

CHAPTER 4

Anomie/Strain Theory

In April 1992, a young man from a well-to-do East Coast family hitchhiked to Alaska and walked alone into the wilderness north of Mt. McKinley. Four months later his decomposed body was found by a party of moose hunters. . . .

His name turned out to be Christopher Johnson McCandless. He'd grown up, I learned, in an affluent suburb of Washington, D.C., where he'd excelled academically and had been an elite athlete.

Immediately after graduation, with honors, from Emory University in the summer of 1990, McCandless dropped out of sight. He changed his name, gave the entire balance of a twenty-four-thousand-dollar savings account to charity, abandoned his car and most of his possessions, burned all the cash in his wallet. And then he invented a new life for himself, taking up residence at the ragged margin of society, wandering across North America in search of raw, transcendent experience. His family had no idea where he was or what had become of him until his remains turned up in Alaska.

— Jon Krakauer (1996), *Into the Wild*. Copyright ©1996
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◆ Introduction

Christopher McCandless grew up in a conforming, upper-middle-class family and seemed to be on the fast track to success. He graduated from Emory University with a 3.72 grade point average, and he spoke of going to law school. Instead, he turned his back on his family, adopted the new name of Alexander Supertramp, and set out to make his way alone in the wilderness. How might we explain this drastic turnaround and McCandless's blatant rejection of societal norms and expectations?

Anomie and strain theories are among the first truly sociological explanations of the causes of deviant behavior. These theories seek to understand deviance by focusing on social structures and patterns that emerge as individuals and groups react to conditions they have little control over. The question these theories address is, How exactly does the structure of society constrain behavior and cause deviance?

Strain theories are generally macrolevel theories, and they share several core assumptions: first, the idea that social order is the product of a generally cohesive set of norms; second, that those norms are widely shared by community members; and third, that deviance and community reactions to deviance are essential to maintaining order.

◆ Development of Anomie/Strain Theory

Émile Durkheim and Anomie

Émile Durkheim's classic statement of anomie set the stage for one of the most important theoretical traditions in criminology. In one of his major works, Durkheim—often considered the father of sociology—studied suicide in 19th-century Europe. While suicide is generally viewed as a very individualistic and personal act, Durkheim effectively argued that characteristics of communities influence suicide rates, independent of the particular individuals living in those communities. He found that some countries had consistently high rates of suicide over several decades, while other countries had consistently low rates. How can we explain these macrolevel differences?

In brief, Durkheim argued that suicide was related to the amount of regulation in a society and the degree of group unity. For Durkheim, social integration and social change are key factors in deviant behavior. As a society undergoes rapid change, norms will be unclear, and a state of anomie will result. **Anomie** is a state of normlessness where society fails to effectively regulate the expectations or behaviors of its members; it occurs when aspirations are allowed to develop beyond the possibility of fulfillment. In better-functioning societies, ambitions are restrained and human needs and desires are regulated by the collective order.

Durkheim argued that “no living being can be happy or even exist unless his needs are sufficiently proportioned to his means” (Durkheim, 1897/1951, p. 246). In Durkheim's understanding, society alone held the moral power over the individual to moderate expectations and limit passions. Durkheim suggested that a state of anomie, or normlessness, results from a breakdown in the regulation of goals; with such lack of regulation, individuals' aspirations become unlimited, and deviance may result. Durkheim argued that in a stable society, individuals are generally content with their positions or, as later scholars interpreted, they “aspire to achieve only what is realistically possible for them to achieve” (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960, p. 78).

A macrolevel example may clarify the concept of anomie: Think back to what you know about the 1960s in the United States. What was happening nationally at that time? The country was undergoing enormous changes as the civil rights movement took hold, women became more liberated and fought for equal rights, and America sent its young men to war in Vietnam. There was rapid and significant social change. Imagine what it would have been like to be a college student in the 1960s—whole new worlds of opportunities and challenges were opening for women and minorities. What should young people expect? How high could they aspire to go? The answers simply were not clear; the old norms no longer applied. With norms and expectations unclear for a large segment of the society, anomie theory would lead us to expect higher rates of deviance.

Anomie might also be applied to the normative expectations for physical attractiveness. Think for a moment about the standard for female beauty in the United States. Is there one ideal type? Or are there common characteristics we can identify? One trait that has been idealized for decades is that female beauties are nearly always thin, sometimes dangerously thin. Fashion models in magazines and walking the runway are very tall and extremely thin. They spend hours being tended to by professional hair and makeup artists and photographed by the best photographers in the world, and, even so, their photos are often airbrushed and photoshopped to make the already beautiful absolutely perfect.

This vision of ideal beauty is pervasive in the media. Young women (and increasingly young men) are exposed to unrealistic expectations of how they should aspire to look. For a time, network television shows glorified improving one's looks through plastic surgery with "reality" shows like *The Swan* and *I Want a Famous Face*. To frame this in terms of the theory, society has failed to regulate the expectations of its members when it comes to physical attractiveness, and we see deviance in the form of eating disorders and extensive elective plastic surgery resulting.

◆ Robert Merton and Adaptations to Anomie/Strain

Informed by Durkheim's writing on anomie, Robert K. Merton narrowed the focus and extended the theory to the United States in his 1938 article "Social Structure and Anomie." Merton argued that anomie does not result simply from unregulated goals but, rather, from a faulty relationship between cultural goals and the legitimate means to access them. While we are all socialized to desire success, we do not all have the same opportunities to become successful. Thus, Merton defined several adaptations to anomie and strain.

Merton was born Meyer Schkolnick, the son of Eastern European Jewish immigrants. He grew up in poverty in a "benign slum" in south Philadelphia. He legally changed to the "Americanized" name of Robert King Merton after he earned a scholarship to Temple University and entered college; he went to Harvard for his PhD and became a professor at Columbia University and one of the most famous sociologists in the world. His own story seems to capture a piece of the "American Dream." Growing up in the pre-Depression era, there was, according to Merton, a sense of "limitless possibilities." As Cullen and Messner (2007) suggest, this sense of limitless possibilities is illuminating. It relates to Merton's view not simply that Americans were urged to pursue some rigidly defined goal of success but, rather, that there also was a broad cultural message that everyone—even those in Merton's impoverished circumstances—could seek social mobility and expect to enjoy a measure of success (p. 14).

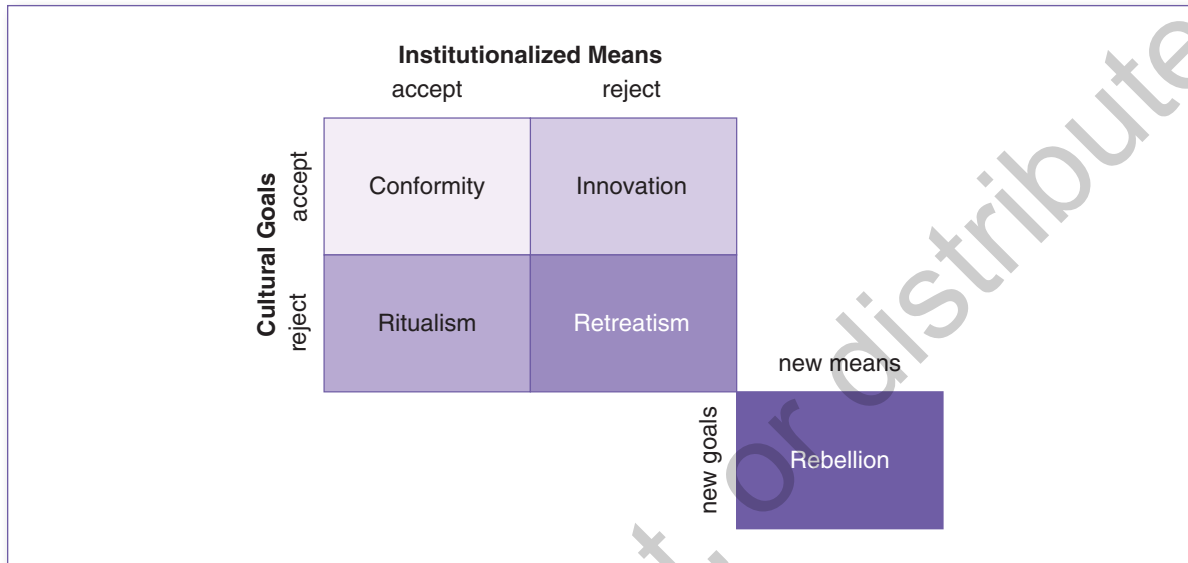
Given this biographical background, Merton's ideas begin to come to life. In "Social Structure and Anomie" (1938), Merton focused on the needs, desires, and processes of cultural socialization. He argued that in the United States, we are all socialized to believe in the sense of limitless possibilities and to desire success on a large scale. These cultural goals are widespread; the problem, however, is that the social structure "restricts or completely eliminates access to approved modes of acquiring these symbols for *a considerable part of the same population*" (p. 680). In other words, **structural impediments** or obstacles exist for whole classes of people who wish to attain wealth using legitimate means. For those in the lower classes who share the cultural goals for success but have limited means to attain them, lack of education and job opportunities create a strain toward anomie, which may translate into deviance.

Merton argued that there are five general adaptations to anomie. The key to each is whether there is an acceptance or rejection of the cultural goal of success (or, to adopt a concept that is easier to measure, wealth attainment) and whether or not the choice is to strive for the goal via legitimate or conforming means (Figure 4.1).

Merton's Adaptations to Anomie

Conformity is the most common adaptation. Conformists have accepted the cultural goal of success or wealth attainment, and they are trying to achieve it via legitimate means. Most college students might be considered conformists as they work hard to earn degrees to get better jobs and have more success after graduation. For Merton, conformity was the only nondeviant adaptation to strain and anomie.

Figure 4.1 Robert K. Merton's Deviance Typology



Innovation is the adaptation for those who have accepted the cultural goal of success/wealth attainment but are trying to achieve it via illegitimate means. Any crime for profit would be an example of innovation. Robbers, thieves, drug dealers, embezzlers, and high-priced call girls all would be classified as innovators in Merton's adaptations.

Ritualism is the category for those who have abandoned the cultural goal of success/wealth attainment but continue to use legitimate means to make their living. The dedicated workers who will never advance to management might be considered ritualists in Merton's typology.

Retreatism is the adaptation of those who have rejected the cultural goal of success/wealth attainment and have also rejected the legitimate means. Merton describes people who adapt in this way as "in the society but not of it. Sociologically, these constitute the true aliens" (Merton, 1957, p. 153). The chronically homeless and serious drug addicts might be considered retreatists in this model. Christopher McCandless, from this chapter's opening story, is a vivid individual example of a retreatist. He clearly rejected the conforming goals and lifestyle of his parents and the larger society;



▲ **Photo 4.1** This photo might represent either conformity or ritualism in Merton's adaptations. Which concept do you think it best illustrates? Why do you think so?

DEVIANCE IN POPULAR CULTURE

Robert Merton's ideas on strain theory and particularly the adaptation of innovation can be easily seen in many movies dealing with the drug trade, audacious heists, kidnappers holding victims for ransom, or virtually any other crime for profit. Many examples are available, including the following:

Blow—A movie based on the true story of George Jung, a working-class kid who built an illegal empire and attained the cultural goal of wealth attainment, making a fortune via illegitimate means first by dealing marijuana and then importing cocaine.

Set It Off—A fictional story of four young African American women struggling to survive in Los Angeles. As their personal troubles mount, they begin robbing banks to solve their money woes.

Merton's other adaptations are less common in film, as they often make for less dramatic stories, but they are represented in popular culture.

Leaving Las Vegas—This story of an alcoholic man who has lost his wife and family and goes to Las Vegas to literally drink himself to death may be viewed as an example of Merton's retreatism.

Murder in Mississippi—A film based on the true story of the murder of three civil rights workers in Mississippi in 1964. The civil rights workers might be viewed as rebels in Merton's typology: They are working and risking their lives for social change. While this was clearly considered deviant in the South, it is another good illustration of how norms and boundaries change over time, perhaps in response to positive deviance and collective action.

As you watch films over the next few weeks and months, try to keep the sociological theories of deviance in mind. It may surprise you how many can easily be applied to the stories and perspectives on the screen.

he chose, instead, to exist in the margins, occasionally working low-level jobs, hitching rides, and ultimately attempting to live off the land in Alaska.

Rebellion is the category for political deviants—those who don't play by the rules but work to change the system to their own liking. Rebels reject the cultural goal of success/wealth attainment and replace it with another primary goal; they may use either legitimate or illegitimate means to achieve this goal—one way to think about it is that rebels will use whatever means necessary to reach their chosen goal. Perhaps the clearest example of rebellion would be terrorist groups, who often use violence in an attempt to achieve political goals.

Merton's 1938 article "Social Structure and Anomie" (SS&A) remains one of the most influential and referenced works in all of criminology and sociology. Reflecting on his seminal ideas in an interview five decades later, Merton observed that

it holds up those goals of success, especially economic, as a legitimate expectation for everybody. You do not have statements anywhere in the history of American aspirations that say: "You the poor, and you the ethnically subordinate—you can have no hopes or legitimate expectation of upward social mobility." You have never heard that said . . . call it rhetoric, call it ideology, call it myth, call it what you will, call it the

American Dream. . . Now that is not typical of other cultural structures and other historical times and places. So it is a very powerful, if you will, theoretically sensitized observation. . . SS&A '38 was saying what is universal for all is the legitimacy of striving to better yourself, to rise upward and onward. . . That's the universal thing and that differs from other cultures . . . in which you say: "Of course, you have no right; you are a servant class and you know your place." . . Now that's the dynamic new component of the cultural structure, and that is what is being said—what is common to all. (Cullen & Messner, 2007, p. 24)

◆ Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin, Differential Opportunity

Richard Cloward was a student of Merton's and undoubtedly knew his work well. Cloward added an important dimension to anomie/strain theory by extending our focus to include the idea of illegitimate means. Cloward (1959) argued that just as not everyone has equal access to the legitimate means of attaining wealth, we cannot assume that everyone has access to illegitimate means either. This is a key point. Imagine that you wanted to become a successful drug dealer. Where would you begin? Would you know where to purchase your product? Would you know where to access customers and how to gain their trust and their business? Would you be able to keep your illicit business going without getting caught and punished? Cloward's point makes perfect sense in this context: Just because you might wish to gain wealth and success via illegitimate means does not mean that you will have the skills and connections to do so.

Cloward teamed up with Lloyd Ohlin in 1960 to write the book *Delinquency and Opportunity*. Just as Cloward was a student of Merton's, Ohlin was a student of Edwin Sutherland's, and he was well versed in the ideas of differential association and the importance of social learning (see Chapter 6 for more details on Sutherland and differential association). They found a research puzzle to be explored in Merton's work: While Merton may generally be accurate in describing pressures and motivations that lead to deviant behavior, the particular type of deviant behavior is unexplained. Cloward and Ohlin argued that we need to understand not just the motivations of individuals to commit deviant behavior but also the availability of opportunities to learn about and participate in illegal or deviant acts.

Cloward and Ohlin incorporated Sutherland's ideas into their theory and argued that criminal and deviant behavior is learned like any other behavior and, importantly, that not everyone has the same opportunities to learn criminal skills and have criminal careers. Their particular focus was on delinquent gangs and the circumstances under which different types of gangs emerged. They focused on neighborhood conditions (still a macrolevel theory) and the opportunities available to learn and practice legitimate or illegitimate skills. Ultimately, Cloward and Ohlin suggested that only neighborhoods in which crime flourishes as a stable institution are fertile criminal learning environments for the young.

To further clarify their ideas, Cloward and Ohlin argued that the different kinds of illegitimate opportunities available in poor urban neighborhoods lead to three types of criminal subcultures: criminal, conflict, and retreatist. Because the focus is on disadvantaged neighborhoods, the assumption is that most young people growing up in these conditions will have poor and limited legitimate opportunities for attaining wealth and success. Thus, the availability of illegitimate opportunities becomes extremely important in shaping the deviance that takes place in these neighborhoods and the types of adolescent gangs that develop.

Criminal subcultures develop among lower class adolescent boys in neighborhoods with open illegitimate opportunity structures. These neighborhoods are characterized by systematic, organized crime, and they provide an outlet in illegal employment for youths to attain wealth and "get paid" via illegitimate means. Successful criminals populate the neighborhood and become visible, serving as distinctive role models for children growing up in the community. For those young people who aspire to emulate these illegitimate role models, there is generally an age-graded criminal structure in place where young males may do low-level jobs and learn from the older criminals in the neighborhood. In this way, social learning takes place, and the young acquire the skills and norms to fully take advantage of the illegitimate opportunities available to them. Compared with alternative poor neighborhoods, those with

criminal subcultures are very structured and are relatively safe places to grow up and live. There is an absence of violence in these neighborhoods because violence—and the attention it draws—would be considered disruptive to both criminal and conventional activities.

Conflict subcultures develop in disorganized communities where illegitimate opportunities are largely absent, and those that exist are closed to adolescents (see Chapter 5 for more information on social disorganization). Such neighborhoods are characterized by social instability, and youth growing up in these conditions are deprived of both conventional (legitimate) and criminal (illegitimate) opportunities. As Cloward and Ohlin (1960) explained it, “The disorganized slum . . . contains the outcasts of the criminal world . . . what crime there is tends to be individualistic, unorganized, petty, poorly paid, and unprotected” (pp. 173–174). With no real access to legitimate or illegitimate opportunities, adolescents growing up in disorganized neighborhoods suffer acute frustration and turn to violence to prove their personal worth. Social controls are weak in these areas, and violence for violence’s sake is valued. With few role models and little chance at success, young men work to earn the toughest reputation and, through their physical prowess, to command some level of respect and deference from those around them.

Retreatist subcultures are associated with drug use and the drug culture among some lower class adolescents. Cloward and Ohlin characterized adolescents in retreatist subcultures as “double failures” who cannot find a place for themselves in either criminal or conflict subcultures. While this is closely related to Merton’s concept of retreatists, Cloward and Ohlin directed attention to the social environment and the conditions that help to explain the formation of each type of deviant subculture. The “double failures” in poor neighborhoods may withdraw from the larger society and retreat into drug use and relative isolation.

It is important to remember that Cloward and Ohlin are still explaining deviance at the macrolevel. Criminal, conflict, and retreatist subcultures develop primarily because communities are organized differently and offer varying legitimate and illegitimate opportunities.

◆ Albert Cohen, *Delinquent Boys*

Similar to Cloward and Ohlin, Albert K. Cohen was an undergraduate student of Merton’s and a graduate student of Sutherland’s, so he, too, combined elements of Merton’s anomie theory and Sutherland’s ideas on social learning in his work. In his book *Delinquent Boys*, Cohen (1955) introduced the idea of delinquent subcultures. Cohen argued that a lower class or working-class boy may find himself at the bottom of the status hierarchy in middle-class schools and the larger middle-class world, and

to the degree to which he values middle-class status, either because he values the good opinion of middle-class persons or because he has to some degree internalized middle-class standards himself, he faces a problem of adjustment and is in the market for a “solution.” (Cohen, 1955, p. 119)

Cohen argues that this **status frustration** or strain may lead to the collective solution of forming a delinquent subculture in which middle-class norms and values are replaced with their antithesis—their very opposite. Cohen suggests that the delinquent subculture can be described as nonutilitarian—for example, stealing just “for the hell of it” and not because the boys need or even want what they steal; malicious, or being “just plain mean” and destructive; and negativistic, or taking the norms of the larger culture and turning them upside down. The delinquent subculture forms and is sustained because it offers alternative criteria that working-class boys can meet and excel at; attributes that are disvalued by the larger culture become status-giving assets within the subculture.

◆ Robert Agnew, *General Strain Theory*

Anomie and strain theories have a long history in sociology and criminology and have surged and waned in popularity over the years. Classic strain theories dominated criminological research in the 1950s and 1960s,

and their relevance was marked in public policy of the time, particularly in strain theory's impact on the War on Poverty during the 1960s (Cullen & Agnew, 2006). Strain theory came under attack in the 1970s as relativist theorists shifted the focus to conflict and labeling theories (see Chapters 8 and 9), offering a new perspective on societal influences on both crime and punishment.

Robert Agnew (1992) breathed new life into the tradition with his **general strain theory (GST)**. Strain theory focuses on what circumstances lead individuals and groups within a society to engage in deviant behavior. Agnew suggests that they are “pressured into crime.” Along with the failure to achieve valued goals, Agnew argues that strain may also result from negative relationships. Agnew specifies three major types of negative relations where others

1. Prevent or threaten to prevent the achievement of positively valued goals (for example, preventing monetary success or popularity with peers)
2. Remove or threaten to remove positive stimuli (for example, the death of a parent or the breakup of a romantic relationship)
3. Present or threaten to present negative stimuli (for example, physical assaults, failing grades, or public insults)

Such negative relations will likely lead to anger and frustration, which may then lead to deviant behavior, such as physical violence, running away from home, illicit drug use, or self-harming behavior.

