Caution in Interpreting Crime Data

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General Characteristics of Crime and Criminals

This is our basic conclusion: Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal. . . . White racism is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II.


Caution in Interpreting Crime Data

In Chapter 1, we discussed at length the necessity of carefully examining the database or other sources of criminological research findings and conclusions. This advice is especially applicable to the material presented in this chapter. Descriptions of characteristics of crime and criminals can vary immensely, depending on the sources of information—for example, official statistics, victim surveys, self-reports—as well as on the type of crime or criminality that is being addressed, whether traditional crime or crime by the elite. The particular method chosen for analysis provides data that flavor the types of theories developed; likewise, the theoretical framework for analysis may subjectively influence the methods of analysis. While the process of inquiry is seldom entirely value-free, triangulation assists in providing multiple assessments of the subject matter. As previously indicated, statistics regarding crime and delinquency are not easily measured. Realizing the limitations of these statistics, I will attempt to avoid misleading and incorrect inferences.
International Variations in Crime

International or cross-cultural comparisons of crime statistics are hazardous given the different definitions of criminal activity, the quality of data, ideological considerations, and the sheer logistical problems of compilation (see Dammer & Fairchild, 2006; Nordstrom, 2007; Rounds, 2000; Terrill, 2007; Van Dijk, 2008). Analysis of cross-cultural crime rates can produce some interesting conclusions. For instance, the inexorable rise in crime in the United States and other industrialized countries in the sixties was contradicted by a declining crime rate in Japan, which discredited the assumption that modernization inevitably produces increased criminality. Freda Adler’s *Nations Not Obsessed by Crime* (1983) and Marshall B. Clinard’s *Cities With Little Crime* (1978) also indicate that crime is not a major concern in such countries as Switzerland. In a contrary view, others indicate that the Swiss police omit crime statistics and the media ignore criminality, not to mention that Switzerland is a haven for white-collar crime (Balrig, 1988; Gerber, 1991). The low crime rate in Japan is achieved by a strong Gemeinschaft (communal) orientation and group conformity, a high level of unchallenged police power, and a tendency to ignore violations of human and individual rights that would be found unacceptable in the Western democracies (J. Williams, 1991). Utilizing data from the International Police Organization (Interpol) and the World Health Organization (WHO), Brantingham and Brantingham (1984) point out,

> At the world level of resolution, clearly different patterns emerge for crimes of violence against the person and for crimes against property. The highest overall crime rates were experienced by the nations of the Caribbean region during the mid-1970s, followed by the nations of Western Europe, North America, and Oceania. The highest levels of violent crimes against the person were experienced in the Caribbean, in North Africa and the Middle East, in sub-Saharan Africa, and in Latin America. Property crimes were highest in Western Europe, North America, and Oceania. Crime patterns appear to be closely associated with high economic development and with income inequality; and high levels of violent crimes against the person are associated with lack of economic development and with high income inequality. Modernization and urbanization are both associated with higher levels of property crime and lower levels of violent crime. (p. 295)

Similar patterns with respect to the impact of income inequality and the lack of economic development and high crime rates have been noted by others (e.g., Clinard & Abbott, 1973; Krahm, Hartnagel, & Gartrell, 1986). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we find that the breakdown of political order, lack of police training, and growing urbanization—particularly in developing countries—produce higher global crime. The Overseas Security Advisory Council of the U.S. State Department issues timely travel advisories to tourists warning of special dangers. Nonviolent theft and pickpocketing are the most common crimes that business travelers endure. In 1999, attacks in unregulated taxicabs in Mexico City were of concern, while pickpockets and thieves were more prevalent in Eastern Europe. Particularly dangerous were capital cities of West and East Africa, where the breakdown of tribal authority and poor police training cultivated high crime. The former Soviet Union in general had experienced high levels of violence, organized crime, and corruption (Nicolova, 1999). In Thailand, a favorite tourist destination, economic collapse and an increase in drug-related crime had increased violence against foreigners, and weak law enforcement had attracted foreign criminal gangs (Cheesman, 1999).

Particularly interesting is concern among Americans about being potential victims in some foreign lands, when in fact the murder and rape rates in general are higher in the United States than in other developed countries. By the year 2000, however, 7 years of declining official crime rates in the United States indicated that for assault, burglary, robbery, and motor vehicle thefts, the U.S. rates were actually lower than rising rates in some other developed countries such as England and Wales (Langan & Farrington, 1998).

Cross-national crime statistics have steadily improved over the years with Interpol, the United Nations, and WHO publishing such data. In addition, the United Nations has sponsored the International Crime Victimization Survey, as well as the United Nations Surveys on Crime Trends and Operations and International ADAM (Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring), a self-report survey of arrests modeled after the U.S. ADAM (see Chapter 2).

Van Dijk and Kangaspunta (2000) indicate the following difficulties in analyzing crime data across countries:
Chapter 3. General Characteristics of Crime and Criminals

- Varying definitions—legal codes define crimes in different ways.
- Recording practices—different police departments record things differently (e.g., bicycle thefts are vehicle thefts in some countries).
- Operating practices—in some countries, only crimes reaching court are recorded.
- Factual inequalities—hidden factors may affect crime rates, such as age, urbanism, and the like.
- Problems especially associated with recorded crime—governments may regard such statistics as indicators of criminal justice system workloads rather than accurate indicators of crime prevalence.


> Statistics of police-recorded crimes reflect the performance of the police rather than the levels of crime. Where police are corrupt or incompetent, fewer victims report crimes and recorded crime rates will consequently be low. Where police forces are more effective, levels of reporting are higher and rates of recorded crime go up. (p. xii)

The International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS) was first carried out in 1988 and has been repeated once or more in 78 countries. For some countries, comparable victim surveys are available from five ICVS reports, the latest being 2005.

In addition to traditional criminal activity, the multinational nature of organized, white-collar, and more sophisticated crimes is a growing phenomenon. In November 1995, a 138-nation United Nations–sponsored conference on international crime was held in Naples, Italy. The end of the Cold War has opened borders and provided an opportunity for collaboration among organized crime groups. Transnational crime poisons business climates, corrupts political leaders, undermines banking and finance, and represents a global challenge of immense proportions.

As an illustration of ideological impacts on crime statistics, one need only look at Russia in the late eighties and the influence of Gorbachev’s glasnost (openness). In the first publication of crime statistics in more than half a century, the Soviet Interior Ministry reported a sharp rise in crime of 18 percent for 1988 over 1987 (“Soviet Crime Rate Up,” 1989) and 32 percent in 1989 (Bogert, 1990). In 1991, the number of robberies, muggings, burglaries, and thefts had jumped by 90 percent over 1990 (M. Shapiro, 1992). Instrumental in this increase was the collapse of an authoritarian regime (whose police were omnipresent) combined with declining economic conditions and general political confusion.

Organized crime groups often filled the power void. Having previously controlled the black market, such groups were well trained for the new, legal capitalism. Such increased levels of crime have also been experienced throughout former Soviet satellite countries and throughout the world—in the Baltic states, the People’s Republic of China, South Africa, and even Vietnam (Larimer, 1996, p. A7).

There have been a number of International Crime Victimization Surveys sponsored by the United Nations, with studies begun in 1989, 1992, 1996, and 2000. The 2000 study involved 92 surveys in 56 countries and was expanding to over more than surveys, involving cities as well as countries. The last survey found that the United States, Canada, and the Czech Republic rank among the highest for burglary, motor vehicle theft, and petty crime. Other countries with higher levels of these crimes were Bulgaria, Estonia, and Slovakia. Low property crime victimization rates were found in Belarus, Norway, Switzerland, and Macedonia. High violence rates were found in countries of the former Soviet Union such as Estonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia. The
United States has high violence scores compared to levels in Canada and Western European nations. Particularly low violence levels were found in Western European nations such as France, Germany, Holland, Hungary, and Macedonia (Van Dijk & Kangaspunta, 2000, p. 39). For more information on international crime and crime surveys, see G. Newman (1999).

The reader is reminded that, due to unreliability of such statistics, international comparisons are risky; however, R. R. Bennett and Lynch (1990) found similar results when they compared four widely used data sets.

### The Prevalence of Crime

Estimates of the extent of crime commission depend upon how far or wide one wishes to cast the net. As one moves from official statistics (UCR) to victim surveys (NCVS) to self-report surveys, the rates increase. Inclusion of other forms of nontraditional criminality, such as corporate crime or tax avoidance, would make crime seem even more pervasive.

#### TABLE 3.1 Crime in the United States, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offense</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Rate per 100,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violent Crime</td>
<td>1,246,248</td>
<td>403.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Crime</td>
<td>9,082,887</td>
<td>2,941.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>14,748</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forcible Rape</td>
<td>84,767</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>367,832</td>
<td>119.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggravated Assault</td>
<td>778,901</td>
<td>252.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>2,159,878</td>
<td>699.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larceny-Theft</td>
<td>6,185,867</td>
<td>2,003.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle Theft</td>
<td>737,142</td>
<td>238.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arson*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sufficient data are not available to estimate the offense.


Table 3.1 presents the 2010 UCR index of serious crime in the United States, sometimes referred to as Part I Offenses.

In June 2004, the Criminal Justice Information System Committee (CJIS) of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) Advisory Policy Board (APB), functioning in an advisory capacity concerning the UCR, decided to discontinue the use of the crime index in the UCR program. They directed the FBI to instead publish a violent crime total and a property crime total until a new index could be developed. They felt that the index was inflated by including larceny-theft, which was the category that had the highest crime rate.

Table 3.2 reports the crimes that most frequently result in arrest. These data refer to persons arrested and not simply, as in the case of the index offenses, crimes known to police. Examination of these primarily Part II offenses indicates the extent to which policing is occupied with offenses related to drunk driving, drunkenness, and disorderly conduct.
Chapter 3. General Characteristics of Crime and Criminals

Trends in Crime

As discussed in the previous chapter, official crime statistics represented by the UCR have risen dramatically since the first study in the early 1930s.

