

General Strain Theory (GST)

Strain increases the likelihood of crime and deviance.

Traditional Model:

- Strain → Anger → Deviant Behavior
- Strains generate negative emotions
 - Anger is the primary mechanism
 - Emotions directly increase offending

Limitation:

GST typically assumes a *direct* link between strain and negative emotion.

A Trauma-Informed Extension

New Proposition:

Strains first reshape how individuals see the world. Rather than immediately producing anger, strains:

- Alter emotional worldviews
- Shift cognitive interpretations
- Change perceptions of safety and social support

Revised Model:

Strain → Altered Worldviews → Negative Emotions → Deviance

Emotional Invalidation

Key Concept: Emotional Invalidation

A belief system in which one's emotional experiences are:

- Dismissed
- Minimized
- Ignored
- Unrecognized by others

When individuals perceive the world as:

- Unsafe
- Invalidating

Negative emotions — especially anger — are more likely to develop.

Contribution

This framework integrates trauma theory into GST and identifies worldview transformation as a critical mechanism linking strain to deviance.

Feelings are Real, but Beliefs Can be Changed: Strains, Emotional Invalidation, and a General Theory of Trauma

Egbert Zavala, Ph.D.

Dept. of Criminal Justice & Security Studies

Table 1. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Coefficients Predicting Anger

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	
Strain					
	Discrimination	1.269 ***	0.275	0.540	0.279
Perceived Invalidation of Emotions (PIES)					
	PIES			1.285 ***	0.174
Demographics					
	Male	0.558	0.334	0.325	0.321
	Black	-0.142	0.335	-0.095	0.325
	Age	-0.106 **	0.034	-0.094 **	0.032
	Citizen	-0.750	0.595	-0.528	0.588
Background Characteristics					
	Income	-0.149	0.077	-0.108	0.074
	Single	-0.138	0.505	-0.167	0.476
	Other Relationship	-0.271	0.557	-0.185	0.521
	Heterosexual	-0.828	0.459	-0.774	0.456
	Low Self-Control	1.410 ***	0.226	1.172 ***	0.220
	Two-Year Degree	0.458	0.543	0.305	0.516
	Four-Year Degree +	0.047	0.485	0.082	0.463
	Full-time Employment	-1.204 **	0.454	-1.211 **	0.438
	Part-Time Employment	-0.430	0.513	-0.320	0.473
	Religiosity	1.065 ***	0.230	0.911 ***	0.224
Social Support	0.523 *	0.215	0.640 **	0.198	
Preparation for Bias	0.780 *	0.302	0.661 *	0.291	
Adjusted R ²	.232		.312		

NOTES: Sample size: 871

ABBREVIATIONS: SE = Standard Errors

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

Table 3. Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Regression Coefficients Predicting Non-Criminal Deviance

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	
Strain									
	Discrimination	1.871 ***	0.281	0.845 **	0.291	1.399 ***	0.271	0.697 *	0.281
Perceived Invalidation of Emotions (PIES)									
	PIES			1.807 ***	0.188			1.454 ***	0.189
Negative Emotions									
	Anger					0.372 ***	0.038	0.275 ***	0.038
Demographics									
	Male	1.156 **	0.424	0.829 *	0.392	0.948 *	0.393	0.739	0.375
	Black	1.072 **	0.397	1.138 **	0.378	1.125 **	0.376	1.164 **	0.365
	Age	-0.104 **	0.036	-0.086 *	0.033	-0.064	0.034	-0.060	0.032
	Citizen	0.264	0.718	0.574	0.690	0.543	0.714	0.719	0.685
Background Characteristics									
	Income	-0.178 *	0.072	-0.120	0.068	-0.122	0.068	-0.090	0.066
	Single	-0.183	0.491	-0.227	0.464	-0.131	0.461	-0.181	0.449
	Other Relationship	-0.018	0.584	0.097	0.526	0.083	0.544	0.148	0.509
	Heterosexual	-0.533	0.488	-0.454	0.462	-0.225	0.453	-0.241	0.435
	Low Self-Control	1.390 ***	0.260	1.057 ***	0.241	0.866 **	0.251	0.735 **	0.236
	Two-Year Degree	1.038	0.603	0.821	0.577	0.866	0.574	0.735	0.561
	Four-Year Degree +	0.950	0.511	0.998 *	0.470	0.931	0.488	0.973 *	0.461
	Full-time Employment	0.302	0.541	0.292	0.491	0.748	0.519	0.624	0.481
	Part-Time Employment	0.349	0.539	0.504	0.492	0.507	0.495	0.591	0.472
	Religiosity	0.609 *	0.250	0.393	0.230	0.213	0.236	0.142	0.222
Social Support	0.303	0.250	0.467 *	0.220	0.109	0.225	0.291	0.210	
Preparation for Bias	-0.043	0.340	-0.210	0.319	-0.334	0.328	-0.392	0.313	
Adjusted R ²	.178		.293		.272		.340		

NOTES: Sample size: 871; variance inflation factors are all lower than 2.13, suggesting that multicollinearity is not an issue.

ABBREVIATIONS: SE = Standard Errors

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

Source: The Cint Exchange

Current Study

Moves beyond a direct strain → emotion model

Centers emotional worldview transformation and integrates trauma theory into General Strain Theory

Data & Methods

Sample

- N = 871
- Adults ages 18–35
- Residing in the United States
- Equal numbers of African American and Latino men and women

Recruitment

- Opt-in online research panel (CINT)
- Survey administered: March 2025
- Compensation: \$3.00 USD

Ethics

- IRB approval obtained prior to data collection

Results

- Discrimination significantly predicts anger.
- However, this relationship becomes non-significant after controlling for emotional invalidation.
- Discrimination is also positively associated with non-criminal deviance, but:
 - The effect size decreases by ~55% when controlling for emotional invalidation.
 - This reduction is more than twice the reduction observed when controlling for anger alone.

Conclusions

Emotional invalidation plays a stronger explanatory role than anger, supporting the need for a trauma-informed theory of criminology that centers trauma-induced emotional worldviews as a pathway to antisocial coping.