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## Revising the assessment of feeling of anomie: Presenting a multidimensional scale

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### Abstract

In spite of vast researches about anomie and its measurements at individual level, these researches have not paid enough attention to high abstraction of anomie and have considered it as one-dimensional construct. Purpose of this study is to bridge this gap and present a multidimensional scale of feeling of anomie. After reviewing all of anomie scales from 1956 to 2007, 22 items were chosen and the responses were arranged on five-point Likert format. Five hundred university students were selected through convenience method of sampling and were required to fill up the designed questionnaire. Explanatory factor analysis revealed two items with very low factor loading that were deleted. Results also suggested three sub-scales that were named meaninglessness and distrust (8 items), powerlessness (7 items), and fetishism of money (5 items). Findings were consistent with theoretical inquiry about anomie.

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### 1. Introduction

The concept of anomie has long been used in many different disciplines and it has been applied differently in various contexts. The general and common meaning of it is lawlessness (known as Anomos in Greece), normless, irregularity, and confusion, and it is considered as guilt and assault to holy things in religious terms (Passas, 1995).

Anomie is one of the most important and most applicable concepts in criminology; therefore, precise assessment of it is highly important. Although some of previous studies assessed anomie with a multidimensional approach (see Bjarnason, 1998; Adnanes, 2007), due to the methodological criticisms and defective conceptualization, they were not quite appropriate for anomie assessment. Thus, the current study is the only study that was aimed to make a more complete and multidimensional scale of anomie.

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## 2. Background

The important point is that the concept of anomie is an abstract concept and has different dimensions which should be considered in its assessment. Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner (2006) presented one of the evidences for high abstraction of anomie which they believed that anomie has personal state while it refers to social structure. More precisely, while anomie implies about structure, it reveals the mental state of the actor too.

Anomie concept of Durkheim is the most obvious manifestation of modern society and it takes place in a situation in which the convention and moral principles of human interaction were destroyed by economical morality. In this situation, there is no limitation on endless desires of getting money, power, and prestige by society (McClosky & Schaar, 1965). On the other hand, Merton (1938, 1968) believed that the monetary achievement and social position have become cultural aspirations which the means to achieve them were not distributed egalitarian among social classes and this unequal means distribution along with equal emphasis on achieving cultural aspirations caused kind of pressure which has various consequences. In most recent theory of anomie, Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) believed that anomie is due to domination of economical purposes on noneconomic institutions. In such society, cultural values encourage success in any ways and any cost. Whatever the cause of anomie might be, these three theories have emphasized on the same consequences of anomie. Meaningless, powerless and distrust feelings and money fetishism are manifestations of anomie in individuals' behavior.

## 3. Literature review

The first operationalization of anomie was offered by Srole (1965) who measured anomie with 5 items that assesses different aspects of it such as pessimistic view to the government, irregularity and unpredictability of social norms, lack of attention to long-term goals, and lack of internalization of social norms. It is true that Srole in his scale of anomie emphasized on five aspects, but he assessed it as one dimensional construct.

After Srole, numerous studies have been conducted on anomie and each of them offered different types of operationalization and emphasized on particular aspect of it: McClosky & Schaar (1965) and Kapsis (1978) on moral chaos, Dean (1961) on ramble and isolation from group norms, Winslow (1968), Cao (2004, 2007), and Elliot (1985) on tendency to illegal behaviors, Fischer (1973) on social isolation, Teevan (1975) on despair and meaninglessness, and Travis (1993) on alienation. All of the mentioned scales considered anomie as one-dimensional construct. As far as we found, there were only two anomie operationalizations which emphasized on multidimensionality of the anomie. Bjarnason (1998) designed a scale in two parts including exteriority and constraint. "Exteriority refers to the more cognitive aspect of experiencing the social world as an objective, predictable, reality that follows a determinable logic" and "constraint, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which one experiences a personal commitment to the demands and expectation of society" (Bjarnason.1998: 713).

