

# Beyond Anomie: Alienation and Crime

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**Abstract** This paper argues that anomie theories are aspects of the more comprehensive, but neglected theory of alienation. The dominant dimension of anomie theories (particularly Durkheim’s version) is normlessness, which is only one of five dimensions of alienation theory. A practical implication of this insight is that anomie theory relies heavily on a Durkheimian focus on the role of normlessness in guiding criminal justice policy, while the other dimensions of alienation theory—powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self-estrangement—have been deemphasized or ignored. By including all dimensions of the alienation concept, an integrated theory of crime and more effective crime control strategies can be formulated.

## Introduction

Durkheim’s theory of anomie has displayed remarkable staying power for more than a century. The theory has been repeatedly revised and expanded. Ironically, none of the versions of anomie theory specifically addresses the linkages between anomie theory and the more comprehensive, but neglected theory of alienation. We contend that the dominant theme of anomie theories (particularly Durkheim’s version) is normlessness, which represents only one of five components of a broader theory of alienation. This emphasis placed on “norms” by anomie theorists continues to support mainstream criminology policies that reinforce equilibrium, control and maintenance of the status quo.

In response, we explicate the potential efficacy of the concept of alienation; specifically, this article examines the remaining alienation components of powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self-estrangement. This endeavor includes an examination of the

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philosophical underpinnings of alienation theory and its theoretical development in relation to criminal justice. The alienation tradition clearly demonstrates a linkage to “critical criminology” applications, particularly in the areas of restoration, integration, social support, and community building.

It is argued that while the central components of alienation theory are evident in anomie theories, the term is rarely used due to its radical implications. In terms of future research, we propose that the inclusion of all components of alienation theory could facilitate the development of an integrated theory of crime in which more effective crime control strategies can be formulated.

## The Concept of Anomie

### Durkheim and Anomie

The notion of “norms” and “normlessness,” as they relate to crime, arguably found its most developed elaboration in the work of the French sociologist Emile Durkheim and his concept of anomie. For Durkheim ([1893] 1964b: p. 67), crime represented a social fact and a normal aspect of society. Durkheim noted that crime marks the boundaries of morality. In short, people would not know what acceptable behavior is, if it were not for crime. According to Durkheim, the social solidarity function of crime is so important that crime would have to be created if it did not already exist. Additionally, crime is functional because it provides a means of achieving necessary social change through, for example, civil disobedience and, under certain circumstances, directly contributes to social change.

According to Durkheim, anomie tends to manifest itself in one of two interrelated ways depending on the evolutionary stage of society. In less developed, more homogeneous societies, anomie is likely to be a product of the breakdown of social norms or the dissociation of the individual from the “collective conscience.” On the other hand, in advanced industrial societies, anomie is more likely to occur when there are problems in the “division of labor” (the interdependency of occupational roles) (Durkheim [1893] 1964a: pp. 129–131). In the first case, the collective or common conscience is unable to regulate human desires (lack of regulation); in the latter case, “individualism” is promoted to such a degree that people become so selfish that they no longer care about the welfare of others (lack of integration) (Taylor et al. 1973: pp. 77, 85, 87).

For Durkheim, the consequence of a society that is temporarily unable to exercise its regulative function is an increase in the rate of suicide, and presumably crime. It is important to note that *heightened* prosperity can disturb the collective order in the same manner as national *declines* of wealth. In fact, Durkheim ([1897] 1965: p. 245) suggested the low suicide rates in Ireland and Spain could be attributed to the protective effect of a long-endured but stable poverty. Parenthetically, the low suicide rates in predominantly Catholic countries could also be attributed to the Church’s strong position against the practice. Regardless, the obvious policy implications are that society must place adequate restraints on the aspirations and appetites of its citizens or better integrate them into the collective whole—maintain the equilibrium and the society will survive. This anomie/strain school of thought was expanded and further developed through the work of Merton (1938), Cohen (1955), Cloward and Ohlin (1960), Messner and Rosenfeld (1997), and finally Agnew (1992, 2001). Interestingly, the concept of alienation (discussed later) though generally not called such (except by Cloward and Ohlin 1960), remained implicit in the work of these anomie/strain theorists.

## Merton on Anomie

While Durkheim emphasized inherent and often insatiable human appetites or aspirations, Merton (1938) argued that many human appetites or aspirations were not inherent but rather culturally induced. The inability of people to achieve culturally defined aspirations, such as the accumulation of material wealth, by legitimate socially structured means produced what Merton called anomie or strain. According to Merton, individuals develop adaptations to the strain they encounter. These adaptations include: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. Three of the adaptations (innovation, retreatism, and rebellion) tend to manifest in aberrant or criminal behavior.

