

THE ROLE OF ANOMIE AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPT

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The term *anomie* originated in religious philosophy about the end of the sixteenth century, and had approximately its current meaning reflecting planlessness, uncertainty and doubt. It reappeared from time to time in religious and philosophical writings throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Durkheim introduced the term into the social sciences in 1893 (10), and later used it as an explanatory concept in his theory of suicide (11).

Since the concept of anomie only recently has aroused interest in psychology, and since there are no up-to-date reviews available, the authors hope that this paper will help fill a gap in the current literature.

A THEORETICAL CHRONOLOGY

Durkheim defined anomie as normlessness or rulelessness in a society, resulting from society's failure to curb man's "inborn impulses." The emphasis of man versus society, arising from the tradition of Hobbes (16) and later greatly expanded by Freud (14), was the basis of much of the philosophical thinking of the day. This emphasis continues in Ogburn's *Social Change* (27), in which man's "original nature," characterized by selfishness, irrationality, and intolerance of his fellow man, is society's major problem and the chief cause of anomie. Ogburn also hypothesized that cultural lag is one of the chief causes of social dysfunction, i.e., anomie.

DeGrazia (9), writing in 1948 (25 years later than Ogburn), makes a distinction between "acute" and "simple" anomie. Acute anomie resembles Durkheim's concept of anomie in that it is a characteristic of the degeneration of society as a whole, but DeGrazia tends to see the "normlessness" or "rulelessness" as resulting from changes in social structure rather than failure to control man's biological drives. Simple anomie is the "intermittent apprehension in the adult, the psychological result of a conflict between systems of belief" (9, p. 71). DeGrazia views both types of anomie as a developmental process with its roots in separation anxiety and early socialization practices, i.e., early in life man learns the need of help and affection from a cooperative community, and the satisfaction of this need protects one

against anomie. Whereas Durkheim's and Ogburn's emphasis upon biological drives parallels Freudian theory, the writings of DeGrazia resemble ideas such as Rank's (29) "separation anxiety," Adler's (2, 3) "social interest," and Fromm's (15) "relatedness."

Merton (23), writing about the same time as DeGrazia, makes a clear break with Durkheim and the biological drive theory, and describes anomie as it is understood today. His central hypothesis is that deviant behavior may be a symptom of the conflict between "culturally prescribed aspirations and socially structured avenues for realizing these aspirations" (23, p. 128). There are differential emphases upon goals and institutional procedures; an adaptation may be made by changing or completely rejecting either the culturally defined goals or means, or both. "As this process of attenuation continues, the society becomes unstable and there develops what Durkheim called 'anomie' or normlessness" (23, p. 128). Clearly, for Merton, social structure is the prime source of anomie. His analysis of cultural norms points to anomie as a symptom of dissociation between the culturally prescribed aspiration of pecuniary success and the socially structured avenues for realizing this aspiration.

Merton offers five types of adaptive behavior to the conflict between cultural goals and means. The *conformist* accepts both the goals and means as the culture defines them. The *innovator* accepts the goals but designs his own more efficient means. This, according to Merton, is more true of the upper socio-economic classes than the lower ones, which agrees with Durkheim's statement that the most fortunate suffer most from anomie. The *ritualist* feels that culturally defined goals cannot be achieved through culturally defined means, but because of deep-rooted beliefs in cultural ways, cannot change the means. He thus operates in culturally acceptable ways, but due to chronic frustration, loses any meaning of the goals. The *retreatist*, frustrated with the conflict between culturally defined means and goals, rejects the means and denies his craving for the goals. Retreatists still are *in* the society but are no longer *of* the society. Some of the activities of vagrants, tramps, alcoholics and drug addicts are characteristic of the retreatist. This adaptation occurs most often when both the cultural goals and institutional practices have been thoroughly assimilated by the individual, but effective institutional means are not available. The *rebel* designs his own goals and his own means; in a wider scope he becomes the revolutionist (23).

Merton, with his emphasis upon motivational conflicts, aspiration level, internalization of social norms, and man's striving for a common cultural goal, holds great interest for the psychologist. The 1957 revision (24) of his original formulation of anomie reflects the empirical work and thought of many who had been stimulated by his original presentation. During this period, MacIver (21) described anomie as

inability to resolve the conflict between means and goals, resulting in the disintegration of an individual's personality (6). At about the same time, Riesman (31) defined the adjective anomic as "virtually synonymous with maladjusted" and classified the anomic individual as lacking the capacity to conform to the behavioral norms of the society.