Another research by Adnanes (2007) showed that anomie has three factors; one is indicator of psychological anomie and the other two factors are nostalgia and normless which refer to the individuals attitude about the social changes. There are some criticisms for Adnanes research. First, internal consistency of the scale was .59 while the second and third subscales Alpha were .36 and .30 respectively that were very low. Another important criticism refers to the ambiguity of the subscales. The researcher did not explain what exactly he meant by psychological anomie and nostalgia.

With regard to the above discussion, the purpose of the current study is about a new operationalization of the anomie which anomie assumed as multidimensional construct that has several components. On the other hand, with regard to the necessity of studies about anomie in Iranian society, an appropriate scale would be provided for Iranian researchers.

## 4. Methodology

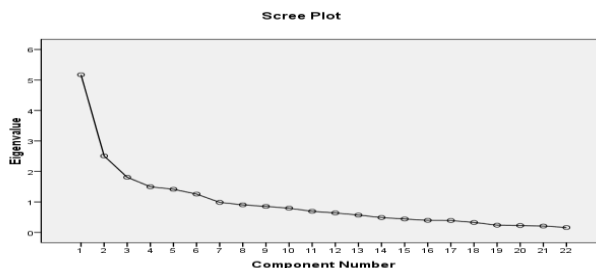
### 4.1 Instrument and sample

First, all of anomie scales were gathered which are as follows: Srole (1956), Mezruchi (1960), Dean (1961, 1968), Nelson (1968), Winslow (1968), Zeitz, Medalie, & Alexander (1969), Carr (1971), Rushing (1971), Fischer (1973), Form (1975), Teevan (1975), Kapsis (1978), Elliot (1985: from Menard. 1995), Travis (1993), Bjarnason (1998), Cao (2004, 2007), McClosky & Schaar (1965), Agnew (1980), and Muftic (2006). Then the items were gathered together and the repeated items were deleted. Some of the scale's response format was dichotomous (yes, no), the statements of the items were changed in a way to put the response in Likert format while the content of the items remained the same.

After refinement of the items, 19 items were chosen; besides that, three items were made by the authors. Two of the author-made items were about the lack of trust towards authority and one item was about the powerlessness. The reason to add the two distrust items was due to the emphasis of the literature on the issue of lack of trust to authority as one of the important indices of anomie (e.g. Srole, 1956; Mezruchi, 1960; Teevan, 1975; Kapsis, 1978); however, except items of Srole's scale, there were no proper items for current situation of Iranian society and the items of this part were ambiguous. The powerlessness item was added for the same reason. Items were formatted on 5-point Likert format ranging from "completely agree" to "completely disagree". The total of 22 items was prepared as the final version to administer on the pilot study. By random sampling, 500 students were chosen to fill up the anomie questionnaire.

## 5. Results

By using Scree test (Figure 1), three factors solution were chosen and subsequently according to Bryman & Cramer (2001) the items with factor loading less than 0.30 were deleted. Thus, two items were deleted: "The trouble with the world today is that most people really don't believe in anything". (item No. 6 of McClosky & Schaar's scale), and "success is more dependent on luck than on real ability" (Item No. 6 of Agnew's scale).



In the scree method, "a graph is drawn of the descending variance accounted for by the factors initially extracted. The factors to be retained are those which lie before the point at which the eigenvalues seem to level off"(Bryman & Cramer, 2001:267).

With regards to the content of the items in loaded factors and by referring to theoretical literature about anomie, they were named as meaninglessness and distrust (8 items), powerlessness (7 items), and fetishism of money (5 items). Each of the three components explains respectively 23.50, 11.40, and 8.22 percent and in total 43.12 percent of the total variance. Table 1 showed the factor loading of each item. In addition, the reference of the items was given in the parenthesis in front of each item.

Alpha cronbach for the meaningless was .79, for powerlessness was .74, and for fetishism of money was .62 and the Alpha cronbach of the total scale was .83 that implies good reliability of the scale.

