matched so far as practicable.

Research Tools

- (i) A Personal Data Sheet was used to get other necessary information about the respondents.
- (ii) Dean’s Alienation Scale adopted in Hindi by Singh was used to measure the alienation of the respondents.
- (iii) SDPI was used to measure the ego-strength and decisiveness traits of the respondents.
- (iv) Witkin’s EFT was used to measure cognitive style of the respondents.

Procedure

Scales along with PDS were employed on 64 boys and 64 girls selected in such a way that they were equal in respect of each of two groups in respect of ego-strength, cognitive style and decisiveness trait respectively. Thereafter, Alienation Scale was employed and data were obtained. The recorded data were analysed using ‘t’ test.

Results and Interpretations

Table 01: Comparison between adolescent boys and girls in terms of their alienation score

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t-ratio	df	P
Boys	64	43.54	5.20	8.42	126	<.01
Girls	64	51.29	5.25			

The results displayed in table-01 clearly indicated the significant difference between adolescent boys and girls in terms of alienation scores. The boys were found with lower degree of alienation than girls. The t-ratio obtained was found significant beyond .01 level of significance ($t = 8.42$; $df = 126$; $P < .01$). Thus, the first hypothesis was retained. Adolescent girls manifest a higher degree of alienation than boys because they often face greater emotional sensitivity, social restrictions, and gender-based expectations. Limited freedom, lack of emotional support, and societal pressure contribute to feelings of isolation, insecurity, and withdrawal, leading to stronger experiences of alienation compared to boys.

Table 02: Comparison between high and low ego-strength groups of adolescents in terms of their alienation score

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-ratio	df	P
Ego Strength	High	64	41.63	4.98	7.47	126	<.01
	Low	64	48.35	5.17			

The results displayed in table-02 clearly indicated the significant influence of ego-strength on alienation of the respondents. It is also clear from the table that respondents belonging to high ego-strength group were less likely to the victim of alienation than their counterparts belonging to low ego-strength group of respondents. The obtained t-ratio was found significant ($t = 7.47$; $df = 126$; $P < .01$). Thus the fourth hypothesis was also retained. Adolescents with low ego strength are more prone to alienation because they lack confidence, emotional resilience, and coping ability. They struggle to face social and personal challenges, leading to withdrawal and feelings of helplessness. In contrast, those with strong ego strength adapt better, maintain stability, and resist alienating experiences effectively.

Table 03: Comparison between FD and FI groups of adolescents in terms of their alienation score

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-ratio	df	P
Cognitive style	FI	64	42.47	5.22	7.33	127	<.01
	FD	64	49.21	5.16			

From the results displayed by table-03 it is clear that respondents belonging to FD group are more exposed to alienation than the respondents of field FI group. The t-ratio showing significance difference between the means was found significant ($t = 7.33$; $df = 126$; $P < .01$). Adolescents belonging to field-dependent groups are more prone to alienation because they rely heavily on external approval and social cues for guidance. When such support is lacking, they feel insecure and disconnected. Field-independent adolescents, being self-reliant and autonomous, adjust better and experience less alienation in challenging social situations.

Table 04: Comparison between high and low decisiveness trait of adolescent respondents in terms of their alienation score

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-ratio	df	P
Decisiveness	High	64	42.47	5.22	7.33	126	<.01
	Low	64	49.21	5.33			

The results displayed in table-04 clearly revealed the significant influence of decisiveness on their alienation. It is clear from the table that respondents of low decisiveness are more prone to alienation as compared to adolescents having high decisiveness. The difference between the two means was found significant ($t = 7.33$; $df = 126$; $P < .01$) Thus, fourth hypothesis was also retained. Adolescents with low or poor decisiveness are more prone to alienation because they often feel confused, lack confidence in judgment, and depend on others for direction. This indecisiveness leads to frustration, social withdrawal, and feelings of helplessness, unlike highly decisive adolescents who show confidence, independence, and better social adjustment.

CONCLUSIONS

- (i) Adolescent girls are more prone to alienation as compared to adolescent boys.
- (ii) High ego-strength group of adolescents are less likely to be exposed to alienation than low ego-strength group of adolescents.
- (iii) Adolescents belonging to field dependent group are more prone to alienation as compared to adolescent respondents belonging to field independent group.
- (iv) High decisiveness inhibits alienation trait.

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