In a short theoretical paper in 1956, Ansbacher (4) equated anomie with the Adlerian concept of "lack of social interest," a concept which for Adler was an essential component of all social and psychological maladjustment. Thus, Ansbacher, as Riesman and MacIver, sees anomie as an individual's psychological incapacity to adjust to cultural norms and to work for the common good.

Merton, in 1957 (24), makes an explicit separation of psychological anomie and sociological anomie. This division clearly reflects the theoretical writings above, as well as the empirical work of Srole to be discussed later. However, for Merton, psychological anomie is the counterpart and not the replacement of the sociological concept.

In Cohen's (8) recent discussion of social disorganization and deviant behavior, delinquency and similar disorders are seen as results of the individual's mode of adaptation for escaping conflict when he fails to achieve whatever the culture expects. The severity of this conflict and the type of adaptation depend on the extent to which cultural goals and means have been internalized, as well as what alternative means or goals are available. Also, Cohen contends that Parsons' (28) more complex classification of deviant (anomic) behavior goes beyond Merton's, and that it makes valuable distinctions not possible with Merton's typology.

This brief review of the theoretical development of the concept of anomie, although not affording a precise definition, permits an outline of some properties of the concept. Anomie arises from the conflict between the goals that a culture sets up and the ineffectiveness of the prescribed means for obtaining these goals. The incidence of this conflict is differentially observable in various strata of society, being more pronounced where an individual's position is weakened either by the structure of the society or by inadequate personality structure. There are two types of anomie: The first refers to any situation that threatens the social structure and its values, as indicated by widespread social disorganization in segments of the society; the second, a psychological counterpart of the first, refers to an individual's perception of the social order as lacking meaningfulness or usefulness, his

withdrawal from society, or his perception of constant conflict between the basic goals in life.

As was mentioned above, DeGrazia attempts to define these two types by calling one "acute" and the other "simple;" Srole (36) more recently suggests using "anomie" and "anomia" for the sociological and psychological concepts, respectively. The present authors feel that the use of "anomia," since it already has a medico-psychological meaning (13), would only compound the confusion. In addition, the distinction seems to be an artificial dichotomy arising from the unit of analysis and the methodology employed in describing the concept. Therefore, one term should be sufficient.

EMPIRICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Although the various theoretical attempts to describe anomie have not easily lent themselves to an operational approach, they have generated some research during the last ten years. In 1951, Leo Srole (36) designed a measure of psychological anomie, consisting of five items to be rated on a five-point scale each. The items were derived from previous theoretical attempts to describe anomie.

The Srole items measure a person's perception of the degree to which: (a) the average person today is losing already attained goals, (b) life itself is not worth living due to loss of meaning of goals and previously internalized group norms, (c) an unpredictability or inconsistency of future perspectives exists due to an unstable social order, (d) help or cooperation can no longer be obtained from fellow man or society in general, and (e) the leaders of the community are disinterested in the individual's needs.

Srole found: Anomie was related positively to prejudice and negatively to socio-economic status. Anomie and authoritarianism were equally related to prejudice; with authoritarianism held constant, anomie related highly to prejudice; with anomie held constant, authoritarianism related very slightly to prejudice. Thus Srole concluded that authoritarianism is not related to prejudice independently of the psycho-social factors measured by the anomie scale. Srole also found that at low education levels, anomie and status, rather than authoritarianism, were related independently to prejudice; but at college level, authoritarianism, rather than anomie and status, was related independently to prejudice.

Following the implication of Srole's data that authoritarianism may be related to prejudice only because of socio-economic components, Roberts and Rokeach (32) attempted to replicate the study. They also found that anomie and authoritarianism were equally cor-

related with prejudice. However, when anomie was held constant, correlations of authoritarianism and ethnocentrism dropped only slightly; but when authoritarianism was held constant, the correlation of anomie with ethnocentrism decreased considerably; when education was held constant, anomie was not related to socio-economic level.

These first attempts to relate anomie to other psychological concepts and the spirited controversy that they precipitated (33, 35), indicate not only that an operational measure of anomie could be constructed, but that important theoretical issues had been raised.

Kogan (19), following Srole and Roberts and Rokeach, recently showed the relationship of prejudice to anomie, finding that highly anomic college students were significantly more "negatively disposed toward old people" than students scoring low on the Srole scale.

Bell (5), while attempting to relate measures of social isolation and class structure to anomie, using the Srole scale, found a positive relationship between anomie and age, but negative relationships between anomie and economic status, as well as anomie and informal and formal group participation. Not only were these determinants of high anomie found important when individual members of a community were considered, but a significant relationship also existed between anomie and the economic character of the neighborhood population as a unit. Bell's study thus supports Srole's finding of a negative relationship between anomie and socio-economic status and Merton's contention that anomie would be found differentially in various segments of society. It also seems to support Ansbacher's contention that anomie and Adler's "lack of social interest" are related, to the extent that Bell's measures of informal and formal group participation may be taken as indicators of social interest.