Agnew (2006) argues that some types of strain are more likely to cause crime and deviance than others. He identifies the following characteristics as most likely to cause crime: The strain is high in magnitude, the strain is seen as unjust, the strain is associated with low self-control, and/or the strain creates some pressure or incentive for criminal coping. More specifically, examples of strains that are likely to cause crime include parental rejection, erratic or excessively harsh discipline, child abuse and neglect, negative school experiences, abusive peer relationships, chronic unemployment, marital problems, criminal victimization, residence in economically deprived neighborhoods, and discrimination based on characteristics such as race/ethnicity and gender.

Agnew is careful to point out that not all individuals respond to strains with crime and deviance, and in fact, most people cope in legal and conforming ways. There are many possible coping strategies, including behavioral coping, cognitive coping, and emotional coping (Agnew, 2006). The resources and social support available to the individuals are important: Do they have conforming friends and family they can turn to for help? Do they associate with criminal others? What is their level of self-control? Is the cost of criminal coping high or low? For some individuals, there is low risk in criminal or deviant coping because they have little to lose—they may not have jobs or close relationships that would be put at risk with criminal or deviant acts. While it is difficult to tease out the exact impact of each of these factors, Agnew argues that whether by personality traits, socialization, or learned attitudes and behavior, some individuals are simply more disposed to crime than are others.

◆ Messner and Rosenfeld, *Crime and the American Dream*—Institutional Anomie Theory

Messner and Rosenfeld (2007a) turn attention to the American Dream and how it contributes to crime and deviance. They write,

The essence of our argument is that the distinctive patterns and levels of crime in the United States are produced by the cultural and structural organization of American society. A strong emphasis on the goal of monetary success and a weak emphasis on the importance of the legitimate means for the pursuit of success characterize American culture. This combination of strong pressures to succeed monetarily and



▲ **Photo 4.2** Do you agree with Messner and Rosenfeld that the American Dream fosters an “anything goes” attitude when pursuing monetary success?

cultural pressures to achieve are enormous, and failure to achieve is often perceived as a failure to make any sort of meaningful contribution to society. Individualism encourages everyone to find a way to “make it” on his or her own. Within this framework of intense competition to succeed, others in the society are viewed as competitors and rivals, and thus, general restraints on behavior are disregarded in the pursuit of personal goals. Universalism echoes Merton’s ideas that virtually everyone in American society is encouraged to aspire to success and wealth attainment. Messner and Rosenfeld point out that while everyone may dream about success, “the hazards of failure are also universal” (p. 70). Materialism is the last value that underlies the American Dream. Money has special significance in American culture; it is the preeminent way in which we measure success and achievement.

At the institutional level, Messner and Rosenfeld argue that the major institutions in the United States, including the family, school, and political system, are all dominated by economic institutions. Noneconomic goals and accomplishments are valued much less than economic pursuits and gains, and economic norms have infiltrated and overpowered other important societal institutions.

Messner and Rosenfeld suggest that the American Dream leads to crime and deviance because of its exaggerated emphasis on monetary success and its resistance to restraint or limits on individual pursuit of success. Thus, they extend Merton’s idea that the very fabric of American society promotes at least some level of deviance. Even as we all aspire to achieve great things and believe it is possible to realize our dreams, the social structure of American society constrains pathways to success; this, in turn, leads to deviance as some members of society pursue alternative success models by any means necessary.

◆ Application of Anomie and Strain Theories

Today, classic strain theory has renewed support, and it is used to examine group differences in crime rates, inequality, and **relative deprivation**, a perspective that suggests that socioeconomic inequality has a direct effect on community crime rates. At the micro level, Agnew continues to actively revise and refine his ideas on general strain theory. Many, many studies have tested pieces of Agnew’s theory and offer limited support; there are still many hypotheses to be discovered, tested, and explained. While research on general strain theory is quite easy to find in the sociological and

weak restraints on the selection of means is intrinsic to the dominant cultural ethos: the American Dream. The “American Dream” refers to a cultural commitment to the goal of economic success to be pursued by everyone under conditions of open, individual competition. The American Dream contributes to crime directly by encouraging people to employ illegal means to achieve goals that are culturally approved. (p. x)

Messner and Rosenfeld argue that the American Dream fosters an “anything goes” mentality when pursuing personal goals. They go on to identify the values underlying the American Dream as follows: achievement, individualism, universalism, and materialism. Achievement is connected to personal worth; Messner and Rosenfeld argue that the

criminological literature, in the following, we highlight three studies that explore different aspects of anomie and strain.

Anomie and the Abuse at Abu Ghraib

A recent study analyzed the abuse at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in terms of Durkheim's concept of anomie (Mestrovic & Lorenzo, 2008). You may remember the vivid images of American soldiers torturing and humiliating Iraqi prisoners: Photos were published of soldiers threatening the nude men with snarling dogs, smiling over the bodies of dead Iraqis, forcing the prisoners to walk around and pose nude with hoods and blindfolds blocking their vision, and offering a thumbs-up to the cameras as they posed in front of literal piles of prisoners in humiliating positions.

Mestrovic and Lorenzo (2008) argue that there were high levels of social disorganization or anomie at Abu Ghraib and within the social structures of the U.S. Army, other government agencies, civilian contractors, and others who interacted with and had responsibility for the prisoners at Abu Ghraib. The authors argue that the social system at Abu Ghraib was disorganized and anomic from the outset and grew progressively worse over time; this confusion produced widespread deviance among prisoners and U.S. personnel alike.

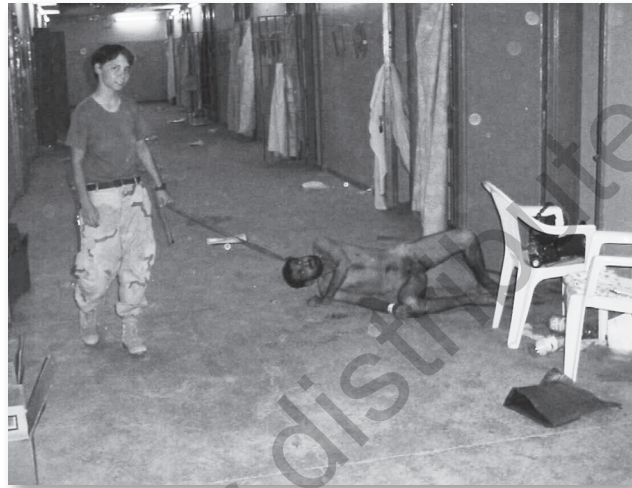
Mestrovic and Lorenzo (2008) identify several sources of confusion that contributed to the anomie and deviance, including confusion as to who was in charge, insufficient training, lack of social integration within the military units at Abu Ghraib, rapid changes in the social milieu, intense pressure to obtain intelligence, confusion as to which norms to follow, "unhealthy mystique," failure of self-correcting mechanisms, and cultural insensitivity. The authors go on to explain,

The extent of social disorganization, social chaos, dysfunction, lack of coordination, and of a general state of *anomie* was so great at Abu Ghraib that abuse and the breaking of norms that are documented was the *inevitable* outcome and should have been expected. (p. 202)

We have included a longer excerpt from Mestrovic and Lorenzo's article in the readings for this chapter so that you can read the primary source and think more deeply about their claims as they relate to anomie.

The American Dream and Incarcerated Young Men

A study by Inderbitzin (2007) focused on boys in a juvenile prison who held deeply to the idea of the American Dream but had few legitimate means to achieve it. The decline of manufacturing jobs and their replacement with low-wage and unskilled work has made it difficult for young men, particularly those with poor educations, to be successful. The ongoing racism experienced by minorities in the labor market imposes an additional barrier to economic success through legitimate means. As such, the loss of viable work for young, poorly educated, minority males seems inextricably linked to their criminal behavior. Committing crimes for profit can help such young men meet their financial needs and counter threats to their self-perception as competent men.



▲ **Photo 4.3** American soldiers purposely degraded and humiliated Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib. How does Durkheim's theory of anomie help to explain such abuse?

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The young men in the study followed the lure of money and status into illegal endeavors that led to confrontations with the law and conforming society. Profit or “getting paid” (M. L. Sullivan, 1989) was frequently cited as one of the main motivating factors in their crimes. They were examples of Merton’s innovators—“men who hold fast to culturally emphasized goals while abandoning culturally approved ways of seeking them” (Merton, 1964, p. 218). Thus, Merton’s ideas remain both useful and relevant some eight decades after the publication of “Social Structure and Anomie.”

Inderbitzin (2007) goes on to argue that staff members in the juvenile facility explicitly encourage the young men in their care to shift their values and aspirations to conforming, less glamorous goals and to adopt new definitions of success and the American Dream. In this way, Durkheim’s ideas on anomie are also found in the work that staff members of the juvenile correctional facility or “training school” are doing to resocialize the incarcerated adolescents to more prosocial goals and behavior.

A latent function of the juvenile prison is to work to normalize the young inmates, re-directing the aspirations of its charges, releasing them back into their communities with more realistic, but essentially deflated goals for their futures. In this way, the institution becomes an important agent of social control in its attempts to combat conditions of anomie and the resulting crime in the larger community. The training school graduates who go on to conforming futures have likely been at least partially normalized and resocialized to expect less from the world outside. (Inderbitzin, 2007, p. 236)

Institutional Anomie Theory and Student Cheating

One attempt to extend and refine Messner and Rosenfeld’s (2007a) **institutional anomie theory** took their ideas and applied them to individual student cheating. Muftic (2006) sought to test the idea that the exaggerated emphasis on economic success in the United States has bled into other social institutions, including academia. She surveyed American and international undergraduate students and asked them about their cheating behavior and their economic goals. Results suggested that American students were more oriented to economic goals and were more likely to admit to cheating. “Students with higher adherence to the cultural values of universalism and the fetishism of money had a higher likelihood of cheating. . . . Location of birth (i.e., born in the United States) appeared to have the strongest impact on cheating” (Muftic, 2006, p. 648).

While she found some support for institutional anomie theory, Muftic also points out that adherence to the American Dream is not universal. Even in a fairly homogeneous sample, American students embraced the cultural ideal at varying levels. Muftic concluded her article by suggesting that both microlevel (neighborhood cohesiveness and levels of informal social control) and macrolevel (poverty, family disruption, racial heterogeneity, and social mobility) analyses be combined in future studies of institutional anomie theory.

◆ Critiques of Anomie and Strain Theories

Macrolevel components of Merton’s theory have rarely been tested as it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure how whole societies focus on particular goals and means (Kubrin, Stucky, & Krohn, 2009, p. 127). Messner and Rosenfeld (2007a) discuss four primary critiques of Merton’s argument and anomie theory. First, Merton assumes that value consensus exists in society and that the goal of monetary success is held above all. As Muftic (2006) pointed out, we should not assume those values are universal; other goals may be equally important—or more important—for many Americans. Second, Merton’s theory and many versions of classical strain theory are class biased and have difficulty accounting for deviance among the privileged classes. Third, Merton seems to suggest that providing more equal

opportunity offers a realistic solution to crime and deviance in the United States; Messner and Rosenfeld do not believe this to be the case. Finally, Merton never precisely defines anomie.

Messner and Rosenfeld (2007a) dispense with the first two critiques as being oversimplified readings of Merton's argument, suggesting that Merton never claimed complete value consensus but that monetary success is a particularly powerful benchmark in the United States. Furthermore, Merton's basic argument can be used to explain deviance and criminal behavior in the middle and upper classes as well, as the definition of success is relative and must still be achieved despite structural constraints.

◆ Explaining Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites: The Occupy Wall Street Movement

The Occupy Wall Street movement in New York in the fall of 2011 focused attention on inequality in the United States and the perceived crumbling of the American Dream. Protesters, embracing the slogan “We are the 99 percent,” took over Zuccotti Park in Lower Manhattan, disrupting the work and daily life of wealthy financial traders for weeks and months. The message of the Occupy movement spread quickly, with protests taking root in cities and college campuses across the country. The protests were largely tolerated by local authorities, but law enforcement created headlines when college students protesting on the University of California campus in Davis were pepper-sprayed by campus police. The Occupy movement lasted for months. Eventually, hundreds of Occupy participants were displaced when they were evicted from Zuccotti Park and arrested for violations as simple as disorderly conduct or laying down in public.

Many of the activists of the Occupy movement were young, highly educated adults. Sociologists found that more than a third of the protesters lived in households with annual incomes over \$100,000, and more than two thirds of them held professional jobs (Moynihan, 2013). And yet, their discontent was palpable and spurred them to action.

It seems education is no longer a guaranteed conforming route to a successful, fulfilling, and profitable career. Researchers found that nearly 80% of the Occupy participants had a bachelor's degree, and of those, about half had a graduate degree, yet a significant portion of the protesters had credit card or student loan debt and were underemployed, working less than 35 hours a week (Moynihan, 2013). Milkman (2012) describes the origin of the Occupy protesters' frustration and activism.

They followed the prescribed path to prepare themselves for professional jobs or other meaningful careers. But having completed their degrees, they confronted a labor market bleaker than anytime since the 1930s. Adding insult to injury, many were burdened with enormous amounts of student debt.

In this sense, Occupy might be seen as a classic revolution of rising expectations. But it is not only about blocked economic aspirations: The millennials were also seduced and abandoned *politically*. Their generation enthusiastically supported Barack Obama in 2008; some participated in “Camp Obama,” and many were otherwise actively involved in the campaign. But here, too, their expectations were brutally disappointed. (pp. 13–14)

As economic, political, and social expectations are disappointed and new realities created, it might be argued that the United States is again experiencing a time of anomie as Durkheim described it, where society fails to regulate the expectations and behaviors of its members. Young people—who if they had been born into an earlier generation might have found their investment in education paying financial dividends—were so frustrated by the inequality and lack of good opportunities that they literally took to the streets in the Occupy movement, banding together and risking arrest in order to make a point and feel heard.



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▲ **Photo 4.4** How might the Occupy movement be an example of both Deviance in the Streets and Deviance in the Suites?

stagnation, if not devastation for many in vulnerable positions, who have been dubbed the precariat. But while surely there was malfeasance, if not criminal behavior, this must be understood as a structural crisis in which the “steering mechanisms” failed.

A vast government bailout pumped trillions of dollars into the insolvent banks and “saved” the banking/financial system. The government rescue halted the plummet, saved the financial system and its elite prospered, yet ordinary people lost jobs, houses were foreclosed, people evicted, and many remain unemployed and/or underemployed. It was soon evident that thanks to “crony capitalism,” the casino players won, the banking/finance industries had “recovered,” indeed amassed more wealth than ever before. Its elites were well rewarded—thanks to the taxpayers.

Economic crises, implosions, and structural contradictions that threaten survival or the maintenance of living standards, or render social status, dignity and self-esteem problematic, lead to questions and challenges to the legitimacy of the economic system, political leadership, and legitimating ideologies. (Langman, 2013, pp. 511–512)

Even as its members protested extreme inequality in the United States, some controversy arose from within the Occupy movement when chronically homeless people moved into the Occupy camps in areas such as New York City, Boston, and Los Angeles. While some Occupy protesters embraced the homeless as epitomizing the very soul of arguments about inequality and the lack of resources of the 99%, others felt like the homeless population took advantage of the comparative luxury and safety of the camps and that their presence brought more stringent scrutiny from authorities and law enforcement.

The Occupy Wall Street movement is an interesting example of highly educated individuals literally taking to the streets to protest what they perceive as deviance in the corporate suites. We began this chapter with the example of Christopher McCandless, who, after graduating college, gave up all of his worldly possessions and struck out to make it on his own in the wilderness far away from the trappings of the larger society. He shared in common with the young people of the Occupy movement a deep frustration with the norms and expectations of American society. In responding to the conditions of anomie and strain, McCandless chose to retreat, whereas the Occupy participants chose to band together and rebel.

Langman, a sociologist, explains how the Wall Street bailout, in which the federal government committed some \$700 billion in taxpayer money to rescue Wall Street banks, showed power differences in the extreme, with wealthy corporations offered enormous financial assistance while middle- and working-class citizens lost their homes, their jobs, and their hope.

There was an explosion of “subprime” mortgages in which vetting applicants was negligent at best, criminal at worst. Eventually, the bubble burst, the rapidly expanding housing market crashed, the entire financial industry imploded and took the entire economy down. There followed a wave of bankruptcies, layoffs of workers, and subsequent economic

◆ Ideas in Action: Defy Ventures—Transforming Innovation Into Legitimate Success

In describing the adaptations to anomie, Robert Merton defined innovation as acceptance of the cultural goal of wealth attainment and the use of illegitimate means to work toward that goal. Thus, crimes committed for money or profit would generally fall under the heading of innovation. While illegal, there are often real skills involved in these illicit business pursuits, and individuals may become successful entrepreneurs selling drugs and services.

After visiting Texas prisons in a religious outreach program, Catherine Rohr discovered that many of the skills and talents prisoners developed and used as drug dealers and criminals—street smarts, resourcefulness, money management, risk taking, and the ability to manage employees—were exactly the traits needed to succeed in more conventional business endeavors. She started the Prisoner Entrepreneurship Program (n.d.), a nonprofit program that teaches Texas inmates an MBA-level curriculum and encourages them to translate their previous skills and work ethic into new and conforming ventures as they form plans to start their own businesses. The Prison Entrepreneurship Program has proven to be very successful in its first decade; it trains and socializes inmates to prepare them for conforming business opportunities, helps individuals with reentry and job placement upon release, and boasts a recidivism rate of less than 10%.

After a highly publicized scandal involving intimate (but not illegal) relationships with four graduates of her program after they were released from prison, Rohr resigned from her role with the Prison Entrepreneurship Program, but she did not give up on her belief that former prisoners could translate their skills into successful businesses. The following is an excerpt from a 2013 interview with Rohr.

“America puts these people in the trash pile,” Rohr said. “They represent America’s most overlooked talent pool: the underdogs.” But, she says they are brilliantly equipped to be leaders because of their street-smart and entrepreneurial (albeit illegal) past activities. After going through 1,000 hours of character and business development, the former felons come out as business people ready to face the world. (Menardi, 2013, n.p.)

Rohr went on to found the New York–based Defy Ventures (n.d.), a nonprofit funded and managed by entrepreneurs and venture capitalists who believe that former drug dealers and gang members may share similar skills with top business leaders. A news story checked in with the first class of Defy students, describing the program and the students’ evolution and practices:

These men are the inaugural class of Defy Ventures, a yearlong, M.B.A.-style program that Rohr created to teach former inmates how to start their own companies. For months, they have been meeting here for 14 to 16 hours a week to learn about things such as cash flow, balance sheets, intellectual property, accounting, and taxes. There are workshops on how to behave in professional settings, how to speak in public, and how to be a better parent. These men are also learning how to create business plans. In June, they will compete in a business-plan competition. The winners will split \$100,000 in seed funding.

Rohr has an interesting theory about criminals. She says that many of the qualities that made these men good at being bad guys (until they got caught, of course) are the same qualities that make effective entrepreneurs. Some of the men in this class had up to 40 employees under management. Though their merchandise was illegal narcotics and not, say, office supplies, these men developed certain business skills—the ability to motivate a team, identify new markets, manage risk, and inspire loyalty and hard work. Rohr’s goal is to help these students apply their abilities to legal endeavors. (Frieswick, 2012)

NOW YOU . . . USE THE THEORY

The following is a graph of the suicide rates in the United States between 1950 and 2003. Note that the data are broken down by age and gender. Using anomie or general strain theory, explain the following:

1. The overall trend (all ages, age adjusted) between 1950 and 2003. Start by describing the trend; then choose one of the two theories to explain it.
2. The trend, over time, for 45- to 64-year-olds between 1950 and 2003. Start by describing the trend; then choose one of the two theories to explain it.
3. The trend for male suicides and female suicides over time. According to one of the two theories, why might women always be less likely to engage in suicidal behavior than men?

Visit the website for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention for additional facts and figures, updated through 2013, at <https://www.afsp.org/understanding-suicide/facts-and-figures>.

U.S. Suicide Rates, 1950–2003 (per 100,000 population)

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003
All ages, age adjusted	13.2	13.2	13.2	13.2	12.5	11.8	10.4	10.7	10.9	10.8
5–14 years	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.8	0.9	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.6
15–24 years	4.5	5.2	8.8	12.3	13.2	13.0	10.2	9.9	9.9	9.7
15–19 years	2.7	3.6	5.9	8.5	11.1	10.3	8.0	7.9	7.4	7.3
20–24 years	6.2	7.1	12.2	16.1	15.1	15.8	12.5	12.0	12.4	12.1
25–44 years	11.6	12.2	15.4	15.6	15.2	15.1	13.4	13.8	14.0	13.8
25–34 years	9.1	10.0	14.1	16.0	15.2	15.0	12.0	12.8	12.6	12.7
35–44 years	14.3	14.2	16.9	15.4	15.3	15.1	14.5	14.7	15.3	14.9
45–64 years	23.5	22.0	20.6	15.9	15.3	13.9	13.5	14.4	14.9	15.0
45–54 years	20.9	20.7	20.0	15.9	14.8	14.4	14.4	15.2	15.7	15.9
55–64 years	26.8	23.7	21.4	15.9	16.0	13.2	12.1	13.1	13.6	13.8
65 years and over	30.0	24.5	20.8	17.6	20.5	17.9	15.2	15.3	15.6	14.6
65–74 years	29.6	23.0	20.8	16.9	17.9	15.7	12.5	13.3	13.5	12.7
75–84 years	31.1	27.9	21.2	19.1	24.9	20.6	17.6	17.4	17.7	16.4

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003
85 years and over	28.8	26.0	19.0	19.2	22.2	21.3	19.6	17.5	18.0	16.9
Male, all ages	21.2	20.0	19.8	19.9	21.5	20.3	17.7	18.2	18.4	18.0
Female, all ages	5.6	5.6	7.4	5.7	4.8	4.3	4.0	4.0	4.2	4.2

Source: Graph from World Health Organization.

