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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to test the hypothesis that anomia as defined by the Srole scale (a measurement of despair, hopelessness, and retreatism) is inversely related to socio-economic status (as measured by occupation, income, and education) and the amount of informal and formal group participation. Data were collected via random sample surveys (personal interviews with head of household or their substitutes) in 3 rural black parishes of Louisiana. The 594 respondents were asked to respond to the following Srole items: In spite of what people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse; It's hardly fair to bring children into the world with the way things look for the future; Nowadays a person has to live pretty much for today and let tomorrow take care of itself; These days a person doesn't really know who can count on; There's little use writing to public officials because often they aren't interested in the problems of the average man. Nearly two thirds of the respondents were classified in the high anomia scale category and significant inverse relationships were found in feelings of anomia as related to education, income, voter registration, and number of organizational affiliations (pessimism was lower among those who participated in secondary associations and/or the political process).
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**SOME SOCIAL STRUCTURAL CORRELATES OF ANOMIA
AMONG RURAL BLACKS OF LOUISIANA**

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Paper presented at the Rural Sociology Section of the Southern
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**SOME SOCIAL STRUCTURAL CORRELATES OF ANOMIA
AMONG RURAL BLACKS OF LOUISIANA**

John Moland, Jr.

Abstract

Low income people, especially blacks in some rural areas, experience dehumanization, discrimination and denial of basic rights. Such conditions including rural living, minority status, low income and poverty are reported to bring about that state of alienation associated with powerlessness, normlessness, hopelessness and despair. The Srole scale of "anomia" has been referred to as a measure of despair, hopelessness, and retreatism. An examination of the literature suggests that anomia as defined by the Srole scale is inversely related to socio-economic status (as measured by occupation, income and education) and the amount of informal and formal group participation.

Data from a systematic random sample of blacks in rural communities of three parishes in Louisiana revealed a coefficient of reproducibility of .9163 when the Guttman scaling technique was applied to the five Srole items. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents were classified in the high anomia scale category thereby indicating the presence of strong feelings of hopelessness and despair among respondents. No significant differences existed among respondents by sex, age, and occupation.

Significant inverse relationships were found, however, with respect to feelings of anomia as related to education, income, voter registration and number of organizational affiliations. With respect to social participation involving organizational membership and voter registration there is some support for the hypothesis that the greater the participation in secondary associations and in the political process the lower the feelings of pessimism, hopelessness and despair. The implication of these findings is the need to promote, among the rural population considered here, greater civic involvement with emphasis on the political process. Such involvement may have positive effects for community problems and thereby reducing the presence of anomia.

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**SOME SOCIAL STRUCTURAL CORRELATES OF ANOMIA
AMONG RURAL BLACKS OF LOUISIANA**

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Blacks in the rural delta South have been characterized as living in a feudal social structure in which they have no control over the decisions that govern their daily activities (Coleman, 1964). The implication is that the black man in the rural South has been limited not only in his choice of cultural goals but also in the means available to him for achieving goals once they have been selected. In addition, once selected goals have been partially achieved or even fully achieved blacks in some rural areas have been denied the means to consummate these goals and/or experience the satisfaction of their attainment. The evidence includes numerous denials of opportunities to secure employment, land, loans, material goods and equipment for house and farm, and the right to vote (including the application of pressure not to vote once registered). Thus, it is concluded that black and low-income people in some rural areas experience dehumanization, discrimination and denial of basic rights (Ginsberg, 1969).

Conditions of low income and poverty, minority status, ghetto living, and rural life are often mentioned in association with strong feelings of alienation (Bell, 1957, Meier and Bell, 1959, Bullough, 1967, Killian and Grigg, 1962). It is presumed that living under the conditions described above brings about that state of alienation, associated with feelings of powerlessness, normlessness, hopelessness and despair. In view of black experiences in the rural South these feelings of alienation are viewed as being more prevalent among rural than urban blacks, among older than younger blacks, and among those of lower social economic status than among those of higher status as measured by occupation, income, and education. Among the several purported measures of normlessness, the best known is the Srole's scale of "anomia" (Srole, 1956). This scale has been widely used in research investigations and is frequently referred to as a general index of alienation. Investigators have noted, however, that Srole's scale of "anomia" appears not to be a measure of normlessness so much as a measure of despair and retreatism (Rushing, 1972; Meier and Bell, 1959; Bryan and Bertrand, 1970; Erbe, 1964). Meier and Bell (1959) write "we are convinced that these questions for the most part measure despair, that is, utter hopelessness and discouragement... We have adopted the term 'anomia' to refer to the Srole scale but other terms such as 'despair', 'hopelessness', 'discouragement', 'personal disorganization', 'demoralization' (especially in the sense of disheartenment) and other terms might be used at this point in our understanding of the phenomenon being measured." Erbe (1964) has referred to this scale as measuring retreatist alienation, characterized "in detachment and despair, in the feeling that the world promises nothing in the way of comfort or support." Somewhat in this sense the Srole scale has been used as a measure of fatalism by Bryan and Bertrand (1970). They used the word "fatalism" to avoid confusion and because it seems most accurately to depict the single dimension meaning of the scale (p. 7).