Although, as we learned in Chapter 1, caution should be exercised in interpreting these statistics. Despite this rise in official rates, victim surveys since the seventies reported relatively stable or falling rates, perhaps reinforcing the point that better recording and reporting may have in part accounted for some of the rise in official statistics.

The public alarm concerning the rapid rise in UCR crime statistics beginning in the mid-sixties was abetted by the fact that the decades of the 1940s and 1950s with their postwar prosperity demonstrated relative stability in many categories of crime. The new “crime wave” appeared particularly out of place. Historians of crime and violence in the United States remind us of our myopia in this regard and that waves of crime and violence, however difficult to measure, were characteristic of this land since colonial times, particularly in the post–Civil War era. (This subject will be given greater scope in Chapter 8.)

In 1968, the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice (1967) addressed the issue of the American crime problem from a global perspective:

There has always been too much crime. Virtually every generation since the founding of the Nation and before has felt itself threatened by the specter of rising crime and violence. A hundred years ago contemporary accounts of San Francisco told of extensive areas where “no decent man was in safety to walk the street after dark, while at all hours, both night and day, his property was jeopardized by incendiariism and burglary.” Teenage gangs gave rise to the word “hoodlum,” while in one central New York City area, near Broadway, the police entered “only in pairs, and never unarmed.” A noted chronicler of the period declared that “municipal law is a failure . . . [and] we must soon fall back on the law of self-preservation.” And in 1910 one author declared that “crime, especially its more violent forms, and among the young is increasing steadily and is threatening to bankrupt the Nation.” (p. 101)

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**TABLE 3.2**  Estimated Number of Arrests, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Crime</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Drug Abuse Violations</td>
<td>1,638,846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>DUI</td>
<td>1,412,223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Other Assaults</td>
<td>1,292,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>*Larceny-Theft</td>
<td>1,271,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Disorderly Conduct</td>
<td>615,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Drunkenness</td>
<td>560,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Liquor Laws</td>
<td>512,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>*Aggravated Assault</td>
<td>408,488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>*Burglary</td>
<td>289,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Vandalism</td>
<td>252,753</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*denotes an index crime

Crime File 3.1

American Crime Problems From a Global Perspective

Transnational crime (i.e., crime that violates the laws of several international sovereignties or impacts another sovereignty) has grown incrementally over the past two decades, at a rate roughly corresponding to both the increase in international trade import-export figures and the developments in transportation and communications. Several events demonstrate the stark reality of transnational crimes, but none more than the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

U.S. law enforcement authorities responded vigorously, but with limited overall success. Our system has been developed to deal with criminality at the city/county level and, in some cases, at the national level. With respect to global crime, however, we lack readiness—in terms of education, research sponsorship, interagency cooperation (between the Departments of Justice and State), and a full commitment to a centralized and coordinated international effort.

Crime is not a strictly local or even national problem; although its impact is felt at the local level, much crime is internationally conditioned and coordinated. For instance, the connection between street crime and the importation and dissemination of drugs is well established. Similarly, an increase in fraud is commensurate with growth in the operational reach of commercial transactions. Profits from the international drug trade, "laundered" overseas and reinvested in American real estate, commercial, or entertainment enterprises, significantly affect U.S. citizens, who must pick up the burden for uncollected taxes on these transactions.

In addition, the impact of ethnic gang criminality on our “local” crime scene is readily apparent—for example, the wholesale trade in cocaine, controlled by illegal immigrants from Colombia; the importation of Chinese slave labor into the United States and exploitation of Chinese American businesses by Chinese gangs (triad-based); trade in arms and drugs by Jamaican gangs; burglaries by Albanian gangs; and involvement in the fuel distribution market and the international trade of weapons and nuclear materials by Russian gangs. These new ethnic gangs maintain intra-ethnic contacts, as well as relations with their countries of origin, and local law enforcement professionals are powerless to stop or control them.


Web Research Project
Examine the issue of international crime. What is an additional, emergent crime problem not mentioned in Crime File 3.1? What strategies are needed for coping with this?

However violent crime may be in large cities today, both urban and rural areas of Sweden, Holland, and England were more violent during the Middle Ages (E. A. Johnson & Monkkonen, 1996). In Hooligans, Pearson (1982) remarks on the historical myth of a crime-free past in England and attributes it to the abundance as well as sophistication of modern statistics, nostalgia for the past, and cultural amnesia. The relationship of crime to the early history of many countries can be illustrated by Australia, a country that was settled as a penal colony for England. Gangs of “bushrangers” (horse rustlers) achieved notoriety, particularly the group led by Ned Kelly, whose reputation reached mythic proportions. This Robin Hood–like figure received support in opposing authority from small farmers who were nicknamed “cockatoos” or “cockys” because, like the bird, they scratched out a living from the ground. The cocky spirit was one of independence and defiance of authority as exemplified by Ned Kelly himself, who was obstinate to the end and was hanged at age 25. This spirit is expressed in Australia’s most beloved song, “Waltzing Matilda,” about a vagabond who steals a sheep and commits suicide rather than be caught (Levathes, 1985, p. 261):

Up jumped the swagman
And sprang into the billabong
“You’ll never catch me alive,” said he.
And his ghost may be heard
As you pass by that billabong
“You’ll come a-waltzing Matilda with me.”
In considering crimes, it is important to realize that, if we were to consider the full range of economic crimes such as the impact of corporate price fixing, then in fact every household has been touched by crime. Casting a wider net, were we to consider self-report data, particularly of minor offenses, we would conclude that criminality is pervasive. Despite problems in instruments used and in samples drawn, self-report studies provide much-needed evidence of the extensiveness of hidden criminality and law violation. One may control misunderstanding or overgeneralizations in referring to “criminals” by using operational definitions such as “those arrested” or “those identified by victims” or “those admitting to certain offenses.”

Crime File 3.2 discusses “Meeting the Challenge of Transnational Crime,” a topic that will be covered further in Chapter 13.

### Age and Crime

Most of those arrested are young. Crime File 3.3 presents data on ages of those arrested for particular crimes. The peak arrest age for property crime is 16, while age 18 is the peak age for violent crime. Overall, crime commission declines with age.

Particularly glaring is the involvement of younger groups in serious property crimes. It is important to note that, while most persons arrested and convicted as adult criminals were first arrested as juveniles, most juvenile delinquents do not become adult criminals. Youthful offenders in urban areas are probably overrepresented in arrest statistics. Such areas have more efficient, formalized policing, while youth generally have less power than their elders to shield themselves from arrest. Juveniles also commit the types of crimes on which municipal police departments tend to concentrate. Excluding common youth offenses, such as curfew and runaway violations, and assuming juvenile offenders are often handled and

### TABLE 3.3  
**Criminal Victimization in the United States, 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number in Millions</th>
<th>Rate per 1,000*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Crimes</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Crime</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Assault</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggravated Assault</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape/Sexual Assault</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Crime</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>120.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Thefts</td>
<td>11.12</td>
<td>91.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Burglary</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Vehicle Theft</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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**Photo 3.2**  
Ned Kelly, an Australian outlaw, was the subject of that nation’s beloved ballad “Waltzing Matilda.” Here he wears his armored suit beaten out of plowshares (circa 1870).
Meeting the Challenge of Transnational Crime

Just as many aspects of our lives have become part of a global village—transportation, communications, economic affairs—so, too, has crime taken on a global dimension. The same political and economic changes and technological advances that support easy international travel, communication, and business transactions also facilitate a criminal’s ability to commit crimes that transcend borders. And because the United States is the world’s richest country, it represents the most opportune target for transnational crime, which is defined by the United Nations as “offenses whose inception, prevention, and/or direct or indirect effects involve more than one country.”

For most of its history, NIJ [National Institute of Justice] could serve its primary constituents—State and local policymakers and practitioners—quite well by focusing on research and development within the borders of the United States. But criminal justice officials today are increasingly being asked to deal with offenses and offenders whose origins and connections lie outside the country. Drugs and drug offenders are the most obvious of these, but by no means the only ones. Transnational crimes include trafficked prostitutes from Southeast Asia or the former Soviet Union; migrant workers being exploited in sweatshops or farm fields; an array of credit card and banking frauds; automobiles stolen for shipment overseas; guns smuggled in an effort to evade regulation; and children trafficked through Canada and Mexico for use by child pornography rings. And the list could go on.

The escalating threat associated with the new forms of crime was highlighted by a crime bill called the International Crime Control Act (ICCA) of 1998, which was introduced exactly 30 years after the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 created NIJ. This bill did not become law, but its goals are suggestive of problem areas needing attention on the international stage: denying safe haven to international fugitives, streamlining the investigation and prosecution of international crime in U.S. courts, promoting global cooperation among law enforcement, and responding to emerging international crime problems.

Factors That Make Transnational Crime Possible

In a recent report of a workshop commissioned by NIJ, the National Research Council said that transnational crime was being affected by three related factors:

- Globalization of the economy.
- Increased numbers and heterogeneity of immigrants.
- Improved communications technology.

These factors do not “cause” transnational crime. Rather, they facilitate crime, or in some cases, they are criminal opportunities in themselves. For example, immigration does not cause crime. The desire to immigrate, however, may cause people to violate immigration quotas and regulations and may lead to illegal immigration, which in turn is exploited by criminals. Most of the causes of transnational crime are not new; they are, in fact, quite similar to factors that drive crime in general: disparate socioeconomic conditions, which stimulate migration and its antecedent trafficking in persons; the desire for illegal goods and services, which moves crime into the transnational realm when the suppliers are in one country and the consumers are in another; and the universal greed for money and power.

The Unique Challenges of Transnational Crime

The challenges in preventing and controlling transnational crime stem from several sources. For example, some crimes arise out of particular cultural or societal conditions and experiences that differ from one country to another. Behavior that is acceptable in one country may be illegal in another. Crimes that arise out of electronic communications, such as money laundering, are not bound by national borders. The whole panoply of so-called cybercrimes are almost by definition transnational crimes, since cyberspace is not constrained within these borders. The traditional desire to hide crime and elude law enforcement is met more fully by the increasing ease of global travel and communication. The challenges in dealing with transnational crime arise from the national orientations of laws and law enforcement. Every country has its own laws and law enforcement system to deal with crime. But what about crime and criminals that cross national borders? Former Deputy Assistant Attorney General Mark M. Richard has noted that “the international community is not well positioned to respond to such issues as foreign nationals committing a crime in the United States and escaping to their home country. [Because] extradition and other procedures are archaic, based upon 19th century standards, and of limited use today.”