Graduates of Defy Ventures have started cleaning businesses, concierge services, construction companies, financial-planning services, repair businesses, a mobile barbershop, and other startup companies. In their quest to build new lives once they were released from prison, they recognized that Defy Ventures was offering legitimate, conforming opportunities, and they put in the work needed to translate their hard-earned skills and energy into new professional businesses.

Rohr and others working at and supporting Defy Ventures hope to eventually replicate the program in every urban community in the United States. If and when communities come together to support formerly incarcerated people who are trying to change their lives, there will be less strain, less need for innovation, and more opportunities for every member of society to conform and thrive.

◆ Conclusion

Anomie and strain theories have a more clearly developed history than other theoretical traditions. Nearly everyone can agree that these ideas began with Durkheim and Merton and were extended in important ways by Cloward and Ohlin and a handful of other theorists. One recent revision of the theory views strain as a function of relative deprivation. In this model, the reference group is a key element. Your own absolute success or wealth is less important than your position relative to those around you. Comparing yourself with those with more wealth and more material success may lead to strain and deviant behavior. Today, Messner and Rosenfeld's institutional anomie theory might be considered the leading version of anomie theory, and Agnew's general strain theory might be considered the leading version of strain theory (Cullen & Agnew, 2006).

Research continues on both anomie and strain theories. More sophisticated methods are allowing for analyses that bridge both macrolevel and microlevel variables, which will offer an ever-increasing understanding of how cultural goals and the social structure affect individuals and lead to deviant behavior.

EXERCISES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Provide another example of a state of anomie. How did it affect rates of deviance?
2. Give a specific example of each of Merton's five adaptations.
3. What are the policy recommendations you might make based on Cloward and Ohlin's ideas? In other words, using Cloward and Ohlin's ideas on delinquency and opportunity,

what programs might be put into place to prevent crime and deviance?

4. Institutional anomie theory argues that our economic goals and system have permeated and overrun other social systems and institutions in the United States. Do you think this is true? Can you think of examples from politics, education, and families?

5. Do you think that Agnew is correct that individuals are pressured into crime and deviance? Can you think of an example of a time when you were faced with a negative relationship but did not turn to deviant behavior? How did you react instead?

KEY TERMS

Anomie	Institutional anomie theory	Strain
Conflict subcultures	Relative deprivation	Structural impediments
Criminal subcultures	Retreatist subcultures	
General strain theory (GST)	Status frustration	

READING 10

Contreras argues in this brief piece that context is critically important in understanding how and why a group of young men became incredibly violent drug dealers. He frames Tukee's story through his learning to desire and believe in the American Dream, the criminal opportunities found in the rise—and fall—of crack cocaine, and the struggle Tukee and his friends went through to attain and maintain wealth and the “high life.” Which version of anomie/strain theory do you think best fits the story of the young men in this reading?

Becoming a Stickup Kid

Randol Contreras

The South Bronx summer night was warm and moist, with that mild glow we always felt after it rained. The neighborhood residents slowly resumed their places on the streets, first standing next to building entrances, then next to wet cars, and then

sitting on the cars after they'd dried. The neighborhood bodega, or grocery store, revitalized the block, blasting the 1980s salsa classics that brought bolero lyrics to the dance floor: *Y me duele a pensar, que nunca mia seras, De mi enamorate-e-e-e . . .*

Source: Contreras, R. (2015). Becoming a stickup kid. *Contexts*, 14(4), 20–25.

Dressed in large T-shirts, Nikes, and baggy shorts, some young Dominican men listened to the cool music alongside me. “Yo, that used to be the jam!”—we nodded our heads; “I used to dance to this shit!”—we tapped our feet; “*A si mi’mo!*”—one of us did a fancy salsa step; *Mira que e, e, e, e, e, e—el-l-l-l!*—some of us sang along, straining our voices with each rising octave. We were all in a good mood. Just chillin’. *Chilliando*, baby.

Then Jonah arrived. He pulled Gus aside for a fur-tive chat. Despite their low voices, we could hear them planning a drug robbery. After about ten minutes, they returned to the group, energized, and recounted stories of their past *tumbes* (drug robbery hits). Most of the young Dominican men joined in with their own tales of brutality and adventure.

Jonah and Gus recounted a drug robbery when they’d targeted a Dominican drug courier who always delivered five kilos of cocaine to a certain dealer on a certain day. For a share of the take, the dealer told Jonah and Gus where to intercept the courier as he walked out of an apartment building. At gunpoint, they led him to the building’s rooftop, beat him, and stole \$100,000 worth of drugs.

Tukee and Pablo told the group about a drug robbery where they had pretended to be undercover officers. With fake badges and real guns, they stopped a pair of drug dealers on the street: “Freeze! Don’t move, motherfucker!” they yelled out. They faced the dealers against a wall and grabbed their suitcase, stuffed with \$40,000 in cash. “Keep facing the wall!” they commanded before trotting around the corner to their get-away car. Neno and Gus told a third story, of a drug robbery that went wrong. They had tortured a drug dealer—punched and kicked him, choked and gagged him, mutilated and burned him—until he passed out. The victim, however, remained unconscious. Afraid, *se fueron volando*—they hurried out so if the victim died, they wouldn’t be there.

Throughout my field research, I heard many of these robbery tales. In fact, I grew up with these stories and these men. As a young man, I had tried my hand at drug dealing. So I was used to seeing and hearing about drug market violence. Yet there were times when I questioned the humanity of the men next to me on front stoops and car hoods.

How could Pablo almost beat someone to death? How could Gus repeatedly burn someone with an iron? How could Tukee chop off someone’s finger? How could Neno sodomize a dealer with an object? How could all of these men *torture*, a cruel and deplorable human act?

In trying to understand drug robbery violence, I realized how easy it was to fall into an individualistic, sociopathic-reasoning trap. Could one not argue that these men were sociopaths who enjoyed inflicting pain on others? Maybe they were evil and solely pursued the emotional thrills of crime?

As a sociologist, though, I took a step back to frame what seemed solely evil and sociopathic within larger historical and social forces, forces that sweep people in one direction or another, that shape “why” some people do violence or crime.

Everyone respects Tukee for his tremendous violence during drug robberies. It seems like he could chop off fingers and pistol-whip someone to the brink of death with no hesitation or thought. Sometimes, he even seemed to enjoy torture:

“I remember one time, we put a[n] iron on this dude’s back,” Tukee recounts, laughing. “I had told him, ‘Just tell me where the shit is [the drugs and cash]. If you don’t tell us, I’m a do some things to you, B[ro]. Things you won’t like.’ He ain’t tell us so, boom, [we] took off his shirt and made the iron real hot. I put that shit on his back and the dude started screaming, B, ha-ha-ha! Then he was like, ‘Alright, take it! It’s inside the mattress!’ That shit was funny, B! Ha-ha-ha!”

Taken out of the proper socio-historical context, the laughter and joy in Tukee’s account make it seem like he’s pure evil. Tukee, though, was born neither a drug robber nor torturer. His biography emerged within a particular social context: the rise and fall of crack cocaine in the abandoned and burned-out South Bronx.

◆ Tukee’s Story

Tukee was born to a Dominican father and a Puerto Rican mother in the South Bronx during the early 1970s. For reasons he never disclosed, his father abandoned the family, never to be seen or heard from again. His mother worked several informal jobs, mostly as a seamstress in a local sweatshop. Tukee

went to underfunded public schools—when he went. A disengaged and unprepared student, he eventually dropped out of high school. He worked part-time, here and there, moving from one fast-food chain job to the next. But he wanted to make money, get rich.

Tukee's chances for upward mobility, though, were fading. Between 1947 and 1976, New York City lost about 500,000 factory jobs. That's half a million unionized jobs that, for about three-quarters of the twentieth century, had provided security and upward mobility for European immigrants and their children. By the time Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and, later, Dominicans, settled in the Bronx, the burgeoning service economy had taken hold. There were lower wages and less job security available to workers with little education, like Tukee.

Crack showed up right on time.

Crack had its origins in the powder cocaine craze of the 1970s. This was a time when professionals like doctors, Wall Street executives, and lawyers likened a line of cocaine to a sip of champagne. The federal government's hysteria over marijuana and its reduction of drug treatment funds further widened the demand for and use of cocaine. Later, in the early 1980s, when cocaine users reduced their intake, desperate cocaine dealers then turned to crack, a smokable form of the drug, to maintain profits. Instead, their profits soared: crack yielded more quantity than cocaine after preparation. More importantly, crack invited binging. Soon many users were consuming the drug around-the-clock.

Crack quickly proliferated in inner cities across the United States. For marginal urban residents, who suffered because of both a declining manufacturing sector and Reaganomics but still hoped to take part in the grandest version of the American Dream—crack was a Godsend. The start-up money for a crack business was low. And unlike the tightly knit heroin market, there was no need for pre-existing family or ethnic ties to edge your way in. Almost anyone could enter this market.

Tukee walked right in.

He and a friend started selling crack in his Highbridge neighborhood. He began earning between \$300 and \$500 per day, all profit. He purchased a salvaged luxury car and restored it to its former glory with stolen car parts. Along with his new expensive jewelry and clothes, the car made him a neighborhood celebrity. *Yo*, here comes Tukee! The sidewalk crowd flocked

around. *What up Tukee, where you going?* The guys and gals wanted to cruise around in his ride.

Tukee also spent his *riquezas*, or riches, living the high life. He arrived at nightclubs *con estilo*, or in style, with an entourage-packed white limousine. Inside, he treated his broke neighborhood friends to over-priced bottles of liquor and bought attractive women expensive drinks. Afterward, if he was still around, the weed was on him, too. Everyone loved Tukee. He was a drug market star.

Of course, Tukee was also feared. As crack use rose, more dealers tried to squeeze into the now-saturated market. Tukee pulled his gun on several newcomers, warning them to stay away from his "spot." He became a legend after he shot a dealer for dealing drugs without his permission. After coming out of hiding (the police investigation lasted a few weeks), everyone deferred to him, greeting him with open arms and a smile. *Tukee*—he's crazy!

Then, after about a year, it was over. Tukee's lucrative crack business slowed down. His nightclubbing and largesse took a hit, and he limited his outings to the affordable Dallas BBQ restaurant. "That was the only place I could take girls to," he remembers. "They served these big-ass glasses of margaritas for real cheap. Those shits looked like they came in Cheerio [cereal] bowls, so I could get bitches drunk for real cheap. I'm telling you, B[ro], times were real hard."

Tukee wasn't alone. During the mid-1990s, crack dealing across New York City took a mighty hit. Unbeknownst to dealers, many crack users had reduced their intake because of the drug's stigma and frenetic, binging lifestyle. Also, the new generation of youth shunned crack because they had seen what it did to their family members, neighbors, and friends. Malt liquor beer and marijuana would become their recreational drugs of choice. The crack market shrank, bringing once-successful crack dealers to the lowest of the lows.

Riches and highlife—gone.

To maintain his dealing income, Tukee started transporting crack to Philadelphia, where he established a selling spot with a local. The money was decent, but it wasn't "Donald Trump" money. When he got word that the police were watching him, he returned to the South Bronx dejected and broke.

"I was sellin' all my guns, all my jewelry, everything B[ro], just to stay in the game," Tukee recounts. "I used that money to buy some dope [heroin] and sell that shit."

However, Tukee struggled to find an open dealing spot. The heroin dealers—who funded quasi-armies for protection—demanded a daily “rent” of \$1,200 to \$2,000 for the right to sell on their block. Tukee could not afford the rent. So he returned to Philadelphia to sell his heroin. No luck. Philly heroin users remained loyal to local brands. Defeated, Tukee again returned to the South Bronx.

Eventually, Tukee joined an auto theft crew that catered to the Crack Era’s big-time drug dealers (the same crew that had sold him the stolen car parts for his own ride). But the stolen car business was no longer lucrative—the shrinking crack market lessened its need, too. Tukee hardly earned any money. He was at a loss: “I was like, ‘This is it,’” Tukee recalls. “Nothing’s workin’ out. This is the end of me.”

Like Tukee, other displaced drug dealers felt a financial strain because of the crack market’s decline. Several of them responded by creating a lucrative new niche in drug robberies. Now they beat, burned, choked, and mutilated their drug-dealing victims. Now they committed horrific acts that they had never done before. Now they were Stickup Kids, the perpetrators of the worst violence in the drug world. Tukee joined their ranks.

A former drug dealing connection contacted Tukee for a drug robbery. They planned to rob a drug dealer for about eight kilos of cocaine and \$30,000 in cash. Tukee had never done a drug robbery before, not even a street robbery. But he was handy with a gun. “I didn’t even think twice about it,” Tukee recalls. “I was like, ‘Fuck it. Show me where the money’s at.’”

It was an inside job, where a drug dealer *wanted* to get himself and his partner robbed. The dealer, of course, would be absent. But he gave the Stickup crew the best time to storm the stash apartment, where his partner sometimes stayed alone. If all went well, the treacherous dealer would get half the proceeds just for providing the information. The crew would split the other half: \$95,000 in drugs and cash.

For the robbery, they brought along “The Girl,” a young, attractive female accomplice. “We needed her ‘cause we can’t just knock on the door and the dude just gonna open,” Tukee explained. “He don’t know us and he’s fuckin’ holding drugs. He’s gonna be like, ‘These motherfuckers are cops or trying to rob my ass.’ So we got her to knock on the door and get the door open.”

It worked. She knocked. The dealer peeped through the peephole. She smiled and flirted and asked for help. When he opened the door to get a better sense of her needs, the drug robbers, crouched on either side of the door, guns in hand, exploded into action. Tukee’s crew rushed the dealer, rammed him back into the apartment, slammed him onto the floor, kicked him, punched him, pistol-whipped him, threatened him to stay down, not to move, or they would stab him, shoot him, would do everything imaginable that would cause his death.

“The shit was crazy, son,” Tukee recalls. “I was like watching at first. But then I had to make sure that niggas saw me do shit. Let niggas know that I ain’t no slouch. [So] I started kickin’ the dude—Bah! Bah! Then we tied him up with duct tape and I put my gun in his head [sic], I was like, ‘Where’s the shit at! You wanna die, nigga?’”

As Tukee and a partner terrified the dealer, the other two robbers frantically searched the apartment for the drugs and cash. After flipping mattresses, pulling out dresser drawers, and yanking out clothes from a closet, they found it. Everyone scrambled out of the apartment, leaving the dealer bloody, bruised, and bound on the living room floor.

There was no need for torture in this robbery. But the thrill energized Tukee. “I was amped up after that, like for awhile, B. I remember we was counting the money, weighing the drugs, splitting everything, giving this dude this much, me this much, him that much . . . I was like, ‘I’m ready to do this again.’ Let’s go, B!”

According to Tukee, the robbery netted him about \$30,000 worth of drugs and cash. This was more than he had earned in a year of stealing cars and selling heroin. So, for him, the violence was worth the money. He wanted to be rich again. Soon, he became a violence expert. He knew how to overcome resistant victims.

“I started doing all types of shit,” Tukee explains. “Like I would tie them [the dealers] up and ask them, ‘Where the fuck the kilos at?’ If they don’t tell me, or be like, ‘I don’t sell drugs. I don’t know why you doing this,’ then I pistol-whipped them. If they still don’t say nothin’, I choked them. If they still don’t say nothin’, then you bring the iron out and burn them. Or you could go to the kitchen and get a kitchen knife, some butcher-type shit, and chop-off one of their fingers. Then those dudes be like, ‘Alright, alright, take it! It’s over there!’”

Tukee, then, *learned* how to do one-on-one violence—fist-to-face, knife-to-neck, hands-to-throat violence—to someone vulnerable, tied up, who pled for mercy, to please, please leave them alone. Tukee felt he had to. *You gotta do what you gotta do*, he always said. Violence for money would become his way of life. *Tukee*—he’s no joke.

◆ Social Context and Violence

Throughout his life, Tukee pursued meaning through the illegal drug market. And his words seem to support an evil and sociopathic understanding of his behavior. Did Tukee enjoy the emotional rush of a drug robbery—yes. Did Tukee enjoy doing violence—yes. But we must also ask: *Why* did he seek thrills as a drug robber rather than as a courtroom lawyer or a Wall Street executive? *Why* did he enjoy physically hurting people as a drug robber rather than as a hockey player, football player, or mixed-martial artist?

The answer lies in the social context, the South Bronx setting in which Tukee’s life unfolded. He came of age during the Crack Era, which resulted from misguided drug policies, the decline of manufacturing, and the collapse of inner cities. If we add the daily cultural messages that try to make Americans pursue the ultimate, most gluttonous version of the American Dream, then we see marginal residents who not only used crack to exit poverty, but also to strike it rich. They wanted the material status symbols that Madison Avenue advertising agencies *taught* them to want and need.

Tukee was born into this world, a world not of his own creation, but one that influenced him first into crack dealing, then into drug robberies. If the Crack Era had not appeared, there is a great chance—though not absolute—that Tukee would have become neither a drug dealer nor drug robber. These lucrative criminal opportunities would have been unlikely, less abundant options. So to understand Tukee, we must understand how history and social structure intersects with his biography. Otherwise, the study of poverty-related brutality becomes a distorted enterprise in which Tukee and other marginal criminals are improperly portrayed.

◆ Recommended Resources

- Timothy Black. 2009. *When a Heart Turns Rock Solid: The Lives of Three Puerto Rican Brothers on and off the Streets*. New York: Pantheon Books. A long-term ethnography that economically and politically contextualizes the criminal and legal life course of three Puerto Rican brothers in Springfield, Massachusetts.
- Philippe Bourgois. 2003 [1995]. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. New York: Cambridge University Press. A theoretically informed ethnography linking the declining manufacturing sector to the everyday lives of Puerto Rican crack dealers in New York City.
- Randall Collins. 2008. *Violence: A Micro-sociological Theory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. A theoretical examination of the emotional dynamics that produce violence during micro-interactions.
- Jack Katz. 1988. *Seductions of Crime: Moral and Sensual Attractions of Doing Evil*. New York: Basic Books. An examination of how emotional thrills and other foreground factors are linked to the commission of crimes.

READING 11

As highlighted in the text, Mestrovic and Lorenzo used Durkheim’s ideas on anomie to help explain the abuse at Abu Ghraib. They argue that the dysfunction and disorganization at Abu Ghraib was so great that the breaking of norms and abuse of prisoners was inevitable. The authors reframe, from a sociological perspective, an important

Source: Mestrovic, S. G., & Lorenzo, R. (2008). Durkheim’s concept of *anomie* and the abuse at Abu Ghraib. *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 8(2), 179–207. Reprinted with permission.

government report documenting the abuse at Abu Ghraib. They highlight the following conditions leading to anomie and abuse: confusion as to who was in charge, insufficient training, lack of social integration within the military units at Abu Ghraib, rapid changes in the social milieu, intense pressure to obtain intelligence, cultural insensitivity, and confusion as to which norms to follow. The conclusion is especially interesting as the authors argue that the courts-martial at Fort Hood, Texas, were meant to bring justice to the abusees and restore the collective conscience. They further argue that this did not happen. Rather, a few “bad apples” were punished, which may not be nearly enough to “make things right” for those directly involved or for the worldwide audience. We think this piece is both useful and interesting for students, teachers, and researchers. It offers a vivid example of how “classic” sociological theories and ideas can still be used today to gain new insight into current examples of deviant behavior.

Durkheim's Concept of Anomie and the Abuse at Abu Ghraib

Stjepan G. Mestrovic and Ronald Lorenzo

The overall conclusion reached by the various US government reports on the abuse committed at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq is that abuse did in fact occur; that no direct orders to commit the abuse were issued by officials high in the chain of command; and that some personnel low in the chain of command should be prosecuted for some of the abuse (Mestrovic, 2007; Strasser, 2004). These same reports also expose evidence of high levels of social disorganization and what sociologists call *anomie* at Abu Ghraib and within the social structure of the US Army and of other government agencies (OGA), among civilian contractors, and among others who were involved with policing, interrogating, and incarcerating prisoners at Abu Ghraib as well as in Afghanistan, Guantánamo, and elsewhere in Iraq. The occurrence of social disorganization and *anomie* ranges from the most microscopic level of analysis (such as the unauthorized merging of the roles of Military Intelligence and Military Police at Abu Ghraib, which led to the policy that MPs ‘softened up’ prisoners for MI) through mid-levels of analysis (such as the question of who was the executive officer in charge at Abu Ghraib) to macro-levels of analysis (such as which interrogation procedures were approved by the US Army and the Department of Defense at which period of time and in which theater of action, as well as the question whether the Geneva Conventions apply in whole

or in part or in what specific aspect, and also what is the significance of the denial of findings contained in International Committee of the Red Cross reports).