Reimanis and Davol (30) were led by Bell to investigate what demographic and psychological factors contributed to high anomie scores in an institutional domiciliary population. They found, as had Srole (36) and Roberts and Rokeach (32), a high negative relationship between educational level and anomie scores. In addition, measures of the desire for social affiliation and the maintenance of contacts with close friends and relatives were found to be important negative correlates of anomie. A major finding was that age *per se* and *actual* social participation were not related to anomie when other variables, such as education and desire for social affiliation, were statistically controlled. But a combination of these variables plus length of stay at the domiciliary, number of letters received, and number of visits made

or received, produced, regardless of arithmetic sign, a multiple correlation coefficient of .679, accounting for almost half of the variance of the anomie score.

These data led the authors to conclude that contact with a friendly and familiar society, motivation toward social interest, and background indicators of socio-economic status are the chief correlates of anomie. The study did not support Bell's conclusion that age and formal and informal group participation as such are highly correlated with anomie; what seems to be more important are the factors related to the aging process, and whether social participation reflects a real desire to enter into the daily life of the society or merely a ritualistic response to institutional pressures. In many institutional living situations contact with friends and family is decreased, the individual is unable to take care of himself independently and may thus feel he has failed to reach cultural expectations. Reimanis and Davol therefore conclude:

Anomie is characteristic and important in many . . . institutional populations, and . . . the core of these populations is highly anomic. This may not be due to the institutional setting alone, but mainly to loss of desire or interest on the part of the individual to live up to cultural expectations once he has severed ties with his old community. In the midst of such an anomic community, new members have to possess strong resistance to opinions and attitudes around them in order to maintain contact with cultural values (30).

In Merton's terms, most individuals in such a population may have attempted to fulfill cultural expectations, but later had to admit, by accepting residence in a domiciliary, that they have failed to reach even the minimum of what culture expects—the ability to take care of themselves and not become a burden on the society—and therefore have rendered themselves overly susceptible to anomic attitudes. In Adler's terms, such individuals have lost the desire to strive for the common good of the society, have chosen a way of life which frees them of social obligations, and their purpose in life has become self-oriented rather than society-oriented.

In a similar study, Meier and Bell (22) report a series of relationships between anomie and class identification, age, and social isolation. In a *post facto* analysis of the data, these authors propose an index of "life chances" measuring the individual's "access to means for the achievement of life goals." This index, they feel, offers the best prediction of anomie derived from their data. The index has not yet been cross-validated, but if verified, it should account for the variance not

covered in the cross-validated prediction equation of Reimanis and Davol, since little overlap exists between the two indices.

Nettler (26), studying the closely related phenomenon of alienation, has devised, on the basis of interviews, a seventeen-item scale of estrangement from society. While he does not feel that alienation is equivalent to anomie, he found a correlation of $+0.309$ between scores on the Srole scale and his scale of alienation. Alienation appears to resemble Adler's lack of social interest even more than does anomie. Nettler's "aliens" also strongly resemble Merton's prototype of the innovator who strives for the culturally defined goals via technically efficient, but culturally disapproved, means.

The Srole scale which has aroused much interest, especially for sociologists, is, of course, only a first step toward operationalizing anomie and presents a number of methodological weaknesses and problems. For example, the present authors, in an unpublished study, found that when the Srole scale was administered to groups, there was a strong acquiescent response set, a tendency to agree rather than to disagree, thus spuriously raising the anomie score. The authors discovered that this problem is not present when the Srole scale is administered verbally in an interview situation, or if five equivalent items scored in the opposite direction are added to the scale.

Despite such problems, the scale measures at least some aspects of anomie as described in the theoretical portion of this paper. Certain relationships stand out when all the empirical work is reviewed: (a) negative relationships between anomie and education, socio-economic status, and indicators of social interest; and (b) a positive relationship between anomie and the authoritarianism-ethnocentrism syndrome.

WHAT IS ANOMIE?

On the basis of theory and empirical evidence, anomie can be described in a number of alternative ways.

1. Anomie may be considered as a syndrome consisting of many attitudes and behaviors. However, whether it reflects some variety of mental illness, such as depression or sociopathic personality disorder, or a normal response to a pathological social structure, is not entirely clear. The relationship of the Srole scale to indices of authoritarianism and ethnocentrism (18, 32, 36), and the association of anomie with suicide (11), delinquency and other serious behavior deviations (7, 8, 20, 24), plus the content of some of the Srole scale items suggest that anomie is a form of mental illness. On the other hand, the relationship

of the Srole scale to low socio-economic status, the index of "life chances" (22), and the anomic attitudes found among minority groups and groups low in the occupational structure (17, 22, 36), support Merton's central thesis that some forms of deviant behavior may be psychologically as normal as conformist behavior.