According to Srole (1956, p. 711), his scale refers to the individual eunomia-anomia continuum representing "the individual's generalized pervasive sense of self-to-others belongingness at one extreme compared with self-to-others distance and self-to-others alienation at the other pole of the continuum." The scale consists of the following five items with which the respondent may either agree or disagree.

1. In spite of what some people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse.
2. It's hardly fair to bring children into the world with the way things look for the future.
3. Nowadays a person has to live pretty much for today and let tomorrow take care of itself.
4. These days a person doesn't really know who he can count on.
5. There's little use writing to public officials because often they aren't really interested in the problems of the average man.

These five items "represent internalized counterparts or reflections in the individual's life situation of conditions of social dysfunction" in the society characterized in a sociological sense as "anomie" (Srole 1956, p. 712). The anomia scale has been taken as a psychological measurement of "anomie" as subjectively experienced and reflected in personal beliefs, perceptions, or orientations of the individual.

The anomia components of the five items have been stated by Srole as follows: The first item reflects the individual's view that he and people like him are retrogressing from the goals they have already reached. The second item, perhaps most closely approximating Durkheim's particular definition of anomie, is the deflation or loss of internalized social norms and values, reflected in extreme form in the individual's sense of the meaninglessness of life itself. A third element of anomia (see Item 3) is the individual's perception of the social order as essentially fickle and unpredictable, i.e., orderless, including the sense that under such conditions he can accomplish little toward realizing future life goals. The individual's perception that his framework of immediate personal relationships, the very rock of his social existence, is no longer predictive or supportive, is expressed by the fourth item. The last item of the five listed above reflects the individual's feeling that community leaders are detached from and indifferent to his needs reflecting severance of the interdependent bond within the social system between leaders and those they should represent and serve (Srole, 1956, pp. 712-713).

In this investigation, anomia as measured by the Srole scale is used as a fairly generalized view or perspective of society held at largely the conscious level and describing the individual's appraisal of life conditions as problematic or non-problematic insofar as personal management is concerned for him and for people like himself. The concern is not with measuring anomia primarily as a psychological manifestation of expressions of normlessness, hopelessness, despair and discouragement but also as reflecting the respondents' perception of reality as a state or condition of society affecting his general life situation. In other words, one's responses to items in the Srole scale are viewed as reflecting what he, the respondent, perceives as being the nature of social conditions as they affect him and others like himself.

Based upon the investigator's examination of the literature it is hypothesized that anomia as defined by the Srole scale is inversely related to individual economic status as measured by occupation, income and education as well as the amount of informal and formal group participation (Bell, 1957; Meier and Bell, 1959; Rushing, 1972).

Methodology

Data for this study were collected by means of sample surveys conducted in the rural black communities of three parishes in Louisiana--West Feliciana, West Baton Rouge, and East Baton Rouge. Through the use of maps and census reports, wards in each parish were identified and the number of black households was determined. After determining in a proportional manner the number of households from each ward to be included in the sample, they were chosen by means of systematic random sampling. In most cases, interviews were conducted with the head of the household or with the wife of the head when he was not present. The total sample of 564 respondents included 191 respondents from rural communities of East Baton Rouge Parish, 173 from West Feliciana Parish, and 200 respondents from the rural areas of West Baton Rouge Parish.

Included in the questionnaire used in this investigation were the five Srole items on anomia. The response categories for these items were strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. From the systematic random sample previously described those respondents not answering each of the five items (43 in number) were excluded. The Guttman scaling technique was applied to the five Srole items and the unique scale types were collapsed to form three scale groups--low, moderate, and high anomia.

Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents by scale type following the application of the Guttman scaling technique to Srole items. After adjustments were made for errors the items were found to scale with a

Table 1

Guttman Scale - Srole Items

<u>Scale Type</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Lots Worse</u>	<u>Write Offs.</u>	<u>Live for Today</u>	<u>Count On</u>	<u>Number of Respondents</u>
6	1	1	1	1	1	330
5	0	1	1	1	1	89
4	0	0	1	1	1	44
3	0	0	0	1	1	21
2	0	0	0	0	1	16
1	0	0	0	0	0	21
						521

Coefficient of Reproducibility = .9163

coefficient of reproducibility of .9163. This finding indicates the presence of an acceptable degree of validity and reliability in the scale for differentiation among respondents in terms of feelings of anomia. It is revealed in Table 2 that nearly two-thirds of the respondents (63 percent) fall in the high anomia scale group while the remaining one-third are divided between the moderate (26 percent) and low (11 percent) scale groups.

Table 2

Anomia Scale Groups

<u>Degree of Anomia</u>	<u>Number of Respondents</u>	<u>Percent</u>
High	330	63
Moderate	133	26
Low	58	11
Total	521	100

Findings

The application of the Guttman scaling technique to the Srole items captures the degree and extent of feelings of hopelessness and despair among respondents. As revealed in Table 3, when agree and strongly agree are combined, from two-thirds to 90 percent of all respondents agree with each of the five items in the scale. It is observed that 90 percent of the respondents feel that "these days a person doesn't really know who he can count on." Nearly 50 percent of all respondents "strongly agree" with this item. Four-fifths or more of all respondents agree with the first three items which suggest that one cannot depend on others and the future is unpredictable and bleak. High agreement is also given to the fourth and fifth items which involve the feeling that things are getting worse and the future is too uncertain for bringing children into the world.

The differences found among scale groups on the five items are extremely significant as revealed by the chi square values. Thus, those respondents who are high on the scale perceive conditions as more difficult and express greater pessimism, despair, and hopelessness toward the realities of their

Table 3

Responses to Srole's Anomia Items

These days a person doesn't really know who he can count on.

<u>Response</u>	<u>Low</u>		<u>Mod</u>		<u>High</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Strongly agree	7	12	68	51	167	51	242	46
Agree	24	41	59	44	147	44	230	44
Disagree	24	41	6	5	15	5	45	9
Strongly disagree	3	5	0	0	1	0	4	1
Total	58	99	133	100	330	100	521	100

Table 3 (Cont'd)

Nowadays a person has to live pretty much for today and let tomorrow take care of itself.

	<u>Low</u>		<u>Mod</u>		<u>High</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Strongly agree	2	2	44	34	127	38	173	33
Agree	19	33	63	47	166	50	248	48
Disagree	25	43	22	16	32	10	79	15
Strongly disagree	12	21	4	3	5	2	21	4
Total	58	99	133	100	330	100	521	100

There's little use writing to public officials because often they are not really interested in the problems of the average man.

Strongly agree	1	2	42	32	98	30	141	27
Agree	4	7	75	56	198	60	277	53
Disagree	45	77	15	11	29	9	89	17
Strongly disagree	8	14	1	1	5	1	14	3
Total	58	100	133	100	330	100	521	100

In spite of what some people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse.

Strongly agree	8	14	35	26	77	23	120	23
Agree	9	15	54	41	199	60	262	50
Disagree	38	66	41	31	48	15	127	24
Strongly disagree	3	3	3	2	6	2	12	2
Total	58	100	133	100	330	100	521	99

It is hardly fair to bring children into the world with the way things look for the future.

Strongly agree	0	0	0	0	96	29	96	18
Agree	16	28	0	0	234	71	250	48
Disagree	39	67	125	93	0	0	164	31
Strongly disagree	3	4	8	7	0	0	11	2
Total	58	99	133	100	330	100	521	99

Chi square for each item (responses collapsed to form dichotomy of agree and disagree) is highly significant. d.f. = 2, $p \leq .001$

life situation. The sharpest difference among scale groups is found in the fifth item--"It is hardly fair to bring children into the world with the way things look for the future." Here, it is observed that all respondents in the high scale group agree with the item while all respondents in the moderate group and 71 percent of those in the low group disagree with the item.

Generally speaking, in view of the high anomia score among nearly two-thirds of the respondents, it is safe to conclude that feelings of despair, distrust, and hopelessness are strongly evidenced among these respondents.

