

# CASE STUDY

## THE BLACK BINDER BANDIT

A recent news story reported on a jobless man who was arrested for committing a dozen bank robberies across the Phoenix valley. The man, Cristian Alfredo Urquijo, 39, told authorities that he did it to survive and that “desperation was a great motivator.” He was accused of robbing at least a dozen banks between 2010 and 2011. The criminal complaint noted that he had been laid off from work, was unable to find employment, and robbed the Phoenix-area banks to survive. He went on to say, “It’s pretty simple. It’s black and white. I don’t have a job, I had to work, and I rob to survive.” During his crime spree, authorities called him “The Black Binder Bandit” because he typically hid a revolver in a black binder and also would usually place the stolen money in this binder.

Urquijo pleaded guilty to nine counts of bank robbery, three counts of armed bank robbery, and one count of use of a firearm in a crime of violence, which carries an enhanced sentence. He had originally been charged with 16 counts of bank robbery, but as often happens in plea negotiations, the counts were reduced. He did admit that he had robbed at least 12 banks and also that he had obtained more than \$49,000 from these bank robberies.

It is obvious that this man committed these crimes because he wanted to provide for himself in an economic recession.

This is just one of many examples of individuals who are strongly motivated to commit crimes—even the major federal crime of bank robbery—to deal with the economic strain or frustration of not being able to “get ahead” or achieve the American Dream of success. This chapter discusses the evolution of theories that address this concept of trying to provide for oneself or succeed while dealing with societal and economic dynamics in American society. Specifically, this chapter reviews the development of anomie/strain theory, starting with its origins among early social structure theorists, such as Durkheim, and moving to its further development by Merton. The chapter also examines the development of various strain models of offending as well as the most modern versions of strain theory (e.g., general strain theory). We will also examine the empirical research findings on this perspective, which reveal that this framework remains one of the dominant theoretical explanations of criminal behavior in modern times. We will finish this chapter by examining the policy implications suggested by this perspective for explaining criminal behavior, and we will further

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discuss the case of “The Black Binder Bandit” toward the end of this chapter.

It should be noted that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) typically assigns nicknames (such as “The Black Binder Bandit”) to serial bank robbers. The FBI does so for a very important reason: The public is more likely to take note of serial bank robbers when there is a catchy moniker or nickname attached to them. Apparently, this strategy is useful, because bank robbery actually has a much higher clearance rate than other types of robbery. Other notable nicknames of serial bank robbers

in the past few years are the “Mesh-Mask Bandit” (still at large in Texas; wears a mesh mask), the “Geezer Bandit” (still at large in Southern California; authorities believe that the offender may be a young person disguising himself as an elderly person), and the “Michael Jackson Bandit” (still at large in Southern California; wears one glove during robberies). Although all these bank robbery suspects are still “at large,” many others have been caught as a result of making their nicknames notable to the public.



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As surveillance photos show, Urquijo typically carried into the bank a black binder, in which he hid a revolver and the money he acquired from the bank robbery.

### THINK ABOUT IT:

1. Can you articulate why the “Black Binder Bandit” seems to be a good example of Merton’s strain theory?
2. Based on what he said to the police and his behavior, what adaptation of strain would you say best fits him?
3. Outside the nicknames already listed in this discussion, do you know of any other robbers the authorities have nicknamed and the reason(s) the robbers were given that moniker?