

HUTTERITE DEFECTORS:

A QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF EBAUGH'S ROLE-EXIT MODEL

by

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A Thesis

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BY

MONA SHARON RICH

**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to test Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh's role-exit model on the experience of Hutterite defectors, and to provide an updated, sociological understanding of Hutterite defectors based on a coherent theoretical model.

The analysis was conducted using the 4 stages and 11 variables of Ebaugh's generic role-exit model. In addition, a sociological model of Hutterite society (developed by Boldt and Roberts) was included to carry out the analysis. This model represents Hutterite society as a relatively undifferentiated and structurally tight group.

A qualitative methodological approach was employed to study the role-exit experience of 28 Hutterite defectors from Manitoba colonies. The stages and variables of the role-exit model were translated into semi-structured, open ended interview questions.

In general terms, it was found that Ebaugh's role-exit model fit the experience of Hutterite defectors. However, it was also discovered that several hypotheses regarding the variables of duration and reversibility/irreversibility did not apply to the case of Hutterites. Also, the findings of this study discovered that individuals are abandoning their colonies as a direct result of their religious concerns. The findings also indicated that defection was not limited to young, single males as it was in the past but also included

young, single females as well as entire families. The interchange between the colony and the outside emerged as a crucial factor in exposing and fostering new perspectives and attitudes in Hutterites.

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CHAPTER 1

THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF ROLE-EXIT

This chapter introduces Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh's theoretical model of the role-exit process as outlined in Becoming an Ex: The Process of Role-Exit (1988). It includes discussions of the origins of the role-exit concept, its current definition, and a description of its conceptual components and correlates. Specifically, the discussion of the concept's origins includes Merton's initial reference to the notion as well as illustrations of the seeds of this concept in substantive areas such as cult defection and divorce. Following this, Blau's (1973) seminal discussion of the concept is covered. Next Ebaugh's development of the concept is reviewed, culminating in her (1988:23) definition of the term as "the process of disengagement from a role that is central to one's self-identity and the reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's "ex-role". Ebaugh's research on this topic has led to a model of role-exit that includes 4 stages: (1) first doubts, (2) seeking alternatives, (3) the turning point, and (4) creating and adapting to the role-exit. Moreover, Ebaugh's investigations suggest that the experience of individuals in each of these stages is influenced by 11 factors including the (1) centrality of the role, (2) voluntariness, (3) reversibility, (4) duration, (5) single versus multiple exits,

(6) individual versus group exits, (7) degree of control, (8) social desirability, (9) degree of institutionalization, (10) degree of awareness, and (11) sequentiality.

This review of the history and current conceptualization of role-exit establishes the theoretical framework for the thesis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Ebaugh's assertion that role-exit represents a generic social process. The argument for the importance of generic concepts to sociology, which describe fundamental processes appropriate to a broad range of situations, is made. Ebaugh's claim that role-exit is a generic social process suggests (1) that a similar process should occur between different kinds of role-exits, and (2) that this hypothesis can be tested through empirical research.

THEORETICAL CONTENT OF EBAUGH'S MODEL

The notion of role change, involving the transition from one role to another by either entering a new role or exiting an old one, has been recognized by sociologists for decades. However, sociologists studying role change have typically focused on role entrance and, in doing so, have made many substantial contributions to the literature on socialization (Ebaugh, 1988:6). By contrast, role-exit is a relatively neglected concept, with a sparse research literature and limited conceptual development. Prior to Ebaugh's recent work, the notion of role-exit was considered by Merton and

Blau. A brief review of how these authors first conceptualized the notion sets the context for understanding Ebaugh's more elaborate examination of the concept.