To Merton, lower class individuals are more susceptible to frustration and strain because they have less opportunity to attain vertical mobility while aspiring to achieve common success goals, such as wealth. It is for this reason that Merton states that lower class society possesses more innovators and hence more criminals than other class groups. Following this logic, one could also state that the lower class produces more innovators who are economically alienated; with crime representing a potential means to achieve cultural status. In short, innovation is an attempt to integrate oneself into the hub of society. The category of "retreatism" features individuals who Merton (1938: p. 677) describes as being "*in* the society but not *of* it" or "true aliens". Retreatists lack the means and desire to achieve cultural goals, and "in this category are some of the activities of psychotics, psychoneurotics, chronic artists, pariahs, outcasts, vagrants, vagabonds, tramps, chronic drunkards and drug addicts" (Merton 1938: p. 677). The rebellion adaptation attracts members of what Merton terms the "out-group," individuals who seek a drastic change in their current social conditions. Members of such groups advocate a new social structure that "presupposes alienation from reigning goals and standards" (Merton 1968: p. 209).

In a similar typology of adaptations to strain, Parsons (1951), Merton's mentor, identified four directional types: "aggressiveness and withdrawal on the alienated side, and compulsive performance and compulsive attendance, on the side of compulsive conformity" (as cited in Merton 1968: p. 217). Thus, it becomes apparent, to both Parsons and Merton, that the individual can respond to strain by *conforming* or by *expressing* his or her alienation. Unlike Parsons, however, Merton seldom uses the term alienation, preferring to state that the adaptations of innovation, rebellion and retreatism are criminogenic "due to frustration or to marginalist perspectives" (Merton 1938: p. 678).

A summary of Merton's theory of anomie reveals that these adaptations are normal (or functional) responses to alienating social conditions, particularly the disharmony between the cultural goal of wealth accumulation and limited legitimate means to achieve such capital. The dichotomization of goals and means results in fairly straightforward social policy implications. To Merton, a reduction or change in success goals and/or an increase in means or opportunity to achieve these goals will result in a decrease in crime. In the case of wealth, this policy implication when explored fully contains both the fundamental ingredients of socialism and the issue of power. To make drastic economic changes in the social structure and to attain a degree of economic equity, one would first be forced to use the Mertonian adaptation of rebellion to seize power. However, history has yet to produce an example of economic power being willingly surrendered. Merton's reluctance to follow the radical policy implications of anomie theory is due to his belief in a self-maintaining system where change occurs naturally and gradually.

It is clear that Merton's anomie theory neglects any consideration of power dynamics, instead opting to focus on the divergence between means and opportunities that generate normlessness. Merton's anomie theory simply provides individuals with the opportunity to

compete for an inequitable share of wealth and power. Legitimate opportunity to achieve success goals, especially an equitable share of material wealth, may require radical changes in the social structure, and not piecemeal reform of a “sick society.”

### Cohen on Anomie

Anomie theory was further developed in Cohen’s *Delinquent Boys* (1955), which revolved around the frustrations and strains experienced by working class families, with particular emphasis on the all-male delinquent gang. Cohen included issues of social class, social status, and potential associations in his work. The manifestation of social inequality is seen in the relationship between family and delinquent son. According to Cohen, even though both working class and middle class families experience frustration and strain, working class males tend to join delinquent gangs because they lack the skills to participate in a society where middle class values dominate. This “status frustration” is evident in young, working-class males who join gangs and engage in acts that are primarily “non-utilitarian, malicious and negativistic” (Cohen 1955: p. 25).

Cohen’s idea of non-utilitarian acts of criminality contrasts sharply with Merton’s conception of criminality as goal-directed behavior. Merton (1968) evades the implications of non-utilitarian criminality by stating that his anomie theory is not a general theory of crime. Cohen, on the other hand, opines that if working class youth are marginalized from society, then non-utilitarian criminal acts become symbolic expressions of the alienated individual; crime reinforces group camaraderie and further solidifies the status of the group in relation to society. The gang also becomes a substitute for the family, and its activities derive “their meaning and flavor from the fact of togetherness”; they are “governed by a set of common understandings, common sentiments, and common loyalties” (Cohen 1955: p. 178). While the gang’s delinquent acts solidify group loyalty and commitment, they also further alienate members from mainstream society, often creating a cyclical pattern of deviance (or “downward spiral”).