Sociological theory and research holds that social disorganization and *anomie* inevitably cause what sociologists call deviance or the breaking of social norms. However, the government reports use metaphors such as ‘poisoned climate,’ rather than the word *anomie*, to describe the social setting at Abu Ghraib. The authors of these reports prefer the word ‘abuse’ to the sociological concept of ‘deviance.’ The military judge allowed an expert witness in sociology to use and explain the concept ‘*anomie*’ in open court during testimony at three of the courts-martial pertaining to Abu Ghraib that were held at Fort Hood, Texas, in 2005.¹ However, what appears to be a straightforward sociological representation of the chaotic social setting leading to abuse at Abu Ghraib as an anomic one actually involves intricate and complex interpretation. It raises questions for sociological theory that have been dormant for decades, including but not limited to the following: Is *anomie* a condition of *dérèglement*, as Durkheim taught, or is it a condition of ‘normlessness,’ as conceptualized by structural functionalists and repeated in hundreds of textbooks? Is anomie primarily a ‘deranged’ state of disorganization involving lack of coordination and other variations of social

chaos that sets the stage for violence and abuse, as taught by Durkheim, or is it a 'normless' condition, as taught by the functionalists? One's assumptions in replying to these and related questions will have a profound impact on how one understands what caused the abuse and how one approaches the task of repairing the damage to social structure caused by abuse at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere. If Durkheim is correct, then the US Army needs to be put into a collective therapy of sorts, along the lines of the remedies that he proposed for healing the evil consequences of *anomie* (Durkheim, 1933 [1893], 1951 [1897], 1983b [1950]). These remedies include establishing fixed normative referents, promoting social integration, and ensuring that existing norms are coordinated, incorporated into policies, and function properly. If the functionalists are correct, then any working 'normative' solution is adequate to the task of restoring social order, even if the norms in question are out of sync with, say, the norms of the international community, such as the Geneva Conventions. In fact, functionalists assume that social systems self-correct automatically when it comes to fixing anomie: 'social life has a tendency to be and to remain a functionally integrated phenomenon' (Theodorson and Theodorson, 1969: 133).

These issues are important and have long-lasting consequences. As of this writing, strict adherence to the Geneva Conventions is *not* part of the discourse for fixing the damage to social relations caused by the abuse at Abu Ghraib. Instead, the US government has chosen to rely on the Army Field Manual as its standard, with the caveat that it can be changed at any time (and has been changed several times in the past six years). According to the Bush Administration, the Geneva Conventions did not and do not apply against Al-Qaida, but did and do apply in the war in Iraq (Danner, 2004). Yet policies from Guantánamo—where the Geneva Conventions were ruled to be irrelevant—were transferred to Abu Ghraib—where the Geneva Conventions were supposed to apply (see Falk et al., 2006). A Durkheimian sociological analysis would apprehend this 'migration' of unlawful policies and contexts as itself a confusing, chaotic, and *anomie*-producing process. Moreover, as the war in Iraq continues to be re-conceptualized as part of a global war against terror, the importance of the Geneva Conventions as an example of firm moral boundaries in the

Durkheimian sense is diminishing. New 'norms' relating to torture and warfare are being created, causing moral confusion among lawyers, officers, soldiers, and everyone else involved in this discourse.

For many decades, sociological theory pertaining to *anomie* and its relationship to deviance has been used by criminologists to study ordinary crime, but not war crimes, torture, and abuse. This vacuum in sociological theorizing has been filled by Philip Zimbardo, who draws upon the obedience-to-authority paradigm in social psychology. Zimbardo (2007) claims that his famous Stanford Prison Experiment explains the abuse at Abu Ghraib on the basis of 'good' people turning 'evil' as the result of 'situational' factors. Space does not permit a full analysis of *anomie* theory (further distinguishable into Durkheimian and functionalist versions) versus the obedience-to-authority paradigm in Zimbardo's book. Suffice it to say that facts and reports concerning Abu Ghraib suggest the opposite of what Zimbardo intends: an egregious lack of authority and leadership at Abu Ghraib seems to have been responsible for the abuse that ensued. Against Zimbardo's position, Durkheim's assumption seems to be that ordinary people (who exhibit a mixture of 'good' and 'bad' traits depending in part upon society's definitions) at Abu Ghraib behaved in ways that some—but not all— aspects of society label as 'evil.' Our purpose here is to clarify, deepen, and apply a genuinely sociological theory of *anomie* to the issue at hand.

◆ Conceptualizing the Problem

The factual evidence for the presence of extreme social disorganization and *anomie* comes from the US government reports pertaining to Abu Ghraib as well as testimony from the courts-martial—described meticulously by Mestrovic (2007) based upon eyewitness accounts of the trials as well as participation in three of them as an expert witness in sociology—and includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- a systemic lack of accountability;
- a disorganized filing system;

- the fact that other government agencies (OGA), including the CIA, operated outside established rules and procedures established by the Army Field Manual as well as the Geneva Conventions;
- the fact that nobody was certain who was in charge of Abu Ghraib;
- overcrowding; a dysfunctional system for releasing prisoners;
- failure to screen detainees at the point that they were arrested as well as the point that they were brought to Abu Ghraib;
- the lack of screening for civilian contractors;
- the introduction of new elements (but not entire units) into the personnel structure (a process that the Army calls cross-leveling);
- failure to adequately train MPs and MIs in policing as well as in interrogation procedures;
- the fact that MPs did not know what they or MIs were not allowed to do;
- lack of military discipline;
- intense pressure to obtain information from a population of prisoners that was not capable of providing the desired information;
- lack of training; lack of familiarity with the Geneva Conventions; the fact that the US military upheld the Geneva Conventions while various attorneys for the White House opined that the Geneva Conventions did not wholly apply to the treatment of prisoners;
- poor paperwork procedures; and
- poor reporting procedures.

These facts, along with a host of others, suggest extreme social chaos. For example, the supply officer at Abu Ghraib, Major David DiNenna, testified that he begged the Army for adequate water, food, toilets, light bulbs, and generators, and that his pleas fell on deaf ears. He testified in open court that he felt 'abandoned' by the Army at Abu Ghraib (Mestrovic, 2007: 107).

The above findings of fact constitute evidence of egregious social disorganization, dysfunction, and anomie, which sets the stage for deviance. The term '*anomie*' was coined by Émile Durkheim in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1933 [1893]) and in *Suicide* (1951 [1897]). Durkheim refers specifically to *dérèglement* as the synonym for *anomie*: 'l'état de dérèglement ou *d'anomie*' (1983a [1897]: 287). *Anomie* is depicted by Durkheim as a general societal condition of *dérèglement* or derangement—literally, 'a rule that is a lack of rule' (1951 [1897]: 257), or in the original French: 'consciences dérèglées et qui erigent en règle le dérèglement dont elles souffrent' (1983a [1897]: 287). Jean-Marie Guyau preceded Durkheim in using this concept in 1885: 'C'est l'absence de loi fixe, qu'on peut désigner sous le terme *d'anomie*' (1907 [1885]: 165). Note that Guyau referred to the lack of 'fixed' moral boundaries, but not a lack of laws or norms per se. French dictionaries such as the *Littre* refer to *dérèglement* as a state of corruption, evil, agitation, torment, impiety, and intemperance which leads to general suffering and torment.² All these terms can be applied to the social conditions at Abu Ghraib as revealed in testimony and reports, and are in line with Durkheim's general assumptions about *anomie*: that it is a disorganized social condition that leads to suffering and distress (see Mestrovic, 1988; Mestrovic and Brown, 1985; Orru, 1987). Durkheim treats *anomie* as acute and temporary as well as chronic and long-lasting. In *Suicide*, he also addresses several varieties of *anomie*, among them conjugal, marital, religious, political, military, and intellectual, pertaining to various social institutions. Durkheim's scaffolding for understanding *anomie* includes: Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy, in which the imperious 'will' is unrestrained by rational categories or 'representations'; theological understandings of *anomia* as sin (Lyonnet and Sabourin, 1970); and the ideas of various other European philosophers (Mestrovic, 1985).

Durkheim's perspective was modified and changed considerably in its interpretation by the most influential American sociologist of the twentieth century, Talcott Parsons (1937). Parsons established what has come to be known as the Harvard School of Sociology, and elaborated *anomie* in relation to the Hobbesian meaning of 'the war of all against all' (Parsons, 1937: 407). His most famous disciple was Robert K. Merton,

whose 'Social Structure and *Anomie*' (1957) became the most cited article in sociology. According to Merton: 'as initially developed by Durkheim, the concept of *anomie* referred to a condition of relative normlessness in a society or group' (1957: 161). Merton established that *anomie* will lead to crime and other forms of deviance when society—at any level of analysis, from the macro-sociological to the microsociological—establishes agreed-upon *goals* but fails to provide for agreed-upon *means* for achieving those goals. Merton's theory has been applied in numerous studies of crime and deviance—but not to the phenomena of war crimes, torture, and abuse. At first glance, it seems to fit some aspects of the social state of affairs at Abu Ghraib that emerges from the US government reports: intense pressure was put on the military personnel at Abu Ghraib to reach the *goal* of obtaining information from prisoners, but the *means* for obtaining this information were unlawful, or, in Merton's words, 'innovative.' According to Merton's paradigm, this systemic discrepancy between socially approved goals and means is, by itself, sufficient to cause many sorts of deviance (the breaking of social norms), including, but not limited to, the type of abuse that has been documented at Abu Ghraib.

But is a Parsonian, or a Mertonian, conceptualization of the problem adequate? The government reports, as well as testimony at the courts-martial pertaining to Abu Ghraib at Fort Hood, Texas, show that abuse was not limited to seemingly rational interrogation techniques that involved goals and means. Some abuse occurred *ad hoc* in showers, hallways, stairwells, and other places not used for interrogation; some abuse was committed for sport and amusement, not for any official purpose at all; and most prisoners did not have the information the Army sought. Thus, the rationality of the goals in the goals-means equation can be called into question. The prosecutor at the courts-martial revealed in open court that 100 percent of the abused prisoners were not a threat to Americans and had no information to give them (Mestrovic, 2007: 11). In fact, it is highly irrational, chaotic, and 'deranged' to use torture for the sake of obtaining information on prisoners who had no information to give. Even if the soldiers who abused the prisoners did not always know that their victims did not have information to give them, the more important Durkheimian point is that there were

no established social mechanisms in place for ascertaining this important fact (for example, no screening, no judicial review boards, no assumption that prisoners were innocent until proven guilty, no implementation of the Geneva Conventions on processing and treating prisoners, and so on). As for the means, the reports, as well as testimony, suggest that nobody could discern whether the rational-legal authority for the approved techniques is to be found in the Army Field Manual, various memorandums, or the Geneva Conventions, none of which are consistent with each other.

From a Durkheimian point of view, the state of *anomie* and social chaos documented at Abu Ghraib was all-pervasive and fundamentally irrational in that it clouded soldiers' judgments concerning what constituted acceptable versus unacceptable thought, emotion, and behavior. Evidence for such a point of view is to be found in the numerous references to 'confusion' found in the reports and disclosed in testimony at the courts-martial (Danner, 2004; Mestrovic, 2007; Strasser, 2004). Soldiers could not discern the difference between normative versus abusive situations. For example, the Company Commander, Captain (CPT) Donald Reese, testified that when he inquired as to why prisoners were forced to wear women's panties on their heads, he was told by his superiors that it was 'a supply issue' or 'an MI thing.' There was no established social system in place to validate his concerns, and the same was true for scores of other whistleblowers at Abu Ghraib, who were routinely invalidated and in some cases threatened (Mestrovic, 2007). The new issues that are raised by this Durkheimian reading include, but are not limited to, the following: Who was responsible for causing, allowing, and failing to ameliorate the state of *anomie* or dysfunctional social organization at Abu Ghraib? What are the different levels of responsibility—sociologically speaking—for the abuse that occurred vis-à-vis the chain of command? Doctors, medics, lawyers, supply officers, and other professionals at Abu Ghraib were all responsible for limited and specific aspects of the division of labor, which was dysfunctional overall. In *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, Durkheim (1983b [1950]) suggests that the professional groups who govern the conduct of such individual professionals are ultimately responsible for the outcome. In the present case, this would mean that the American Medical

Association, the American Bar Association, and other professional groups share some of the responsibility for the abuse. Even if orders for the abuse were not given from positions high in the chain of command, why were the social conditions that led to the abuse not corrected? A Parsonian-inspired reply to the effect that officers could wait for or could trust in the system to self-correct seems inadequate.

The US government reports thus document not only abuse but also high levels of social disorganization and *anomie* at Abu Ghraib—but these reports lay the primary blame for specifically sexual and violent abuse on a ‘few bad apples’ (morally corrupt individuals) and neglect the question of blame for the state of social chaos that led to the abuse. Furthermore, these same reports document a systemic state of chaos in command, procedure, organization, and societal structure *vis-à-vis* the detainment and interrogation of prisoners at Guantánamo, in Afghanistan, and in Iraq. Logically, one is forced to draw the conclusion that a large segment of the ‘apple orchard’ was contaminated. It is important to determine the different levels of responsibility (international, national, local), sociologically speaking, not only for the abuse but also for the chaotic state of affairs that led to the abuse. A functionalist perspective might assume that social systems are self-correcting—but the dysfunctional military society at Abu Ghraib did not self-correct. In the words of CPT Jonathan Crisp, defense counsel for Lynndie England, the dysfunctional social system not only failed to self-correct, ‘but was self-perpetuating’ (Mestrovic, 2007: 175). Durkheim, however, assumes that *anomie* becomes chronic until self-conscious and deliberate remedies are sought from outside the dysfunctional system.

In general, functionalists who follow in the footsteps of Parsons and Merton tend to assume that society is a stable, self-maintaining, and self-correcting system made up of norms, values, beliefs, and sanctions.³ All of these assumptions can be questioned with regard to the reality of abuse at Abu Ghraib. The functionalists typically do not address problems in synchronizing international with local dimensions of such units of analysis. In other words, there exist several layers of norms (international, national, local, and other finer distinctions), and the same holds true for the other system components (values, beliefs, and sanctions). But in the case of

Abu Ghraib, the international norms (exemplified by the Geneva Conventions) were sometimes out of sync with national norms (based upon the US Constitution as well as US Army field manuals) as well as local norms (memorandums and competing interpretations of permissible interrogation methods). US values concerning the importance of democracy, due process, and human rights were out of sync with the dehumanizing atmosphere established at Abu Ghraib. The collective belief that Americans were liberators was out of sync with the belief that Americans acted like tormentors at Abu Ghraib. The sanctions exemplified by courts-martial of low-ranking soldiers are out of sync with sanctions for ‘grave breaches’ of the Geneva Conventions which call for the prosecution of high-ranking leaders, or what is referred to as the doctrine of command responsibility (see Human Rights Watch, 2006).

The important point is that even though the doctrine of command responsibility exists as an international norm, and has been incorporated into the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), it was dysfunctional at Abu Ghraib. It has been and continues to be applied at the tribunals at the Hague to punish high-ranking civilian as well as military officials, but has not been applied at the courts-martial at Fort Hood, where most of the blame for the abuse has been heaped onto low-ranking soldiers. Again, the problem seems to lie not in a lack of norms and moral boundaries, but in a lack of coordination, in confusion, and in dysfunction in implementing such norms and boundaries. From a Durkheimian perspective, all these factors and more constitute a widespread collective condition of *dérèglement*.

◆ Cultural Frames of Reference

An important development in social theory since Durkheim and Parsons has been the introduction of a variety of cultural perspectives. Every culture relies upon a frame of reference that is used to apprehend events ranging from natural disasters to wars and acceptable modes of leisure (see Cushman and Mestrovic, 1995; Goffman, 1986). Like a picture frame, a cultural frame excludes elements from discourse at the same time that it includes other elements. And some

of these elements are contradictory. In part because of publicity given to the Abu Ghraib abuses, the image of the United States, too, has been framed by some members of the international community as the country that 'liberated' Iraq and as the country that became Iraq's brutal 'occupier.' The notorious prison that Saddam Hussein used to inflict torture, Abu Ghraib, served as a symbol of Arab oppression for Americans who framed themselves as liberators, but later became a symbol of American abuse and torture. One could multiply these and similar examples of how the popular consciousness changes the focus and frame of reference for perceiving events and their significance.

Sociological theory itself is not immune to the effects of cultural framing. There is no doubt that Durkheim's discussions of *anomie* are framed in a European context while Parsonian approaches are framed in an American context. Durkheim assumes a pessimism concerning human nature that is found in European cultural traditions. Parsons assumes a sunny-side-up American optimism. Perhaps it is significant that Durkheim comes from a cultural background including descent from several generations of German rabbis, and was a French Jew living in a deeply anti-Semitic France at the time. On the other hand, Parsons was the son of a Congregationalist minister whose writings bespeak the Puritan 'habits of the heart' described by Alexis de Tocqueville (2004 [1848])—specifically, Parsons seems to imply the doctrine of American exceptionalism (see Lipset, 1997). Durkheim was personally involved in the defense of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a French Jewish officer from the German Alsace region (where Durkheim was also born) wrongly convicted of treason (see Lukes, 1985). Given these and other cultural and contextual differences between the USA and Europe, Parsons and Durkheim, it would not be surprising that Durkheim's and Parsons's understandings of *anomie* would differ despite overall similarities (Mestrovic, 1988). Writings such as Seymour Martin Lipset's *Continental Divide* (1990), which point to cultural differences that persist even between the United States and Canada, for example, serve to demystify some of the assumptions in functionalism which seem to reflect Protestant, American values from the 1930s. Perhaps because of these cultural differences, the European scholar André Lalande defines

anomie as 'absence d'organisation, de coordination' (1980 [1926]: 61) and refers to Durkheim, while the American writers Theodorson and Theodorson define it as 'a condition characterized by the relative absence or confusion of values in a society or group' (1969: 12) and refer to Parsons and Merton.

James Loewen's book *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (2007) exposes how facts about American history change in meaning when one questions one's assumptions and frames of reference in approaching these facts. We are approaching the meanings of *anomie* in a similar way, with the implied subtext: 'Lies My Social Theory Teacher Told Me: What Your Social Theory Textbooks Got Wrong Regarding *Anomie*.' While it is beyond the scope of this essay to review the many criticisms of Parsons and structural functionalism extant in the literature, the most important point, for this discussion, is that the Parsonian–Mertonian misinterpretation of *anomie* as 'normlessness' remains unseen and unchallenged.⁴

The conceptualization of cultural frames of reference also becomes significant when the sociologist addresses issues pertaining to law, crime, and justice. How and why do societies frame some acts as crimes in general and crimes of war in particular, yet exclude other similar acts from such frames of reference? How do societies distinguish between just laws and punishments versus inhumane punishment? How does the collective consciousness frame international war crimes tribunals as just versus 'victor's justice,' or as scapegoating? The concept of 'war crime' was not formally and legally conceptualized until the twentieth century and especially the end of World War II (Solis, 1998). Although massacres and mass killings are to be found throughout history, it is only in the post-Nuremberg era that genocide, persecution, and other war crimes came to be defined and distinguished from other crimes per se (Gutman and Rieff, 1999). The central focus of the relatively new conceptual frame regarding war crimes is that these sorts of crimes are typically depicted as being intentional, rational, planned from the top of a hierarchical organization, and widespread (Bauman, 1990). War crimes imply the existence of an organized bureaucracy and well-developed, modernist, state functions. This collective, cognitive shift—the ability to conceive of

war crimes in a frame of reference that goes beyond the old adage that all wars are brutal—involves a fundamental ambiguity or ambivalence from the outset in conceptualizing war crimes as well as crimes committed during wars. It involves the forced conjunction of radically 'split' categories: that which is regarded highly (the many manifestations of modernism embodied in bureaucracy and the idea of the chain of command) and what is despicable (the passion and chaos of crime). The idea of a war crime conjoins numerous cultural refractions of highly idealized 'grand narratives of the Enlightenment' (Lyotard, 1984) with numerous cultural refractions of passionately devalued notions of crime. The inherent contradiction in depicting war crimes as intentional, rational, planned, and widespread is that modern, Western societies value highly the notions of agency, rationality, planning, and organization. Part of the shock of the Holocaust remains the fact that genocide was carried out in a cold, calculated, organized and almost business-like manner. It is as if the West's most esteemed virtues came to be twisted into the most hated vices. Additionally, contemporary Western societies seem to insist that international war crimes must be distinguished, conceptually, from crimes that are spontaneous and limited in scope, which is to say, distinguished from ordinary crimes of passion committed by a few corrupt individuals.

