

**ANOMIE: HISTORY AND RESEARCH APPLICATION**

Lawrence M Hynson Jr, Oklahoma State University

**DEFINITION**

The Greeks first used the concept *anomia* to describe a lawlessness pervasive to a society. As this word passed to Latin, and later to the French form, *anomie*, the definition was expanded to include any societal disruption. After the emergence of *social physics*, Comte's term for the new science of sociology, in the 18th century, the concept of *anomie* provided a basis for conceptual analysis in social research.

Because the concept of *anomie* is derived from *anomia*, the relation between the terms must be clarified. Durkheim (1951) used *anomie* to describe a state of cultural and social disruption in which inadequate guidance is provided the individual. Usually, man's overweening ambitions are disciplined or controlled by the normative structure of society. When this control system breaks down due to economic or social disruption, the results are normlessness with increased deviance. If there is a disturbance of the collective order, then suicide rates increase. The reference points are gone and levels of aspiration can go unchecked. Riesman (1950 129) thinks these ideas have relevance for today: "Durkheim was right to see comparatively high suicide rates in the advanced industrial countries as symptoms of a psychological malaise uncontrolled by any cultural tradition."

**HISTORY**

Merton challenged the Durkheim's interpretation and he rejected the idea that man is a creature of wild passions controlled only by social pressures. Whereas Durkheim employed *anomie* as an explanation of one type of suicide, Merton generalized its application to all deviant behavior. He claimed that the "dissociation between culturally prescribed aspirations and socially structured avenues for realizing these aspirations" creates *anomie*, which in turn issues in deviant behavior (Merton 1957 134). Though Merton claims to have presented some differences in definition, Madge (1962 45) thinks that in the typology in the individual's adjustment to society there are similarities. The mode of adaptation designated *innovation* by Merton

is similar to the concept of *anomie* as defined by Durkheim, and Merton's *retreatism* resembles Durkheim's *egoistic suicide* (See Figure 1).

De Grazia used Durkheim's concept of *anomie*, but he did not limit it to suicide either (1948 xii). He applied the *anomie* concept to all types of social problems and defined it as "the disintegrated state of a society that possesses no body of common values or morals which effectively govern conduct ... The study of *anomie* is the study of the ideological factors that weaken or destroy the bonds of allegiance which make up the political community." For De Grazia the political community depends on the social bond which integrates it. Without this bond there is disruption and *anomie*.

Seeman (1967 273) summarized the concept of *alienation* under five categories of a psychological state resulting from a social state or condition including: 1) feeling of powerlessness; 2) feeling of meaninglessness; 3) perception of normlessness (Durkheim's *anomie*), 4) a sense of isolation; 5) a feeling of self-estrangement.

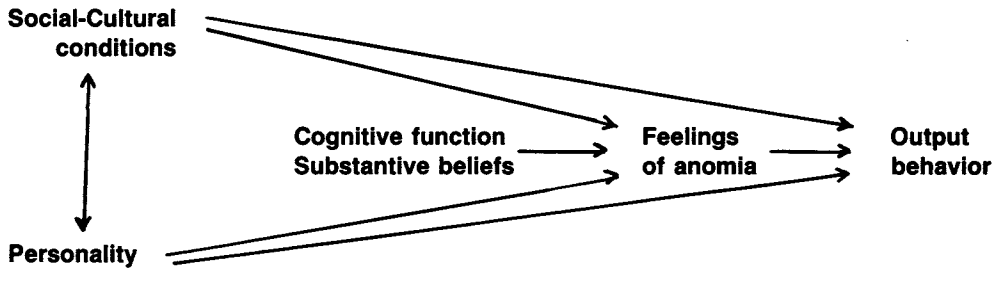
Srole (1956 63) devised an *anomia* scale as an index of Durkheim's causes of suicide. As translated from Latin, *anomia* is the psychological counterpart of *social dysfunction*. Similarly, Mizruchi (1964 50) explained *anomia* as the subjective experience of strain which is concomitant with stress in the social structure. Thus, Srole's scale identifies high *anomie* or *self-to-other alienation* with the individual's agreement with the idea that political leaders are indifferent to his needs; things in general are getting worse; most people are unsupportive; life has no meaning; and the social order is unpredictable. These latter statements were constructed in order to identify the five components of *alienation* delineated by Seeman.

Mizruchi (1964 56) explained that the Srole scale is an index of social structure stress, and not a test for understanding personality dynamics. However, after investigating *anomia*, McClosky and Schaar (1965 35) stated that "... the principal source for *anomic* feeling resides for some people in their social

**FIGURE 1: ANOMIE PARADIGM BY MERTON-DURKHEIM LOGIC**

**Social condition                      Psychological state                      Deviant behavior**

**FIGURE 2: ANOMIE PARADIGM BY McCLOSKY-SCHAAR LOGIC**



settings; for others in their individual personality; and for still others, in a combination of the two." Using multivariate analysis and controlling social variables of education, age, community size, race and sex, they found that persons with high anomia scores consistently scored higher on measures of hostility, guilt, and paranoia (See Figure 2). It is possible for a person to have culturally induced high anomic scores and still be an adjusted person. Both personality and social structure factors interact in creating anomia. Thus, anomia scores may measure the individual's alienation from society or it may reflect the anomic state of society. "Although it is not usually clear whether anomia is an independent or a dependent variable, one can at least affirm that when an individual's score on the anomia scale is known, other characteristics and tendencies can be inferred to a useful degree." (Yinger 1965 205)

**APPLICATION**

In view of the history of the concept of *anomie*, a variety of applications for research are available. I will elaborate on that of political behavior. In 1968 George Wallace campaigned for the Presidency as head of his own *American Independent Party*, and garnered millions of people who rejected both the Democratic and Republican nominees. Two

social scientists saw this movement emerging from a general cultural disruption. According to Lipset (1968) the Wallace movement voiced "the sense of frustration of millions of Americans." It is true that discontented voters have abounded often in the past, but a third party movement as strong as this was unusual. Riesman reasoned that "it is only under certain conditions such as an unsatisfactory war that these local pockets of right wing and defensive conservatives coalesce into any kind of national movement." (Riesman 1968). In the Fall of 1968 I collected data from each of the three major political organizations for Tarrant County, Texas. My questionnaire included the Srole anomia scale. Table 1 shows the results, which empirically support the ideas of Lipset, namely, that these people were politically alienated. Without exception, a higher percentage of those with high self-to-other alienation were found in Wallace's American Party group. Going across Table 1 from white Democrat to Republican to Black Democrat to the American Party, the percentages in the high anomia categories increase regularly. The difference in cell loadings is clearly significant, and with correction for small expected values in cells for black Democrats, I calculated the statistic for the disproportion among cells:  
 $Chi^2 = 58.4; df = 6; p = .001.$

**TABLE 1: ANOMIA AND POLITICAL PARTY BY RACE**

Anomia Score	Democratic (White)		Republican		Democratic (Black)		American		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
3-5	4	11	9	21	7	58	31	76	51	39
1-2	9	24	23	55	5	42	8	19	45	34
0	24	65	10	24	0	0	2	5	36	27
Total	37		42		12		41		120	

**CONCLUSION**

Operationalizing anomie via the Srole scale may be one approach the study of social or political movements. In such research, not only should the psychological factor of anomia be considered, but also the social factors. In research on social movements the Srole scale can provide some valid indicators of the psychological and social factors pertinent to its emergence. However, other social and cultural factors should be included in a research design. The McClosky and Schaar paradigm, as we have seen, could provide the conceptual framework for such analysis.

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