

A GROUP PROCESS AND A SPECIFICATION OF ALIENATION WITHIN A TRADITIONAL AND A SPLINTER GROUP

Ralph Fagin and Richard Dodder

Department of Behavioral Science, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, Oklahoma
and Department of Sociology, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

It was postulated in this study that individuals may be alienated from mainstream values of society and still remain non-alienated from themselves. The purpose of this study was to empirically test a theoretical model that purported to describe a splinter group process which buffered group members (who held deviant views from the general normative pattern) from being alienated from themselves. Analysis of the data revealed that splinter members may be alienated from the value position of the majority and not be alienated from themselves. However, the rationale concerning the splinter group process was not confirmed. Hypotheses, which stated that the more individuals were acculturated within the splinter group the less alienated from self they would be, were statistically insignificant at the .05 level. Consequently, the splinter group process was not empirically identified by this study.

The major goal of this study is to offer a distinction between anomie and alienation and to investigate some possible implications of these two concepts for group behavior. Before the effects of anomie and alienation on groups can be studied, the differences between these two concepts need to be stated.

Much of the study and research in the area of anomie has relied on the original contributions of Emile Durkheim. According to Durkheim, anomie results when the society sets no limits on the aspirations of man. Instability will occur when man is freed to strive for things that are impossible to obtain. "To pursue a goal which is by definition unattainable is to condemn oneself to a state of perpetual unhappiness (1, p. 284)." Since Durkheim defines anomie as the condition that results from the inability of society to set limits on man's aspirations, then anomie is a characteristic of a social system. The term refers to the way society is organized. Anomie does not originate in the individual but from without.

Following Durkheim's lead, Merton also felt that anomie was a condition emitted from the social structure and not a property of the individual. Merton, however, added the idea of availability of means to the original concept of the regulation of goals authored by Durkheim. Merton argued that anomie resulted when there was not sufficient means to obtain the legitimate goals of a society. Thus, when individuals do not

have adequate methods of reaching goals to which they aspire, anomie is the result (2).

While it is the case that Durkheim and Merton treat anomie as a property of the social structure, others have deviated from this approach. Men like Maclver, for instance, view anomie as an attitude of the individual (3). McClosky and Schaar attack the problem from a psychological viewpoint, studying personality types as they relate to anomie. They also argue that anomie is a condition of the mind rather than the social structure (4).

This treatment of anomie as an individual trait has had its effects on the measuring instruments used in studying anomie. Srole, for example, developed a scale that measured the feelings of individuals as they perceived an anomic situation (5).

A limitation of this approach is that the social condition may not correspond to the feelings the individuals of that society have about it. Just because some individuals feel that they are without moral roots does not mean that the society is anomic. On the other hand, if there are forces in the social structure that produce anomie, it is not necessarily a sufficient condition to personally disorganize an individual.

The point of view of this study is that the subjective condition described might be better labeled as alienation. A person can be alienated from himself, others, an ideology, labor, products, or many other diverse objects, all of which may be an

outcome of living in an anomic society. Netter states that alienation and anomie are correlated, but this does not provide a reason for confusing the two concepts (6).

It is proposed in this thesis that individuals do not necessarily become estranged from themselves in an anomic situation. It should be noted that alienation can take many forms as was previously mentioned. One of these forms could be a repudiation of an anomic society and the ideology it espouses. However, this does not mean that an individual who sees the society's values as illegitimate and is estranged from the mainstream ideology has to be estranged from himself.

The two forms of alienation that are of importance to this study are: estrangement from self, and estrangements from the values of the main culture. Estrangement from self refers to a person who has found little purpose or direction for his life. This type of individual is characterized by personal disorientation and the lack of ability to decide which values or norms should be incorporated into his belief system. Estrangement from the values of the main culture reflects the resentment of the individual against the expectations of society.

Keeping in mind Merton's definition of anomie, the discrepancy between culturally defined goals and possible means of attaining them, there would be a pressure for nonconforming behavior for those in this situation. One channel through which this behavior may take place is a splinter group. People with similar difficulties of attaining goals through legitimate means could join together and collectively offer support for one another. Through the communication of the group, the individuals could then view their deviant or non-conforming actions as being legitimate (7). Consequently, people may solve the problem of being alienated from a society by changing their "frame of reference" to a group that sees its own actions (which would be considered deviant by the mainstream society) as being legitimate (8).

Thus, a splinter group acts as a type of intermediary between the individual and a larger social system. One opportunity open to individuals to maintain status and self-esteem is through the opinion of others. If individuals do not receive a bolstering

effect from the major social structure, then they can adapt by realigning values to a splinter group. In other words, if people cannot legitimately use the means approved by the society, then alternative behaviors may be chosen that are seen as just by a smaller group. When people feel that lack of success is due to the social system, they may define that order as unjust and thus repudiate the morality of these norms. In this condition, the people will be alienated from the mainstream cultural values and will seek new norms and rules that they view as just. With this rationale, people can feel justified in resorting to behavior that is considered abnormal according to the value position set up by the main society.