Individuals marginalized from state and family are offered integration via the subculture; and delinquency becomes a rite of passage. As Cohen (1955: p. 121) states, “certain children are denied status in the respectable society because they cannot meet the criteria of the respectable status system. The delinquent subculture deals with these problems by providing criteria of status which these children *can* meet.” Stated differently, working-class male adolescents can reduce feelings of alienation by joining together, inverting middle class values, and expressing camaraderie through non-utilitarian, criminal acts. The reaction of the marginalized to social forces continues to be essential to other anomie proponents, particularly through the work of Cloward and Ohlin.

### Cloward and Ohlin on Anomie

Cloward and Ohlin argue that delinquent acts are “essential requirements of the performance” of marginal subcultures (1960: p. 7). They describe three delinquent subcultures or gang types: criminal (prone to theft and extortion), conflict (prone to violence) and retreatist (prone to drug consumption). Criminal and conflict subcultures, or gangs, pursue illicit avenues to success-goals, while retreatist subcultures, or gangs, overtly reject collective symbols of success.

Cloward and Ohlin’s anomie theory describes a process where humans initially become alienated from the social structure, social institutions, and other humans, and eventually

become self-alienated. They devote 14 pages of *Delinquency and Opportunity* (1960) to a description of a “process” of alienation whereby lower-class adolescent boys either predict or actually encounter failure to achieve desired goals and respond by joining one of the subcultures or gang types. Cloward and Ohlin’s critics contend that delinquent gang members seldom specialize in particular delinquent activities and dispute whether the specific delinquent subcultures or gang types even exist (see, for example Kornhauser 1978). However, the larger issue for our purposes here is that a lack of opportunity to achieve success-goals is primarily determined by the individual’s position in a stratified society. The social status of the individual influences his or her access to both legitimate and illegitimate avenues of success (Cloward 1959). The internalizing of personal “failure” can develop into anger at an unjust system, feelings of shame, guilt, and inferiority; or crime and anomic suicide. Thus, Cloward and Ohlin’s anomie theory describes a process where humans initially become alienated from the social structure, social institutions, and other humans, and eventually become self-alienated.

Cloward and Ohlin’s directives to reduce alienation became integral to Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty. Specifically, policies directed towards improving education, constructing employment opportunities, and assisting lower-class communities dominated the 1960’s landscape. Unfortunately, these efforts failed for two related reasons. First, policies were directed towards regulating the *norms* of lower class individuals rather than addressing social inequity. Second, agencies serving lower class communities become increasingly bureaucratic and self-protecting, resulting in further alienation (see Rose 1972). While the “normlessness” of the poor remained a concern, the War on Poverty (and Cloward and Ohlin’s work) largely neglected the role of power, meaning, isolation and self-estrangement associated with criminality. With this in mind, we now turn to more contemporary interpretations of anomie/strain theory.

### Recent Developments in Anomie Theory (Messner and Rosenfeld, Agnew)

Recent developments in anomie/strain theory include the work of Messner and Rosenfeld (1997) and Agnew (1992, 2001). In both cases, there is clearly an analogous relationship between anomie/strain theory and the broader concept of alienation.

In *Crime and the American Dream* Messner and Rosenfeld (1997) attempt to explain the cause of the United States’ elevated crime rate in terms of the American Dream. They draw upon Merton’s original analysis, in which nearly 60 years earlier Merton maintained that, “the American stress on pecuniary success and ambitiousness for all thus invites exaggerated anxieties, hostilities, neuroses and antisocial behavior” (1938: p. 680). Messner and Rosenfeld echo this idea in their analysis of individuals and groups who remain locked out of the American Dream while simultaneously living in “a society that enshrines the unfettered pursuit of individual material success above all other values” (1997: p. 79). Here, one can visualize the literary figure of Willy Loman; with his enduring faith in an individualistic and competitive society juxtaposed by his slight prospects of achieving status goals (see Miller 1949).

To Messner and Rosenfeld, the conditions that make the United States experience high crime rates (for example, restricted means, unobtainable goals, slavish devotion to materialism) are equally difficult to alter. In fact, policy implications must include a fundamental social transformation and potential abandonment of the American Dream. Once more, anomie/strain theorists have failed to include the component of power, and as such, failed to acknowledge the radical implications of their work.

The most recent development in anomie theory is Robert Agnew's general strain theory. Agnew advanced anomie theories that were predominately sociological by including measures of noxious psychological stressors in a revised strain theory. In fact, Agnew added several new sources of strain, including: "the loss of positive stimuli (e.g., loss of a romantic partner, death of a friend), the presentation of negative stimuli (e.g., physical assaults and verbal insult), and new categories of goal blockage (e.g., the failure to achieve justice goals)" (2001: p. 319). It is here that strain theory assesses the alienation of the individual, specifically the components of normlessness and self-alienation. Self-alienation takes an existential leaning, with noxious stimuli stimulating negative affective states. The strained individual expresses anger and may experience cognitive dissonance when efforts toward self-actualization conflict with actual behaviors. In short, the strained individual is estranged from others and self, and crime becomes the expression of this alienation.