Nevertheless, it seems to be the case that regardless of how logically academics and jurists conceptualize war crimes in theory, an event or set of events comes to be regarded as criminal only when these events offend what Durkheim (1933 [1893]) called the collective consciousness. The so-called 'world community' responded in widely divergent ways to war crimes in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Cambodia, Sierra Leone, and Abu Ghraib, among other sites. Reactions of the collective consciousness are emotional, unplanned, unscripted, and even disorganized—in Durkheim's (1995 [1912]) view, this is because they are based upon a spontaneous 'collective effervescence.' To be offended is to give in to passion. When one is discussing international war crimes, one needs to analyze which collective consciousness is offended, by which aspects of a given situation, at what time, and why. One also needs to ascertain whether a true, global, international collective consciousness exists or can exist. Can the international

community maintain a consistent frame of reference with respect to war crimes?

Durkheim pronounced in 1893 that an act—no matter how heinous—that is not punished by the collective consciousness is not a crime. Conversely, a punitive reaction by a collective consciousness transforms an event into a crime. Durkheim's counter-intuitive assessment has withstood the test of time and of rigorous research pertaining to crimes committed by individuals. A crime is that which offends the collective conscience in a strong and consistent manner, but not all acts that some people might deem criminal or immoral will necessarily offend a particular collective conscience in a specific cultural setting. In Durkheim's words, 'an act is criminal when it offends strong and defined states of the collective consciousness' (1933 [1893]: 80). And he elaborates:

In other words, we must not say that an action shocks the common conscience because it is criminal, but rather that it is criminal because it shocks the common conscience. We do not reprove it because it is a crime, but it is a crime because we reprove it. (1933 [1893]: 81)

It seems that one could extend Durkheim's understanding of crime *vis-à-vis* a particular collective conscience to instances of *anomie vis-à-vis* an international collective conscience. We must not say that collective abuse shocks the international community because it is criminal, but rather that it is an international war crime because it shocks the international collective conscience. We do not reprove it because it is anomic, but it is anomic because the world reproves it. To put it another way, cultures vary greatly in their responses to collective abuse, ranging from the acts of the Pol Pot regime and various forces in the Balkans to the perpetrators of the Holocaust. The fact that the international community will respond to certain events and thereby transform them into crime is universal, but the acts which provoke this strong reaction are not universal. Yet the very concept of international war crimes seems to presuppose a universal standard for what is deemed criminal. In fact, as already noted, the world community responds in a politicized and inconsistent manner to war crimes—as defined by

the Geneva Conventions—depending upon various factors and cultural frames of reference. For various reasons, a critical mass of the international community responded with passionate revulsion to the war crimes in Yugoslavia and Rwanda sufficient to establish international tribunals. Yet other sites of apparent international war crime failed to offend the international community's collective conscience strongly enough for it to react punitively, including the abuses at Abu Ghraib, in Afghanistan, and at Guantánamo. In general, Durkheim's insight regarding crime and its relationship to a collective conscience has not been extended into the domain of crimes committed upon an international stage, which range from acts labeled as war crimes to terrorism. But without the scaffolding of his sociological theory, the conceptualization of international war crimes can be reduced easily to explanations of vengeance, 'victor's justice,' scapegoating, and particularized politics (coercing some nation-states to hand over alleged war criminals to an international tribunal, while looking the other way for other nation-states).

The new millennium has raised the concept of international war crime to a much higher level of public consciousness than at any other time since World War II. However, the cultural frame of reference pertaining to the law that is being applied at Abu Ghraib constitutes a significant departure from the ways that crimes of war have been conceptualized since the Nuremberg era. If Zygmunt Bauman (1990) and others are correct that war crimes in general and genocide in particular are modernist phenomena (in that they necessarily involve rational planning, systematic procedures, and a chain of command with top-down hierarchy), then how can one conceptualize or prosecute crimes of war that are conceptualized primarily as irrational, chaotic, unsystematic, and as perpetrated by individuals who operate outside the chain of command? In other words, how does society understand a war crime as being *anomic* or disorganized and chaotic? This seems to constitute a gaping conceptual hole in sociological theory as well as in international law pertaining to war crimes.

In general, the law does not assume, as some other cultural institutions—for example, some religions—do, that everyone is a sinner, and that everyone deserves forgiveness. The law, as depicted by Durkheim, condemns the criminal and punishes him or her in the

name of upholding social order and in the name of the 'sacred' and highly idealized symbolic status of the rest of society. Durkheim asserted that modern societies put more emphasis on restitution and less emphasis on extreme punishment (mutilation, torture, the death penalty, and so on) than do traditional societies, but in all human societies at every phase of development, the function of the law is to preserve the integrity of the group at the expense of the criminal, namely, he or she who dares to put him- or herself above the law. Foucault (1977) argued against Durkheim that in the punitive exercise of sovereignty, criminals were punished not because they had offended the collective conscience but because they had offended a particular 'sovereign' or symbolically charged political figure.⁵ This divergence between Durkheim and Foucault on the role of society in punishment needs to be extended to the international stage and the concept of war crimes. How should the international community respond when a nation-state behaves as if it were above international law? Who or what is 'the sovereign' when it comes to 'the sovereignty of nations'?

In practice, at the Hague, contemporary international law has found culpable leaders in the chain of command who may not have pulled the trigger, who may not have known that crimes were committed low in the chain of command and who did not order crimes and abuse, but who laid out a policy that led to abuse and crime or who failed to prevent criminal and abusive acts (Hazan, 2004). Moreover, in all of the cases where the defendant was found guilty by the Tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda, the Tribunal's judgments asserted that none of the guilty parties necessarily had to be 'an architect or the prime mover' of the established persecution in order to be deemed guilty of war crimes. Instead, the precedent established by the Tribunals is that the guilty war criminal could have known or *should* have known, and therefore prevented, the criminal actions of subordinates. The Tribunal's precedents have been reversed at the courts-martial pertaining to Abu Ghraib: the United States military chose to prosecute primarily low-ranking soldiers and not to prosecute officers high in the chain of command, in addition to accepting the excuse offered by many officers that they did not know about the abuse, without raising the issue that they should have known (see Karpinski, 2005).

In general, jurists and lawyers do not display what C. Wright Mills (1959) called the 'sociological imagination,' by which he meant grasping the interplay between a particular 'biography' and 'history.' For the most part, they act out their social roles without reflecting on the meaning of those roles and its attendant vocabulary. The commonly used legal terms 'widespread,' 'systematic,' 'planned,' 'command responsibility,' 'chain of command,' 'rational,' and other elements of judicial vocabulary are essential to lawyers who engage each other in verbal battle in various courtrooms that involve crimes of war, because without these concepts, given acts could not rise to the level of being framed as war crimes. Yet the 'biographies' of seven particular soldiers whom the government labeled as 'rotten apples' has been imperfectly linked to the sociological 'history' of the abuse at Abu Ghraib, which is connected to abuse at Guantánamo and elsewhere. Thus, opinion-makers, journalists, and some organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Amnesty International have noted that some acts committed by American soldiers and political leaders in both Gulf Wars qualify as war crimes, especially with regard to the abuse and torture inflicted upon prisoners in Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo Bay, and other American-run prisons around the world (Danner, 2004). But no one engaged in these discussions of alleged war crimes committed by Americans, or other Westerners such as Britons, seriously believes that an American or a Briton will be put on trial for war crimes at the Hague in the near future. Instead, the United States has put forth the argument that it will monitor and try American military lawbreakers under its Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). More significantly, some journalists as well as human rights groups claim to have uncovered evidence that leaders high in the 'chain of command' either knew or should have known and should have taken steps to prevent alleged abuses and war crimes committed by US troops in Iraq (Danner, 2004; Hersh, 2004). The ICRC, in particular, has labeled the abuses at Abu Ghraib as 'routine,' hence systematic, not as isolated incidents. A plethora of US government reports on abuses committed by American soldiers arrived at the general conclusion that abuse occurred, but offered competing and contradictory interpretations regarding who knew or ordered what sort of abuse or torture in

the chain of command (Strasser, 2004). The discourse on this explosive subject avoids completely the subject of putting on trial Americans who are high in the chain of command and who should have known and should have taken steps to prevent the abuse even if they did not order it.

Thus, the sociologist must take seriously the general criticism leveled by postmodernists such as Baudrillard (1986) and other cultural theorists that Western institutions are self-privileging and regard themselves as exceptional in the world community; that: (1) the West in general and the United States in particular derive their cultural frame of reference from a specific cultural base, namely, Western Europe; (2) this Western European and American cultural base is depicted in terms of the grand narratives of the Enlightenment, which is considered unique to the West; and (3) the West is reluctant to apply this frame of reference to itself with regard to war crimes yet does sometimes apply it to cultural sites and actors which are labeled as non-Western. Put together, these assumptions seem to be part of what Lipset (1997) and others call American exceptionalism. Specifically, officials high in the chain of command in Yugoslavia and Rwanda were prosecuted and many were found guilty of war crimes even though several may not have known of and did not order crimes or abuse or other breaches of the Geneva Conventions. On the other hand, the Abu Ghraib torture scandal has been framed by the US government as a set of events that involved a small group of disorganized and unprofessional soldiers who were labeled as morally corrupt. The dominant frame of reference in the United States, namely, American exceptionalism, cannot tolerate the cognitive dissonance that an American (as the idealized representative of highly superior values) could engage in seemingly Balkan acts unless he or she was acting outside the American frame of reference. At the same time, some journalists in the information media and some organizations such as Human Rights Watch (2006) frame the abuses at Abu Ghraib as a set of events that flowed from a general 'climate' of disregard for the Geneva Conventions that was established at the highest levels of the United States military and political chain of command and that trickled down to the soldiers on the ground. The perspective taken in the present study supposes that it is a matter

not of choosing between top-down versus bottom-up explanations, but of integrating both perspectives and finding a middle ground between them. Specifically, soldiers low in the chain of command clearly committed abuses, but officers high in the chain of command should have known and should have taken steps to prevent the abuse.

It is likely that the abuse at Abu Ghraib was not the result of direct orders that came top-down from high in the chain of command. But it is also unlikely that the abuse at Abu Ghraib was solely the result of a handful of unprofessional soldiers at the bottom of the chain of command. The most complete explanation must involve some middle-level explanation that includes elements of both the top-down and bottom-up explanations. In Major General (MG) Fay's words, an 'unhealthy mystique' developed at Abu Ghraib (Strasser, 2004: 53). Who is responsible for creating the unhealthy mystique? What effect did it have on the soldiers at Abu Ghraib? One can rephrase these questions in a sociological vocabulary: How did *anomie* develop at Abu Ghraib? What were its consequences for the soldiers as well as the relationship between the United States and the rest of the world? And how can it be remedied?

◆ A Socio-cultural Analysis of MG George R. Fay's Report

The most comprehensive US government report on the abuse at Abu Ghraib was written by MG Fay and is referred to as the Fay report.⁶ In the remainder of this paper, we shall re-read portions of his report in a sociological and specifically Durkheimian context, with a particular focus on the relationship between 'confusion' and what Durkheim calls *anomie*. MG Fay writes:

This investigation found that certain individuals committed offenses in violation of international and US law to include the Geneva Conventions and the UCMJ and violated Army Values. Leaders in key positions *failed properly to supervise the interrogation operations at Abu Ghraib* and failed to understand *the dynamics created at Abu Ghraib*. (p. 7, emphasis added)

Note that several layers of normative structure are invoked (international, national, and local), and that MG Fay is treating Abu Ghraib as a social system, although he does not use this sociological term explicitly. MG Fay continues:

The *environment* created at Abu Ghraib contributed to the occurrence of such abuse and the fact that it remained undiscovered by higher authority for a long period of time. What started as nakedness and humiliation . . . carried over into sexual and physical assaults by a *small group of morally corrupt and unsupervised Soldiers and civilians*. (pp. 9–10, emphasis added)

Throughout his report, MG Fay makes the quasi-sociological and basically correct connection between the social 'environment' and abuse. Although he does not say it explicitly, he is clearly not writing about the environment and atmosphere as phenomena pertaining to meteorology. He is using these terms to refer to 'social environment' as a system of norms, values, sanctions, and beliefs, although he does not use this sociological vocabulary explicitly. First, he makes it clear that the sexual and physical abuse was part of the overall 'poisoned' or anomic atmosphere at Abu Ghraib. Second, he makes it clear that the sexual and physical abuse was part of an overall pattern of normative breakdown that includes other forms of abuse, including unauthorized use of dogs, the improper use of isolation, and humiliating and degrading forms of treatment. Third, he fails to explain how and why the social system at Abu Ghraib would have permitted morally corrupt individuals to perform acts of deviance or failed to properly sanction them after the initial acts of deviance. As stated at the outset, Parsons assumed that a healthy social system would correct itself, while Durkheim would have claimed that an unhealthy or anomic social system becomes increasingly anomic unless it is self-consciously corrected. Fourth, and finally, morally corrupt individuals (for example, persons who can be identified as sadists, perverts, or otherwise severely disturbed through psychological testing) exist in all social settings, but this does not mean that they are able to easily impose their deviant fantasies and behavior onto others. Under normal conditions, a healthy social system will

keep morally corrupt individuals under control through a system of norms, values, sanctions, and beliefs (as postulated by Parsons) that regulates everyone, from the healthiest individuals to the most corrupt.

Before launching into an extended discussion of MG Fay's report, it is worth examining the sequence of logical steps he uses to arrive at his conclusion. On p. 71, he writes, regarding physical and sexual abuse at Abu Ghraib: 'They were perpetrated or witnessed by individuals or small groups.' Acts can only be perpetrated by individuals, acting alone or in small groups, but such individuals are always acting in the context of some social system. He continues: 'Such abuse can not be directly tied to a systemic US approach to torture or approved treatment of detainees' (p. 71). In this sentence, MG Fay leaps to the national level of normative discourse (the norms of the United States) and leaves open the possibility that the abuse might be *indirectly* tied to such a national level of norms. However, one should also note that MG Fay leaves out other logical possibilities, which he, in fact, supports with evidence in his report, namely that such abuse can be directly linked to a systemic approach at Abu Ghraib; that such abuse can be indirectly linked to a systemic approach at Abu Ghraib; that such direct as well as indirect links at Abu Ghraib are themselves linked in some fashion, through the chain of command, to national systems of norms, and to international systems of norms *vis-à-vis* the ICRC and information media coverage. By implication, MG Fay seems to take the position that there was a social environment or climate at Abu Ghraib for the very types of abuse (sexual and physical) that he attributes to morally corrupt individuals, as when he writes elsewhere in this same passage: 'The *climate* created at Abu Ghraib provided the opportunity for such abuse to occur and to continue undiscovered by higher authority for a *long period of time*' (p. 71, emphasis added). This claim begs the question: What was the state of dialogue between US Army and other US national organizations and the local 'climate' at Abu Ghraib? MG Fay leaves this question unanswered. He then makes the critical logical leap: 'What started as undressing and humiliation, stress and physical training (PT), *carried over* into sexual and physical assaults by a small group of morally corrupt and unsupervised Soldiers and civilians' (p. 71, emphasis added). Again, the sociologist must ask the question: How and

why did the unauthorized undressing and humiliation begin in the first place? What defect in the social system led to the initial breach of norms (primary deviance), and how did these breaches 'carry over' into systemic breaches of norms (secondary deviance)? This is the crux of the issue that needs to be explained. Based upon the facts that MG Fay reports, it seems that the social system at Abu Ghraib was disorganized and anomic from the outset; that this state of social disorganization and *anomie* grew progressively worse over time; and that these defects in the social system produced widespread forms of deviance among prisoners and US personnel alike. Abu Ghraib was a dangerous, stress-inducing, deviance-producing social setting for everyone who was forced to be there. There existed several specific sources of 'confusion' which contributed to this anomic state of affairs. We shall now consider these in more detail.

◆ Confusion as to Who Was in Charge

MG Fay notes that at Abu Ghraib, 'people made up their own titles as things went along' (p. 43). He adds that 'some people thought COL Pappas was the Director; some thought LTC Jordan was the Director' (p. 43). Can one imagine a sociology department or medical office or any other institutional setting in which people made up their own titles and did not know who was in charge? This fundamental confusion concerning roles and authority bespeaks extreme *anomie*.

◆ Confusion Between Approved and Abusive Activities

MG Fay writes: 'Theater Interrogation and Counter-Resistance Policies (ICRP) were found to be *poorly defined*, and *changed several times*. As a result, interrogation activities *sometimes crossed into abusive activity*' (p. 7, emphasis added). This state of affairs, alone, is sufficient to create the state of 'derangement' that is discussed by Durkheim. It is less a case of 'normlessness,' in that norms did exist, than it is a case of chaos and confusion regarding norms.

MG Fay notes that non-doctrinal approaches that were approved for use in Afghanistan and Guantánamo Bay ('GTMO') 'became *confused* at Abu Ghraib and were implemented without proper authorities or safeguards' and that 'soldiers were not trained on non-doctrinal interrogation techniques' (p. 8, emphasis added). One of these approaches involved the use of dogs, based on 'several documents that spoke of exploiting the Arab fear of dogs' (p. 10). MG Fay concludes that '[t]he use of dogs in interrogations to "fear up" detainees was utilized without proper authorization' (p. 10).

MG Fay returns to the improper use of dogs later in his report. He reports that as of 20 November 2003, 'abuse of detainees was already occurring and the addition of dogs was just one more abuse device' (p. 83). There arose controversy over who 'owned' the dogs and how they would be used. The presence of the dogs is mysteriously 'associated with MG G. Miller's visit,' but this link is not explored by MG Fay. MG Fay concludes this section: 'COL Pappas did not recall how he got the authority to employ dogs; *just that he had it*' (p. 83, emphasis added). In any bureaucracy based upon a hierarchical rational-legal authority, including the US Army, it is an indicator of *anomie* that a commanding officer would claim that he 'just had' authority without rational-legal justification.

Elsewhere MG Fay writes that '[e]ven with all the apparent *confusion over roles, responsibilities and authorities*, there were early indications that MP and MI personnel knew the use of dog teams in interrogations was abusive' (p. 84). If personnel knew that their use was abusive, at the same time that they engaged in abuse made possible and even encouraged by social disorganization, they were placed in what sociologists and psychologists call a 'double-bind' situation: one is damned if one does and damned if one does not engage in abuse. The double-bind situation has been researched thoroughly and found to be a causal factor in a plethora of forms of deviance, and mental breakdowns of various sorts.

Insufficient Training

MG Fay writes: 'As pointed out clearly in the MG Taguba report, MP units and individuals at Abu Ghraib *lacked sufficient training on operating a detainment/interrogation*

facility' and that 'MI units and individuals also *lacked sufficient, appropriate, training to cope with the situation encountered at Abu Ghraib*' (p. 46, emphasis added). In sociological terms, the MP and MI units were not able to internalize the proper and required norms, values, sanctions, and beliefs appropriate to their mission. This was, sociologically speaking, an invitation for abuse to occur.

The state of confusion was so great that MG Fay asserts that soldiers did not know what they were permitted to do or not do:

Guard and interrogation personnel at Abu Ghraib were *not adequately trained or experienced and were certainly not well versed in the cultural understanding of the detainees*. MI personnel were *totally ignorant* of MP lanes in the road or rules of engagement. A common observation was that MI knew what MI could do and what MI couldn't do; but MI did *not know* what the MPs could or could *not do* in their activities. (p. 46, emphasis added)

In this passage MG Fay seems to imply that role confusion occurred such that MI did not know the role expectations for MPs. However, in another passage, MG Fay suggests that this role confusion was pervasive, and extended to the role expectations for MIs, MPs, and their perceptions of each other's role expectations: 'Again, who was allowed to do what and how exactly they were to do it was *totally unclear*. *Neither of the communities (MI and MP) knew what the other could and could not do*' (p. 70, emphasis added). The phrase 'totally unclear' refers to all of the personnel at Abu Ghraib, and constitutes a very powerful description of the drastic extent of *anomie* at Abu Ghraib. According to MG Fay: 'Most of the MPs were *never trained* in prison operations' (p. 46, emphasis added). From a sociological perspective, one could not expect even the minimal semblance of 'social order' and consensus in a social milieu which relied upon actors who were not trained in the normative expectations for their roles. This aspect of the social milieu at Abu Ghraib might be likened to a university whose professors were not trained in the subject areas they were teaching, or a clinic run by personnel untrained in medicine. Again, norms exist—but they are not coordinated or implemented properly.

Furthermore, according to MG Fay, 'approximately 35% of the contract interrogators lacked formal military training as interrogators' (p. 50). In addition: 'Proper oversight did not occur at Abu Ghraib due to a *lack of training and inadequate contract management and monitoring*' (p. 52, emphasis added).

◆ Lack of Social Integration Within the Military Units at Abu Ghraib

MG Fay writes: 'The JIDC [Joint Interrogation Detention Center] was created in a very short time period with *parts and pieces of various units. It lacked unit integrity, and this lack was a fatal flaw*' (p. 9, emphasis added). Elsewhere, MG Fay elaborates that 'cross-leveling' occurred with the 'disadvantage of inserting Soldiers into units shortly before deployment who had never trained with those units' (p. 32). In summary, 'The Soldiers did not know the unit' and 'the unit and the unit leadership did not know the Soldiers' (p. 32). COL Pappas had at his disposal 'disparate elements of units and individuals, including civilians, that had never trained together, but now were going to have to fight together' (p. 32). Later in the report, MG Fay emphasizes this point:

It is important to understand that the MI units at Abu Ghraib were far from complete units. They were small elements from those units. Most of the elements that came to Abu Ghraib came *without their normal command structure*. The unit Commanders and Senior NCOs did *not* go to Abu Ghraib but stayed with the bulk of their respective units. (p. 41, emphasis added)

'JIDC interrogators, analysts, and leaders were unprepared for the arrival of contract interrogators and had no training to fall back on in the management, control, and discipline of these personnel' (p. 19). Moreover, the contract interrogators were supposed to be screened yet '[s]uch screening was not occurring' (p. 40).

