

# *Application of the LIT Model to General Strain Theory, Situational Anger, and Social Networks: An Assessment of Condition Influences*

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**Abstract:** Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST) says that strain elicits negative emotions which are released through crime. Strain is any situation that causes distress which elicits a negative emotion. This paper focuses on one component of strain, the inability to escape a harmful situation. A probable solution to this type of crime is the Leadership Implementation Training model which suggests putting children through leadership training to reduce angry and aggressive responses. Examining the effectiveness of the Leadership Implementation Training model on a specific instance of situational anger, this article finds the model proves to be ineffective at reducing situational anger.

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## **Introduction**

Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST) has roots in Merton's Anomie theory, which states people resort to criminal behavior based on failure to achieve success in society (a situation that puts strain on a person). People achieve success through Merton's specific modes of adaptation. Some modes are deemed criminal while others are not. Thus, the people who achieve success by the modes deemed criminal are called criminals.

Agnew (1992) derived his own theory from Merton's by creating a causal mechanism for crime. The causal mechanism is a three-step process where crime is the outcome. Crime results when a person experiences negative emotions through strain; the strain is then released through criminal means. Strain is any stressful situation that brings up a negative emotion such as anger, fear, anxiety, etc. GST is complex in nature because the three categories of strain are broad and can incorporate and draw on numerous stressful situations (Agnew, 1992). Though Agnew (1992) divides strain into three categories, the focus of this paper is on one—the inability to escape noxious stimuli. Research shows that situational anger (Capowich, Mazerolloe, & Piquero, 2001) and victimization (Burt, Patel, Butler, & Gonzalez, 2013) are specific instances where individuals are unable to escape an unpleasant and/or harmful situation. These circumstances elicit

anger that correlates with violent crime (Burt et al., 2013; Capowich et al., 2001).

In the midst of a toxic situation and an angered emotional state, individuals need to release their anger (Agnew, 1992). Sometimes that release is a violent criminal act. According to Agnew's GST (1992), crime and delinquency are a means of releasing the negative emotions felt. Research conducted by Brezina (1996) assessed if committing crimes actually released a person's negative emotions. The results showed they did. In this study, strain was correlated with negative emotions, and when delinquency was factored in, it seemed to reduce the negative emotions experienced from the stressful circumstance (Brezina, 1996).

Following Brezina's (1996) work, it is apparent that committing crime is an effective way to release negative emotions. However, the goal is to get people in these stressful circumstances the help they need, so they can deal with their noxious experience in a healthy way and not fall into criminal habits. Therefore, Burt, Patel, Butler and Gonzalez (2013) proposed a solution to help youth manage their anger through the application of leadership skills through the Leadership Implementation Model (LIT).

The purpose of this paper is to see if the application of leadership skills from the LIT model reduces anger and aggressive responses, which potentially could be criminal. Essentially, this article is facilitating a conversation between Capowich, Mazerolloe, and

Piquero's (2001) findings and the results of Burt et al.'s (2013) Leadership Implementation Training model. The article concludes with input on the effectiveness of the proposed solution to reduce anger and aggressive, potentially criminal, behavior.

### **Outline**

This article applies the LIT model to situational anger. The situational anger in Capowich et al.'s (2001) study is the possibility of losing one's significant other to another person. In the beginning, the LIT model is outlined showing the training and curriculum used. Next, the results from the program are explained, evaluated, and interpreted. The evaluation of the results reveal criticisms in the measure of the leadership skills and measures of anger, which deter from the effectiveness of the model.

Following the LIT model, this article describes Capowich et al.'s (2001) scenario evoking situational anger. The strain comes from the possibility of losing one's significant other to another person. Defining strain is necessary because that is the first component of Agnew's (1992) GST that leads to crime. The second component, anger, is also present in Capowich et al.'s (2001) scenario. The participants in the study felt anger as a result of the thought of losing one's significant other. The subjects released their anger via assault which is a crime, and a crime is the last component of GST (Agnew, 1992).

After describing situational anger, this article applies the effectiveness of the LIT model to the results of the scenario involving situational anger. Next, the article evaluates the effectiveness and discusses several criticisms of the LIT model. Lastly, the conclusion incorporates an overall summary of these findings. Ultimately, the criticisms invalidated the LIT model as a way to reduce anger and aggressive behaviors.