The process just mentioned makes it possible for individuals who live in an anomic society to be alienated from that society but not necessarily from themselves. Consequently, the greater the degree individuals are socialized into a splinter group, (a group in an anomic condition whose members offer support for one another), the less alienated or estranged from self people should be. It is further stipulated that things such as loyalty, perceived alliance with the splinter group, participation and length of membership should contribute toward a lessening of alienation from self. For the purpose of conciseness and easy reference, the following propositions are hypothesized for this research project.

1. A splinter group in an anomic situation will on the average be more alienated from the values of society than a traditional group.
2. There will be no significant difference between a splinter group and a traditional group in regards to alienation from self.
3. Length of membership within the splinter group will be negatively related to alienation from self.
4. Loyalty will be negatively related to alienation from self within the splinter group.
5. Participation within the splinter group will be negatively related to alienation from self.
6. Acceptance within the splinter group will be negatively related to alienation from self.

METHODS

In order to test the validity of the hypotheses, it was imperative to find a situation in reality that lent itself to meeting the assumptions of the theory. The most

important ingredients needed for this study were: a social structure which acted as a primary socializing agency of society in which individuals perceived anomie, a splinter group which was alienated from the mainstream cultural values, and the splinter group must be of primary importance to the individuals so that the theorized interaction process could take place.

Two religious groups were found that seemed to meet the assumptions put forth by the theory, and it was decided to use them as respondents for the study. The sample for the research was made up of two Catholic churches, one representing a traditional group and the other representing a splinter group. The traditional group appeared to be a rather typical Catholic congregation whose membership was largely a function of geographic location. The splinter group's members came from different parts of the urban area in order to do a lot more than they perceived they could accomplish in their original churches. One of the leaders of the splinter group exemplified such an attitude when he remarked that he could not reach his goals because of the red tape and rigidity of his former church. We assumed that the members of the splinter group perceived themselves to be in an anomic condition, because of a disjunction between the goals advocated by the traditional Catholic church and the means for the members to attain these goals. (This study is using the definition of anomie offered by Merton which points out a disjunction between goals and means).

To test the hypotheses of this study, data was gathered from mailed questionnaires that were sent to members of a splinter group and a traditional group. Since the splinter group had only 127 members, the entire population was sent questionnaires, while a random sampling procedure was used for the larger congregation of the traditional church to select 220 subjects. The final response rate was 51.2% from the splinter group and 42.3% from the traditional group.

To investigate the implications of the model, scales were constructed to measure religiosity, alienation from the Catholic church, alienation from self, and alienation from the mainstream society. It was previously noted that some social scientists view anomie as a deviation from norms held by the general society, and consequently, those in an anomic condition are in a state of personal disorganization. The traditional scales used to measure anomie reflect this limitation. In an attempt to alleviate this problem, several original items and questions primarily from the scales of Srole, Dean, Middleton, Seeman, McClosky and Shaar were selected on a judgmental basis to measure alienation from self and alienation from mainstream society. The resultant scales were examined by means of test-retest and were shown to be highly reliable. Table 1 illustrates the prominence of the new scales by the strength of the alpha coefficients. According to Nunnally, for a scale to be considered adequate, an alpha level of at least 0.5 should be attained (9).

RESULTS

Before the testing of the hypotheses, a matter for consideration is the investigation of the assumptions underlying the theoretical model. Previously it was stipulated that certain conditions must exist in reality in order for the theoretical model to be applicable. If these necessary conditions are not in evidence, then the hypotheses deduced from the model may have little meaning. Specifically, it was speculated in this thesis that the members of the splinter group perceived themselves to be in an anomic condition. It was proposed that these Catholics do not have the means necessary to reach the goals that they hope to attain. If it is true that these members are alienated toward the organized Catholic church (an outcome that is usually expected in an anomic situation) then the assumption is supported. The data attest to these suggestions. The following table reflects a significant difference between the two groups in

TABLE 1. *Item analysis of questionnaire scales*

	Alienation From Mainstream	Alienation From Self	Alienation From Catho- lic Church	Religiosity
ALPHA	0.67	0.72	0.93	0.83

regard to alienation from the organized Catholic church. The splinter group members score much higher on this scale on the average than the traditional group. The t value of -9.10 is a statistically significant difference of means beyond the 0.05 level.

TABLE 2. Comparison of traditional group with splinter group for alienation from organized Catholic Church

	N	\bar{X}	\bar{X}_D	S _D	t	p
Traditional Group	93	31.55	-13.59	9.55	-9.10	0.05
Splinter Group	65	45.14		8.78		

Another assumption of this study is that the Catholic Church, as one of the major social institutions, projects the major norms, attitudes, and values of society. It is believed that this religious group, since it broke many of its ties with the Catholic Church, is alienated toward the church and hence alienated toward values of society. The church as a culture carrier, is a presumption that necessitates investigation. It can be surmized that if the Catholic church does reflect the mainstream value position, then the variables of alienation from mainstream society and alienation from the institutional Catholic church should be positively and highly correlated. The results confirm this supposition. The Pearson r correlation coefficient for alienation from society and alienation from church is 0.61 which is statistically significant beyond the 0.05 level.