In his conclusions, MG Fay explains:

The JIDC was established in an ad hoc manner without proper planning, personnel, and

logistical support for the missions it was intended to perform. Interrogation and analyst personnel were quickly klu[d]ged together from a half dozen units in an effort to meet personnel requirements. Even at its peak strength, interrogation and analyst manpower at the JIDC was too shorthanded to deal with the large number of detainees at hand. (p. 113)

Lack of social integration among the individuals who make up a social system is one of the keystones of Durkheim's entire system of thought in the analysis of modern forms of social pathology. Lack of social integration has been found by sociologists to be consistently related to the breaking of norms. In his landmark study *The American Soldier*, Samuel Stouffer (1949) found that strongly integrated military units performed better than less cohesive units. It would be important to investigate in future theoretical and empirical work whether social integration is better understood in Durkheim's terms of a coordinated division of labor versus that functionalist view which tends to quantify integration in terms of instances of social interaction and bonding (Gibbs, 1982).

◆ Rapid Changes in the Social Milieu

MG Fay writes: 'By mid-October, interrogation policy in Iraq had changed three times in less than 30 days' (p. 28). Elsewhere he writes: 'There is no formal advanced interrogation training in the US Army' (p. 17). Furthermore, 'Most interrogator training that occurred at Abu Ghraib was on-the-job training' (p. 18). Rapid social and normative change is in itself a promoter of stress and contributes to social disorganization.

◆ Intense Pressure to Obtain Intelligence

MG Fay writes that 'as the *need for actionable intelligence rose*, the realization dawned that pre-war planning had not included planning for detainee operations' (p. 24, emphasis added). Later in the report, he elaborates: 'LTG

Sanchez did not believe significant pressure was coming from outside of CJTF-7 [Combined Joint Task Force Seven], but *does confirm that there was great pressure placed upon the intelligence system to produce actionable intelligence*' (p. 42, emphasis added). Elsewhere MG Fay writes: 'COL Pappas perceived *intense pressure for intelligence* from interrogations,' and that this pressure was passed 'to the rest of the JIDC leadership' (p. 45). MG Fay elaborates that '[p]ressure consisted in deviation from doctrinal reporting standards' and other ways (p. 45). Philip Zimbardo and others have found that intense pressure upon a police unit is one of the key components that lead to abuse, though without explaining the social structural reasons for this connection (see Huggins et al., 2002). Note that Fay volunteers the Durkheimian-sounding explanation that intense pressure may have led to a breaking of moral boundaries, which in turn led to abuse.

◆ Confusion as to Which Norms to Follow

MG Fay writes: 'Soldiers on the ground are confused about how they apply the Geneva Conventions and whether they have a duty to report violations of the conventions' (p. 19). Further confusion is documented on p. 28 of the Fay report, wherein the General discusses CPT Wood's chart on 'Interrogation Rules of Engagement.' MG Fay writes:

The chart was confusing, however. It was not completely accurate and could be *subject to various interpretations*. . . . What was particularly confusing was that nowhere on the chart did it mention a number of techniques that were in use at the time: removal of clothing, forced grooming, hooding, and yelling, loud music and light control. Given the detail otherwise noted on the aid, the failure to list some techniques *left a question of whether they were authorized for use without approval*. (p. 28, emphasis added)

From a sociological point of view, the soldiers would have had a very difficult time making out the difference between what is normative versus what is not

if the commanding officer present could not. The commanding officer represents, in a Durkheimian sense, the values, norms, sanctions, and beliefs of the US Army and other, related organizations.

◆ 'Unhealthy Mystique'

MG Fay claims that the 'acronym "Other Government Agency" (OGA) referred almost exclusively to the CIA' and that 'CIA detention and interrogation practices *led to a loss of accountability, abuse, reduced interagency cooperation, and an unhealthy mystique* that further *poisoned the atmosphere* at Abu Ghraib' (pp. 52–3, emphasis added). MG Fay adds that 'the *systemic lack of accountability* for interrogator actions and detainees *plagued* detainee operations in Abu Ghraib' (p. 54, emphasis added). A 'systemic' lack of accountability suggests a social milieu that approximates social chaos much more than any semblance of social order. It is intriguing that MG Fay uses words such as 'unhealthy,' 'poisoned,' and 'plagued' when referring to the social milieu at Abu Ghraib. He repeatedly and explicitly describes a toxic social environment in terms similar to the vocabulary that Durkheim uses to describe an anomic social environment.

According to MG Fay, several abusive incidents 'were *widely known within the US community* (MI and MP alike) at Abu Ghraib' (p. 54, emphasis added). He adds: 'Speculation and *resentment* grew over the lack of personal responsibility, *of some people being above the laws and regulations*. The resentment contributed to the *unhealthy environment* that existed at Abu Ghraib' (p. 54, emphasis added). MG Fay refers again to a social 'atmosphere' at Abu Ghraib when he writes: 'According to COL Pappas, MG G. Miller said they, GTMO, used military working dogs, and that they were effective in *setting the atmosphere for interrogations*' (p. 58, emphasis added). Clearly, the 'social atmosphere' at Abu Ghraib was out of sync with Army Doctrine, the Geneva Conventions, and other systems of agreed upon social norms.

MG Fay implies that humiliating nudity was part of the social atmosphere at Abu Ghraib: 'Many of the Soldiers who witnessed the nakedness were told that this was an *accepted practice*' (p. 68, emphasis added). Because MG Fay lists nakedness as a form of abuse in

his summary, he is implying that nudity was part of the deviant subculture that was created at Abu Ghraib. He does not address who told whom and with what regularity that this form of abuse was 'accepted practice.' Elsewhere he adds: 'MI interrogators started directing nakedness at Abu Ghraib as early as 16 September 2003 to humiliate and break down detainees' (p. 69). This observation gives one some indication of the long time-frame in which this form of abuse was practiced.

◆ Failure of Self-Correcting Mechanisms

MG Fay's report is replete with instances of soldiers objecting to or reporting abuse, and supervisors ignoring them, failing to take corrective action, or invalidating their morally correct observations. Consider incident #1 as an illustration: '1LT Sutton, 320th MP BN IRF intervened to stop the abuse and was told by the MI soldiers, "we are the professionals; we know what we are doing." They refused 1LT Sutton's lawful order to identify themselves' (p. 71). 1LT Sutton reported the incident 'to the CID [Criminal Investigation Command] who determined the allegation lacked sufficient basis for prosecution' (p. 71). Clearly, options other than prosecution were available, but were not pursued. In fact, '[t]his incident was not further pursued based on limited data and the absence of additional investigative leads' (p. 72). Incident #19 quotes an unnamed Colonel as responding as follows to a sergeant who cited the Geneva Conventions as objection to the abuse he witnessed: 'fine Sergeant, you do what you have to do, I am going back to bed' (p. 80). There is no need to go over the forty-plus other documented 'incidents' in detail here: taken as a whole, they suggest that a climate of abuse was prevalent at Abu Ghraib; that soldiers were not in a position to have their objections validated by superiors; and that officers high in the chain of command did not follow their role expectations to correct the abuse within the social system that was Abu Ghraib. The significance of this conclusion is that it contradicts MG Fay's interpretation that the abuse in question was the result of a few corrupt individuals. Clearly, using the facts in his own report, one may arrive at the conclusion that the abuse was widespread, systematic, and that

normative mechanisms which existed did not function as intended, so that soldiers were not validated by their superiors or the dysfunctional social system in objecting to the abuse.

In summary, the language used by MG Fay to describe the social environment at Abu Ghraib is remarkably similar to Durkheim's (1951 [1897]) descriptions of *anomie* as a social condition that is *dérégulée*. MG Fay stops short of making the connection that an unhealthy environment of this sort inevitably leads to deviance, but this is precisely Durkheim's conclusion.

◆ Cultural Insensitivity

MG Fay writes that US soldiers at Abu Ghraib were 'certainly not well versed in the cultural understandings of the detainees' (p. 46). There is ample evidence to support this claim, but the problem goes far deeper than not being 'well versed.' A sociological reading of the US government reports on the abuse at Abu Ghraib suggests that the US Army failed to understand and predict the impact of forced nudity upon a specifically Muslim population. Moreover, this form of abuse seems to transcend the normative chaos at Abu Ghraib, to appear in other facilities. MG Fay writes: 'Removal of clothing was not a technique developed at Abu Ghraib, but rather a technique which was *imported and can be traced though Afghanistan and GTMO*' (p. 87, emphasis added).

'Removal of clothing is *not* a doctrinal or authorized interrogation technique but appears to have been directed and employed at various levels within MI as an "ego down" technique' (p. 88, emphasis added). Furthermore: 'It is apparent from this investigation that removal of clothing was *employed routinely* and *with the belief it was not abuse*' (p. 88, emphasis added). After an ICRC visit, CPT Reese is quoted as saying: 'We could not determine what happened to the detainee's original clothing' (p. 88). MG Fay makes the interpretation that '[t]he use of clothing as an incentive (nudity) is *significant* in that it likely *contributed to an escalating "de-humanization"* of the detainees and *set the stage for additional and more severe abuses to occur*' (p. 88, emphasis added). Note that this observation by MG Fay, and other ones like it, supports the sociological

interpretation that an unhealthy, anomic social atmosphere was established at Abu Ghraib, which led to abuse. According to the anthropologist Akbar S. Ahmed (1992), nudity is a cardinal normative violation in Islamic culture because this culture puts a high premium on modesty.⁷ Based on Ahmed's and other sociological and anthropological research into Islamic culture, one may conclude that forced nudity was a form of psychic abuse for most of the prisoners, due to its significance as an extreme form of humiliation in Islamic culture.

MG Fay writes:

The interrogators believed they had the authority to use clothing as an incentive, as well as stress positions, and were not attempting to hide their use. . . . It is probable that use of nudity was sanctioned at some level within the chain-of-command. If not, lack of leadership and oversight permitted the nudity to occur. (p. 90)

In general, MG Fay lists the following as organizational and sociological problems at Abu Ghraib:

- There was a lack of clear Command and Control of Detainee Operations at the CJTF-7 level.
- The JIDC was manned with personnel from numerous organizations and consequently lacked unit cohesion.
- Leaders failed to take steps to effectively manage pressure placed upon JIDC personnel.
- Some capturing units failed to follow procedures, training, and directives in the capture, screening, and exploitation of prisoners.
- The JIDC was established in an *ad hoc* manner without proper planning, personnel, and logistical support for the missions it was intended to perform.
- Interrogation training in the Laws of Land Warfare and the Geneva Conventions was ineffective.
- MI leaders did not receive adequate training in the conduct and management of interrogation operations.

- Critical records on detainees were not created or maintained properly, thereby hampering effective operations.
- OGA interrogation practices led to a loss of accountability at Abu Ghraib.
- ICRC recommendations were ignored by MI, MP, and CJTF-7 personnel.

But each and every one of these shortcomings also produced a cultural impact upon a primarily Islamic population of prisoners that was interpreted—by their cultural standards—as offensive, disrespectful, dehumanizing, uninterested in their cultural backgrounds, and hostile to their culture. In other words, the social disorganization among the American soldiers at Abu Ghraib promoted cultural suspicion and still more *anomie* from the point of view of Muslim culture. The results included riots by prisoners, which in turn led to vengeance by some American guards, which in turn escalated to more riots, and so on. Cultural insensitivity contributed to an initial state of *anomie*, which, left unchecked, contributed to a clash of cultures and still more *anomie*, which, in turn, set the stage for further abuse.

◆ Conclusions

The extent of social disorganization, social chaos, dysfunction, lack of coordination, and of a general state of *anomie* was so great at Abu Ghraib that abuse and the breaking of norms that are documented was the *inevitable* outcome and should have been expected. Moreover, because the social system at Abu Ghraib could not self-correct, as functionalists might claim to predict, its disintegration increased and it could not respond to corrective measures outside the system, including but not limited to the ICRC. Recent reports by journalists and human rights groups point to an increase in incidents of abuse at other military posts throughout Iraq, suggesting that the toxic or anomic state of affairs at Abu Ghraib has spread. All of this poses a challenge both to sociological theory and, practically, to the US Army.

Regarding social theory, sociologists need to re-examine the largely dormant understandings of

anomie by Durkheim and by functionalists, compare and contrast them critically, and apply them appropriately to contemporary contexts, including but not limited to Abu Ghraib. Mountains of theory and research on the relationship of ordinary crime to *anomie* do not seem to be helpful in understanding international war crimes, abuse, and torture, which have become important global issues since World War II. Moreover, criticisms as well as applications of Parsonian or Mertonian functionalism have failed to settle the question whether *anomie* is a condition of normlessness that will correct itself. Durkheim seems more convincing in arguing that *anomie* is a grievous social evil characterized by genuine social 'derangement' that produces equally grievous and long-lasting negative consequences. In this case, the abuse at Abu Ghraib has stained American intentions of liberating Iraq, has contributed to a clash of civilizations between the West and Islamic cultures, and may have contributed to the insurgency movement. The Parsonian assumption that social systems can automatically self-correct thus seems to be off the mark. If Durkheim's classical perspective is the more correct one, then one should take seriously his proposed program for repairing anomic social systems.

This last point holds immediate consequences for the US Army and government. The Abu Ghraib courts-martial at Fort Hood, Texas, were supposed to repair the damage caused by the abuse, and restore justice. But if Durkheim is correct, the fact that the Army chose to shift all the blame onto a handful of low-ranking soldiers may not appease the collective conscience in the long run. In fact, Durkheim (1995 [1912]) introduced the concept of scapegoating to account for such instances of anomic miscarriage of justice, in which the 'sins' of a larger social group are displaced onto a few individuals, animals, or even objects.⁸ In the case at hand, the Government's own reports, as well as the outcomes of the courts-martial, suggest a Durkheimian interpretation that the responsibility of American society as a whole and many of its institutions for the abuses at Abu Ghraib was displaced onto a handful of so-called 'rotten apples.' Durkheim's own public defense of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, also a target of collective scapegoating, lends further support to such a conclusion. In addition, Durkheim's concept of

scapegoating suggests that the prisoners at Abu Ghraib were themselves the scapegoats for American society's pain and rage in response to the terrorist event that has come to be known as 9/11. Durkheim writes:

When society undergoes suffering, it feels the need to find someone whom it can hold responsible for its sickness, on whom it can avenge its misfortunes: and those against whom opinion already discriminates are naturally designated for this role. These are the pariahs who serve as expiatory victims. (in Lukes, 1985, p. 345)

No credible evidence has linked Iraq to 9/11, and MG Fay's as well as other reports and testimony make it clear that the prisoners at Abu Ghraib had no connection to 9/11 or any other sort of terrorist activity. In the final analysis, the abuse committed against the inmates at Abu Ghraib prison comes across as an exercise in irrationality and scapegoating, or what Durkheim called *dérèglement*.

◆ Notes

1. Matt Taibbi writes: 'Mestrovic described Abu Ghraib as a "state of *anomie*." "A what?" [Colonel] Pohl snapped, frowning. "A state of *anomie*," the doctor repeated. Pohl shuddered and sipped his coffee, seeming to wonder whether such a word was even legal in Texas' (2005: 48).

2. According to the Littré *Dictionnaire de la langue française* ([1863], 1963 vol. 2, p. 1672), the principal meaning of *dérèglement* is derangement: '*Dérèglement, dérangement* are words expressing two nuances of moral disorder: What is *dérangé* is disarranged [*hors de son rang*] or is without place. What is *dérégulé* is out of rule [*hors de la règle*]. The state of *dérèglement* is more serious than that of derangement.' One of the many sources that Litté cites is Jacques Bossuet, who describes *dérèglement* in the following terms, among others: *mal, égarement, péché, tourments, infini de misères, maladie, désordre, dangereux, souffrir, impiété, intemperance, dessèchement, miserable captivité* (Bossuet, [1731] 1836 pp. 43–79). It is interesting that many English equivalents of these words are used by soldiers and investigators to describe the social climate at Abu Ghraib.

3. These assumptions are ubiquitous and mostly unquestioned in literally hundreds of articles, treatises, and textbooks. However, one is at a loss to find any of these secondary interpreters quoting Durkheim in these regards.

4. The reader is free to consult any contemporary sociology textbook as evidence for this persistent misunderstanding. Thoughtful alternatives to functionalist misrepresentations of Durkheim's concept of *anomie* are also sidelined in sociological theory and textbooks. For example, in *The Lonely Crowd*, David Riesman writes: 'Anomic is English coinage from Durkheim's *anémique* (adjective of *anomie*) meaning ruleless, ungoverned' ([1950] 1977 p. 242). But in his discussion, Riesman seems to imply that different types of *anomie* correspond to tradition-, inner-, and other-directed forms of social character. However, despite being acknowledged as one of sociology's most important writers, Riesman's analysis of *anomie* in the context of his overall theory has been largely ignored.

5. Foucault writes: 'The ceremony of punishment, then, is an exercise of "terror" . . . to make everyone aware, through the body of the criminal, of the unrestrained presence of the sovereign' (1977, p. 49).

6. It is also sometimes referred to as the Jones-Fay report, for internal, bureaucratic reasons within the structure of the US Army that need not be explored here. Reports by MG Antonio Taguba and James Schlesinger also exist (Strasser, 2004), along with other reports, but the Fay report is chosen here in the interest of conserving space. For a fuller discussion of the government reports on Abu Ghraib, see Danner (2004) and Mestrovic (2007).

7. It would be important to devote a separate study to Ahmed's observation about the relative meaning of nudity in American, Muslim, and other social contexts. Moreover, there are hints in the government reports, which cannot be pursued here, that American interrogators deliberately used this knowledge concerning nudity in Islamic culture to establish policies at Abu Ghraib. If true, such deliberate strategies are out of sync with the policies on interrogation that existed at the time of the abuse, and constitute yet another instance of *anomie*, specifically, lack of coordination with lawful Army policies on interrogation.

8. Durkheim writes: 'When the pain reaches such a pitch, it becomes suffused with a kind of anger and exasperation. One feels the need to break or destroy something. One attacks oneself or others. One strikes, wounds, or burns oneself, or one attacks someone else, in order to strike, wound, or burn him. Thus was established the mourning custom of giving oneself over to veritable orgies of torture. It seems to be probable that the vendetta and head hunting have no other origin. If every death is imputed to some magical spell and if, for that reason, it is believed that the dead person must be avenged, the reason is a felt need to find a victim at all costs on whom the collective sorrow and anger can be discharged. This victim will naturally be sought outside, for an outsider is a subject *minoris resistentiae*; since he is not protected by the fellow-feeling that attaches to a relative or a neighbor, nothing about him blocks and neutralizes the bad and destructive feelings aroused by the death. Probably for the same reason, a woman serves more often than a man as the passive object of the most cruel mourning rites. Because she has lower social significance, she is more readily singled out to fill the function of scapegoat' ([1912] 1995 p. 404).

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READING 12

While still using a version of strain theory, this article offers an alternative explanation for terrorism than the one just presented by Mestrovic and Lorenzo in Reading 11. In this piece, Agnew reviews terrorism research and offers a general strain theory of terrorism. Agnew argues that terrorism is most likely when people experience “collective strains,” or strains that are experienced by an identifiable group such as a racial, ethnic, religious, class, or political group. Only a small percentage of collective strains increase the likelihood of terrorism, however. Agnew argues that such strains are (a) high in magnitude, with civilians affected; (b) perceived as unjust; and (c) inflicted by significantly more powerful *others*. These collective strains increase the likelihood of terrorism for several reasons, but they do not lead to terrorism in all cases. Agnew describes many factors that condition their effect.

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A General Strain Theory of Terrorism

Robert Agnew

It has been suggested that crime theories can shed much light on the causes of terrorism (Rosenfeld, 2002; LaFree and Dugan, 2004, 2008; Rausch and LaFree, 2007). Following that suggestion, this article applies general strain theory (GST) to the explanation of sub-state terrorism. The research on GST has focused almost exclusively on ‘common crimes,’ such as interpersonal assault, theft, and illicit drug use (although see Agnew et al., 2009). But as argued below, GST can contribute much to the explanation of terrorism, although the theory needs to be extended to account for this type of crime.