The review of the developments made by Messner and Rosenfeld (1997) and Agnew (1992, 2001) provide evidence that anomie theory is: (1) restricted by a reluctance of key anomie/strain theorists to follow the radical implications of the theory, and (2) that anomie/strain theory is actually a partial component of a much broader theory of alienation. With this in mind, we now examine the concept of alienation and its relevance to criminology.

### The Concept of Alienation

The concept of alienation has a long and significant role in the history of humankind (Josephson and Josephson 1962). The term alienation has three nominal definitions: "(1) transfer of property rights, (2) insanity, and (3) aversion, dislike, withdrawing of the feeling of goodwill and friendship" (Feuerlicht 1978: p. 211). With regard to the second meaning, insanity, early psychiatrists were actually called "alienists." Theological meanings of alienation described in Hebrew and Christian texts include narratives of "original sin" and the subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden, symbolic of alienation from God (Torrance 1977). Marx ([1843] 1964) discussed alienation using two definitions: the first was the transfer of rights or property ("*Entfremdung*"), while the second was estrangement from others ("*EntzauBerung*"). Alienation also evolved into Freud's "discontents" and Sartre's "nausee" (Feuerlicht 1978: p. 5).

#### The Philosophers on Alienation (Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, Fromm)

In *Phenomenology of Spirit* ([1807] 1977), Hegel first identified the alienation process in the following way: society consists of various institutions or "social substance" that are created and sustained by humans. The creation of "social substance" is an essential ingredient to the development of "human spirit," yet, at the same time "social substance" is independent or foreign to "human spirit" resulting in alienation. Restated, humans create the social, political, and cultural institutions that eventually control and dominate them. The alienation process has also been described in the following manner: "alienation expresses the fact that the creations of men's hands and minds turn against their creators and come to dominate their lives. Thus, instead of enlarging freedom, these uncontrollable powers increase human servitude and strip men of the capacities for self-determination and self-direction which have raised them above the animals" (Mandel and Novack 1973: p. 7). Furthermore, for Hegel (and later Feuerbach and Marx) social, institutional, and cultural alienation ultimately "is a priori alienation from self" (Horton 1964: p. 285)—an issue that is addressed later.

Hegel believed that “alienation is the inescapable fate of humanity and its object world. Alienation is inherent in human life which necessarily and everywhere creates the social world by making and using objects, while making and transforming itself in that very process” (Gouldner 1982: p. 180). Alienation, to Hegel, was an indication of human social development and, consequently, unavoidable. Though overcoming alienation was a futile notion to Hegel, both Feuerbach and Marx viewed the concept of alienation as a challenge. The following examples reveal how Feuerbach applied the Hegelian theoretical foundations of alienation to the concept of God, and how Marx viewed alienation and the state. The perspective of philosopher and social psychologist Erich Fromm, who was a leading proponent of alienation theory, is included in this discussion.

### Alienation from God

Fromm (1955: p. 30) describes the evolution of humankind as being analogous to alienation from nature and God:

This birth may have lasted for hundreds of thousands of years, but what matters is that a new species arose, transcending nature, that life became aware of itself. Self-awareness, reason, and imagination disrupt the “harmony” which characterizes animal existence. Their emergence has made man into an anomaly, into the freak of the universe. He is part of nature, subject to her physical laws and unable to change them, yet he transcends the rest of nature. He is set apart while being a part; he is homeless, yet chained to the home he shares with all creatures.

In *The Essence of Christianity* ([1841] 1957), Feuerbach argued that religion is an attempt to ease this alienation from God and nature: “the situation is really that the ideas of religion are produced by men as a pale reflection of this world, which is the only reality” (Stevenson 1974: p. 47). The implication is that once an individual develops a certain level of self-awareness (particularly the awareness of mortality), then the individual is to some extent alienated; that is, most humans are to some extent alienated. In Hegelian tradition, humans create the institution of religion in an effort to deny man’s natural limitations, primarily sexuality and mortality (Torrance 1977). Religion, being an institution or “social substance,” ultimately dominates and controls the creator. Marx ([1844] 1964) echoed this position in his famed depiction of religion being the “opiate of the masses.” An analysis of the entire quote provides greater insight into the alienated individual. Marx wrote, “religion is the moan of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of the heartless world, as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people” ([1844] 1964: p. 12). To Marx, religion is an indication of the existence of alienation in society. Religion is viewed as another attempt to placate the discontent experienced by actors in an unequal political system.