Influential contributors to Ebaugh's role-exit model included Merton and Kitt's (1950) concept of anticipatory socialization. Anticipatory socialization requires that an individual acquire and learn the proper values, beliefs and norms of a status or group to which he or she aspires. Learning these new rules and expectations helps the individual learn how to act in the new role and thus makes it easier for the person to adjust to a new status. As well, the practice of anticipatory socialization allows the person to be more easily accepted by the new group. The notion of Merton's anticipatory socialization is interpreted by Ebaugh to mean that an individual's adoption of the "values of a group in which one aspired to belong but did not yet belong, suggests a process whereby one begins to make a role change before actually exiting a role" (Ebaugh, 1988:xiv). Although Merton does not specifically focus on role-exit, his notion of anticipatory socialization, as well as his reference to the consequences and dynamics of being an "ex-member" of a group or "former occupant" of a social status, plays a major part in Ebaugh's concept of role-exit. Ebaugh views anticipatory socialization as only one aspect of the role-exit process (since looking forward to a new role is not always a component of the role-exit process).

Blau (1973) introduces the term "role-exit" and suggests a theoretical framework for considering it. She defines role-exit as a process that "occurs whenever any stable pattern of interaction and shared activities between two or more persons ceases" (Blau, 1973:210). Blau used empirical data on the elderly to develop a theory that is generalizable to all types of role-exits and concludes that role-exit is a generic process in social life. Having considered Blau's discussion of role-exit, as well as Merton's idea of anticipatory socialization, Ebaugh further expands the concept of role-exit. She also incorporates Glaser and Strauss' (1971) work on status passage.

EBAUGH'S THEORETICAL MODEL OF ROLE-EXIT

Ebaugh uses role analysis to guide her conceptualization of role-exit. Her model incorporates a synthesis of the structural and interactional perspectives. Using the structural perspective, Ebaugh argues that the role-taking process is inevitable in societies that have culturally prescribed rules, regulations and expectations attached to each role. However, she argues that individuals also engage in a role-making process where they have the flexibility to interpret and adapt the role expectations to specific situations. In addition, her model incorporates the notion of anticipatory socialization, disengagement and one's personal identity as being part of the role-exit process. While

anticipatory socialization may be one aspect of the role-exit process, it is not sufficient to adequately understand role-exit, since looking forward to a new role is not always a component of the role-exit process. Anticipatory socialization and disengagement are two dimensions of the role-exit process. While anticipatory socialization describes the process of learning a new role, disengagement focuses on the process of leaving a role, and does not consider what happens to identity after disengagement.

In considering the role-exit process, Ebaugh defines role-exit as "the process of disengagement from a role that is central to one's self-identity and the reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's ex-role" (Ebaugh, 1988:23). Ebaugh's understanding of role-exit has led to a model that unfolds along 4 stages: (1) first doubts, (2) seeking alternatives, (3) the turning point and finally, (4) creating and adapting to the role-exit.

The first step, (i.e., first doubts) of the role-exit process begins when individuals first consciously doubt their commitment to a role and realize that alternatives exist. This process can be gradual and can take many years, or it occurs over a period of a few months. Ebaugh argues that the more control individuals have over their choice to exit and the more aware they are of their dissatisfaction, the shorter the duration period for exiting. Individuals may be motivated to consider leaving a role by organizational changes, burnout,

disappointment and changes in relationships or some other meaningful event. Regardless of the reason for leaving any major role, exiters will emit cues that signal their unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and desire for an alternate role. These cues are often recognized by significant others, and they react with negative or positive reinforcement. Negative reactions may either halt the role-exit process or put it on hold. On the other hand, positive reactions may lead the individual to the second stage of the process, seeking alternative roles.

The conscious decision to leave a role results in a person actively seeking possible alternatives. At this point it is common for individuals to practice selective perception that reinforce their initial doubts and helps them justify their decision. The positive or negative reactions of others are processed in this way and help influence the process of seeking alternatives. At this point, individuals often experience an emotional relief associated with the realization that there is a freedom of choice. Following this realization individuals shift their reference groups. As part of the process of seeking alternatives, individuals often take part in anticipatory socialization. Not only do the individuals study norms, values, and orientations of alternative roles, but they may also engage in imaginary or real role playing. Ebaugh highlights several factors that influence how long the process of seeking alternatives lasts. These include degree of

social support, degree of institutionalization, reversibility of the exit, social desirability of the exit, status as a lone traveller or as part of a group as well as the degree of awareness of the process of leaving.