The article is in three parts. First, it briefly reviews current strain-based explanations of terrorism. While promising, these explanations suffer from three major problems: they fail to describe the essential characteristics of those strains most likely to result in terrorism; they do not fully explain *why* such strains result in terrorism; and they do not explain why only a small percentage of those exposed to such strains turn to terrorism. Second, it provides a brief overview of GST, pointing to those key elements which can help address these problems. Third, it presents a general strain theory of terrorism, designed to explain why some people are more likely than others to form or join terrorist organizations and commit terrorist acts. In brief, this theory argues that terrorism is more likely when people experience ‘collective strains’ that are: (a) high in magnitude, with civilians affected; (b) unjust; and (c) inflicted by significantly more powerful *others*, including ‘complicit’ civilians, with whom members of the strained collectivity have weak ties. These collective strains increase the likelihood of terrorism because they increase negative emotions, reduce social control, reduce the ability to cope through legal and military channels, foster the social learning of terrorism, and contribute to a collective orientation and response. These collective strains, however, do not lead to terrorism in all cases. A range of factors condition their effect, with these factors influencing the subjective interpretation of these strains; the emotional reaction to them; and the ability to engage in, costs of, and disposition for terrorism.

Before applying GST to terrorism, however, it is first necessary to define terrorism. The many definitions of terrorism often disagree with one another, but several key elements are commonly mentioned (see National Research Council, 2002; LaFree and Dugan, 2004, 2008; Tilly, 2004; Goodwin, 2006; Hoffman, 2006; Post, 2007; Forst, 2009). Terrorism is defined as the commission of criminal acts, usually violent, that target civilians or violate conventions of war when targeting military personnel; and that are committed at least partly for social, political, or religious ends. Although not part of the formal definition, it is important to note that terrorist acts are typically committed by the members of sub-national groups (LaFree and Dugan, 2004; Pape, 2005).

Current Strain-Based Explanations of Terrorism

Terrorism researchers commonly argue that strains or ‘grievances’ are a major cause of terrorism (e.g. Gurr and Moore, 1997; Blazak, 2001; National Research Council, 2002; de Coming, 2004; Bjorgo, 2005; Pape, 2005; Victoroff, 2005; Callaway and Harrelson-Stephens, 2006; Goodwin, 2006; Hoffman, 2006; Robison et al., 2006; Piazza, 2007; Post, 2007; Smelser, 2007; Stevens, 2002; Freeman, 2008; LaFree and Dugan, 2008; Forst, 2009). Rosenfeld (2004: 23), in fact, states that ‘without a grievance, there would be no terrorism’. Researchers, however, differ somewhat in the strains they link to terrorism. Terrorism is said to result from:

- absolute and relative material deprivation;
- the problems associated with globalization/modernization, such as threats to religious dominance and challenges to traditional family roles;
- resentment over the cultural, economic, and military domination of the West, particularly the United States;

- territorial, ethnic, and religious disputes resulting from postcolonial efforts at nation building and the breakup of the Soviet bloc;
- economic, political, and other discrimination based on race/ethnicity or religion;
- the problems encountered by certain immigrant groups, including unemployment, discrimination, and the clash between western and Islamic values;
- the denial of 'basic human rights,' including political rights, personal security rights, and the right to the satisfaction of basic human needs;
- harsh state repression, including widespread violence directed at certain groups;
- severe challenges to group identity or what Post (2007) calls 'identicide';
- displacement or the loss of one's land/home;
- military occupation of certain types;
- threats to the status of working-class, white, male heterosexuals, including the loss of manufacturing jobs and the movements for civil, women's, and gay rights.

It should be noted that terrorists also explain their actions in terms of the strains they experience. This is apparent in the statements they make, the literature and videos they distribute, and on their websites (see Hoffman, 2006). The centrality of strain explanations for terrorists is frequently reflected in the names of their organizations, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Organization for the Oppressed on Earth (Hoffman, 2006: 21–2). Further, government figures frequently employ strain explanations when discussing terrorism. President George W. Bush, for example, stated that: 'We fight against poverty because hope is an answer to terror' (quoted in Piazza, 2006: 160; also see Atran, 2003; Krueger and Maleckova, 2003; de Coning, 2004; Hoffman, 2006; Newman, 2006).

Most of the academic research on strain and terrorism has involved case studies of terrorist groups. Such studies almost always conclude that strains played a central role in the formation of such groups

(for overviews, see Callaway and Harrelson-Stephens, 2006; Hoffman, 2006; Post, 2007). It is possible, however, that similar strains do not lead to terrorism in other cases. Several quantitative studies have investigated this issue. Such studies should be interpreted with caution since they usually suffer from definitional, sampling, and other problems (Victoroff, 2005; Newman, 2007). Nevertheless, they provide the best test of the link between strain and terrorism. Surprisingly, such studies provide only mixed or weak support for strain explanations (see Gurr and Moore, 1997; Krueger and Maleckova, 2003; de Coning, 2004; Newman, 2006; Piazza, 2006; Robison et al., 2006; LaFree and Dugan, 2008).

Most research has focused on the relationship between terrorism and material deprivation (absolute and, to a lesser extent, relative). Studies suggest that this relationship is weak at best (Atran, 2003; de Coning, 2004; Turk, 2004; Maleckova, 2005; Merari, 2005; Pape, 2005; Victoroff, 2005; Krueger and Maleckova, 2003; Newman, 2006; Piazza, 2006; Smelser, 2007; Araj, 2008; Forst, 2009). This is true at the individual level. For example, poor and poorly educated Palestinians are *not* more likely to support terrorism or engage in terrorist acts (Krueger and Maleckova, 2003; also see Maleckova, 2005). In some regions, terrorists are more often drawn from the ranks of the middle class and educated—including college students (Maleckova, 2005; Victoroff, 2005; Post, 2007). The weak link between deprivation and terrorism is also true at the macro-level. Most studies suggest that measures of material deprivation are unrelated or weakly related to the number of terrorist acts that take place in or originate in a country (Maleckova, 2005; Pape, 2005: 17–19; Newman, 2006; Piazza, 2006).

It is a central contention of this article that this weak support stems from problems with the strain *explanations* that have been advanced, and not from the fact that strain plays a small role in terrorism. Drawing on GST, current strain explanations of terrorism suffer from three major problems. First, they fail to fully describe the core characteristics of strains likely to lead to terrorism. These theories typically focus on one or a few types of strain, such as material deprivation, threats to traditional values, and military occupation. But the characteristics of a given type of strain may differ greatly from situation to situation. For example, a type of strain such as material deprivation may differ in its

magnitude (e.g. degree, duration, centrality, pervasiveness), perceived injustice, and source (e.g. is the source a more powerful *other*). Such differences, as argued below, have a major effect on whether the type of strain leads to terrorism.

Second, most strain-based explanations of terrorism fail to fully explain *why* certain strains increase the likelihood of terrorism. Such explanations most commonly argue that the strains are intensely disliked and terrorism represents a desperate attempt to end them or seek revenge. The connections between strain and terrorism, however, are far more complex; and the failure to fully describe them significantly diminishes the completeness and policy relevance of existing strain explanations (more below).

Finally, current strain explanations fail to explain why only a small portion of the individuals exposed to strains become involved in terrorism (see Victoroff, 2005: 19; Newman, 2006). For example, although 1.4 billion people lived in extreme poverty in 2005 (*New York Times*, 2008: A30), only a very small percentage turned to terrorism. The responses to strain are quite numerous, and include suffering in silence, legal challenge, common crime (e.g. theft, drug selling), political protest, and guerilla war. Current strain explanations of terrorism provide, at best, only limited information on those factors that influence or condition the response to strain.

In sum, three problems account for the mixed or weak support for current strain-based explanations of terrorism. General strain theory (GST) holds the potential to correct for these problems. In particular, GST has much to say about the characteristics of strains most conducive to crime, the intervening mechanisms between strains and crime, and the factors that condition the effect of strains on crime. With some modification, these arguments can be used to construct a general strain theory of terrorism.



A Brief Overview of General Strain Theory (GST)

GST states that certain strains or stressors increase the likelihood of crime (for overviews, see Agnew, 1992, 2001, 2006a, 2006b). Strains refer to events or

conditions that are disliked by individuals. They involve negative or aversive treatment by others (receive something bad); the loss of valued possessions (lose something good), and/or the inability to achieve goals (fail to get what is wanted). Those strains most likely to increase crime are high in magnitude, seen as unjust, associated with low social control, and create some pressure or incentive for criminal coping. Examples of such strains include parental rejection, harsh discipline, peer abuse, work in the secondary labor market, chronic unemployment, criminal victimization, discrimination based on ascribed characteristics, and the failure to achieve goals such as masculine status and monetary success.

A distinction is made between objective strains, which refer to events and conditions disliked by most people in a given group; and subjective strains, which refer to events and conditions disliked by the particular person or persons experiencing them. Much data suggest that people often differ in their subjective evaluation of the same events and conditions; for example, divorce may be a devastating event to some and a cause for celebration to others (see Wheaton, 1990). There is reason to believe that subjective strains may be more strongly related to crime than objective strains (Froggio and Agnew, 2007). Further, a distinction is made between strains that are personally experienced, those that are anticipated in the future, and those that are vicariously experienced (i.e. strains experienced by others around the individual, particularly close others such as family and friends). In certain cases, anticipated and vicarious strains may contribute to crime (Agnew, 2002; Eitle and Turner, 2002).

Strains of the above type increase the likelihood of crime for several reasons. Most notably, they lead to a range of negative emotions, including anger, frustration, humiliation, and fear. These emotions create pressure for corrective action; individuals feel bad and want to do something about it. Crime is one possible response. Crime may be a way to reduce or escape from strains. For example, individuals may steal the money they desperately desire or run away from abusive parents. Crime may be a way to seek revenge against the source of the strain or related targets. For example, individuals may assault those who have mistreated them. And crime may be a way to alleviate the negative

emotions that result from strain. For example, individuals may use illicit drugs in an effort to make themselves feel better. Strains may also lead to crime for additional reasons; for example, the continued experience of strains may increase irritability or 'negative emotionality', reduce social control (e.g. emotional ties to parents), foster the belief that crime is excusable or justifiable, and lead to association with other criminals (more below).

Most strained individuals, however, do not cope through crime. They endure their strain and/or employ legal coping strategies, such as negotiation and exercise. Crime is more likely when people lack the ability to cope in a legal manner. In particular, they lack coping skills, such as problem-solving skills; they lack coping resources, such as money; and they are low in social support. Crime is more likely when the costs of crime are low. For example, people are in environments where crime is seldom sanctioned, they have little to lose if they are sanctioned, and they do not believe that crime is wrong. And crime is more likely when individuals are disposed to crime. For example, they possess personality traits conducive to crime, such as negative emotionality; they hold beliefs favorable to crime; and they associate with others who model and reinforce crime.

With some modification, these ideas can form the foundation for a more refined strain theory of terrorism.

◆ A General Strain Theory of Terrorism

Terrorism has certain special features that are in need of explanation. Terrorism is more extreme than most common crimes, since it often involves the commission of serious violence against civilians who have done nothing to directly provoke their victimization. Also, terrorists typically commit their acts with the support of sub-national groups, while most adult offenders act alone. Further, terrorism is committed wholly or in part for political, social, or religious reasons. Most common crimes, by contrast, are committed for reasons of self-interest. GST, then, must devote special attention to explaining the extreme and collective nature of terrorism.

Strains Most Likely to Contribute to Terrorism

Terrorism is most likely to result from the experience of 'collective strains', or strains experienced by the members of an identifiable group or collectivity, most often a race/ethnic, religious, class, political, and/or territorial group. Only a small percentage of collective strains increase the likelihood of terrorism, however. These strains are: (a) high in magnitude, with civilian victims; (b) unjust; and (c) caused by significantly more powerful *others*, including complicit civilians, with whom members of the strained collectivity have weak ties. These arguments draw on GST (Agnew, 1992, 2001, 2006a, 2006b), but also take special account of the characteristics of and literature on terrorism (see especially Senechal de la Roche, 1996; Gurr and Moore, 1997; Black, 2004; Goodwin, 2006; Smelser, 2007).

Are High in Magnitude, With Civilian Victims (Nature of the Strain)

Collective strains are high in magnitude to the extent that they have the following characteristics: they involve acts which cause a *high degree of harm*, such as death, serious physical and sexual assault, dispossession, loss of livelihood, and major threats to core identities, values, and goals. They are *frequent, of long duration, and expected to continue into the future*. (However, strainful events—experienced in the context of persistent strains—may increase support for terrorism and precipitate terrorist acts [see Hamm, 2002; Oberschall, 2004: 28; Bjorgo, 2005; Newman, 2006; Post, 2007; Smelser, 2007: 34–5].) And they are *widespread*, affecting a high absolute and/or relative number of people in the strained collectivity, including *many civilians* (defined as individuals not directly involved in hostile actions against the source of the collective strain).

Case studies of terrorist organizations provide preliminary support for these arguments. Consider those strains associated with the emergence of several major terrorist groups: the Tamil Tigers, Basque Homeland and Liberty, Kurdistan Workers Party, Irish Republican Army, Shining Path, Hezbollah, Hamas,

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, and al Qaeda. Such strains involved serious violence—including death and rape, major threats to livelihood, dispossession, large scale imprisonment or detention, and/or attempts to eradicate ethnic identity. Further, these strains occurred over long periods and affected large numbers in the collectivity, including many civilians (Callaway and Harrelson-Stephens, 2006; Hoffman, 2006; Post, 2007).

There are certain terrorist groups that do not seem to have experienced strains of high magnitude. Examples include the Red Brigades in Italy and the Red Army Faction in West Germany, which included current and former university students; many left and right-wing terrorist groups in the United States; and certain groups made up of Muslim immigrants in western countries. Case studies of these groups, however, suggest that the group members believe that they or those they identify with are experiencing strains of the highest magnitude (Hoffman, 2006; Post, 2007). For example, many right-wing terrorists in the USA believe that the ‘Zionist Occupation Government’ and others pose a fundamental threat to all that they value, including their livelihood, status, and freedom (Blazak, 2001; Hamm, 2002). There is, of course, good reason to believe that these threats are imagined or greatly exaggerated. Nevertheless, it is *perception* of strain that is critical in motivating action (see Agnew, 2006a; Froggio and Agnew, 2007). Further, there is evidence that the members of these groups were in fact under significant *objective* strain. For example, the Red Brigades and Red Army Faction emerged at a time when university students typically found that only unskilled factory work was available to them (see Post, 2007: 129). Also, students in both Germany and Italy were subject to harsh government crackdowns and other strains (see Post, 2007). Blazak (2001) and Hamm (2002) provide excellent discussions of those strains contributing to the emergence of contemporary right-wing groups in the USA, including threats to the employment prospects and social standing of working-class, white, heterosexual males. At the same time, the existence of these groups does raise critical questions about the relationship between objective and subjective strains, a topic discussed below.

Are Seen as Unjust, Involving the Voluntary and Intentional Violation of Relevant Justice Norms by an External Agent (Reason for the Strain)

Collective strains may result from several sources other than the voluntary and intentional acts of an external agent. For example, they may result from the acts of members of the strained collectivity (e.g. some lower-class individuals victimize other lower-class individuals), from natural disasters (e.g. hurricanes, epidemics), or from ‘reasonable’ accidents (e.g. airplane crashes, fires). In addition, collective strains may be seen as the result of ‘bad luck’ (Merton, 1968) or supernatural forces, such as an angry God (see Smelser, 2007: 65). Terrorism is much less likely in these cases, even though the collective strain may be high in magnitude.

Further, the voluntary and intentional infliction of collective strain by an external agent is unlikely to result in terrorism unless it also involves the violation of relevant justice norms. Several such norms appear to be applicable across a wide range of groups and cultures (Agnew, 2001, 2006a). In particular, the voluntary and intentional infliction of collective strain is more likely to be seen as unjust if:

- (a) The strain is seen as undeserved. Strains are more likely to be seen as deserved if they result from the negatively valued behavior or characteristics of members of the strained collectivity that are deemed relevant in the particular situation. Further, the strain must not be seen as excessive given the behaviors or characteristics. To illustrate, members of a particular group may receive low pay for their work, but they may not view this as unjust if they believe they work in less demanding jobs and/or they have lower levels of education.
- (b) The strain is not in the service of some greater good. Members of a collectivity, for example, may experience much loss of life during a war, but not view this as unjust if the war is seen as necessary.

- (c) The process used to decide whether to inflict the strain is unjust. Among other things, victims are more likely to view the process as unjust if they have no voice in the decision to inflict the strain, they do not respect and trust those inflicting the strain, and no rationale is provided for the infliction of the strain.
- (d) The strain violates strongly held social norms or values, especially those embodied in the criminal law.
- (e) The strain that members of the collectivity experience is very different from their past treatment in similar circumstances and/or from the treatment of similar others (i.e. members of the collectivity are subject to discriminatory treatment).

Collective strains are likely to be viewed as unjust if conditions (a) and (b) are satisfied or if one of the other conditions is satisfied.

Explanations of terrorism commonly make reference to the perceived injustice of the strains that are experienced. For example, Ahmed's (2005: 95) account of Palestinian terrorism states that: 'The fact is unmistakable and the message comes over loud and clear: a deep sense of injustice beyond the stage of profound frustration and despair stands at the heart of the issue.'

Are Caused by More Powerful Others, Including 'Complicit' Civilians, With Whom Members of the Strained Collectivity Have Weak Ties (The Relationship Between Those in the Strained Collectivity and the Source of Strain)

These 'others' most commonly differ from members of the strained collectivity in terms of some salient social dimension, such as religion, race/ethnicity, class, territorial location, nationality, and/or political ideology. They are more powerful because of their greater resources, including numbers, military equipment and skills, and/or

support from others. The strain they inflict may be partly attributed to civilians for several reasons (see the excellent discussion in Goodwin, 2006). Civilians may play a role in creating the Government or organization that inflicts the strain (e.g. through voting); they may support the Government/organization through acts such as paying taxes, public expressions of support, and service in government agencies; they may benefit from the infliction of the strain (e.g. occupying land formerly held by those in the strained collectivity); and they may fail to take action against those who inflict strain when such action is seen as possible (also see Pape, 2005: 137). Goodwin (2006) roughly measures civilian complicity in terms of whether the source of strain is a democratic state; the argument being that terrorists are more likely to believe that civilians in democratic states play major roles in electing and influencing their governments. Finally, members of the strained collectivity have weak emotional and material ties to the source of strain. These weak ties may stem from lack of contact, strong cultural differences (e.g. differences in language, values, beliefs, norms), and/or large differences in wealth/status/power, which tend to limit positive interaction and mutually beneficial exchange (Senechal de la Roche, 1996; Black, 2004; Goodwin, 2006).

In sum, several characteristics related to the nature of the collective strain, reason for the strain, and the relationship between the recipients and source of strain influence the likelihood of terrorism. Most of these characteristics vary even when the focus is on a particular type of strain, such as material deprivation. Researchers sometimes take account of certain of these characteristics, but rarely consider all of them. And this is a major reason for the weak quantitative support for strain theories of terrorism.

◆ Why Do Strains of the Above Type Increase the Likelihood of Terrorism?

This section describes the intervening mechanisms between collective strains and terrorism. Examining such mechanisms not only provides a fuller explanation of terrorism, but suggests additional ways to prevent

terrorism. Terrorism can be prevented not only by reducing or altering the strains that contribute to it, but also by targeting the intervening mechanisms below.

The Above Collective Strains Lead to Strong Negative Emotional States and Traits—Including Anger, Humiliation, and Hopelessness—Which Are Conducive to Terrorism

Strains of the above type contribute to a range of negative emotional *states*, and the persistent experience of these strains contributes to a heightened tendency to experience negative emotional states (referred to as an emotional *trait*). Negative emotions create much pressure for corrective action; individuals feel bad and want to do something about it. These emotions also reduce the ability to cope in a legal manner. Angry individuals, for example, are less able to accurately [assess] their situation and effectively communicate with others. Further, these emotions lower inhibitions, reducing both the awareness of and concern for the consequences of one's behavior. Finally, certain of these emotions create a strong desire for revenge, with individuals feeling they must 'right' the wrong that has been done to them (see Agnew, 2006a for an overview).

There is much anecdotal data suggesting that negative emotions play a key role in the explanation of terrorism (Stern, 2003; Victoroff, 2005; Moghadam, 2006a, 2006b; Newman, 2006; Forst, 2009). A member of the Tamil Tigers, for example, stated that:

In the late '90s when I was in school, the Sri Lanka military bombed my village. An elderly woman lost both legs, one person dies and two students were injured. I was angry with the [military] and joined the Tigers one year later. (Post, 2007: 92)

Related to this, many terrorists state that revenge is a major motive for their acts. Araj (2008), in fact, argues that the desire for revenge is so strong that individuals will sometimes commit terrorist acts even when they believe that doing so will impede the achievement of their ultimate goals.

These Strains Reduce the Ability to Legally and Militarily Cope, Leaving Terrorism as One of the Few Viable Coping Options

The above strains reduce the ability of those in the strained collectivity to effectively employ such coping strategies as negotiation, lobbying, protest, appeals to external agents such as the United Nations, and insurgency. These strains frequently involve the massive loss of material and other resources, which facilitate these forms of coping. The weak ties between members of the strained collectivity and the source of strain further reduce the likelihood that many of these coping strategies will be effective, since the source has little emotional or material incentive to respond to the requests of those in the strained collectivity. In addition, these strains often involve exclusion from the political process and the brutal suppression of protest movements (Callaway and Harrelson-Stephens, 2006; Post, 2007). Finally, the significantly greater power of the source of strain reduces the effectiveness of these coping options (e.g., military campaigns by those in the strained collectivity are unlikely to be successful).