### Alienation and the State

For Hegel’s student Marx, the relationship of humans to the state was of primary importance. According to Mandel and Novack (1973: p. 13), “it was the alienation of man as a citizen in his relationship with the state that became the starting point of Marx’s philosophical, political and social thought.” Hegel’s passive acceptance of alienation as a component of the human condition contrasted significantly with Marx’s support for praxis

(Tatsis and Zito 1974). Marx criticized Hegel's treatment of alienation as expressing "merely the thought of alienation, its abstract and hence vacuous and unreal expression" (Marx [1844] 1964: p. 659).

According to Marx ([1844] 1964), when social structures such as the political state are reified as being separate from humans, then humans become alienated from the state and eventually from each other. Marx sought an end to alienation and did not "believe in the eternity of alienation any more than he believes in eternal damnation" (Mandel and Novack 1973: p. 6). The Marxist vision for overcoming alienation is described as "the positive transcendence of all estrangement, that is to say, the return of man from religion, family, state, etc., to his human, i.e., social mode of existence" (Ollman 1976: p. 135).

Marx identified capitalism as being an alienating force. As Stevenson (1974: p. 55) writes, "for Marx, alienation sums up what is wrong with capitalism; the concept rolls up together both a description of certain features of capitalist society and a value judgment that they are fundamentally wrong." In *The Grundrisse* (completed in 1861; originally published in 1939), Marx analyzed the alienating aspects of private property, the division of labor, and the quantification of the worker in capitalist society. According to Marx, labor is sold as a commodity, given an exchange value, and "what was originally a means to the furtherance of production becomes a relationship alien to the producers" ([1939] 1971: p. 61). Creative, humanistic endeavors yield to alienated labor producing strain and frustration in the individual. Examples that highlight this phenomenon include the exploitation of the juvenile workforce in the 19th century (Stevenson 1974) and the frustrated "intrinsic needs" of the workers in the automobile and textile industries (Blauner 1964).

Although it is important to acknowledge that alienation has characterized "all systems of private property from slavery to capitalism" (Mandel and Novack 1973: p. 7), Fromm (1955) argues that capitalism (and alienation) have increased dramatically during the last two hundred (and now 250) years. In *The Sane Society*, Fromm (1955) suggests that capitalism has become increasingly exploitative, with ensuing alienation and discord occurring between the owner of capital and workers. Fromm further explains how workers are subject to quantification, by becoming faceless numbers in a system, and abstraction, whereby specialization of duty leads to a disassociation from the tangible product the company provides.

Marxist emphasis on praxis moved the concept of alienation from philosophical dialogue into pragmatic, real world situations. The Marxist concept of work alienation (including the basic Marxist tenets of division of labor, means of production, and fetishism of commodities) is often seen in conflicts between company and worker/union.

In 1932, the popularity of the concept of alienation resurged after Marx's *Philosophical and Economic Manuscripts* were translated (Mandel and Novack 1973). The manuscripts reveal that "Marx was concerned with many alienations; work alienation, alienation from others and from nature, and the alienations manifested in law, religion, money and so on" (Feuerlicht 1978: p. 3). It was not long before the concept of alienation was incorporated into multiple and diverse fields of study.

## The New Left on Alienation

The popularity of alienation as a concept increased during the New Left movement of the 1960s. Mills emphasized the potential benefits of addressing alienation, which he called a "major theme of the human condition" (1959: p. 171). Mills found that in addition to the

work of Marx and Fromm, alienation was an integral aspect of Freud's "Id," George Mead's "I," and Karen Horney's "spontaneity." Researchers relied on these theoretical linkages to describe social phenomena in a range of academic fields. Unfortunately, with this increased popularity alienation was often defined in a sweeping and nebulous manner. Definitions of alienation included "loss of self, anxiety states, anomie, despair, depersonalization, rootlessness, apathy, social disorganization, loneliness, atomization, powerless, meaninglessness, isolation, pessimism, and the loss of beliefs or values" (Feuerlicht 1978: p. 10). Alienation had also been associated with "apathy, authoritarianism, conformity, cynicism, hoboism, political apathy, political hyperactivity or personalization in politics, prejudice, privatization, psychosis, regression and suicide" (Dean 1961: p. 753). The criticism to the expansive use of the term was that alienation as a concept should be restricted or simply not used at all.