Table 4

Sex of Respondents

<u>Scale Group</u>	<u>Male</u>		<u>Female</u>	
	N	%	N	%
High	89	61	241	64
Moderate	46	31	87	23
Low	12	8	46	12
Total	147	100	374	99

$\chi^2 = 4.53, 2 \text{ d.f. insignificant}$

Table 4 indicates that there is no significant difference between male and female respondents with respect to high feelings of anomia. It has been suggested by other investigators that anomia may be typical of the poor in general and that poverty is "a climate of discouragement and despair." The poor have been characterized by Oscar Lewis (1961) as having a "sense of resignation and fatalism based upon the realities of their difficult life situation."

No significant difference was found among the three scale groups in terms of age (see Table 5). While a slightly larger percentage of those in the high anomia group as compared with those in the moderate and low group are under 35 years of age, the difference is small and statistically insignificant.

Slightly above one-fifth of all respondents (22 percent) had completed less than five years of schooling (see Table 6). Nearly half of all respondents (46 percent) have less than eight years of schooling. Only about one-fourth (24 percent) had completed 12 years or more of formal education. Findings from other studies previously mentioned in this paper suggest that those persons with higher levels of education will be less anomic than those with lower levels of education. Respondents with 12 or more years of education are less anomic than those with less than 12 years of schooling. The chi square value for this comparison with 2 d.f. is significant at the .05 level.

Table 5

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Age of Respondents

Age Intervals	Low		Moderate		High		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
15-24	4	7	8	6	28	8	41	8
25-34	8	14	19	14	65	20	92	18
35-44	16	27	29	22	74	22	118	22
45-54	15	26	32	24	57	17	104	20
55-64	6	10	20	15	44	13	70	13
65-74	5	9	19	14	44	13	68	13
75-84	2	3	1	1	12	4	15	3
85 and above	0	0	1	1	2	1	3	1
Not Given	2	3	4	3	4	1	10	2
Total	58	99	133	100	330	99	521	100

Table 6

Education by Scale Groups

Grades Completed	Low		Moderate		High		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
12 or more	18	31	40	30	68	21	126	24
8-11	16	28	29	22	110	33	155	30
5-7	15	26	35	26	75	23	125	24
0-4	9	15	29	22	77	23	115	22
Total	58	100	133	100	330	100	521	100

($\chi^2 = 6.31$, 2 d.f. significant at .05 level after collapsing grades below 12.)

No significant difference is obtained by scale group when respondents are compared in terms of occupation (see Table 7). Even when grouped in terms of white collar, blue collar (craftsmen and operative), service workers and laborers (including farm laborers) no significant difference is found among the three scale groups. Over 50 percent of the respondents in each scale group are laborers.

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Table 7
Occupation of Respondents

<u>Occupation</u>	Scale Group					
	Low		Moderate		High	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Professional Workers	5	9	8	6	11	3
Semi-Professional Workers	0	0	1	1	4	1
Proprietors, Managers and Officials	0	0	5	4	14	4
Clerical, Sales and Kindred Workers	0	0	1	1	2	1
Craftsmen, Foremen, Kindred Workers	3	5	7	5	21	6
Operative and Kindred Workers	2	3	14	10	14	4
Domestic Service Workers	1	2	6	4	21	6
Protective Service Workers	0	0	0	0	1	0
Service Workers except domestic and protective	4	7	8	6	25	8
Laborers (farm laborers, croppers, and foremen)	34	59	72	55	185	56
None, not given	9	15	11	8	32	10
Total	58	100	133	100	330	99

Table 8
Monthly Family Income By Scale Group

<u>Income</u>	Scale Groups							
	Low		Moderate		High		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
\$700 and above	16	32	25	20	38	13	79	17
500 - 699	8	16	20	16	40	13	68	14
300 - 499	6	12	24	20	74	25	104	22
0 - 299	20	40	54	44	146	49	220	47
Total	50	100	123	100	298	100	471	100

Chi Square = 15.98, d.f. = 6, $p < .02$

Table 8 presents income by scale group. Inspection of this table reveals that 32 percent of those in the low scale group have monthly family incomes of \$700 or more as compared to only 13 percent of those in the high scale group. Nearly three-fourths of the respondents in the high scale group have

family incomes of less than \$500 per month as compared to about 50 percent of those respondents in the low scale group. The chi square value obtained for this table (15.98) is significant at the .02 level. Income is not independent of scale group. Those respondents with higher incomes are less anomic than those with lower incomes. Thus, income is a significant variable for differentiating among the scale groups.