A third assumption is that a splinter group must be meaningful to an individual for the dynamics of that group to have an impact on that individual. In our case, the splinter group process of legitimizing norms that are in opposition to mainstream cultural directives are thought to have the influence of reducing alienation from self in a splinter group that is important to its members. Due to the fact that the sample consists of two Catholic church groups, religiosity is used as one measure for meaningfulness of the splinter group. Since they are religious groups, the performance of their religious functions is thought to act as an indicator of group importance. The splinter group scored significantly lower on

religiosity than the traditional group members at the 0.05 level of significance. These results describe the splinter group as not performing its religious function, which may mean that the splinter group may not be of major importance to its members. This finding does not support the third assumption of the model.

With the assumption of the model having been studied, attention is turned to the results of the testing of the hypotheses.

The first two hypotheses, since they dealt with the differences between two groups, were examined by the use of the difference of means test, while the remaining hypotheses were tested by Pearson r correlations.

The first hypothesis is concerned with the difference between a splinter group and a traditional group in regard to alienation from mainstream values.

H₁: A splinter group in an anomic situation will on the average be more alienated from the values of society than a traditional group.

TABLE 3. Comparison of traditional group with splinter group for alienation from mainstream society

	N	\bar{X}	\bar{X}_D	S _D	t	p
Traditional Group	93	27.46	-5.46	4.62	-7.15	0.05
Splinter Group	65	32.92		4.87		

The hypothesis is confirmed beyond the 0.05 level of significance. The splinter group has a mean of 5.46 less than the traditional group. This result indicates that the members of the splinter group reject, to a greater extent, widely held beliefs of the main society.

The second hypothesis deals with the degree of alienation from self for the members of the splinter and traditional groups. Even though the splinter group is more alienated toward the mainstream values, the bolstering effect of the splinter group is posited to inhibit these members from becoming alienated from self.

H₂: There will be no significant difference between a splinter group and a traditional group in regard to alienation from self.

TABLE 4. Comparison of tradition group with splinter group for alienation from self

	N	\bar{x}	\bar{x}_D	SD	t	P
Traditional Group	93	31.72	1.53	5.94	-1.58	not sig
Splinter Group	65	33.25		5.93		

As was expected, there is not a significant difference at the 0.05 level between the two groups in regard to alienation from self. The splinter group has a mean score of only 1.53 greater than those in the traditional group.

Hypotheses three through six involve the association of alienation from self and the acculturation into the group variables. It is proposed that the more a person becomes involved in the splinter group process of legitimizing norms deviant from the main culture, the less alienated from self he will become.

H₃: Length of membership will be negatively related to alienation from self.

H₄: Loyalty will be negatively related to alienation from self.

H₅: Participation will be negatively related to alienation from self.

H₆: Acceptance within the group will be negatively related to alienation from self.

The four correlations included in Table 5 are not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Although three out of four are in the correct direction, the strength is negligible. None of the last four hypotheses suggest the results that were predicted. These low correlations do not provide evidence for the sub-group process that was expected. The possible reasons for the splinter group being alienated from the mainstream society but not alienated from themselves were not delineated by the results from hypotheses three through six.

TABLE 5. Associations of alienation from self with acculturation variables

	N	r	P
Length	65	-0.04	not significant
Loyalty	65	0.05	not significant
Participation	65	-0.05	not significant
Acceptance	65	-0.02	not significant

While the dynamics of the splinter group have seemed to escape empirical verification, some alternative explanations might provide some plausible, though theoretical, solutions. Perhaps the most salient factor in this facet of the study is the lack of a meaningful religious experience within the splinter group. Since the splinter group showed a statistically significant lower religiosity level than the traditional group, this organization might not be important to them. Consequently, the splinter group process might have little effect.

Another diagnosis might be that these individuals have a strong self-support system before they enter the splinter group. Their departure from the traditional group may suggest high self-esteem; and the debilitating effect of being in conflict with the mainstream values then may not exist for them. If these people do indeed reflect the characteristic of being autonomous, then the attitudes conveyed in the splinter group would also have little influence.

Still another interpretation of the results would lead one to conclude that the splinter group is a loosely knit organization that has a lot of interaction before official membership is attained. The splinter group process may be occurring outside of the confines of formal relationships. Consequently, the formal acculturation variables which were measured in this study might not take into account the informal interaction that took place. An idea which aligns itself closely with the solution just offered is that the splinter group process may be occurring in other organizations of which the people of the splinter group are members. For instance, these individuals may also belong to subcultural social action groups that display the theoretical dynamics of positing legitimacy to their own beliefs, while their alliance to the splinter religious group may just be an outgrowth of their other interests.

In conclusion, the supposition that individuals in an anomic condition can be alienated from the values of the mainstream culture and yet not be alienated from self was supported. However, the process by which such a situation comes about was not empirically identified by this study.

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