The third stage of the role-exit process, the turning point, occurs after the individual has made the final decision to leave the existing role. A turning point is a critical specific event in an individual's life that triggers an actual role-exit. Turning points include specific events, the last straw, time-related factors, excuses and either/or alternatives. It is the turning point that gives the exiter the justification and rationalization to leave. In addition, the turning point allows the individual to announce his or her departure to others, which not only reduces cognitive dissonance, but also allows the individual to consider the resources needed to exit.

The final stage of the role-exit involves creating and adapting to the ex-role. Individuals who leave a role carry the residual of their previous with them. Typically, the previous role must be taken into account and incorporated into the new role. This process of transformation is difficult for the individual since significant others usually view the individual in terms of the exiter's previous identity. Ebaugh discovered that there are 6 major areas of adjustment that a role-exiter is confronted with at this stage, presenting oneself in order to cue others of the role change, accepting

positive or negative social reactions to their ex-status, establishing intimate relationships, learning to change friendship networks, relating to members of the former group as well as fellow exes, and dealing with role residual that remains after the exit.

Ebaugh elaborates her theoretical model by demonstrating that the experience of individuals in each of the four stages is influenced by eleven mediating factors. She uses the properties of status passage derived from the work of Glaser and Strauss (1971), as well as her own research in arriving at these factors, as follows:

1. Centrality of the Role, refers to the saliency and importance of an exiting role to an individual's self-identity;
2. Voluntariness, refers to the amount of choice an individual has in whether or not to leave a role;
3. Reversibility, refers to whether or not an individual has the opportunity to return to the role that has been exited;
4. Duration, refers to the length of time it takes an individual to make a decision to leave a role, and to the length of time it takes an individual to adjust to the new role;
5. Single versus multiple exits, refers to the fact that exiting from one role may be related to exits from other roles;

6. Individual versus group exits, refers to the possibility of an individual leaving alone or with other people;
7. Degree of control, refers to the variable degree of cooperation and assistance that exiters receives from other individuals and institutions;
8. Social desirability, refers to the degree of social approval or disapproval of the exit;
9. Degree of Institutionalization, refers to the degree to which society attaches rules, regulations, and expectations to the entire process of leaving a role;
10. Degree of Awareness, refers to the extent that individuals are conscious of leaving a role; and
11. Sequentiality, refers to the degree of specified progression associated with a particular exit.

ROLE-EXIT - A GENERIC SOCIAL PROCESS

Building on the work of Prus (1987), Ebaugh (1988:14) has suggested that any development of a generic social process will help describe human behaviour regardless of the specific circumstances in which it is found. Without focusing on social process, sociologists will have less insight into the experiences of people (Prus,1987:264). Understanding parallel activities across different situations will help to highlight similar processes in diverse settings and expand our knowledge about group life. Without acquiring knowledge from a variety of groups, the focus of understanding becomes too narrow and

scattered and the relationship between segments of society is lost. Based on this reasoning Ebaugh (1988:14) argues that the social sciences have become too specialized into subdivisions and subdisciplines so that there are fewer theories or even theories of the middle range. Generic social processes are important because they focus on group life. According to Ebaugh, one such generic social process is the role-exit.

TABLE 1

EBAUGH'S THEORETICAL MODEL

<u>STAGES</u>	<u>MEDIATING VARIABLES</u>
I FIRST DOUBTS	
Conducive Conditions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organizational Change 2. Burn Out 3. Disappointments and Changes in Relationships 4. Events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Centrality of Role 2. Voluntariness 3. Reversibility 4. Duration 5. Single versus Multiple Exit 6. Individual versus Group Exit 7. Degree of Control 8. Social Desirability 9. Degree of Institutionalization 10. Degree of Awareness 11. Sequentiality
II SEEKING ALTERNATIVES	
Functions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Weighing Alternatives 2. Conscious Cuing 3. Role of Social Support 4. Realization of Freedom to Choose 5. Weighing Pros and Cons 6. Shifting Reference Groups 7. Role Rehearsal 	
III TURNING POINT	
Types	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Specific Events 2. Last Straw 3. Time-Related Factors 4. Excuses 5. Either/or Alternatives 	
IV CREATING AND ADAPTING TO EX-ROLE	
Areas of Adjustment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presentation of Self 2. Social Reactions 3. Establishing Intimate Relationships 4. Changing Friendship Networks 5. Relating to Former Group and Fellow Exes 6. Role Residual 	

CONCLUSION

The Hutterites, being a unique and atypical ethnic group, provide an appropriate community on which to test Ebaugh's role-exit model. Ebaugh claims that role-exit is a generic social process which could apply to any group. The Hutterites have been able to maintain their society for over 400 years and are held up as an example of a highly successful and integrated ethnic community. However, recent evidence indicates that the cohesiveness of Hutterite communities may be declining. Increased rates of defection are one indicator of this reduced solidarity.