Ignoring the transnationalization of crime would be akin to adopting a “head in the sand” strategy. American police, prosecutors, judges, and corrections officials, as well as regulatory agencies—the customers for cutting edge research knowledge to help them understand and combat crime—would be shortchanged by such an outdated strategy. Both criminal justice practitioners and researchers would be forced to do their jobs with only partial and very limited information. It was the recognition of this changing reality and of the ensuing need that led NIJ to create a new International Center in 1997.
recorded differently depending on police jurisdictions, the median age for arrested robbers, burglars, thieves, auto thieves, arsonists, and vandals is under 20 in all categories. Estimates of the average age of embezzlers, price-fixers, bribers, and the like considerably alter this age profile, however, since these crimes are committed by older criminals. The “graying of America,” with a large proportion of the population becoming elderly, has led to forecasts of an increase in the number of older criminals (Wilbanks & Kim, 1984).

Criminologists had incorrectly predicted a possible demographic time bomb as the number of people in the maximum crime-committing ages of 15–24 expanded at the end of the last century. From 1996 to 2000, there were 500,000 more males in this age group than there were a decade earlier—about a 20 percent increase. The homicide rate among 15- to 19-year-olds increased 154 percent between 1985 and 1991. This increase began with the advent of crack cocaine in the mid-1980s, along with a proliferation of guns to protect crack markets (Blumstein, 1995). The rate decreased beginning in 1992, in part due to the ending of this “crack epidemic.”
What Is the Relationship Between Age and Crime?

Participation in crime declines with age.

Arrest data show that the intensity of criminal behavior slackens after the teens, and it continues to decline with age. Arrests, however, are only a general indicator of criminal activity. The greater likelihood of arrests for young people may result partly from their lack of experience in offending and also from their involvement in the types of crimes for which apprehension is more likely (for example, purse snatching vs. fraud). Moreover, because youths often commit crime in groups, the resolution of a single crime may lead to several arrests.

The decline in crime participation with age may also result from the incapacitation of many offenders. When repeat offenders are apprehended, they serve increasingly longer sentences, thus incapacitating them for long periods as they grow older. The success of habitual offenders in avoiding apprehension declines as their criminal careers progress. Even though offense rates declined over time, the probabilities of arrest, conviction, and incarceration per offense all tended to increase. Recidivism data also show that the rates of return to prison tend to be lower for older than for younger prisoners. Older prisoners who do return do so after a longer period of freedom than younger prisoners.

Different age groups are arrested and incarcerated for different types of crime.

- Juveniles under age 18 have a higher likelihood of being arrested for robbery and UCR index property crimes than do members of any other age group.
- Persons between ages 18 and 34 are the most likely to be arrested for violent crimes.
- Among jail and prison inmates, property crimes, particularly burglary and public order crimes, are more common among younger inmates.
- Violent crimes were more prevalent among older inmates admitted to prison in 1982 but showed little variation among jail inmates of different ages.
- Drug crimes were more prevalent among inmates ages 25 to 44 in both prisons and jails.

Percentage of Arrestees Under 18 Years of Age, by Type of Crime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Serious Offense Charged</th>
<th>Juvenile Arrests as a Percentage of Total Arrests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Crime Index</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder and non-negligent manslaughter</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forcible rape</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggravated assault</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Crime Index</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larceny-theft</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor vehicle theft</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arson</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other assaults</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgery and counterfeiting</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embezzlement</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolen property (buying, receiving, possessing)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalism</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons (carrying, possessing, etc.)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 3. General Characteristics of Crime and Criminals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Serious Offense Charged</th>
<th>Juvenile Arrests as a Percentage of Total Arrests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prostitution and commercialized vice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex offenses (except forcible rape and prostitution)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug abuse violations</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambling</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenses against family and children</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving under the influence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquor laws</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drunkenness</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorderly conduct</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vagrancy</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other offenses (except traffic)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Web Research Project
Visit the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention website (http://www.ojjdp.gov/) and note any trends or changes in crime by age.

Age-Crime Debate
An intramural academic war of sorts has broken out in criminology. It could be described as the age-crime debate. On one side of the debate are Gottfredson and Hirschi (1986, 1987), who view as a constant the “matur- ing out of” crime or desistance from crime as individuals age. They indicate the following:

Further, this distribution is characteristic of the age-crime relation regardless of sex, race, country, time or offense. Indeed, the persistence of this relation across time and culture is phenomenal. As long as records have been kept, in all societies in which such records are available, it appears that crime is an activity highly concentrated among the young. (1986, p. 219)

They question the emphasis on career criminal research, incapacitation, and the recent “fetish” for longitudinal research that justifies a search for groups of offenders (career criminals) whose criminality does not decline with age (Blumstein, Cohen, & Farrington, 1988a, 1988b; L. E. Cohen & Land, 1987; Farrington, 1986). Blumstein and Cohen (1987), in a longitudinal study of those arrested for more serious crimes in the District of Columbia and Detroit in 1973, found that those who remained active in their twenties did not age out in their thirties, but only after age 45. Farrington suggests that offenses of different types peak at different times and that this represents “crime switching rather than replacement of one group of offenders by another” (p. 189). Steffensmeier (1989a) finds variation by age-specific type over time with the offenders becoming younger and younger, and also finds that some crimes such as embezzlement or fraud are less likely to decline with age.

The outcome of this age-crime controversy is claimed by the disputants to have important consequences for career criminal research (Tittle, 1988). Why do most criminals “mature out of” crime? Farrington (1986) suggests factors such as the influence of wives or girlfriends, the decline of gang or peer group support, and increased penalties, as well as increased legitimate opportunities as individuals reach their twenties. The decline in crime involvement is not explained by the physiology of aging since substantial decline in fitness does not occur until the late fifties or older. Social changes are more important than physiological changes in explaining this decrease. Steffensmeier and Allan (1990) identify a number of social changes that encourage conformity, including more legitimate access to material goods and excitement, changes in age-graded norms and anticipatory socialization, changes in lifestyle and peer groups, stronger social bonds, higher legal
INTRODUCTION TO CRIMINOLOGY

and social costs, and fewer illegitimate opportunities. Discussion of developmental theories in Chapter 7 will address this issue in depth.

Perhaps one of the best-kept secrets in criminology is the existence of the “bible of juvenile justice research”—Juvenile Offenders and Victims, an annual report by Howard Snyder and Melissa Sickmund (2005), produced by the National Center for Juvenile Justice in Pittsburgh. This document, with tables and figures, reports the latest trends in juvenile justice.

**Gender Differences in Criminality**

Table 3.4 presents some statistics on “women offenders” in the United States (Greenfield & Snell, 1999).

Of all demographic variables, gender is the best predictor of criminality; most persons arrested are males. In the United States at the turn of the century, males represented about 83 percent of those arrested and, with the exception of primarily female offenses such as prostitution (in which “Johns,” or customers, are seldom arrested), this difference holds for all criminal offenses. The male crime rate exceeds that of females universally, in all nations, in all communities, among all age groups, and in all periods of history for which statistics are available. Whereas in some more traditional countries the crime–gender arrest ratio may range from 200-to-1 to 1,000-to-1, in modernized societies the gap in gender variation in crime has been closing. Why such variation? Gender per se is not as important a variable as a particular culture’s conception of gender. The female crime rate appears to be closer to the male level in countries in which females enjoy more equality and freedom and thus an increased opportunity to commit crime.

### TABLE 3.4 Characteristics of Female Offenders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Violent Offenders</th>
<th>All Arrestees</th>
<th>Convicted Felony Defendants</th>
<th>Correctional Populations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Offenders</td>
<td>2,135,000</td>
<td>3,171,000</td>
<td>160,500</td>
<td>951,900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Based on the self-reports of victims of violence, women account for about 14 percent of violent offenders—an annual average of about 2.1 million violent offenders.
- Male offending equals about 1 violent offender for every 9 males age 10 or older, a per capita rate 6 times that of women.
- Three out of four violent female offenders committed simple assault.
- An estimated 28 percent of violent female offenders are juveniles.
- Three out of 4 victims had a prior relationship with the female offender.
- An estimated 4 in 10 females committing violence were perceived by the victim as being under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of the crime.


This universality of disproportionate male criminality can best be explained by the differential treatment of males and females. Traditionally, males are socialized to be dominant, active, and aggressive. In fact, chivalry and the law often require that the male take responsibility for what occurs. In many traditional societies, it is the husband who is punished for his wife’s transgressions. Similarly, customary gender role socialization of females emphasizes passivity and subordination.

In explaining some of the social, psychological, and physical reasons for these differences, Steffensmeier (quoted in Blaum, 1991) notes that “there is no female equivalent to the ‘romanticized’ rogue male” (p. 1). For some males, crime is considered macho and enhances status, while female crime is usually stigmatizing. Despite social change, social expectations of women still center on nurturing, beauty, virtue, and stereotypes of femininity that are incompatible with qualities valued in the criminal underworld. Steffensmeier (quoted in Blaum) also sees female criminals as more likely to be drug-dependent or to come from deprived family backgrounds. They are more likely to engage in crime because of intimate or romantic relationships and are
often introduced to crime by a significant other. Male physical strength and agility also favor males’ greater participation in certain crimes such as robbery and burglary. The threat of potential sexual victimization also limits females’ mobility and access to criminal haunts.

Females tend to concentrate on less rewarding types of crime, such as shoplifting and employee theft, rather than on more lucrative, organized activities, such as burglary rings, drug cartels, and fencing networks. Even prostitution is usually controlled by males. Racketeering and corporate fraud are almost overwhelmingly male-dominated (Blaum, 1991). Girls exposed to a variety of familial risk factors are found to be far less likely to deviate than boys raised in similar circumstances (Dornfeld & Kruttschnitt, 1991).

