ARE UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS A VALID INDICATOR OF THE INDEX CRIMES? AN AFFIRMATIVE ANSWER WITH MINOR QUALIFICATIONS*

WALTER R. GOVE
Vanderbilt University

MICHAEL HUGHES
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and University

MICHAEL GEERKEN
New Orleans Sheriff's Office

For more than two decades, the validity and reliability of official statistics on crime have been treated as highly questionable. Recently a number of studies have investigated the construction of official statistics on crime and issues related to their reliability and validity. However, there has been no recent attempt to bring together and evaluate these studies; thus, we do not know what official statistics mean and how we should interpret them. In the present paper it is argued that it is now possible to develop an understanding of what official statistics measure. It appears that both citizens and the police are in general agreement about what a serious crime is: it involves bodily injury (or serious threat of bodily injury), the property stolen is of high value, the act is committed by a stranger, or it involves breaking and entering. The authors argue that the perceived seriousness of the crime, first and primarily as defined by the victim, second as determined by the police, apparently accounts for most of the variance in whether a crime is reported and officially recorded; personal characteristics of the offender and victim have only minor effects. It is concluded that the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), as measured by the FBI Index of Crime, are valid indicators of serious crimes as defined by the citizenry. The evidence supporting this conclusion is very substantial with regard to motor vehicle theft, robbery, burglary, and homicide, while with larceny, rape, and aggravated assault, the evidence supporting this conclusion is substantial but does require the interpretation of conflicting evidence.

* We would like to thank Jack Gibbs, Lisa Heinrich, Michael Swafford, Donald Shoemaker, Debra Unberson, and Carol Zeiss for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper. In 1980 arson was added as an index crime; however, because of the lack of any data on the validity or reliability of the official statistics on arson, we have not included this index crime in our analysis.
Two recent assessments (Gibbs, 1983; Gove, 1983) of the field of criminology during the past 20 years conclude that the key methodological issue (and, in many respects, the key theoretical issue) confronting the field is a clear determination of how official crime rates are constructed and what they reflect. Both assessments hold that the field of criminology cannot substantially advance without using official crime rates for scientific purposes.

The present paper attempts to assess the validity and scientific utility of the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR). It is argued that the UCR have a clear interpretation and for most purposes are a valid measure of the FBI index crimes. In reaching this conclusion we draw on a variety of evidence including studies of citizen and police behavior, victimization studies, and, to a lesser extent, self-report studies of deviant behavior. The conclusion that the UCR are reasonable measures of the various index crimes is in part based on the proposition that official statistics provide good measures of certain types of criminal behavior, and we recognize that they are less adequate as measures of other types of criminal behavior. Thus, part of the conclusion is based on developing a fairly clear understanding of what the UCR actually measures. The conclusion also requires an understanding of what is measured by self-reports and, particularly, victimization surveys.

This position is controversial and runs counter to what has been a very common view of the UCR. O'Brien (1983: 434), for example, asserts that few criminologists would disagree with the proposition that it is generally not wise to make comparisons of officially recorded crime rates across police jurisdictions. McCleary, Nienstedt, and Erven (1982) concur, stating "we agree with the conventional view that the UCR are non-comparable across jurisdictions." Furthermore, a content analysis of 15 textbooks of criminology in current use found that all say the UCR suffer from serious methodological problems; 8 of the textbooks suggest that the UCR may have no value in a comparative context (Sullivan and Gove, 1984).

Much of the justification for questioning the validity and/or utility of the Uniform Crime Reports is based on empirical evidence. Introduced by Porterfield (1946), self-report studies have shown drastically higher rates of unofficial delinquency and much weaker correlations by class and race than are disclosed by official statistics. Furthermore, victimization surveys indicate that the majority of crimes are not reported to the police (Decker, 1980: 50; Cohen and Lichbach, 1982: 261). These data are commonly interpreted as indicating that the vast majority of crime goes unrecorded, and the large number of unreported crimes, commonly called the "dark figure of crime," is used to call into question the validity of official statistics. It is also argued that the victimization surveys and the UCR appear to be measuring different things. This argument is dramatically illustrated by Decker, Shichor, and O'Brien (1982: 31) in their analysis of the relationship of a variety of independent variables to aggravated assault, as measured by the victimization
surveys and the UCR for 26 cities. As seen in Table 1, for percent white, percent aged 12-24, median income, percent in crowded households, percent foreign born, and percent on public assistance, the relationships with the UCR and the victimization surveys are all statistically significant but in the opposite direction. From these and other analyses, Decker et al. (1982: 79) concluded, “the NCS measures are probably more valid that the UCR measures for most crimes.” Other investigators have reached a generally similar position (e.g., Booth, Johnson, and Choldin, 1977: 196).