The tight social structure of Hutterite communities produces extensive social conformity and commitment by colony members to the collective interest. Accordingly, when an individual defects from the colony, a pronounced instance of role-exit occurs. For these reasons, examining the experience of Hutterite defectors provides an excellent opportunity to test Ebaugh's generic role-exit model.

Table 1, summarizes Ebaugh's theoretical model. The following chapter, Chapter 2, discusses the basis for understanding Hutterite defection. Chapter 3 presents empirical research on Hutterite defection. In Chapter 4, the methodological approach used in the research is presented. Chapter 5 will proceed through each of the 4 stages of the role-exit model and apply each of the stages to the Hutterite case. In Chapter 6, the 11 mediating variables are discussed

and applied to the experience of Hutterite defectors. Chapter 7 presents the implications this research on Hutterite defectors has for contemporary Hutterite society.

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING THE BASIS FOR HUTTERITE DEFECTION

Ebaugh's role-exit model represents the general case of which Hutterite defectors are a specific instance. This chapter provides the understanding of Hutterite society necessary to interpret the experience of Hutterite defectors. To situate the present conditions of Hutterite society, the chapter opens with a brief history and factual overview of this ethnic group. After this overview, a sociological model of Hutterite society, developed by Boldt and Roberts, is introduced. This model represents Hutterite society as a relatively undifferentiated and structurally tight group. This sociological model provides a context for interpreting the experience of Hutterite defectors. The implications of this sociological model for the Hutterites' ability to resist assimilation and encourage conformity are then developed.

At this point, it is important to identify a number of concepts used throughout this thesis: (1) "Outside" refers to all the symbolic and physical boundaries that are not a part of the Hutterite way of life; (2) "Non-Hutterites" refers to people who have never been Hutterites; (3) "Ex-Hutterites" refers to those colony members who left previously and are no longer living on the colony; and (4) "Defectors" refers to those people who were interviewed for the present study. There are two types of defectors, "temporary" and "permanent".

Temporary defectors are individuals who leave the colony but have no intention of staying away and fully plan on returning. Permanent defectors, on the other hand, leave with no intention of returning. This is not to say that they will never return, but their intention is to remain on the outside. The present study only examines permanent defectors.

BRIEF HISTORY OF HUTTERITES

The Hutterite Brethren are a fundamentalist Christian sect who have organized themselves into a sacred, Gemeinschaft-like society grounded upon religious beliefs. Their origin is largely German and Swiss and dates back to the Protestant Reformation and the Anabaptist Movement in 1528. The Anabaptists were a counterculture group who rejected infant baptism and membership in state churches. As a result of religious persecution, they wandered throughout Europe until 1874 when they migrated to the United States. In 1918, some Hutterite groups migrated to Canada and formed colonies. All Hutterite colonies belong to one of three Leut (people), Lehrerleut, Dariusleut, or Schmiedeleut. Basically, the Leuts are similar since they have the same principles of community. However, there are some differences in marriage patterns, culture traits and rules of order (Hostetler, 1965:9). The Lehrerleut are located in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Montana, Dariusleut are found mainly in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and the Schmiedeleut are located in Manitoba, North Dakota, and

South Dakota. The present study focuses on those members from the Schmiedeleut located in Manitoba.