The traditional handmaiden of sexism has been paternalism, a sort of sexual noblesse oblige in which males felt that they were responsible for protecting the dependent female. This policy is reflected in the law and its administration, since females generally receive much lighter sentences for the same offense, are viewed more favorably by judges and juries, and seldom receive the death penalty.

Literature on the subject of gender and crime notes the androcentric (male-centered) bias in many delinquency and crime theories (Chesney-Lind, 1989). Burnett (1986) also notes that women have been left out of criminological scholarship and that a new era began with publications such as F. Adler’s Sisters in Crime (1975), R. J. Simon’s Women and Crime (1975), and F. Adler and Simon’s The Criminology of Deviant Women (1979).

Using UCR data, R. J. Simon (1990) notes increases in female crime, particularly in property offenses, especially white-collar offenses involving small-to-medium amounts of money. While writers such as F. Adler (1975) were arguing that a gender convergence or closing of the gap between male and female crime rates was taking place, others such as Steffensmeier (1978) and Steffensmeier and Allan (1988) found no such change in the crime–gender ratio.

The National Institute of Justice has noted a rise in the number of female offenders at the turn of the twenty-first century (National Criminal Justice Reference Service [NCJRS], 2003). The NCVS for 2001 showed the percentage of estimated female perpetrators as increasing from 14 to 19 percent for violent crime. From 1990 to 1998, the number of women in prison grew 48 percent compared to 27 percent for men. Between 1988 and 1997, female delinquency cases increased 83 percent.

A major literature is developing regarding gender and crime. One example is a “power-control theory” of delinquency and gender (J. Hagan, Gillis, & Simpson, 1985, 1987), which proposes that male and female children react differently to parental power sharing. The authors hypothesized that balanced family structure (shared power by spouses) lessens the differences in delinquency between genders and that unbalanced family structures increase those differences. However, both Singer and Levine (1988) and Morash and Chesney-Lind (1991) found little support for this theory.

Social Class and Crime

Social class is not a category included in the UCR, yet the vast majority of those arrested or labeled as criminal are from lower social classes. Criminality for traditional crimes is higher among lower-class individuals, totally apart from bias in statistics or the administration of justice. Part of the excessively high rate is likely to be due to their lack of power and sophistication in shielding themselves from formal litigation proceedings. Traditional explanations of crime and social class view the relationship as an inverse one; that is, as social class becomes higher, the volume of crime commission decreases proportionately. Figure 3.1 attempts to depict this relationship schematically. Reckless (1967) proposes a bimodal theory of the distribution of crime commission in which the criminality curve has two modes (most frequently appearing cases) among the lower class and the upper class, though crimes of the latter are seldom reflected in national crime statistics.
The relationship between social class and criminality remains a subject of debate. The early self-report surveys (Nye, Short, & Olson, 1958; Short & Nye, 1958) found no relationship other than that lower-class offenders were more likely to be officially processed. Tittle, Villemez, and Smith (1978), in a literature review of major self-report studies, found no relationship between class and criminality. More recent research and reviews of self-report surveys suggest that much of this lack of difference by class may have been due to the measuring instruments, which tended to concentrate on rather trivial offenses. Lower-class youth were found to commit more serious crimes more often; and their offense profile was found to more closely follow that presented by official statistics (Elliott & Ageton, 1980; Hardt & Hardt, 1977; Hindelang, Hirschi, & Weis, 1979). Examining calls to police, Warner and Pierce (1991) found that the poverty of an area consistently increased the rate of assault, robbery, and burglary, although in examining delinquency, Larzelere and Patterson (1990) found that parental monitoring and discipline were more predictive than social class. It is important to caution, however, that official statistics undercount the typical crimes of higher socioeconomic groups, so even though the lower class has higher official crime rates, this does not indicate that individuals in this class are necessarily more criminal.

Race and Crime

Just as an androcentric bias was identified earlier, a Eurocentric bias may also exist in criminology, in part because African American criminologists in particular, but other ethnic minorities as well, have not played a significant role in the field (Young & Sulton, 1991). Eurocentric bias refers to the fact that the field of criminology is dominated by views reflecting those of European (white) descent, and such a bias may tend not to fully appreciate the interactions among racism, inequality, and the experiences of African Americans and other minorities in the criminal justice system.

Race is a relatively arbitrary, socially defined status. For example, in an early study, Herskovits estimated that of the total number of black persons classified as “Negro” at that time in the United States, 15 percent were more “white” than black, 25 percent were equally “white” and black, and 22 percent were unmixed black (p. 177). Thus, the concept of “race” is more a socially defined category than a taxonomically simple biological classification. As Sutherland and Cressey (1974) point out, “There is no avoiding the fact that at least 80 percent of the offenders contributing to the ‘black’ crime rate are part ‘white’” (p. 132).

Given the increasing ethnic diversity of the United States, a racial and ethnic classification system that pigeonholes entire segments of the population obfuscates true understanding. Scientists have proven there is no biological basis for such traditional racial classifications. Students need to be aware of the inherent problems in this currently accepted system. The validity of this shorthand method of identifying different groups in an increasingly diverse society needs to be questioned by more criminologists (Mellow, 1996, p. 7).
Chapter 3. General Characteristics of Crime and Criminals

The foregoing facts become important in light of *cryptonacist* theories that were rediscovered and treated by some as respectable in the 1970s. These were regenerated, long-discredited hereditary theories of racial inferiority to explain why African Americans, despite social changes in the 1960s, had failed to succeed (Skolnick & Currie, 1988, p. 12). Such theories obviously ignore the black experience in a nation that until relatively recently practiced institutionalized racism against African Americans.

To paraphrase one writer (Dr. Charles King), we have a society that crippled a people—then blamed them for limping (cited in L. A. Ross & McMurray, 1996, p. 3). The long legacy of slavery, followed by “Jim Crow” laws (legalized or *de jure* segregation and discrimination) and succeeded by *de facto* (in practice) discrimination, placed a generational burden on black Americans that far exceeded the milder forms endured temporarily by other ethnic groups. Much of the discrepancy between black and white crime rates can perhaps be explained by the fact that African Americans until relatively recently have been locked disproportionately into the lower class through a pseudo—caste system.

At the turn of this century, roughly 27 percent of those arrested in the United States were black, while blacks made up only about 12 percent of the population. In the early nineties, roughly 1 in 4 young black males in the United States was behind bars, on parole, or on probation. This was more than the number of black men enrolled in college. While 23 percent of black men in their twenties were under supervision, only 10 percent of Latinos and about 6 percent of whites were being similarly sanctioned. In Washington, D.C., estimates have been made that 70 percent of all black men have been arrested and served time in jail before the age of 35 (J. Marshall, 1992). Nationally, the disparity of rates between blacks and nonblacks was much greater for offenses of violence than for property offenses. This difference in arrest rates is generally taken to indicate equally disproportionate rates of crime commission. Most studies indicate that these differences are not a result of police discrimination.

In a book titled *The Myth of a Racist Criminal Justice System*, Wilbanks (1987) claims that although the criminal justice system was racist in the past, there is little racism or systematic discrimination in the criminal justice system today. One of his primary themes is that any disproportion in black arrest and incarceration rates reflects actual higher offense rates among blacks. In critiquing this, C. M. Mann (1989, 1993) argues that racism in criminal justice is institutionalized in the same way that it is in other institutions in the United States such as education, politics, religion, and the economic structure. If our society is racist, do we not expect the criminal justice system to reflect this? Mann claims that Wilbanks ignores the informal aspects of the criminal justice system, or what Georges-Abeyie (1989) calls “petit apartheid realities,” namely, stop-and-question and stop-and-frisk police practices that cause the police to be viewed by blacks as rude, insulting, and sometimes brutal. Claims of a nonracist system would have to be justified or supplemented with qualitative, observational research and actual accounts of minority experience.

Crime File 3.4, “Racial Profiling,” describes a discriminatory practice by some police departments of stopping and searching a disproportionate number of blacks and minorities, particularly in traffic stops.

Spohn and Cederblom’s (1991) study found support for Kalven and Zeisel’s (1966) “liberation hypothesis,” which holds that racial discrimination in sentencing is significant primarily in less serious cases. While race was found to play no role in judicial decision making in Pennsylvania (Steifensmeier & Kramer, 1990), black murders of whites were found more likely to result in the death penalty in Kentucky (Keil & Vivo, 1989). In the 1990s, federal drug laws featured more severe penalties for possession or sale of crack cocaine (favored by black dealers) than for powder cocaine (favored by whites). As a result, a disproportionate number of those given longer prison sentences were black.

Crime has in the past been primarily intraracial in nature; that is, in most cases, whites victimize whites and blacks victimize blacks. According to UCR arrest data, blacks represent 62 percent of robbers and exhibit particularly disproportionate rates for murder, rape, and assault (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1988, p. 47). All of these crimes are relatively unsophisticated and command a great deal of police attention.

Statistics on crime by race are subject to countervailing pressures that may on the one hand overestimate and on the other underestimate the actual black crime rate. Blacks are more likely than whites to be arrested, indicted, convicted, and imprisoned. If convicted, they are less likely to receive probation, parole, or pardon. These factors may tend to exaggerate the black crime rate. In the past especially, many crimes by blacks against other blacks were ignored by the criminal justice system. A certain proportion of the rising crime rate beginning in the sixties reflects a greater willingness on the part of the police to respond to ghetto crime, which had previously been overlooked (see Gabbidon & Greene, 2005; Walker, Spohn, & DeLone, 1995).

Despite these offsetting crime trends, the crime rate of blacks is disturbingly disproportionate to that of the general population. Wolfgang’s (1958) analysis of homicide in Philadelphia found the crime rate for nonwhite, 20- to 24-year-old males to be about 25 times the Caucasian rate for the same age group (see also Wolfgang, 1987). The few early self-report surveys suggested no significant differences by race with respect to admitted
Racial Profiling

Crime profiling refers to attempts to construct typical characteristics of types of criminals (R. M. Holmes, 1989). It has been particularly useful in programs such as the FBI’s Behavioral Science Unit and its tracking down of serial killers. However, it has been highly controversial when applied to traffic stops of those fitting the general profile. Phrases such as DWB (driving while black) or BWB (breathing while black) have been coined by black citizens who feel that they have been unfairly singled out for police attention simply for fitting the suspicious profile of being black.