Those in the strained collectivity may turn to common crimes in an effort to cope; for example, they may engage in theft to reduce their material deprivation. Common crimes, however, do little to end the collective strain and frequently do little to alleviate individual suffering. Common crimes, for example, are not an effective remedy for those collective strains involving violence or displacement. Further, common crime may not be a viable option in circumstances of massive deprivation. Terrorism, then, is often one of the few remaining coping options. While those in the strained collectivity may not have the resources to mount an effective military campaign, it is usually the case that they can easily target civilians. Civilians are generally more accessible and less able to resist attack than military targets. Further, there is some evidence that terrorism is an effective coping strategy in certain cases, ending or alleviating collective strain (see Pape, 2005; Victoroff, 2005; Hoffman, 2006; Moghadam, 2006b; Smelser, 2007). Also, terrorism serves other important functions for members of the strained collectivity (more below).

These Strains Reduce Social Control

In addition to reducing the ability to effectively cope through legal and military channels, the above strains also reduce most of the social controls that prevent terrorism (see Agnew, 2006a). In particular, these strains further weaken the emotional ties between members of the strained collectivity and the source of strain. They rob those in the strained collectivity of valued possessions, as well as hope for the future, leaving them with little to lose if they engage in terrorism. They weaken the belief that terrorism is wrong (more below). And they reduce the likelihood that members of the strained collectivity will sanction terrorists, since the experience of these strains tends to create tolerance, sympathy, or even support for terrorism. Again, there is much anecdotal evidence for these arguments in the terrorism literature, with terrorists frequently stating that they have weak/hostile ties to the source of their strain, that their strain has left them with little to lose, and that they no longer condemn terrorism (e.g. Post, 2007; Araj, 2008).

These Strains Provide Models for and Foster Beliefs Favorable to Terrorism

Collective strains of the above type frequently involve violent acts against civilians, thereby providing a model for terrorism. To illustrate, an aide to Arafat stated that Israeli civilians 'are no more innocent than the Palestinian women and children killed by Israelis' (Hoffman, 2006: 26). These strains also foster beliefs that excuse, justify, or even require terrorism. Recall that these strains are high in magnitude, involve civilian victims, are seen as unjust, and are inflicted by more powerful *others*, including complicit civilians, with whom those in the strained collectivity have weak ties. Given these circumstances, it is not difficult for those in the strained collectivity to employ such techniques of neutralization as denial of the victim (the source of strain deserves punishment), appeal to higher loyalties (terrorism is necessary to protect those in the collectivity), and condemnation of the condemners (terrorism is no worse than the acts committed by the source of strain) (see Gottschalk and Gottschalk, 2004; Bloom, 2006; and Post, 2007 for examples).

These Strains Foster a Collective Orientation and Response

Members of the strained collectivity believe they are under serious assault by more powerful others with whom they have weak ties. This does much to foster a heightened sense of collective identity (see Hogg and Abrams, 2003; Stevens, 2002; Post, 2007). This identity amplifies the experience of vicarious strains, since we care more about those we closely identify with (Agnew, 2002). It creates a sense of 'linked fate', or an 'acute sense of awareness (or recognition) that what happens to the group will also affect the individual member' (Simien, 2005: 529). And it creates a sense of obligation to protect others in the collectivity, at least among those traditionally cast in the protector role. This collective orientation helps explain the terrorism of those who have not personally experienced severe strain. Such individuals strongly identify with others in the collectivity and, through this identification, they vicariously experience, feel personally threatened by, and feel responsible for alleviating the strain experienced by these others (see McCauley, 2002: 9). The literature on terrorism provides numerous illustrations of these points (e.g. McCauley, 2002; Gupta, 2005; Pape, 2005; Post, 2005; Victoroff, 2005: 21–2, 30; Loza, 2006; Forst, 2009). A Palestinian terrorist, for example, stated that she grieves for the loss of her

homeland, for the loss of a whole people, the pain of my entire nation. Pain truly affects my soul; so does the persecution of my people. It is from pain that I derive the power to resist and to defend the persecuted. (Post, 2007: 26)

This collective orientation is also important because it contributes to the formation of 'problem solving' groups that respond to the collective strain. When individuals confront shared problems that they cannot solve by themselves, they may develop a collective solution to their problems—one that sometimes takes the form of a criminal group (Cohen, 1955; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960). The Internet and media have come to play a critical role in facilitating the formation of such groups, since they publicize strains, allow strained

individuals to (virtually) interact with one another, and facilitate the recruitment of individuals by terrorist groups (see especially Hoffman, 2006; Moghadam, 2006b; Forst, 2009).

Terrorist Groups, Once Formed, Promote Terrorism in a Variety of Ways

For reasons suggested above, those problem-solving groups that develop in response to collective strains of the above type are often disposed to terrorism. These groups, in turn, play a critical role in the promotion of terrorism (Caracci, 2002; Hamm, 2002; McCauley, 2002; National Research Council, 2002; Victoroff, 2005: 30–1; Smelser, 2007). The members of such groups model terrorism; differentially reinforce terrorism—usually with social approval/status; promote the adoption of beliefs favorable to terrorism; and diffuse responsibility for terrorist acts. These effects are often heightened by isolating group members from others who might challenge the aims of the terrorist group. On a more practical level, terrorist groups provide informational, material, and other support necessary for the commission of many terrorist acts.

It is important to note that while collective strains contribute to the development of terrorist groups that pursue collective goals, such groups also alleviate a range of individual strains. As suggested above, collective strains embody a host of individual strains; including feelings of anger, humiliation, and hopelessness; identity threats; and the loss of material possessions. Participation in terrorist groups allows for the alleviation of these strains (e.g. McCauley, 2002; Stevens, 2002; Stern, 2003; Victoroff, 2005; Moghadam, 2006a; Post, 2007; Forst, 2009). In particular, participation provides an outlet for one's rage, a sense of self-worth, and status. A Palestinian terrorist, for example, stated that: 'An armed action proclaims that I am here, I exist, I am strong, I am in control, I am in the field, I am on the map' (Post, 2007: 61). Further, participation may alleviate material deprivation, since terrorist organizations frequently provide material aid to terrorists and their families (Hoffman, 2006). In addition, participation may address individual strains not directly linked to the collective strain. Abrahms (2008), for example, argues that many terrorists are socially alienated and

that participation in terrorist groups allows them to develop close ties to others. Terrorist organizations, then, allow for the alleviation of a range of individual strains; some linked to the collective strain and some not. This fact helps explain the persistence of such organizations in the face of both repeated failure and full success (see Victoroff, 2005; Abrahms, 2008).

◆ Factors That Condition the Effect of Collective Strains on Terrorism

While collective strains of the above type are conducive to terrorism, they do not guarantee terrorism. The members of certain collectivities experiencing these strains have not turned to terrorism or have only turned to terrorism after many years (Gupta, 2005; Pape, 2005; Bloom, 2006; Moghadam, 2006a; Goodwin, 2007; Post, 2007). This is not surprising given the extreme nature of terrorism and its mixed effectiveness (see Victoroff, 2005; Hoffman, 2006; Moghadam, 2006b; Smelser, 2007; and Abrahms, 2008 for discussions on the effectiveness of terrorism). This section draws on GST and the terrorism literature to describe those factors that influence or condition the effect of strains on terrorism. These factors influence the *subjective* interpretation of strains; that is, the extent to which given strains are seen as high in magnitude and due to the unjust acts of others, including civilians. They also influence the emotional reaction to strains, the ability to engage in both non-terroristic and terroristic coping, the costs of terrorism, and/or the disposition for terrorism. It is important to note that while these factors are to *some* extent independent of the collective strains experienced, collective strains may alter them in ways conducive to terrorism. For example, the continued experience of collective strains may alter individual and group beliefs such that they come to excuse, justify, or require terrorism (see above).

Coping Resources, Skills, and Opportunities

The members of some collectivities may be better able to cope through non-terroristic means. This includes collectivities with extensive financial resources and legal

and political skills. Also critical are the opportunities for coping provided by the larger political environment. In this area, some argue that terrorism is less likely in democratic states since there are more opportunities for legal coping (Crenshaw, 1995; National Research Council, 2002; Callaway and Harrelson-Stephens, 2006; Krueger and Maleckova, 2006; Piazza, 2007; Freeman, 2008). The research on the relationship between democracy and terrorism, however, is mixed (see the overview in Maleckova, 2005; also see Newman, 2006; Robison et al., 2006; Piazza, 2007; Abrahms, 2008; Freeman, 2008). This may reflect the fact that while democracies provide more opportunities for legal coping, they also provide more opportunities for terrorists—with democracies being less willing to harshly repress terrorists and more willing to negotiate with them (see Piazza, 2007).

In addition to the ability and opportunity to engage in non-terroristic coping, it is important to consider the ability/opportunity to engage in terrorism. At the individual level, this ability includes certain physical skills and a willingness to engage in risky behavior; attributes which tend to favor the young males who most often engage in terrorism (LaFree and Dugan, 2004: 56; Forst, 2009: 22–3). At the group/collectivity level, this ability involves the knowledge, material resources (e.g. money, munitions), and organization to commit terrorist acts (see Gurr and Moore, 1997; Oberschall, 2004). It has been argued that there are more opportunities for terrorism in 'failed states', since such states are less able to repress terrorist groups and often provide a base for such groups to operate. There is limited support for this view (Newman, 2007; Piazza, 2007; Forst, 2009: 409).

Social Support

Individuals, groups, and the collectivity itself may receive support for non-terroristic coping. Other individuals and groups, including foreign nations, may attempt to alleviate strain through the provision of such things as food, shelter, medical care, and military protection. They may attempt to end the strain through persuasion, sanction, and military intervention. And they may provide information, material assistance, and moral support in an effort to help those in the strained collectivity cope through non-terroristic means. Such support should

reduce the likelihood of terrorism, particularly if it is believed to be effective and that terrorism will jeopardize it. For example, Goodwin (2007) argues that the African National Congress avoided terrorism partly because it feared alienating supportive groups.

Individuals, groups, and collectivities may also receive support for terroristic coping, including information, moral support, material resources, and direct assistance (e.g. the provision of outside fighters). Such support may come from outside groups, including governments and foreign terrorist organizations. For example, the PLO and other terrorist organizations helped train members of the Tamil Tigers in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Pape, 2005: 73). And such support may come from internal sources. Individuals may receive support for terrorism from friends and family, terrorist groups, and members of the larger collectivity. And terrorist groups may receive support from members of the larger collectivity. Some researchers argue that it is unlikely that individuals and groups will engage in terrorism without such support (e.g. Merari, 2005; Pape, 2005; Smelser, 2007). There are rare cases of lone terrorists, but such terrorists are often loosely affiliated with others who support terrorism (see Hamm, 2002; McCauley, 2002; Smelser, 2007).

Social Control

While collective strains of the above type reduce most forms of social control, there may nevertheless be some independent variation in the control experienced by those in the strained collectivity. In particular, the source of strain may exercise high direct control over individuals and groups in the strained collectivity, thus reducing the likelihood of terrorism (see Gupta, 2005; Bloom, 2006; Callaway and Harrelson-Stephens, 2006; Robison et al., 2006; Smelser, 2007; Abrahms, 2008; Araj, 2008). This was the case in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, in Iraq under Saddam Hussein, and in Germany under Hitler. Also, some strained individuals and groups may maintain their bonds with selected individuals associated with the source of the strain, again reducing the likelihood of terrorism. This is said to partly explain why the African National Congress avoided terrorism against white civilians; there were close

ties between the ANC and whites involved in the antiapartheid movement (Goodman, 2007). Further, some strained individuals and groups may have valued possessions—including both material possessions and reputations—that would be jeopardized by terrorism.

Finally, individuals and groups within the collectivity are less likely to engage in terrorism when it is condemned and sanctioned by others in the collectivity (see Pape, 2005).

Individual Traits

Terrorists are no more likely than comparable controls to suffer from psychopathology (McCauley, 2002; Atran, 2003; Pape, 2005; Victoroff, 2005; Post, 2007). Certain other traits, however, may increase the disposition for terrorism. Such traits include negative emotionality, low constraint, and cognitive inflexibility (Gottschalk and Gottschalk, 2004; Post, 2005; Victoroff, 2005: 27; Loza, 2006). Individuals with these traits are especially sensitive to strains, inclined to aggressive coping, attracted to risky activities, and prone to view the world in 'black and white' terms. Also, those who are alienated and socially marginalized may be more inclined to terrorism, since they have less to lose through terrorism, terrorist groups may provide them with a sense of belonging, and terrorism may be seen as a solution to certain of their problems. Such individuals include young, unmarried males; widows; those not gainfully employed, and unassimilated immigrants (see National Research Council, 2002; Merari, 2005; Post, 2005; Smelser, 2007; Abrahms, 2008; Forst, 2009; see Victoroff, 2005 for a discussion of other traits that may contribute to terrorism).

Association With Close Others Who Support Terrorism

Associating with close others who support terrorism has a major effect on the disposition for terrorism. As indicated above, such others may model terrorism, reinforce terrorism, teach beliefs favorable to terrorism, and provide the training and support necessary for many terrorist activities. Anecdotal accounts and some research suggest that individuals whose family members and friends are involved in terrorism are much more likely to

be involved themselves (Sageman, 2005; Victoroff, 2005; Post, 2007; Smelser, 2007; Abrahms, 2008; Forst, 2009).

Beliefs Favorable to Terrorism

The beliefs/ideology of those experiencing collective strains also influence the disposition for terrorism. Such beliefs may be learned from family members, friends, schools, neighbors, religious figures, and a variety of media sources (National Research Council, 2002; Victoroff, 2005: 18; Post, 2007; Forst, 2009). Beliefs favorable to terrorism have at least some of the following features: they emphasize the importance of collective identity (e.g. religious affiliation, ethnicity); increase the sensitivity to certain strains by, for example, placing much emphasis on 'honor' and 'masculinity'; claim that the collective strain being experienced is high in magnitude; provide an explanation for the strain, attributing it to the unjust acts of more powerful others, including complicit civilians; provide guidance on how to feel in response to the strain, with negative emotions such as rage and humiliation being emphasized; depict the source of strain as evil, subhuman, and otherwise deserving of a harsh response; encourage little or no contact with the source of strain; depict the source as both powerful but vulnerable to attack; point to the special strengths of those in the strained collectivity; excuse, justify, or require a terroristic response; provide a vision of a more positive, often utopian future that will result from such a response; promise rewards to those who engage in terrorism, including martyrdom and rewards in the afterlife; and create a history to support these views (e.g. emphasize the past victories of the collectivity over similar injustices) (Gupta, 2005; Loza, 2006; Moghadam, 2006a; Post, 2007; Smelser, 2007).

While such beliefs are fostered by the experience of collective strains of the above type, they are also a function of other factors (see Smelser, 2007). As a result, some groups experiencing the above collective strains hold beliefs that discourage terrorism. For example, Goodwin (2007) argues that the emphasis of the African National Congress on nonracialism helped discourage terrorism against white South Africans. And the Dalai Lama's advocacy of the 'middle way' has likely done much to prevent terrorism by the Tibetans against the Chinese (see Wong, 2008).

Anticipated Costs and Benefits of Terrorist Acts

Estimates of costs/benefits are partly a function of the success of prior terrorist acts, both those committed by the collectivity in question and by others (Gurr and Moore, 1997; Pape, 2005; Hoffman, 2006; Sedgwick, 2007). It is important to note, however, that it is difficult to objectively define 'success' (see Pape, 2005; Goodwin, 2006; Hoffman, 2006; Moghadam, 2006a; Abrahms, 2008; Newman and Clarke, 2008). Terrorist acts seldom result in the end of the collective strain experienced. Such acts, however, may be deemed successful if they call greater attention to the collective strain, gain recruits or other support for the terrorist organization, boost the morale of those in the organization and sympathizers, inflict significant damage on the source of the collective strain, or result in the partial alleviation of the strain. Researchers must therefore consider the subjective views of those involved in terrorism when assessing success. Further, the anticipated costs and benefits of terrorism are influenced by a host of more immediate factors, including those having to do with the availability of attractive targets and the absence of capable guardians (Newman and Clarke, 2008).

◆ Conclusion

The general strain theory of terrorism presented in this article builds on current strain-based explanations of terrorism in three ways. First, it better describes the core characteristics of strains that contribute to terrorism. Terrorism is most likely in response to collective strains that are high in magnitude, with civilian victims; unjust; and caused by more powerful others, including complicit civilians, with whom members of the strained collectivity have weak ties. Second, it more fully describes the reasons why such strains increase the likelihood of terrorism. In particular, such strains lead to negative emotional states and traits; reduce the ability to effectively cope through legal channels, common crime, and military means; reduce social control; provide models for and contribute to beliefs favorable to terrorism; and foster a collective orientation and response to the strain. Third, it provides the most

complete description of those factors that condition the effect of the above strains on terrorism. Such factors include a range of coping resources, skills, and opportunities; various types of social support; level of social control; selected individual traits; association with others who support terrorism; beliefs related to terrorism, and the anticipated costs and benefits of terrorism. The general strain theory of terrorism extends GST in important ways; pointing to new strains, intervening mechanisms, and conditioning variables that are especially relevant to terrorism.

It is important to note, however, that the general strain theory of terrorism is not a complete explanation of terrorism. Being a social psychological theory, it does not describe the larger social forces that contribute to the development of the above strains and help shape the reaction to them. Also, collective strains of the above type are likely only one of several causes of terrorism. Indeed, the final section of this article lists several factors that have been said to directly affect terrorism, such as social controls, beliefs/ideologies, association with others who support terrorism, and the anticipated costs and benefits of terrorism. A complete explanation of terrorism will require that we draw on a range of theories and describe the complex relations between them. The development of such an explanation is beyond the scope of this article, but this article does describe what will likely be a central variable in this explanation—collective strains of a certain type.

In addition to shedding light on the causes of terrorism, the general strain theory has important policy implications. The most obvious is to end or reduce collective strains of the above type. For example, the source of strain may attempt to reduce civilian casualties. In addition, it may be possible to target those intervening mechanisms that link collective strains to terrorism. For example, governments may make it easier to address grievances via legal channels. Further, conditioning variables may be targeted. Outside groups, for example, may provide social support to members of the strained collectivity. These multiple points for intervention provide some hope for efforts to reduce terrorism.

At the same time, it is important to note that collective strains of the above type often set in motion a self-perpetuating process that is hard to interrupt. These strains gradually change members of the strained

collectivity in ways that increase the likelihood of a terroristic response. Among other things, these strains foster individual traits conducive to terrorism, such as negative emotionality; further reduce social control, including ties to the source of strain; lead to the adoption of beliefs that favor terrorism; and contribute to the development of terroristic organizations. In addition, the terrorism carried out by such organizations frequently provokes a harsh response, which further increases support for terrorism in the strained collectivity (see Hamm, 2002; Smelser, 2007: 80–1; Araj, 2008; LaFree and Dugan, 2008). And, to further complicate matters, concessions by the source of strain may be seen as a success for terrorism—also prompting further terrorist acts. As LaFree and Dugan (2008) point out, however, it may be possible to escape this cycle of violence with a very carefully calibrated response to terrorism—one that does not reinforce terrorism or provoke a harsh reaction—along with efforts to address the types of root causes described above.

Before proceeding further, however, it is critical to test the general strain theory. As indicated, most current tests of strain-based explanations are far too simplistic. They fail to measure the key dimensions of strain, including magnitude, injustice, and the nature of the source. Further, these tests do not examine intervening mechanisms, the subjective interpretation of strain, or conditioning variables. Unfortunately, most existing data sets do not permit anything close to a full test of the general strain theory. Agnew (2001, 2006a) provides suggestions on how to obtain both 'objective' and subjective measures of many of the dimensions of strain that were listed, as well as measures of many of the intervening and conditioning variables. In the interim, researchers can draw on the theory to conduct better tests of strain explanations. One example of an approach that might be taken is provided by the cross-national research on criminal homicide (Agnew, 2006a). Material deprivation is often unrelated to violence in such research. Certain researchers, however, have attempted to roughly measure the perceived injustice of such deprivation. For example, they have estimated whether such deprivation is due to race/ethnic or religious discrimination (Messner, 1989; also see Gurr and Moore, 1997). Deprivation resulting from discrimination is strongly related to violence.

If the general strain theory is supported, it is critical to note that while collective strains may help *explain* terrorism, they do not *justify* terrorism. First, it is important to distinguish between the objective nature and subjective interpretation of such strains. In certain cases, there is good reason to believe that the members of terrorist groups exaggerate—often greatly—the strains they experience (e.g. members of certain white supremacist groups in the USA who claim they are being oppressed by the Zionist Occupation Government). Second, it is important to recognize that the members of the strained collectivity may sometimes contribute to the strains they experience through such things as attacks on the source of strain. Finally, the argument that collective strains contribute to terrorism is a causal one, not an ethical one. There are many responses to strain, some ethical and some not; being subject to strain does *not* justify any response to it.

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