

Reaching the Alienated

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Extension must have concern for the alienated farmer, the man who feels left out and turned off from the mainstream of society. According to Dickinson, this feeling of alienation prevents people from seeking assistance from agencies and individuals that might be able to help the alienated person. The author compares personal and impersonal Extension contacts in his study of alienation. As might be predicted, those farmers with high alienation scores avoided personal contacts with Extension. Alienation was not a factor in the use of impersonal contacts.

One of the main aspects of an Extension agent's work is to modify knowledge, skills, and attitudes of farmers so they can evaluate new practices and adopt those that will improve their farm operations. The agent uses many ways to distribute information and encourage adoption, but not all of them are used by every farmer because each appeals to a slightly different group. Some objective characteristics such as age and education help explain part of the variation in farmers' use of information sources.¹

Of greater importance, however, may be underlying attitudes and values not yet studied. This article examines the relationship between one such subjective variable—

alienation—and the use of certain Extension contact methods.

Data Collection

Data were collected during a survey of the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia in the summer of 1968.² A total of 638 randomly selected household heads were interviewed, of which 239 respondents (37%) were farmers. The farm interviews included questions about alienation and seven Extension contact methods.

Alienation

The alienated farmer is one who feels a breakdown in his sense

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of attachment to society. He may see himself as being alone, unwanted, and unvalued.³ The concept of alienation has no single precise definition. Seeman,⁴ for example, identified five elements including powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. Dean⁵ listed three meanings of alienation: powerlessness, normlessness, and social isolation. Srole describes the concept in terms of a continuum with one pole representing a general sense that the individual belongs with others and the other pole indicating a feeling of distance from others. The concept of alienation outlined by Srole and his method of measuring it was used in this study.

The feeling of alienation or distance from others may prevent people from seeking contacts with agencies or individuals who distribute information. In addition, the alienated have more difficulty than the unalienated in learning new material once contact is established.⁶ Thus, farmers who are more alienated may have fewer contacts with Extension and learn less from these contacts when they do occur.

Marsh, Dolan, and Riddick⁷ found that alienation was inversely related to a combined Extension contact score, but they didn't analyze the components of the combined score. Because Extension uses many methods to inform farmers, alienation may be related differently to each method. You would expect that alienation would be a greater deterrent to direct personal contacts with Extension agents than to indi-

rect forms of communication using the mass media. No feeling of belongingness is necessary for the farmer to initiate impersonal contacts, but a feeling of distance from others would act as a barrier to personal contacts with Extension.

Measuring Alienation

Alienation was measured by the Srole scale,⁸ one of the most widely used instruments in sociological research. This scale consists of the following five items, each representing a particular aspect of alienation.

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

The respondent could agree or disagree with each item as it was read to him. Agreeing with an item indicates alienation for that component of the scale. The total number of items agreed with constitutes an alienation score. Of the 239 farmers

interviewed, 32 percent disagreed with all of the items and had a zero score. Thirty-nine percent agreed with one or two items and were classified as having a low alienation score. The remaining 29 percent who agreed with three, four, or five items were classified as having a high alienation score.

Extension Contacts

Farm respondents were asked to name an Extension agent who served in their area and two-thirds could do so.

Seven kinds of information sources were studied and then divided into personal and impersonal contact types. The personal contacts reported by farmers included attending meetings and field days (45%), farm visits by an Extension agent (43%), office visits (38%), and telephone calls (37%). One-third of the farmers had no personal contact with an Extension agent during the year studied. Impersonal contacts included reading newspaper articles written by an Extension agent (85%), listening to or watching Extension radio or television programs (85%), and reading material mailed by Extension (55%). Six percent didn't use any impersonal contact method. Therefore, farmers used impersonal sources more than personal ones.

Extension contacts were analyzed by alienation score category. The number of farmers naming an Extension agent decreased as the alienation score increased. The per-

centage who had a zero alienation score and knew an Extension agent was 82 percent compared to 61 percent of the low-score and 54 percent of the high-score groups.

Table 1 shows the total number of personal and impersonal contacts in each alienation score category. For personal contacts, the zero-score group had the fewest farmers with no personal contacts (26%) as well as the most with 9 or more contacts (33%). The low-score group contained 42 percent with no personal contacts and 12 percent with 9 or more, while 29 percent of the high-score farmers had no personal contacts and 16 percent had 9 or more.

The difference in the distribution between the three groups was statistically significant. It was somewhat surprising that the high-score farmers had more personal contacts than those with a low alienation score, but both of these groups had fewer contacts than the zero-score farmers. This suggests that the presence or absence of alienation rather than the degree is more important in looking at the relationship between alienation and personal contacts with Extension agents.

The total number of impersonal contacts appeared unrelated to alienation. Between 5 percent and 7 percent of the farmers in each alienation score category had no impersonal contacts, and from 63 percent to 70 percent reported 105 contacts or more. As expected, then, alienation didn't influence the number of Extension contacts using the mass media.

Table 1. Alienation scores of farmers and personal and impersonal contacts.