Charges of racial bias in the criminal justice system are certainly given support in cases such as the New York City Police Department’s incidents involving Abner Louima and Amadou Diallo. Louima was sodomized and brutalized while in police detention, while Diallo was killed by many volleys from police revolvers when reaching for his identification. David Cole in his book No Equal Justice: Race and Class in the American Criminal Justice System (1999) indicates that, between 1995 and 1997, a total of 70 percent of those stopped on Interstate 95 in New Jersey and Maryland were blacks and Hispanics, even though they constituted only 17.5 percent of speeders. Similar findings were noted by Cole for Illinois.

While blacks make up only 12 percent of the population of the United States, they represent one half of the nation’s prison population. In fact, 1 out of every 3 black men in his twenties is either in prison, in jail, on probation, or on parole. Much of this disparity is due to the “war on drugs.” While the U.S. Public Health Service estimates that blacks represent 14 percent of U.S. illegal drug users, they are 35 percent of those arrested, 55 percent of those convicted, and 74 percent of those sentenced to prison for drug possession—a rate that is 6 times their representation in the population.

Racial profiling has what sociologists call a “self-fulfilling prophecy” quality about it. According to the developer of the concept, W. I. Thomas (Thomas & Swaine, 1928), “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” Blacks are perceived by nonblacks as more criminal. They are arrested and incarcerated more than other groups. Studies of incarcerated populations show that a disproportionate number of prisoners are black; therefore, when authorities are profiling or looking for criminals, they concentrate on blacks. David Cole (1999) concludes by stating,

Finally, and fundamentally, we need to think beyond policing. It sometimes appears that the only public resources that the majority is eager to supply to the inner cities are more (and more aggressive) police officers. But if similar levels of crime were occurring in white neighborhoods, and large numbers of white children were under criminal-justice supervision, isn’t it likely that we would be hearing calls for different kinds of social investments, such as better schools, more job training, better after-care programs, and drug treatment? To restore legitimacy, the majority needs to show that it is willing to invest in something other than the strong arm of the law. (n.p.)

What are some later developments in the issue of crime (racial) profiling? Have there been any new public policies for dealing with this issue?
average and as much as 20 times the national average when committed on reservations. One in 3 Indian women will be raped in her lifetime (“Obama,” 2010). Crime File 3.5 further describes “Native Americans and Crime.”

Minority Groups and Crime

Race per se is not as crucial an explanatory variable in traditional crime commission as social class. Until recently, a large percentage of blacks was concentrated in lower-socioeconomic-class ghettos that have traditionally exhibited high rates of breakdown. African Americans are disproportionately represented in the very largest cities. Early research by the “Chicago School” of sociology, most notably that of C. R. Shaw and H. D. McKay (1942) and their utilization of E. W. Burgess’s (1925) “concentric zone theory,” serves as an illustration of this relationship, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Crime File 3.5

Native Americans and Crime

The indigenous peoples in the United States are members of about 550 federally recognized tribes including Cherokee (16.4 percent), Navajo (11.7 percent), Chippewa (5.5 percent), Sioux (5.5 percent), Choctaw (3.4 percent), Pueblo (2.8 percent), Apache (2.7 percent), and all others (51 percent; Greenfield & Smith, 1999, p. 1). The rate of victimization for American Indians has been greater than that of all other races for rape and sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated and simple assault.

In 1999, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) issued a special report titled American Indians and Crime (Greenfield & Smith, 1999). The data were based on over 5 years of National Crime Victimization Survey data and reported that the rate of violent victimization among the nation’s 2.3 million Native Americans is well above that of other American racial and ethnic groups and twice as high as the national average. Astoundingly, the rate of violent crime experienced by Native American women was nearly 50 percent higher than that reported by black males. (This report was updated by Perry in 2004.) American Indians were more likely to be victims of assault and rape/sexual assault committed by a stranger or acquaintance rather than an intimate partner or family member.

The BJS study indicated that the rate of Native American victimization was 124 violent crimes per 1,000 Native Americans, which was more than twice the rate of the nation as a whole (50 per 1,000). The average for whites was 49, for blacks 61, and for Asians 29 per 1,000. Native Americans, unlike other racial/ethnic groups, are more likely to be victims of interracial violence (that is, between races). Sixty percent of those committing crimes against Native Americans were whites; most of these offenses were attributed to racism and alcohol. The rate of murders committed by Native Americans (as of 1996) was 4 per 100,000, well below the then national average of 7.9 and the white rate of 3.9. Native Americans are, however, twice as likely as blacks and 3 times more likely than whites to be victims of rape or aggravated assault.

Native Americans are one of the smallest minority groups, yet they represent one of the largest percentages of prison inmates. There are 555 recognized Native American tribes in the United States and, despite the well-publicized success of gambling facilities on some reservations, a third of the country’s 2 million Native Americans live below the poverty line. This figure is higher than for all other minority groups (Blackman & Simmons, 1995). In 800 or more treaties over the years, native tribes were guaranteed a reasonable level of education, health, and resources. However, such promises by the federal government were not honored and, instead, these people—who experienced near cultural and physical genocide—have also experienced high levels of unemployment, social disorganization, alienation, alcoholism, and crime.

Native American youth are the largest category of youth incarcerated under federal jurisdiction, about 65 percent (75) of the 124 confined in 1994 (Greenfield & Smith, 1999, p. 30). Similar to indigenous peoples in other colonized countries, Native Americans were marginalized from the dominant society (Nielson, Fulton, & Tsoosie, 2000, p. 5). Nielson (1998) states,

Native American have endured a century and more of government policies that ranged from genocidal to assimilative to supportive of limited sovereignty. The assimilative policies in general were, and still are (to the extent that they can still be found in American Indian law), important contributors to the development of social and economic conditions conducive [sic] to the development of Native American gangs. (p. 143)

Web Research Project

Visit the website www.bjs.gov and find the 2004 report by Steven Perry on American Indians and Crime. What are some additional facts of interest regarding Native Americans and crime?
In examining certain areas for delinquency, C. R. Shaw and McKay (1942) report similar rates of delinquency in the same area of transition (zone II) despite changeover in racial and nationality groups. The concentric zone theory assumes that city growth occurs in a series of rings. Zone I is the central business district, while zone II is the oldest and highest residential crime area. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7. Despite this assumption, Nettler (1982, Vol. 2, p. 58) points out that Dutch, German, and Scandinavian settlers in the United States have had low crime rates in general, particularly for violent crimes. In addition, the low rates for Jews and Asians challenge the assumption that racial visibility, prejudice, and discrimination are sufficient explanations of criminality. It should be pointed out, however, that many of these groups were not lower-class immigrants, but instead had migrated during a period in which their craft, mercantile, and other skills were economically in demand (Flowers, 1988).

The excessive violent crime rate for blacks in the United States stands in contrast to that of Latinos who are generally poorer, less educated, and have more menial jobs, but who also have lower rates of violent crime. Silberman (1978), in analyzing New York City crime rates, found the rate of black violent crime to be 3 times higher than the Latino rate—twice as high for homicide.

Since other minority groups that at one time were discriminated against were able to overcome difficulties and “rise from the ashes,” so to speak, many ask the question, “Why haven’t blacks been able to achieve the same success?” In 1968, in the aftermath of the worst series of urban riots in modern U.S. history, the Kerner Commission, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, addressed this issue by suggesting four reasons for differences between the immigrant and black experiences:

1. *The Maturing Economy:* When the European immigrants arrived, they gained an economic foothold by providing the unskilled labor needed by industry. Unlike the immigrant, the Negro migrant found little opportunity in the city. The economy, by then matured, had little use for the unskilled labor he had to offer.

2. *The Disability of Race:* The structure of discrimination has stringently narrowed opportunities for the Negro and restricted his prospects. European immigrants suffered from discrimination, but never so pervasively.

3. *Entry Into the Political System:* The immigrants usually settled in rapidly growing cities with powerful and expanding political machines, which traded economic advantages for political support. Ward-level grievance machinery, as well as personal representation, enabled the immigrant to make his voice heard and his power felt.

   By the time the Negroes arrived, these political machines were no longer so powerful or so well equipped to provide jobs or other favors, and in many cases were unwilling to share their influence with Negroes.

4. *Cultural Factors:* Coming from societies with a low standard of living and at a time when job aspirations were low, the immigrants sensed little deprivation in being forced to take the less desirable and poorer-paying jobs. Their large and cohesive families contributed to the total income. Their vision of the future—one that led to life outside the ghetto—provided the incentive necessary to endure the present.

   Although Negro men worked as hard as the immigrants, they were unable to support their families. The entrepreneurial opportunities had vanished. As a result of slavery and long periods of unemployment, the Negro family structure had become matriarchal; the males played a secondary and marginal family role—one which offered little compensation for their hard and unrewarding labor. Above all, segregation denied Negroes access to good jobs and the opportunity to leave the ghetto. For them, the future seemed to lead only to a dead end. (Kerner, 1968, p. 15)

William Julius Wilson in *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987) points out how the deindustrialization (loss of blue-collar factory jobs) of the inner cities combined with racism, segregation, and poverty to condemn the black, inner-city poor to chronic unemployment and hopelessness. In 1989, an astonishing 35 percent of black males between the ages of 16 and 35 had been arrested at some point, and much of this was because of an aggressive nationwide crackdown on drugs that affected blacks much more than whites. Even though blacks represent about 12 percent of users, their visibility and greater involvement in trafficking in targeted urban areas has had a devastating effect. As noted earlier in this chapter, particularly problematic was the fact that much heavier
sentences were levied against those using crack (a form of rock cocaine generally preferred by blacks) than against those abusing the same amount of powder cocaine (preferred by whites). In 2009, President Obama passed legislation that reduced, but did not eliminate, this discrepancy.