This criticism was countered by Seeman who argued that "there is no fundamental difference between the imprecision regarding alienation and the imprecision which, of necessity it seems, surrounds other concepts that we regularly employ and find essential, e.g., the concepts of 'social norms' or 'social class,' or even the basic idea of 'social structure'" (1983: p. 172). Indeed, one often finds multiple and contradictory definitions of "mental illness" (see Szasz 1997), yet the field of psychology finds utility in the term. In response to the overly expansive use of the concept of alienation during the 1960s, efforts were initiated to clearly define and explain the concept. For many, alienation described the outcome of a process by which humans create a social structure that in due course dominates them, and the resulting attitudes and behaviors of the self-alienated character.

Feuerlicht argued that an elementary feature of alienation research must include a description of "Alienated from what?" Put differently, "one is not simply alienated but alienated from one's self, from others, from one's work, from society, and so forth" (1978: p. 14). To observe that one is in an "alienated state" is an unfinished prognosis; it is the relationship to social institutions, to other humans and the self that is also necessary. Schacht (1970) dichotomized the source of alienation as the social context and the individual or self. Schacht utilized the following terms: (1) objective alienation (or "O-alienation") that explains the structure-relative position of individuals to other individuals, groups, and social structures, and (2) subjective alienation experienced as self-alienation (or "S-alienation"). Examples of objective alienation include social conditions such as economic exploitation or racial oppression, while self-alienation is a psychological state (Josephson and Josephson 1962). Thus, there is a process and a state of alienation: an overwhelming influence of the societal structure and the resulting separation from self as an individual. If one were economically, politically, and culturally alienated, one would exhibit higher levels of subjective alienation. Economic inequality (an indicator of objective alienation), for example, is evident in the disadvantaged classes of society. Therefore, one would expect self-reported alienation to be high in such populations. This proposition is supported by the results of the "Alienation Index," a survey distributed every year since 1966 by the Harris poll organization. Self-reported alienation is consistently highest in "poor people with household incomes of \$15,000 or less, African Americans, Democrats and Hispanics" (Taylor 2001).

Nevertheless, one should not assume that alienation is absent in upper-class society. Although members of stronger classes may alienate the weak, they are also controlled by their social role in a stratified political system (Cloward 1959; Gouldner 1982). More than 50 years ago, Mills (1951) observed that an increasingly rigid bureaucratic structure had resulted in professionals becoming dependent on output and profitability, alienated from the product of their work. Paradoxically, company management is subservient to

shareholders, and shareholders are separated from the workers and the product (Fromm 1955; Gouldner 1982). When executive decisions are made, the condition of alienation facilitates illegal saving and loans scandals, the manufacture of faulty products, or unsafe working conditions. It is important to note that the available paths of opportunity are not the same for people of differing social classes and for that reason the manifestation of criminal behavior may differ. Although social class status makes certain criminal acts more or less accessible; alienation remains the ubiquitous theme in the criminality.

### The Sociologists on Alienation (Seeman's Typology)

In order to operationalize the concept of alienation, sociologist Melvin Seeman (1959) developed a typology of five common interpretations of alienation:

1. Powerlessness (Marx): expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behavior cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes he seeks.
2. Meaninglessness (Mannheim): low expectancy that satisfactory predictions about future outcomes of behavior can be made.
3. Normlessness (Durkheim-Merton): high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviors are required to achieve given goals.
4. Isolation (Nettler): low reward value assigned to goals or beliefs that typically are highly valued in the given society.
5. Self-estrangement (Fromm): degree of dependence of the given behavior upon anticipated future rewards (cited in Tatis and Zito 1974: p. 225).

Dean adds that the literature tends to divide normlessness into the subtypes of purposelessness and conflict of norms. "Purposelessness" is defined as "the absence of values that might give purpose or direction to life, the loss of intrinsic and socialized values, the insecurity of the hopelessly orientated," while a "conflict of norms" involves decisions between competition and cooperation directives (Dean 1961: p. 754). Middleton states that the dimensions of alienation are conceptually distinct yet represent an underlying theoretical unity. Thus, the dimensions often overlap to some extent (Middleton 1963).

The last 20 years has seen a reduction in research that utilizes the keyword "alienation" in its title or abstract. In 1983, Seeman published *Alienation Motifs in Contemporary Theorizing: The Hidden Continuity of the Classic Themes*. In this work, Seeman argued that alienation, as a concept, is enmeshed within various sociological theories and continues to be utilized in contemporary research under a variety of alternative labels. Perhaps most interesting is this statement: "the root ideas that have been identified as components of the alienation theme...play, if anything, an enlarged role in contemporary theorizing" (Seeman 1983: p. 173). Seeman (1983) also suggests that the concept of alienation has been attached to social events like the 1960s student protest movement and, consequently, the term is now avoided. Could it be that the current avoidance of the term alienation is the result of its connection to Marxist thought, the Cold War era, or the political inclinations of the researcher?