### **Leadership Implementation Training Model**

The Leadership Implementation Training Model's (LIT) purpose is to teach elementary school children leadership skills in to reduce children's anger and aggression levels (Burt et al., 2013). The training consisted of eight one-hour long counseling sessions and two half-hour sessions for pre- and post-tests. The children were administered a self-report test that measured their anger management and leadership skills before and after training. Five leadership skills and five measures of anger were

tested on a four point scale, with the possible choices on the scale being "... (1) *Never*, (2) *Some of the time*, (3) *Most of the time*, or (4) *Always*" (Burt et al., 2013, p. 128, emphasis in original). Two leadership skills tested the likelihood of the individual to use a specific leadership skill to avoid negative behaviors as a result of anger (self-responses), and the other three leadership skills tested the likelihood to discourage others to react on their anger (others' responses). Also, four measures of anger tested the likelihood of negative reactions from that individual as a result of their anger (from the self) and one about the likelihood of encouraging others to engage in behavior as the result of anger (from others) (Burt et al., 2013).

Continuing, the middle eight counseling sessions used Bandura's agentic perspective to teach children the ability to facilitate changes in their surrounding environment for the benefit of themselves and others (Bandura, 2006; Burt et al., 2013). The agentic perspective is comprised of four components that help individuals change their situation for the better. Intentionality is the first component taught. Children learn to actively engage and compromise with others to accomplish individual and group goals (Bandura, 2006; Burt et al., 2013). Next, the children were taught forethought, the ability to plan ahead and set goals that include the entire group (Bandura, 2006; Burt et al., 2013). Forethought helps the children apply their knowledge of potential outcomes to see what goals are attainable with their current group of peers. Third, children were taught self-reactiveness, the ability to control their personal behavior in group dynamics in order to achieve goals (Bandura, 2006; Burt et al., 2013). This third skill is vital. Because with this skill, children will eventually be able to control their behavioral responses when they feel angry. Thus the children will not respond negatively to themselves or others. Lastly, the counseling sessions introduced the component self-reflectiveness, a person's ability to examine behavior and actions as a leader, evaluate if the behaviors and actions are effective or not, and then make the appropriate adjustments for prospective actions and behaviors (Bandura, 2006; Burt et al., 2013). At the end of the training, the last session assessed the children on their anger management and leadership skills.

Results from the final assessment show there is an increase in two specific leadership skills and a decrease in one measure of anger. The two specific

leadership skills are “I walk away when confronted” and “I help someone else stay out of fights.” “I walk away when confronted” represents a child’s ability to remove themselves from a situation that angers them, so they do not respond to confrontation with an aggressive behavior (Burt et al., 2013). An increase in this skill means these children are less likely to respond to confrontation in an aggressive manner because they are choosing to walk away. The second leadership skill is “I help someone else stay out of fights.” An increase in this skill means children will help prevent other children from engaging in aggressive behavior. Next, the measure of anger, “I encourage others to fight,” decreased after the children went through LIT training (Burt et al., 2013). In other words, the leadership training helped children to not encourage their peers to fight even if they were angry. Overall, the results from the pre- and post- test revealed that as total leadership skills increased, total anger decreased (Burt et al., 2013).

### **Situational Anger**

Given the LIT model’s goals and successes, this article now theoretically applies the model to people who face situational anger, specifically men in Capowich et al.’s (2001) vignette. Their scenario involved men facing the intrusion of another man vying for his girlfriend’s affections. The intrusion angered the boyfriend, which resulted in him assaulting the other man. Capowich et al. (2001) found that intentions to fight from the situational anger in this scenario increased as a result of the anger. These findings support GST’s notion that anger felt from strain can lead to criminal behaviors.

Anger, like any emotion, needs a release. In Capowich et al.’s (2001) presented scenario, the boyfriend was so upset that he decided to assault the man trying to take away his girlfriend by bashing a beer bottle on the man’s head. The assault by the boyfriend was his release of anger. However, assault as a release of anger is a crime, which is something we aim to prevent.

Burt et al.’s (2013) proposed LIT model suggests that through the application of leadership skills, anger and aggressive responses would be reduced. However, the LIT model only increases one self-leadership skill, “I walk away when angry.” Also, the LIT model resulted in no significant reductions in children’s personal reactions to anger (Burt et al., 2013). There was only a significant reduction in

the measure of anger, “I encourage others to fight.” Because this measure of anger was reduced, children were less likely to encourage other children to engage in fights. Unfortunately, this skill is not applicable to Agnew’s (1992) GST because his theory deals with the individual’s response to anger, not with a person’s choice to encourage or inhibit another person’s anger. Agnew’s (1992) GST only looks at individual anger, and the instrument used to test anger management and leadership skills only contains two questions asking about personal leadership skill responses and four measures of anger about individual reactions. Therefore, there are not sufficient questions applicable to Agnew’s GST.