Other studies have suggested an inverse relationship between feelings of anomia and membership in secondary associations. Inspection of Table 9 reveals that nearly half of the respondents in the high and moderate scale groups belong to no organization (exclusive of church membership) as compared to only one-third of the respondents in the low group. While there is not much difference among the three scale groups in terms of membership in one organization, 22 percent of low anomia group belong to three or more organizations as compared to 8 percent of the moderates and only 5 percent of the high anomia group. When respondents belonging

Table 9

Number of Organizations to Which Respondents
Belong By Scale Group

Number of Organizations	Low		Scale Groups Mod		High	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Eight or more	0	0.0	1	.8	2	.6
Seven	1	1.7	0	.0	0	.0
Six	1	1.7	2	1.5	1	0.3
Five	2	3.4	1	0.8	0	0.0
Four	3	5.2	3	2.2	3	0.9
Three	6	10.3	4	3.0	11	3.3
Two	5	8.6	14	10.5	51	15.4
One	21	36.2	46	34.6	110	33.3
None	19	32.8	61	45.8	149	45.2
No Response	0	0.0	1	0.8	3	0.9
Total	58	99.9	133	100.0	330	99.9

$\chi^2 = 12.52, 2 \text{ d.f. significant at } .01 \text{ level for three or more.}$

less than three organizations are compared with those belonging to three or more organizations the obtained chi square value is significant at the .01 level. Thus, a larger percentage of respondents in the low scale group than those in the moderate and high groups belong to three organizations or more.

During the past decade blacks in many rural communities have become registered voters for the first time. This is especially the case in West Feliciana parish where no blacks were registered to vote prior to 1964. It is very likely that registering to vote and participation in local politics tend to reduce the feelings of despair, hopelessness, and powerlessness.

Table 10 presents by scale group responses to the question, "Are you registered to vote?" Here, it is noted that 86 percent of the respondents in the low scale group gave an affirmative response as compared to 80 percent of the moderates and only 71 percent of the high scale group. Only 14 percent of the respondents in the low scale group answered "no" while twice as many (29 percent) in the high scale group answered "no". The chi square value obtained for this distribution is significant at the .01 level. Thus, there is a highly significant relationship between the scale groups and voter registration. Those respondents with low anomia scores are more likely to be registered voters than those respondents with high anomia scores.

Table 10

Registered and Non-Registered Voters
by Scale Group

Response	Low		Mod		High		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	50	86	107	80	233	71	390	75
No	8	14	26	20	97	29	131	25
Total	58	100	133	100	330	100	521	100
Chi Square:		9.345	d.f. = 2,		p < .01			

Summary

The analysis of the anomia scale scores revealed that nearly two-thirds of the respondents fall in the high anomia scale category and one-fourth in the moderately anomia scale group while only about one-tenth of the respondents exhibited low feelings of anomia. The presence of such strong feelings of hopelessness, despair, and pessimism among the respondents suggest the presence of a climate of discouragement, despair, and pessimism within the community insofar as the residents being able to effect significant changes in their circumstance and condition.

About half of all respondents had less than an eighth grade education and about one-fourth had less than five years of schooling. In an age of automation and emphasis on obtaining at least a high school education, these respondents may find themselves at a distinct disadvantage. Thus, as rural people in a setting where mechanized farming is increasingly replacing manual labor, they may feel themselves locked in a hopeless situation without the power to bring about needed changes. It should also be noted, however, that while respondents with 12 years or more of education were less anomic than those with less than 12 years of education, still 54 percent of them (those with 12 years or more of education) were in the high anomia scale group.

Contrary to expectations, there was no difference between white collar workers (those positions which usually require higher levels of education) and other workers with respect to position on the scale. A significant inverse relationship was obtained, however, between income and anomia. Those with higher incomes tended to be less anomic than those with lower incomes.



With respect to social participation involving organizational membership and voter registration there is some support for the hypothesis that the greater the participation in secondary associations and in the political process the lower the feelings of pessimism, hopelessness, and despair. The implication of these findings is the need to promote, among the rural populations involved, greater civic involvement including involvement in the political process. Such involvement may not only reduce the condition of anomia but also aid in bringing solutions to the problems of housing, unemployment, and poverty (McManus, 1973; Means, 1973; Moland, 1972).

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