No. of Personal Contacts	Alienation Score		
	Zero %	Low %	High %
0	26	42	29
1—2	17	13	24
3—5	18	20	18
6—8	6	13	13
9+	33	12	16
TOTAL	100	100	100

No. of Impersonal Contacts	Zero %	Low %	High %
0	5	5	7
1—52	14	18	15
53—104	11	14	9
105+	70	63	69
TOTAL	100	100	100
N	77	94	68

Personal contacts: $X^2 = 18.80$, d.f. = 8, $p < .05$.

Impersonal contacts: $X^2 = 1.68$, d.f. = 4, not significant.

When analyzed separately, six of the seven contact methods followed a similar pattern in relation to alienation score as they did when considered together as personal and impersonal categories. The lone exception to the trend was readership of mailed material. The number of farmers reporting no use of this service ranged from 38 percent in the high-score category to 57 percent in the zero-score group. The pattern for mailed material was opposite

that found for personal contacts—use of the source increased with alienation score whereas use of personal sources decreased as alienation score increased.

Communicating with Alienated Farmers

These findings indicate alienation is inversely related to the use of personal sources of information, while the use of impersonal sources

is unrelated to alienation. Personal contact methods involve direct, face-to-face contacts with Extension agents. These may be avoided to a greater extent by farmers who are more alienated because the risk of inappropriate behavior is higher than when impersonal contacts are involved. The positive relationship between alienation and the use of mailed material suggests that the more alienated farmers have either sought agricultural information by being put on a mailing list, or been added to a list involuntarily by the Extension agent.

While the alienated farmers showed no less use of impersonal sources of information, these aren't the most effective methods of effecting change. An adoption study of this same farmer population found that slower adopters depended less on personal contacts and more on mass media than did the average.⁹ The more alienated farmers use personal sources less, have more difficulty in learning new material, and are slower adopters. The less alienated farmers are just the opposite.

The Extension agent will have difficulty distributing information to help alienated farmers change since they minimize personal contacts and have difficulty learning new material. Agricultural information disseminated through mass media should try to reduce the feelings of uncertainty of farmers about contacting Extension agents. At the same time, the agent should actively seek out those farmers who feel alienated rather than waiting for

them to approach him. Once a direct personal relationship is established, information may be furnished on an individual basis but at a slower rate than with farmers who aren't alienated. Eventually, feelings of alienation may be reduced and learning can proceed at a faster rate using a wider range of information sources.

Summary

The identification of alienated individuals is a necessary prerequisite to reducing feelings of alienation. The scale used in this study could be included in a systematic survey by an Extension Service elsewhere. If that isn't possible, the kinds of information sought in the five scale items could be brought out in general conversation with the farmer.

The problem of alienation may be most difficult for the Extension agent to deal with in a low socioeconomic group. These farmers have failed to achieve economic success, which has probably contributed to their feelings of alienation. Research indicates that alienation increases as socioeconomic status decreases, and that lower socioeconomic groups have the fewest contacts with Extension and other educational agencies.

If initial contact can be established through either personal or impersonal methods, the agent should try to provide learning experiences in which the probability of success is high and the results of learning can be known quickly. Establishing a re-

lationship with an Extension agent or agency may be a first step in the difficult process of the alienated person's reattachment to society.

Footnotes

1. One recent study found that four objective characteristics including years of schooling, distance traveled for services, social participation, and amount of gross farm income accounted for 33 percent of the variation in the total number of Extension contacts. See Isaac A. Akinbode and M. Dorling, *Farmer Contacts with District Agriculturists in British Columbia* (Vancouver, British Columbia: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Education, 1969).
2. For details of the survey procedure, see Coolie Verner, *Planning and Conducting a Survey: A Case Study* (Ottawa, Ontario: Department of Forestry and Rural Development, Rural Development Branch, 1967).
3. Leo Srole, "Social Integration and Certain Corollaries: An Exploratory Study," *American Sociological Review*, XXI (1956), 712.
4. Melvin Seeman, "On the Meaning of Alienation," *American Sociological Review*, XXIV (1959), 783-91.
5. Dwight G. Dean, "Alienation: Its Meaning and Measurement," *American Sociological Review*, XXVI (1961), 753-58.
6. See William H. Puder and S. E. Hand, "Personality Factors Which May Interfere with the Learning of Adult Basic Education Teachers," *Adult Education*, XVIII (1968), 81-93. Also, see Jane Zahn, "Some Adult Attitudes Affecting Learning: Powerlessness, Conflicting Needs and Role Transition," *Adult Education*, XIX (1969), 91-97.
7. C. Paul Marsh, Robert J. Dolan, and William L. Riddick, "Anomia and Communication Behavior: The Relationship Between Anomia and Utilization of Three Public Bureaucracies," *Rural Sociology*, XXXII (1967), 435-45.
8. Srole, "Social Integration," 709-16. No tests for scalability were made with the present sample.
9. Coolie Verner and Frank W. Miller, *Adult Education and the Adoption of Innovations by Orchardists in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia* (Vancouver, British Columbia: University of British Columbia, Department of Agricultural Economics, 1966), p. 72.