### Criminology on Alienation

Alienation theory suggests that social structural conditions determine attitudes and behaviors (Lystad 1972). Historically, a large number of diverse fields of study have

utilized this framework to explain facets of the human condition. Criminological research also utilizes alienation theory, though it appears reluctant to utilize the term alienation. For example, Wozniak examined 29 criminology textbooks published between 1980 and 2000 and found only five with the topic of alienation in the subject index. Wozniak also notes that the term alienation is seldom found in respected journals such as *Criminology* and *Justice Quarterly* (2000: p. 48).

Rare exceptions to the rule include C. Wright Mills (1956) analysis of the United States social structure. Here, the *Power Elite* governing large corporations, government, and military alienate other social classes. By virtue of their social position, these powerful actors develop a higher immorality or moral insensitivity to others, which in turn facilitates the commission of illegal practices. David Simon's *Elite Deviance* (2006), which is predicated upon Mill's theory, employs alienation as its most derivative concept. Here, Simon redirects our attention from street crime towards the unprecedented growth in white-collar crime. Simon notes that powerlessness is equally chronic in both lumpen proletariat and upper bourgeoisie milieus. As such, the street criminal and the deviant corporate manager are equally alienated, with their criminal acts varying according to opportunity and social distance. This phenomenon means that alienation and crime are curvilinear in their manifestation, with the middle-class less alienated and less criminogenic.

This work corresponds with the book *Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison* (2007) in which Jeffrey Reiman extends a Marxist critique of criminal justice. Reiman levels an "alienation charge" at capitalism, arguing that crime is the product of antagonistic or alienated relations between humans. As Reiman (2007: p. 230) states, "the high crime rates characteristic of capitalism are due to the fact that people in capitalism are taught to see their interests as in conflict with others' and thus they are trained to have limited altruism and fellow feeling...when limited fellow feeling meets economic need and insecurity the result is crime." Taking this perspective, the criminal is the product of socially-produced alienation and as such, their personal culpability is diminished.

This perspective compliments Richard Quinney's work on the exploitative effects of the the capitalist system. In *Class, State and Crime* (1980), Quinney contends that poor, alienated members of society represent a threat to the dominant class and therefore must be controlled though inequitable laws and increased confinement. In fact, the powerful create a social reality in which the alienated are perceived as dangerous and criminal (see Quinney 1970). Principally, this image is created in order to minimize any chance of social revolution.

A final example of criminological research that includes alienation is Elijah Anderson's *Code of the Street* (1999). Anderson argues that alienation is so profound in poor, inner-city, minority communities that a perverse form of "street justice" guides social interactions. Middle-class ideals are inverted so that residents may make sense of the violence and chaos surrounding them. In these communities, masculinity is defined through violence, having numerous offspring and serving jail time. Economic alienation produces alternative markets in drugs, theft and prostitution. In the United States, this acute alienation marks the foundation of an institutionalized oppositional culture. So entrenched is this alienation that inner-city residents have lost a sense of security, instead they have "a profound lack of faith in the police and the judicial system" (Anderson 1999: p. 323). These examples of criminological research exploring alienation indicate enormous potential for future applications in practice and theory. We now present a comparison of alienation and anomie, and argue that alienation represents a novel and productive springboard to stimulate future work in criminology.

## Alienation and Anomie/Strain

The notion of being alienated from the state is central to the theoretical work of both Marx and Durkheim; in fact, there is evidence that the approaches of alienation and anomie are actually analogous (Horton 1964; Schacht 1994). Marx's concept of alienation and Durkheim's treatment of anomie display the following historical development with indistinguishable characteristics.

First, both theorists launched radical attacks on Western society during a period of industrial expansion and domination. These attacks were grounded in "radical, ethical and political directives" that called for action (Horton 1964: p. 285). Second, both theorists expressed strong views on how society should operate; "in the works of Marx and Durkheim, alienation and anomie critically and negatively describe states of social disorder from utopian standards of societal or human health" (Horton 1964: p. 284). The classic theoretical explanations of alienation and anomie described and condemned economic individualism, or extreme self-interest. Third, the issue of self-alienation was the ultimate concern expressed by Marx and Durkheim. Recall that for the Hegelian philosophers (Marx included) the nadir of social discontent, the ultimate form of alienation, was "self-alienation." It should come as no surprise that Durkheim's 1897 classic *Suicide* also focused on an expression of severe self-alienation, "anomic suicide."