2. One may view anomie as a generalized response to cultural and social change, as does DeGrazia (9), who discusses anomie as the individual's or the society's response to changes in systems of beliefs such as religious de-emphasis, or changes in the power structure of society such as the death of a ruler. Similarly, Ogburn (27) sees anomie as a product of the lag between advances of material culture and the adaptation of the culture to these advances. Wiener (37), writing of the social disorganization that could accompany automation of industry, also cautions that such cultural lag must be overcome if the society is to be preserved. If these writers are correct, ever-increasing indices of anomie will be found in our culture as time progresses.

3. Anomie may be viewed as a style of life with its roots in the individual's developmental history. The relationships found between Srole scores and education and father's occupation, even in an aged population with low socio-economic status (30), indicate that the early experience of the individual may have an important effect in determining the goals and values for which he strives. The particularly consistent negative relationship of education to anomie seems to indicate that education may perform the function of transmitting cultural goals and norms, and the approved ways for achieving them, in such a way that even under later conflicts the individual is relatively resistant to anomic modes of adaptation. Studies of anomic attitudes in juvenile delinquents (7, 20) indicate that an anomic style of life may manifest itself at an early age; and DeGrazia (9) points to separation anxieties in early childhood and faulty socialization practices in childhood and adolescence as predisposing factors in later anomie.

4. Finally, anomie may be interpreted as lack of social interest, using the term in the Adlerian sense (2, 3). From the content of the Srole scale items, an anomic individual is seen to perceive today's society as disorganized, lacking stability, and populated with un dependable and uncaring individuals and leaders. In order to survive in such a world, one must look out and strive only for oneself. Under such circumstances, an individual's potential for pursuing goals use-

ful to society may become asocialized and the energy channelled into an anomic style of life. Again, the importance of education cannot be overlooked because it guides the early development of socially useful behavior and helps provide constant contact between the society and the individual. Studies which found social isolation, lack of desire to enter social activities, and alienation significantly related to anomie provide further empirical support for lack of social interest as an explanation of anomie.

DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

This paper has examined some theoretical formulations and empirical evidence related to anomie, and has outlined some alternative ways of looking at anomie. In this final section, an attempt will be made to indicate some directions which research could take to clarify this complex concept.

Since striving for success and cultural goals underlies many of the theories of anomie, one important area would involve measures of social motivation. The possible ways of approaching this area are multitudinous, ranging from projective techniques such as the TAT, to "paper and pencil" instruments such as Edward's PPS (12), both based on the Murray need system.

Another possible approach would be to treat anomie as an attitude and determine some of its affective and cognitive components. In addition to the more traditional methods of attitude measurement, the methodology of Abelson and Rosenberg (1), presented in their "model of attitudinal cognition," offers a particularly fruitful approach.

A third approach, the study of anomie as a developing process in the individual, springs from the emphasis of Adler (3) and DeGrazia (9) on the importance of early childhood in determining later style of life. Studies of socialization processes and of juvenile delinquency indicate some of the possible methods which could be applied here. In particular, the methodology and theoretical model of Rommetveit (34) seem appropriate.

Finally, in addition to attacking the problem through these broad approaches, the straightforward gathering of large numbers of empirical relationships of sociological and psychological variables to anomie should not be overlooked. As Merton (24) has emphasized, an immediate need for research lies in the development of objective and reliable indicators of anomie. Some of the most important of the

numerous sociological and psychological variables are direct measures of an individual's acceptance or rejection of the cultural means and goals which provide the basis for Merton's five categories of anomic adaptation. Morris' (25) factor-analyzed Ways-to-Live test provides one approach which could be adapted for this purpose. Large numbers of empirical relationships could be factor-analyzed to point out the empirical content of anomie, assuming such measures as the Srole scale are conceptually valid for use as "markers."

Thus the general outline of anomie should become more and more distinct and answers to such theoretical questions be obtained as to whether anomie more resembles lack of social interest, a response to conflict between biological drives and cultural restraints, or a response to pathological structure in society.

SUMMARY

Through anomie Durkheim provided sociology with a concept rich in meaning and inviting as a field for research and theory. The important thinking and research which have already been generated by this concept—making anomie a major concept in psychology, as well as in sociology—have been summarized, and some directions for future research suggested.

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