Decreasing job prospects in such poor, inner-city areas has created a vicious cycle in which

- Discrimination holds blacks back in the job market.
- The loss of blue-collar jobs, erosion of real wages for low-skilled work, and weakened unions make unskilled work less available and attractive.
- Drug dealing becomes a fairly lucrative alternative employment option.
- Once they are caught and have served time, dismal job prospects for ex-cons make them less desirable marriage partners.
- This creates more female-headed households, a major cause of poverty (J. Marshall, 1992).

Does minority group status itself produce higher crime rates? In general, the answer to this question is no. Much depends upon the particular minority group and its specific values and cultural traditions. In the United States, for instance, the crime rate among Japanese Americans and Asians in general is lower than that of the general population. Many newer immigrant groups in the United States such as Cambodians, Koreans, and Vietnamese have low crime rates in part because of close extended family ties, a strong work ethic, and merchant skills (Launer & Palenski, 1988; Light & Bonacich, 1988). On the other hand, the crime rates for Algerians in France or Finns in Sweden or Latinos in the United States are higher than those of the general population.

Most immigrants to the United States have come from close-knit peasant societies, and the crime rate for this first-generational group is usually lower, with the exception of crimes peculiar to the area from which they emigrated. For instance, for the first-generation Italian immigrant, crime rates were lower, with the exception of murders and assaults. In the 1800s, the areas of southern Italy and Sicily from which they came were experiencing a wave of vendettas and violence, and this pattern was carried over into the New World. Similarly, Irish immigrants experienced higher rates for alcohol-related offenses; in the nineteenth century, Ireland reputedly had the highest alcoholism rate in the Western world.

It is not the parental group of immigrants that exhibits excess criminality; for many groups, it is the second generation that shows a marked upsurge in crime. Living in a strange new land and often being the victims of discrimination, the first generation tends to cling to old values. Moreover, this group may fear deportation. Wishing to be Americanized, the second generation often rejects many of these ways and attempts to assimilate the general values of U.S. culture. Unfortunately, in the area in which these individuals live (zone II, for instance, according to concentric zone theory), they also assimilate the criminal values of a high-crime area. Not being placed in such environments or possessing a higher parental social class may explain the relative success of Vietnamese immigrants in the United States.

Nettler (1982, Vol. 2, pp. 48–62), in a four-volume work, Criminal Careers, does an excellent job of summarizing much of the international research on ethnic migrants and crime. Care must be exercised in examining these data, since many of the studies refer to Gastarbeiter (guest workers), who are not immigrants as such, but rather temporary workers in the host community. Studies in Switzerland found the crime rate higher for foreigners than natives, particularly for violent crime. Ferracuti (1968) claimed that the crime rate of foreign workers increased as their numbers increased, although many of their crimes were unreported. Nettler (pp. 48–49) cites similar findings that suggest higher rates among Hungarians and Yugoslavs in Sweden; for Turks, Italians, Africans, and Mediterraneans in West Germany and Belgium; for Algerians in France; and for Irish, Asians, and West Indians in England. However, one chief problem in many of these studies is their failure to control for age and sex differentials, since many immigrant groups consist of a heavier population of young, single males, a group with a higher crime commission potential.

Regional Variation in Crime

Not only do crime rates, however difficult to measure, vary between nations, but they also vary by region within a country (see Brantingham & Brantingham, 1984). Table 3.5 shows that in 2010 the rates for murder, robbery, aggravated assault, larceny, and burglary were highest in the U.S. South, which also had the highest overall crime rate. The Northeast had the lowest overall crime rate. The rates for aggravated rape were highest in the Midwest, while vehicle theft was highest in the West.
Urban/Rural Differences in Crime

Internationally, urban recorded crime rates are generally higher than rural crime rates, and, with few exceptions, this difference appears to have been the case since cities first appeared. Although crime rates tend to increase with the size of the community, there are some important exceptions. UCR statistics in general show a positive relationship in which, as the size of community increases, the crime rate also increases.

### TABLE 3.5 Crime Rates by Size of Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UCR Index Crime Rates per 100,000 Population</th>
<th>Violent Crime</th>
<th>Property Crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs)—urbanized areas that include at least one city with 50,000 or more inhabitants, or a Census Bureau–defined urbanized area of at least 50,000 inhabitants and a total population of at least 100,000</td>
<td>428.3</td>
<td>3,046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-MSA cities—these do not qualify as MSA central cities and are not otherwise included in an MSA.</td>
<td>349.7</td>
<td>3,602.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural areas</td>
<td>1,195.1</td>
<td>1,605.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This same relationship with size of community also holds in the NCVS. Even if one assumes less reporting and recording of rural crime, the difference between rural and urban rates persists. In the 2004 data, however, the rates for property crime were actually higher for smaller than for larger cities, yet rural and suburban crime rates have actually been increasing faster than those of central cities since the sixties. Urbanism and its “way of life” are no longer confined to cities. The advent of modern communications and transportation has effectively erased many of the distinctions between rural and urban lifestyles, creating a truly urban society. The relatively high rates of violent crime in rural areas may be explained by certain criminalistic traditions in some areas that are much closer to frontier values and by a possible “subculture of violence” (to be explored in Chapter 4), which may explain high rural rates in the South as well as southern Appalachia.

Ferdinand (1991), in what he calls the “theft/violence ratio,” notes that historical studies show a relationship between social structure and levels of property or violent crime. Theft was more prevalent in older, established cities with a preindustrial history, whereas violent crime was more common in rural, agricultural regions and in rapidly and newly industrializing cities.

Institutions and Crime

Sociologists define social institutions as relatively stable social patterns that serve a broad range of crucial functions in society; examples are the economy, family, church, state, and education. In contrast, associations are special-purpose organizations that serve a narrow range of interests; examples are corporations, unions, and professional societies.

The Family and Crime

The family is the primary or most important agent of socialization, particularly during childhood. The family has exclusive contact with the child during the period of greatest dependency and plasticity. Despite considerable popular literature on the subject, there is little, if any, scientific evidence on the subject of child rearing. Advocates of permissive or restrictive socialization to the contrary, the key appears to be firm but consistent discipline that is reinforced as well as understood by the child. The most important variables correlated with delinquency are probably poor home discipline, neglect, and indifference (Rosenbaum, 1989a).
Many U.S. studies of delinquency include under that label a significant number of activities, such as truancy, incorrigibility, and the like, that would not be criminal had they been committed by an adult. In a review of family factors associated with delinquency, Sutherland and Cressey (1974, pp. 203–218) as well as Hirschi (1983, pp. 33–68) point to moderate-to-high correlations between delinquency and immorality or criminality or alcoholism of parents, absence of one or both parents, a lack of parental control, unhappy home life, subcultural differences in the home, and economic pressures. The general process of family influence relates to the fact that the parental social class determines the residence, school, and associates of its offspring. Parental transmission of criminogenic attitudes or failure to train the child may influence delinquency. Similarly, a poor home environment may force the youth into the streets seeking peer primary group support.

Statistics on broken homes, ordinal positions (birth order) of siblings, and number of siblings, and their influence on crime and delinquency appear inconclusive (L. Rosen & Neilson, 1978; Sutherland & Cressey, 1974, pp. 216–217). It would appear that the quality of family interaction is more important than the family structure per se.

More sophisticated family studies of delinquents appear in early research by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (1950), who examined 500 delinquents and 500 nondelinquents and found that roughly 50 percent of the delinquents were from broken homes compared with about 29 percent of nondelinquents. Delinquents were more likely to have families characterized by physical illness, mental retardation, mental disturbance, alcoholism, and parental criminality. Such parents employed poor child-rearing practices, being either overly strict or overly permissive and exercising discipline inconsistently. Thus, defective family relations were perceived as a key causal variable in delinquency (F. E. Hagan & Sussman, 1988). Cathy Spatz Widom (1992) found that childhood abuse increased the odds of delinquency and future adult criminality by about 40 percent. Neglect alone, not just physical abuse, was significantly related to later violent behavior.

In the longest longitudinal study of delinquents—the “Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study”—begun in 1935, William and Joan McCord (1958) found delinquents to be products of poor or weak parental discipline as well as a quarrelsome home environment. Family structure, that is, whether the home was broken or intact, was less salient than the nature of family interaction. All of the boys from quarrelsome environments had been convicted of crime (J. Q. Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985, p. 232). D. J. West and Farrington’s (1977) longitudinal study of London working-class boys found the following associated with delinquency: low IQ, poor child-rearing practices, criminality of father, large family size, and low family income. Similar findings with respect to defective parental supervision and socialization have been suggested by Baumrind (1978); Hirschi (1969); Patterson (1982); Van Voorhis, Cullen, Mathers, and Garner (1988); and K. N. Wright and Wright (1995).

Loeb and Stouthamer-Loeber (1986), in an exhaustive analysis of the literature, summarize the relationship between family and delinquency as exhibiting (a) the most powerful predictors—lack of parental supervision, parental rejection, and lack of parent–child involvement; (b) medium predictors—background variables such as parents’ marital relations and parental criminality; and (c) weaker predictors—lack of parental discipline, parental health, and parental absence. Research by other scholars confirms these findings (Farrington, Ohlin, & Wilson, 1986; Laub & Sampson, 1988). The proportion of children in American households living with both parents has declined since 1970. In that year, 90 percent of white children lived in intact households; in 1997, only 74 percent did so. For black children, the figures were 64 percent (1970) and 35 percent (1997) (Thornberry, Lizotte, Krohn, Farnworth, & Jang, 1991). An estimated 40 percent of white children and 75 percent of African American children will experience parental separation or divorce by age 16, many of them multiple family transitions. Longitudinal studies of youth in Rochester, Denver, and Pittsburgh found substantial changes in family transition: Rochester—63.5 percent, Denver—49 percent, and Pittsburgh—30 percent. They found a consistent relationship between higher numbers of family transitions and higher delinquency (Thornberry, Smith, Rivera, Huizinga, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1999).