Although alienation presents itself as a theoretical quandary to both Marx and Durkheim, their solutions to the problem were vastly different. An assessment of the policy ramifications of alienation and anomie reveal "a history of different ideologies, different types of self-extension, different and socially conditioned approaches to the problem of social discontent" (Horton 1964: p. 285). Durkheim viewed society as the source of logic and morality; therefore, solutions favored freedom *through* constraint, whereas Marx questioned the legitimacy of capitalistic social control and valued freedom *from* constraint. Durkheim emphasized the norms that maintain the status quo; his followers arguing that increased opportunity and restricted aspirations would create social harmony. Marx (and radical criminologists) explored the notion of power and the legitimacy of political and economic institutions. Simply put, Durkheimian solutions focused on the alienation dimension of norms (and normlessness), while Marx was concerned with the dimension of power (and issues of powerlessness). While anomie/strain theory has enjoyed longevity in the criminological domain, it will remain incomplete until it includes the dimension of powerlessness and the policy implications of obtaining power in society.

The concept of alienation offers a much broader and balanced approach to crime reduction because it includes the dimensions of powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, and self-estrangement, *in addition to* anomie or normlessness. We see in contemporary crime policy an overemphasis towards Durkheimian policies of equilibrium, control, and maintenance of the status quo. The politically conservative focus on controlling and punishing the individual has guided criminal justice policy for years with little success. Responses to crime are one-dimensional. Norms are reinforced and social control is increased; yet, criminal behavior remains unexplained, unpredicted, and a continual concern for the American public.

The concept of alienation suggests that crime can be reduced via critical criminology based policies that include: restoration, integration, social support, and community building—policies that have the potential of decreasing the influence of an alienating social structure. Of course, ultimately the alienating social structure must be changed. Fortunately, for those pursuing that goal, the same policies that promise a reduction in crime also hold promise as means of changing the alienating social structure.

## Alienation: An Integrative Future?

The concept of alienation captures the essence of many different criminological theories and, thus, has enormous untapped potential as an integrating concept (see Tittle 1995: pp. 116–117, for a discussion of conceptual integration). It is especially useful because it can explain crime and delinquency at different levels of analysis.

Among the theories that infer that crime or delinquency is a function of alienation are: classical and neoclassical theories (alienation of human beings from the social contract), psychological or psychoanalytic theories (alienation of human beings from society because of psychopathy or criminal personality, inability to satisfy basic human needs legally, oppression), social disorganization theory (alienation from fellow human beings because of social disorganization), anomie theory (already discussed), differential association theory (alienation from fellow human beings because of differential social organization or culture conflict), social control theories (alienation of human beings from society because of an inadequate moral bond or low self control caused by ineffective child rearing), interactionist and labeling theories (alienation from society through the internalization of the criminal label), conflict theory (alienation from dominant interest groups, powerlessness), radical theory (alienation from fellow human beings by virtue of the class struggle and exploitation), feminist theories (alienation of males and females by virtue of patriarchy and gender discrimination), and peacemaking theories (alienation from fellow human beings because of hierarchical structures that inhibit empathy).

Because this paper is devoted to making the case for alienation, there is little space left to do anything other than identifying theories in which alienation plays a substantial role. The next step is the development of a general theory of crime and delinquency based on the concept of alienation—a project that could bring coherence to a discipline currently fragmented by numerous presumably disparate theories.

## Conclusion

This manuscript provides a contrast of anomie/strain and alienation theories. Specifically, it has been demonstrated that anomie is actually a subset of the broader concept of alienation. While anomie/strain theorists continue to stress the relevance of norms in relation to crime, these theorists have largely ignored other important dimensions that alienation theory effectively captures (i.e., powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, and self-estrangement).

As a result, the anomie tradition continues to support “mainstream criminology” policies that reinforce equilibrium, control, and maintenance of the status quo. On the other hand, the alienation tradition has more of a linkage to “critical criminology” policies that promote restoration, integration, social support, and community building. Once again this is due to an over-reliance on Durkheimian notions of normlessness, which is only one of five dimensions of alienation theory. By including all dimensions of the alienation concept, an integrated theory of crime and more effective crime control strategies can be formulated.

In fact, alienation is a very promising organizing concept that can be used to integrate diverse criminological theories. This manuscript identifies crime theories that reveal that crime or delinquency is a function of alienation. This is a novel and productive springboard to stimulate future work in critical criminology.

With this progress in mind, we would be remiss to not mention the obstacles that future alienation research must address. Specifically, there is little understanding of the mediating

pathways that connect alienation to crime. While alienation may increase the risk of criminality, it may also lead to other outputs, such as, artistic creativity, mental illness, and introversion. Additionally, there is an unexplained gender effect in which men and women report approximately equal states of alienation, yet males commit the vast majority of crime. While future attention should be directed at addressing these issues, the theory of alienation offers enormous potential for criminology theory and practice.

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