The Hutterites are a modern continuation of the ancient Christian practise of communal withdrawal and collective property rights as set forth in the Book of Acts. Traditionally, they have followed the dress, speech, and the customs of their 16th and 17th century ancestors. Hutterites believe in the "community of goods", that is, they do not personally accumulate, own, or covet property. They aim to accomplish the ideal of a true Christian community by avoiding the corrupt world system. Hutterites turn away from individual pursuits such as selfishness, competitiveness, and regard the pursuit of pleasure and luxury as deplorable (Barkin and Bennett, 1972:460). They view their community as a place where they give up their individuality for a spiritual collective existence. Reinforcement of their ideological concerns takes place through an institutionalized communal system (Hostetler, 1965:24). For example, childhood socialization in the nursery school and later in German school discourages individuality and encourages the doctrine of the community of goods. While an egalitarian ethos is stressed, the system is predicated on submission to a theocratic, patriarchal, authoritarian rule (Hostetler, 1965:26).

According to the most recent census information, in 1991 there were 7,445 Hutterites living in Manitoba. Currently, when a colony reaches between 130-150 people, the community

begins to experience problems of fractiousness and inefficiency. When this occurs, a new tract of land is acquired and developed for a new colony. Hutterite colonies are in relatively isolated rural agricultural areas of the province. Each colony is an autonomous economic unit that uses large-scale, state of the art agricultural technology. Basically all colonies are alike in their social organization. Community organization is headed by a male who is elected by the elders and then ordained as a preacher. He holds preeminent authority over all colony members (Hostetler, 1965:26). Not only is he responsible for the religious and spiritual aspects of the colony, but he also has a strong influence on all colony policies. In addition, each colony has an appointed "boss", or steward, who manages the secular affairs of the colony and oversees the various (male) department managers. For example, there is a field boss, a hog boss, and a dairy boss. One appointed position, head cook, is held by a woman; otherwise, from the age of 15 onward, women work on a rotation basis as cooks, kitchen workers, and gardeners. All able people are required to work in the colony and they are given tasks that suit their abilities.

Mackie (1965:28-29) describes the hierarchy of a Hutterite colony as follows. At the top of the hierarchy of each Leut is the Vorsteher, or bishop, who is elected from the available body of ordained preachers. Under the bishop, is the council that includes all the preachers from all the

colonies in the bishop's leut. It is this body that directs and affirms all the rules and regulations. Each colony is an autonomous economic unit that is controlled by a council of elders that is made up of the preacher, assistant preacher, farm boss, German school teacher, and one other member. The council is responsible for the work organization and spiritual life of the colony.

All colonies are basically alike in their social organization (Hostetler, 1974). Families live together in modest dwellings. When two people marry, they are given a room and, if possible, a separate entrance. Children under the age of 3 spend most of their time in the house, but for all other members it is primarily a place to sleep. The Hutterites practice a degree of separation of family members during the day. Children are raised by the collective, and only return to their parents home at specified times during the day. For example, children return home for an after school snack. The basic reason for this separation is the need to socialize the members in the ideals and behaviour patterns of the Hutterite way of life and to free the women to work.

There is a central kitchen where all food preparation takes place, a central laundry, and a central bath house. All meals are eaten in the colony's communal dining hall. There is an adult dining room where males sit on one side of the room and females on the other. According to their age, the

males as well as the females are assigned a place at their respective tables. Children eat in a separate room from the adults but, they too, are assigned seats according to gender and age. However, all colony members, except young children and their mothers, come together for a daily church service. They gather together to worship, to listen to the preacher's sermon and to "shriek the long, slow hymns" (Hostetler, 1965:46).

Hutterite society is based on religious ideology. Its primary institution is the Hutterian Church. Their religious beliefs have a profound impact on their way of life and view of the world. Traditionally, their attitudes and beliefs about work, education, and family are restricted to the ideology embodied in their religion. The religious tradition of Hutterites is that absolute authority belongs to God. God is viewed as placing everything in a divine and hierarchical order. Hutterite behaviour, thought, speech and feeling are directed by this divine and hierarchical order: "God is Lord over man, man is master of woman, and the older person has authority over the younger" (Hostetler, 1974:36). The ideology of the Hutterites clearly defines the expectations of the colony member. Individuals know what is expected of them with regard to living the Hutterite way of life. In exchange for submitting to the will of the community, colony members are offered social support and security (Hostetler, 1974:45).