Conservative writers who have more recently dominated the literature, such as Hirschi (1983) and J. Q. Wilson and Herrnstein (1985), seem to view material disadvantage and quality of family life as mutually exclusive explanations. Currie (1985) calls this belief, that what goes on in the family is somehow separate from outside social forces that affect the family, the “fallacy of autonomy” (p. 185). Those who commit this fallacy fail to view the family in a larger social context; have an obsessive concern with control rather than supportive social policies; and lend the impression of intractability of family problems, unresponsive to enlightened social policy.

Two influential works that challenge our criminological conception of family and crime are Daniel Moynihan’s Family and Nation (1986) and Elliott Currie’s Confronting Crime (1985). Moynihan reiterates his theme of the disintegration and siege of the American family, an issue that he claims should have concerned us in the sixties. He indicates that the individual has been the center of public policy in the United States rather than families: “This was a pattern almost uniquely American. Most of the industrial democracies of the world had adopted a wide range of social programs designed specifically to support the stability and viability of
INTRODUCTION TO CRIMINOLOGY

While growth in federal entitlement programs since the sixties led to a major achievement—the virtual elimination of poverty among the elderly—by the 1980s the United States had achieved another unique distinction: It had become the first society in history in which people are more likely to be poor if they are young than if they are old.

The age bias of poverty is pronounced, affecting 24 percent of school-age children. The principal correlate has been a change in family structure—the rise of female-headed households and the feminization of poverty. In 1984, nearly half of the poor in the United States lived in female-headed households (Moynihan, 1986, p. 96). The percentage of such households nearly doubled from 10 percent of all families in 1960. A flattening of the tax system and federal reduction in income maintenance programs constituted a federal family policy in reverse. While three fourths of median family income in 1948 was exempt from federal tax (a powerful national family policy), by 1983 less than one third of such income was exempt. Of particular concern in fueling single parenthood has been the rising illegitimacy rates in the United States. While broken homes per se are an uncertain predictor of delinquency and crime, the stresses and lack of support systems that result in changed family functioning for the more impoverished and growing numbers of single mothers and children are of concern. Currie (1985) states,

The real issue is whether we regard the evidence on the persistence of family problems and the continuity of troubling behavior from childhood to adult life as indicative of predispositions that are largely unrelated to their social context and that we are virtually powerless to alter. (p. 219)

Education and Crime

The relationship between education (formal schools/schooling) and crime and delinquency is at least twofold. First, for adolescents in modern societies, schools—particularly high schools—represent a major factor in their self-esteem at a very important stage in their lives. Second, there is an inverse (negative) relationship between the amount of formal schooling individuals possess and arrest rates for traditional crimes.

The fact that traditional crime commission decreases with the amount of formal education simply reflects the fact that legitimate opportunities increase with formal education, as do occupational and corporate criminal opportunities, which are less likely to be criminally stigmatizing. It is not formal education per se that causes or prevents crime; rather, educational status reflects one's social class, location of residence, and exposure to criminal or delinquent opportunity.

Research on crime and delinquency has come to focus most heavily on family and education as critical variables (J. D. Hawkins & Lishner, 1987; J. Q. Wilson & Lowry, 1987). Moynihan (1986, p. 92) cites a study commissioned by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (1980) titled The Most Significant Minority: One-Parent Children in the Schools, which found that one-parent kids were twice as likely to drop out and showed significantly lower achievement in school.

Fagan, Piper, and Moore (1986) note that violent delinquents in inner cities differ from nondelinquents in their attachment to school, their peers, and weak maternal authority, among other variables. They indicate,

Complex social, economic and political factors are contributing to the creation of a vast new class of poor persons who are younger, more poorly educated and more likely to give birth sooner. One of the predictable consequences of this phenomenon is the continuing isolation of inner-city communities and a hardening of the processes observed among these samples. . . . These findings suggest that
delinquency policy should be linked with economic development policy. The infusion of material and social resources into inner-city neighborhoods may strengthen social institutions including schools and families and alter the familiar correlates of serious delinquency by providing for the natural controls which characterize lower-crime neighborhoods. (p. 463)

Strong school bonding decreases the likelihood of delinquency. Denno (1985) indicates that a major predictor of delinquency is misconduct in school. An example of a highly successful program is Head Start, which targets preschool enrichment. Schweinhart and Weikart (1980), in evaluating such a program for disadvantaged black children, found better later elementary school performance, higher rates of graduation from high school, increased employment, and less crime and delinquency. F. Adler (1983), in a previously cited study of low-crime nations, analyzed 47 variables and found the only factor common to all low-crime countries was strong social controls outside the formal system of justice. This well illustrates the fact that crime and justice matters are not to be treated in isolation from general societal conditions.

Religion and Crime

Lee Ellis (1996), in a review of criminology texts, found that only 2 of 18 even mentioned religion as a variable in crime causation, despite the fact that a significant one third of the public believes it plays a significant role. Of major religious groups in the United States, Jews have the lowest official crime rate, followed by Protestants; Catholics have the highest rates. Why? There is a hidden variable: social class. Catholics in the United States include a significant proportion of low-income minorities, particularly in the Southwest. Of Protestant denominations, Presbyterians and Episcopalians have lower crime rates, while Baptists have the highest. Again, social class rather than denominational affiliation is the explanation. L. Ellis (1985) reviewed over 60 studies in the research literature on this religion–crime connection. The majority of the studies confirm, as might be expected, that attendance at religious services reduced crime commission. This is a stronger relationship than that between religious denomination and crime. Religion may be the “forgotten” factor in criminological theory (B. R. Johnson & Jang, 2010). In a review of 270 reports on religion and crime since the late 1960s, they found that only two of the articles reported any negative effects of religion on crime (Akers, 2010).

War and Crime

War has an impact upon crime. Although it is an example of institutionalized violence, elements of war itself may be considered violations of international law. Social conflict theorists such as Simmel (1955) and Coser (1956) tell us that conflict with an outside group tends to increase the internal solidarity within groups; that is, as conflict with outside enemies increases, conflict within groups decreases.

During major wars, the domestic crime rate as a whole tends to decline. This probably reflects increased social solidarity, group cohesion against an outside enemy, and high employment. Juvenile delinquency tends to increase during such periods because of displacement of families and increased mobility. As noted earlier, female crime rates increase because of increased opportunity. A major form of crime that tends to increase during wartime is “white-collar crime” such as black-marketeering, profiteering, wartime trade violations, violations of wage-price freezes, and the like (Sutherland & Cressey, 1974, pp. 240–241).
Archer and Gartner (1984, pp. 79–81), using their “Comparative Crime Data File,” found that nations participating in World Wars I and II were more likely to experience postwar increases in homicide than control nations (those who had not participated). The differences are similar, but less pronounced, after smaller wars. They found data supporting a “legitimation of violence model” (p. 92) in which wars tend to legitimize the general use of violence in domestic society.

**Economy and Crime**

In summarizing the diverse literature on the relationship between trends in the economy and crime, Sutherland and Cressey (1974) draw the following conclusions:

- Serious crimes have a slight and inconsistent tendency to rise in periods of economic depression and to fall in periods of prosperity.
- The general crime rate does not increase significantly in periods of economic depression.
- Property crimes involving violence tend to increase in periods of depression, but property crimes involving no violence, such as larceny, show only a slight and inconsistent tendency to increase in depression periods.
- Juvenile delinquency tends to increase in periods of prosperity and to decrease during periods of depression (pp. 225–226).

Using data from the United States, Canada, England, Scotland, and Wales, Brenner (1978) examined historical data for all major crimes since 1900 and their relationship to employment/unemployment, per capita income, inflation, and other economic indices. He found in all five political areas that the rate of unemployment showed strong and significant relationships to increases in all major categories of crime (p. 562). There is a significant difference in these statistics before and after World War II. There has been a speeded up or a quicker reaction to unemployment since World War II, particularly an increase in violent crimes. The United States especially demonstrated inverse (negative) correlations between employment and incarceration rates (see also Cantor & Land, 1985).

Currie (Skolnick & Currie, 1988) argues that conservative criminologists tend to underemphasize the impact of economic forces on crime. He points out that, while little crime increase took place during the Depression, crime rose during the more prosperous sixties. Currie feels there is a strong, although subtle, relationship and that those who underemphasize the economy ignore three factors:

- First, subgroups with high crime rates—such as young black men—do have high unemployment rates, even when overall unemployment is low. Second, unemployment has a different impact when it portends a lifetime of diminished opportunity. And finally, unemployment statistics do not reflect the quality of available work. (p. 471)

In examining the relationship between the economy and crime, it is important to note that there have been many changes in the economy since 1960. Women have joined the workforce in large numbers. Unions have decreased their size and influence, while much manufacturing has moved overseas and computers and the Internet have altered the nature of the economy. Most affected by all of this is a shift away from dependence on less educated male workers. This is especially pronounced for young, black males (Bushway, 2010).

**Mass Media and Crime**

A subject of continual heated debate is the role of the mass media in encouraging crime, particularly crimes of violence. Do comic books, violent video games, music, newspapers, magazines, movies, or television cause an increase in crime? This protracted debate is periodically fueled by crimes, especially brutal ones, that appear to have some link with the media coverage or fictionalization of criminal events.

Charles Manson was obsessed with the Beatles, while Mark Chapman, the assassin of John Lennon, carried a copy of *The Catcher in the Rye*. In the aftermath of the 2007 Virginia Tech massacre, yet another culprit was added to the witch hunt or moral panic regarding the media and crime (Ferguson, 2007). It was alleged that video games such as *Counter-Strike* or *Streetfighter II* may have inspired the shooter, Seung-Hui Cho. Two
meta-analyses of video games by Sherry and another by Ferguson found no relationship between video games and aggressive behavior (cited in Ferguson, 2007). In contrast, more than two decades of research on video games includes the American Psychological Association's Resolution on Violence in Video Games and Interactive Media, passed in 2005, which concluded that exposure to violent media increases aggression in children and youth (cited in Carll, 2007). For a subgroup of disturbed youth, such media predisposes them to violence by exposing them to violent video games that rehearse recipes for action. Such interactive games may be more potent than other media.