Since application of the LIT model leads to significant increases in the self-leadership skill “I walk away when confronted,” this study chose to apply the model to Capowich et al.’s (2001) scenario. In the scenario, walking away when confronted would have been helpful because the boyfriend would not have retaliated and punched the other man. However, the measures for anger and aggression, “I hit back when someone hits me first” and “I push, shove/slap/kick others,” which also applies to Capowich et al.’s (2001) scenario, were not significantly reduced by the LIT model (Burt et al., 2013).

This lack of reduction brings up a contradicting point; although a helpful leadership skill did increase, two other measures of anger did not significantly decrease. This is a contradiction because the whole point of this training program was to increase leadership skills and decrease measure of anger. In other words, the measures of anger, “I hit back when someone hits me first” and “I push, shove/slap/kick others,” would still be present in the individual and not be released after participation in the LIT model. This continued presence of anger in the boyfriend is problematic because a release is still needed. Potentially, he could still commit a crime, just not one at the presented situation. Thus, walking away when confronted does not reduce the boyfriend’s anger or his aggressive responses. It only reduces his aggressive response in that particular situation.

Interestingly, results in Burt et al.’s, (2013) study do not show or measure the effect of a specific leadership skill on a specific measure of anger. In other words, the study did not measure if the specific leadership skill “I walk away when confronted” increased or decreased a

specific measure of anger such as “I make threats to hit or hurt another person.” This is problematic because we are unable to ascertain the effect of one leadership skill on one measure of anger. All the study measured and presented was an overall increase or decrease of specific leadership skills and measures of anger. The study did not explore if a specific leadership skill influenced a specific measure of anger. Because the study of the LIT model did not examine the influence of specific leadership skills and specific measures of anger, the exact effect of the LIT model on anger management is unable to be determined.

From the above criticisms, it appears the LIT model is not an effective means at reducing anger and aggressive responses. Since anger is a mediating variable in Agnew’s (1992) GST between strain and crime and the LIT model is not effective at reducing anger, crime would not be reduced. Therefore, there is not sufficient evidence to show the LIT model can be used as a means to reduce anger in order to reduce crime.

## Conclusion

In theory, the Leadership Implementation Training model is a good idea. However, upon closer examination, it does not prove itself to be effective. The LIT model is not a probable solution for the situation created by the Capowich et al. (2001) scenario.

The first reason is the LIT model did not look at the effect of specific leadership skills on specific measures of anger. There was no way to know if the specific leadership skill “I walk away when confronted” reduced a specific outcome of anger. Although that leadership skill was increased from the training program, the LIT study did not show which specific measure of anger it reduced. Since the point of the LIT model is to reduce anger and aggressive responses through leadership skills, it is imperative to see which leadership skills reduce which measures of anger in order to see which skills work and which ones do not. However, the LIT model study did not compare the specific leadership skills to specific measures of anger. To Burt et al’s (2013) credit, they did mention their leadership and anger management scale had not been tested for its validity, so the researchers were aware problems could arise. Although Burt et al. (2013) mentioned the potential problem with their scale of measure, they said their findings were still proof enough to be used in therapy. From the evidence previously stated, I do not agree

with that statement. Since the direct effect of specific leadership skills on specific measures of anger was not evaluated, the analysis deems the LIT model ineffective at reducing anger and aggressive responses.

Another reason the LIT model is not a probable solution is that the model’s increased specific leadership skill “I walk away when confronted” does not release the anger from the individual but instead helps the individual avoid the criminal behavior in that situation. This is problematic because the anger still needs to be released and could still be released through criminal behaviors. If the boyfriend would have walked away, he still would have felt angry and would have needed to release his anger. He could have come into contact with someone else who angered him, and the boyfriend could have assaulted someone else.

In the end, the LIT model does not address the impact of specific leadership skills on specific measures of anger. Nor does it address what happens to the anger that has not been released and how that anger could still be released through criminal behavior. Due to these problems, the LIT model is not an effective means to reduce anger and aggressive and/or criminal behaviors.

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