Table 1. Factor loading of each of the items of each component

| <b>Meaninglessness and distrust</b> |  | <i>Factor loading</i> |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| 1.                                  | I can trust to the statements of high-ranking officials (authority) (author-made).   | .75                   |
| 2.                                  | There is little use writing to public officials because often they aren't really interested in the problems of average man (Srole, 1956; Teevan, 1975; Agnew, 1980). | .74                   |
| 3.                                  | In spite of what some people say, a lot of average man is getting worse, not better (Srole, 1956; Mezruchi, 1960; Zeits et al., 1969; Teevan, 1975).                 | .67                   |
| 4.                                  | I believe most of the congress bills are towards the welfare of people (Author-made).  | .66                   |
| 5.                                  | Most public officials(people in public office) are not really interested in the problems of the average man (Mezruchi, 1960; Zeits et al., 1969; Kapsis, 1978)       | .63                   |
| 6.                                  | I often wonder what the meaning of life really is(Dean, 1961)  | .52                   |
| 7.                                  | It's hardly fair to bring children into the world with the way things look for future(Srole, 1956)   | .51                   |
| 8.                                  | Everything is relative, and there just aren't any definite rules to live by(Dean, 1961)  | .49                   |
| <b>Powerlessness</b>                |  |                       |
| 9.                                  | I lead a trapped or frustrated life(Teevan, 1975)  | .80                   |
| 10.                                 | Nobody knows what is expected of him or her life(Bjarnason, 1998)  | .66                   |
| 11.                                 | I have no control over my destiny(Teevan, 1975)  | .61                   |
| 12.                                 | The socioeconomic status of people determines their dignity and its inevitable (Author-made).  | .56                   |
| 13.                                 | The world is changing so fast that it is hard for me to understand what is going on(Teevan, 1975; Form, 1975)  | .47                   |
| 14.                                 | My whole world feels like it is falling apart (Travis, 1993)   | .44                   |
| 15.                                 | No matter how hard people try in life it doesn't make any difference (Travis, 1993)  | .43                   |
| <b>Fetishism of money</b>           |  |                       |
| 16.                                 | To make money, there are no right and wrong ways anymore, only easy ways and hard ways(Srole, 1956;Zeits et al., 1969)   | .73                   |
| 17.                                 | A person is justified in doing almost anything if the reward is high enough(Rushing, 1971)   | .68                   |
| 18.                                 | I am getting a college education so I can get a good job(Muftic, 2006).  | .55                   |
| 19.                                 | I follow whatever rules I want to follow (Kapsis, 1978, Bjarnason, 1998)   | .46                   |
| 20.                                 | Money is the most important thing in life(Srole, 1956)   | .45                   |

## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to build a multidimensional scale of anomie for Iranian society. The results showed that anomie or anomic feeling among the actors in the societal stage has three dimensions which are completely consistent with theoretical approaches in this field from Durkheim (1897) to Messner and Rosenfeld (2001).

Thus, anomie is a state of mind and set of attitudes, beliefs and personal feelings. This state of mind gives a kind of feeling to the person that his surrounding is full of chaos and confusion which does not bear any regularity and systematic rules. For anomic person, the norms that regulate the behaviors are weak and vague and he is living in a situation where "norms pressure" is low and moral principles have collapsed. The anomic person is isolated and has distrusted to his surrounding (Dean, 1968; Teevan, 1975; Fischer, 1973; Travis, 1993). Anomie encompasses the alienating from society and social institutions, disappointment, powerlessness and distrust to authority and society (Srole, 1965). In short, anomic person has meaningless and powerlessness feelings that both were covered in dimensions of the suggested scale.

Another important aspect that theorists by following Durkheim emphasized on it is unrestraint aspirations and lack of social control on these aspirations. Merton (1968) and Messner and Rosenfeld (2001) believed that the aspirations have deep root in culture and the most important aspirations are money and wealth. Anomic person is willing to do whatever just to achieve that aspiration. In other words, for anomic person, all of activities are toward

the monetary success. In fact, money becomes fetishistic. Fetishism of money epitomizes the progress in economical achievements. Thus, fetishism of money is one of the most important dimensions of anomie as Muftic (2006) mentioned and is assessed in the current scale.

With regard to the reviewed discussion and literature, the current scale is the only multidimensional scale about anomie which has good reliability and validity and covered good theoretical dimensions.

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