Two rival hypotheses exist with respect to media and violence: the catharsis hypothesis and the precipitation hypothesis. The former claims that exposure to media violence enables a vicarious letting-off-of-steam and thus has a calming effect. This notion comes to us from the Greek tragedies, in which it was assumed that audiences, as a result of identification with the terrible travail and violent experiences of the characters, would feel an emotional purging of their own frustration, anger, or desire. In contrast, the precipitation hypothesis assumes that exposure to media coverage of violence, fact or fiction, will produce greater propensities to aggression and violence.

In an early report titled Television and Behavior, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1982) concluded on the basis of a review of the research literature that there is an association between the viewing of television violence and aggression. One finding that seems continually to present itself concerns the image of society that television creates. In an American Broadcasting Company (ABC, 1983b) poll of viewers, 51 percent of respondents thought television news (a) gives too much coverage to crime and violence and that this distorts the public view of what is really going on in the streets; (b) leads to the perception that crime is more rampant and a person more likely to be victimized than is in fact the case; and (c) brainwashes us into fear, suspicion, and feelings of vulnerability. The National Institute of Mental Health, in its review of the literature, concluded that violence on television was one factor in children's aggressiveness, although not necessarily in their violent behavior (cited in ABC, 1983b).

In support of the precipitation hypothesis, Glaser (1978) states, “The $30 billion spent annually in the United States on advertising—about $5 billion of it on television—suggests that many people have faith in the impact of mass communication on conduct” (p. 235).

A contrary view is presented by a 14-nation international study of television violence, which found that Japan has the most violent programming and is relatively free of violent crime (“Japanese TV,” 1992). This low crime rate appears unaffected by graphically violent comic books, tabloids, videos, and a thriving market in pornography.

Copycat Crimes

The issue of differential impacts of the media on different subgroups can be illustrated by means of the notion of “copycat crimes.” The term copycat is a slang expression for imitation; thus, copycat crimes are fads in crime and are often stimulated by media coverage or portrayals.

In the early days of television, there was tremendous concern about children imitating Superman by jumping from the tops of buildings. In the 1990s, when a 5-year-old girl in Norway was stoned and kicked by playmates and left to freeze to death in the snow, the Scandinavian network TV-3 dropped the American live-action series Mighty Morphin Power Rangers from its broadcasts in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark (Mellgren, 1994). The 1976 film Taxi Driver, in which a character played by Robert DeNiro attempts to kill the president, inspired Reagan’s attempted assassin, John Hinckley, Jr. The film The Program inspired two teenagers to copy a scene in which drunken football players play “chicken” by lying in the middle of a highway. The boys were killed. The film Natural Born Killers was banned in Great Britain and Ireland because of copycat murders in the United States and France (Murr & Rogers, 1995, p. 47). The film Child’s Play and its sequels featured a demonic, animated character called Chucky, and may have inspired two boys from Liverpool to lure a 2-year-old boy from a local shopping mall and subsequently to murder him (Kolbert, 1994, p. A13). The horrible dragging death of a black man, James Byrd, Jr., behind a pickup truck in Jasper, Texas, in 1998, perpetrated by three white men and widely publicized in the news media, was followed by two similar crimes in Illinois and Louisiana. Similar patterns with copycat school shootings and workplace violence have also been noted.

Much like the tobacco industry, the purveyors of such violent themes claim no direct causal relationship between their product and harmful outcomes. However, the scientific studies are overwhelming in predicting harmful effects, even though in any particular case not all individuals are adversely affected.
On July 26, 2000, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry issued a joint declaration stating the following:

Viewing violence may lead to real-life violence. . . . Children exposed to violent programming at a young age have a higher tendency for violent and aggressive behavior later in life than children who are not so exposed. (quoted in American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000, n.p.)

Summary

In reviewing descriptions and statistical accounts of crime and criminals, it is important to examine the database or other sources of findings and conclusions. Official statistics, victim surveys, self-reports, and other sources all provide different pictures. Similarly, the various types of criminal activity being addressed, whether traditional or elite, will provide different findings. Although they differ slightly in definitions of crime, concentrating on incidents in the UCR and on victims in the NCVS, the two measures are viewed as converging, with each providing certain information that the other lacks.

Estimates of the prevalence of crime depend on the measure used, with the extent of crime increasing as we move from UCR to NCVS to self-reports to estimates of corporate crime and other forms of criminality. The bulk of UCR Part I or index crimes consists of property crimes; the most frequent arrests among Part II crimes are for service functions. Trends in crime as measured by the UCR demonstrate a major crime wave in the United States since the mid-sixties. Comparison of trends using the NCVS since the early seventies shows only a small increase, if not a stable pattern in criminal victimization. Despite the lack of good, representative self-report surveys of the general population, existing studies certainly suggest that crime is even more pervasive than is reported in the UCR and NCVS.

Official statistics on crime indicate that most of those arrested are young (15 to 19 years of age). This is particularly the case with serious property crimes. Age profiles obviously would be altered upward were we to have accurate estimates for corporate and “upperworld” violators. Of all demographic variables, gender is the best universal predictor of criminality; with the exception of prostitution, the male crime rate exceeds the female rate for all crimes, although the gap has been closing, particularly in developed societies. This difference in criminality by gender can best be explained by cultural and socialization differences rather than by innate genetic ones. While some self-report studies demonstrate less of a gap, others indicate patterns like those in official data.

Official statistics show an inverse relationship between social class and criminality (as measured by arrests); that is, as social class rises, criminality decreases. This relationship remains a subject of debate. Most recent self-report surveys indicate that patterns of lower-class admissions of criminality match those of official statistics. Such findings belie the possibility of high upper-class criminality, since the most typical upper-class offenses are not tapped by such sources.

In examining race and crime, the reader was informed of the precariousness of the scientific concept of race and that a goodly proportion of the black population in the United States might better be described as being of mixed race. UCR arrest statistics indicate a black crime rate, particularly for violent crimes, that greatly exceeds their proportion of the U.S. population. Despite countervailing biases in these statistics, it would appear that they are accurate descriptions of excessive commission of these offenses. Most crime is intraracial in nature; that is, most whites victimize whites and most blacks victimize blacks. While self-report surveys show mixed results, more recent studies confirm higher rates among blacks for serious offenses.

Minority group status itself does not result in higher crime rates. Early research demonstrated high rates in the area of transition (zone II) despite turnover in the minority in residence. Some groups—Dutch and Japanese, for example—never appear to have had higher crime rates. The first generation of immigrants generally has lower crime rates than the native population. It is their offspring, becoming Americanized into the lower class, who experience higher rates. Blacks have had higher rates than other minorities in part because of a maturing economy, the disability of race, late entry into the political system, and cultural factors. Crime patterns of European immigrants are similar to general U.S. patterns, although many “immigrants” are really temporary guest workers.

Official U.S. crime rates vary by region, with the South highest for murder, rape, and burglary; the West highest for assault, vehicle theft, and larceny; and the Northeast highest for robbery. International variations are difficult to determine because of inadequacies in crime statistics. Urban crime rates are generally higher.
than suburban and rural ones, particularly for property crimes. Recently, suburban and rural rates have been increasing more rapidly than urban rates.

While much has been written regarding the impact of the family on crime, with variables such as poor home discipline, neglect, indifference, parental criminality, and others identified as correlates, the key appears to be the quality of the family interaction rather than its structure as such. The impact of education on crime is highly correlated with social class.

Major external conflicts (wars) appear to decrease internal conflicts (crime), with the exceptions of female crime, juvenile delinquency, and certain white-collar crimes. Studies of economic trends and crime show inconsistent results; however, since the end of World War II there has been a quicker crime increase, particularly in violent crimes, corresponding with dips in the economy.

The nature of the impact of media upon crime is unresolved. While some propose a catharsis hypothesis (media violence as a vicarious, tension-relieving function), others support a precipitation hypothesis (media violence as an encouragement of the acting out of fictional themes). Television portrayals of violence appear to create increased feelings of potential vulnerability on the part of the public. Surveys of the literature by the Department of Health and Human Services, the Surgeon General’s Committee, and the National Institute of Mental Health all concluded that violence on television tends to increase aggressiveness in children. Media violence appears to have particular, albeit unpredictable, impacts on certain subpopulations of viewers. This point was illustrated by the occurrence of copycat crimes, imitation crimes based on media portrayals.
WEB SOURCES

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
http://www.aacap.org/

Atlantic Monthly's Criminology Collection

Florida State University's Criminal Justice Site
http://criminology.fsu.edu/

Megalinks in Criminal Justice
http://www.drtomoconnor.com/

National Criminal Justice Reference Service
http://www.ncjrs.gov/

National Institute of Justice
http://nij.gov/

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
http://www.ojjdp.gov/

Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics
http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook

TruTV’s Crime Library
http://www.trutv.com/library/crime/

Uniform Crime Reports
http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm

WEB EXERCISES

Using this chapter’s recommended websites, explore variations in crime.

1. What types of information are provided on the Atlantic Monthly site on crime?

2. Examine Tom O’Connor’s Megalinks in Criminal Justice and find some sources on international variations in crime.

3. What types of information are available on The Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics?

4. Perform an online search for “international crime,” “international crime statistics,” and “transnational crime.” Can you draw any preliminary broad conclusions from this search?

SELECTED READINGS


This book provides an excellent review and assessment of critical issues related to the issue of gender in criminology and criminal justice.


Cole makes a strong case that inequality exists in the American criminal justice system primarily due to uneven enforcement as part of the war on drugs.


This book reviews what is “wrong” with the criminal justice system and what can be done to make it “less wrong.” It reviews three themes: the impact of ideology, the role of the media, and the politicization of crime and criminal justice.


Russell examines the role of race in the operations of the American criminal justice system.


This annual report on the state of the U.S. juvenile justice system might better be titled “Everything you always wanted to know about the American juvenile justice system, but were afraid to ask.” This bible of juvenile justice features excellent, multicolored graphics and is also available in a CD-ROM version. Contact the Office of Juvenile Justice for a copy.


Terrill provides an incisive review of criminal justice systems in countries throughout the world, including updates on China and Russia.


In what has become a modern-day sociological classic, Wilson describes the “deindustrialization” and abandonment of areas of our inner cities and the accompanying social disorganization and crime.