Table 1. Relationships With Aggravated Assault for 26 Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Victimization Surveys</th>
<th>UCR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>.43***</td>
<td>-.50***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Age 12-24</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>-.47**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium income</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>-.48**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household crowding</td>
<td>-.65****</td>
<td>.58***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Foreign born</td>
<td>-.45**</td>
<td>.37*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public assistance</td>
<td>-.41**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10  **p < .05  ***p < .01

Source: Decker et al. (1982: 31)

In addition to the empirical evidence, the labeling perspective raises theoretical questions regarding the validity of the UCR. The article by Kitsuse and Cicourel (1963), “A Note on the Uses of Official Statistics,” which played a critical role in the development of the labeling perspective, argued that research should shift the focus of investigation “from the process by which certain forms of behavior are socially and culturally generated to the process by which rates of deviant behavior are produced” (1963: 134-135). As Kitsuse and Cicourel (1963: 139) argue, “The rates of deviance constructed by the use of statistics routinely used by these agencies are social facts par excellence.” Their article raises serious questions and appears to be a call for research. However, the article is usually cited simply as indicating that official statistics are invalid. There is now sufficient evidence to answer the questions asked by Kitsuse and Cicourel.

OFFICIAL CRIME STATISTICS AND SELF-REPORTS: THE ILLUSION OF A DIFFERENCE

The apparent sharp disparity between self-reports and official statistics which has plagued criminologists for a number of years has, to our satisfaction, been resolved. This resolution effectively answers one of the issues used
to question the validity of official statistics and provides a step towards understanding what official statistics in general and the UCR in particular measure. Recently there have been at least four major attempts to interpret the apparent disparity between official delinquency rates and self-reported delinquency rates. The first, by Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis (1979: 1,009), concluded that (1) self-report instruments typically tap a domain of criminal behavior which is nonserious and which is virtually outside the domain of official data; (2) self-report measures provide reliable and valid indicators of the domain of behavior they typically measure; (3) a self-report approach is capable of dealing with behavior in the domain of official crime; but (4) self-report samples have been inadequate to draw clear conclusions concerning the correlates of offending behavior as compared to the correlates found in official data. Hindelang et al. (1979: 1,009) also concluded, drawing largely from data other than self-reports, that official measures of criminality provide valid indicators of the demographic distribution of criminal behavior.

Elliott and Ageton (1980) report on a national longitudinal survey of youth which uses a greatly improved self-reported delinquency measure. The measure is improved primarily in two ways. First, it includes the FBI Index of Crimes (except homicide) and second, it uses detailed data on the frequency with which crimes are committed. These self-report data show relatively clear differences by class and race and are more consistent with official statistics than previous studies using self-report data.

In a controversial article, Tittle, Villemez, and Smith (1978), performing a meta-analysis of self-report studies (most of which focused on nonserious crimes and all but one dealt with juveniles), suggested that the class-crime relationship, so central to the sociology of deviance, is a myth. In rebuttal Braithwaite (1981) conducted a very comprehensive review. He found that (1) official crime statistics do indeed show a strong negative relationship with class and (2) self-report studies show a similar but much weaker pattern. Braithwaite emphasizes three points in his paper. First, among lower-class and middle-class youth known to have been in trouble with the police and the courts, questioning in follow-up studies showed that the lower-class youths are less likely to report that they have been in trouble. Second, lower-class youths tend to score higher on scales measuring deception in self-report measures (Braithwaite, 1981: 47). Third, the only study where the class distribution of crime was systematically collected by direct observation showed

1. Some of the more radical criminologists go so far as to assert that there is no such thing as criminal behavior because "criminalization" is the consequence of the acts of social control agents (e.g., Turk, 1969: 9; Quinney, 1970: 15).
2. For a different, if less detailed, critique of the article by Tittle et al. (1978) that reaches similar conclusions to Braithwaite's (1981), see Clelland and Carter (1980).
3. This claim remains controversial. Kleck (1982) reviews several studies which tend to support Braithwaite's (1981) claim of a class bias in reporting delinquency. In
larger social classes (particularly the very low class) to have much higher crime rates (see Miller, 1967).

Thornberry and Farnworth (1982) reported on a large longitudinal study of males born in 1945 and residing in Philadelphia; the study included self-reports on criminal behavior and official police statistics (1) when the subjects were juveniles and (2) when the subjects were adults. The data from both self-reports and official statistics showed a very weak negative correlation between low social class and criminal behavior among juveniles. Among adults, both the self-reports and official statistics showed a strong negative correlation between low social class and criminal behavior.

These studies indicate that at least most of the apparent disparity in the rates in the self-report studies and official statistics is due to the very high rates of nonserious crime found in the self-report studies. This suggests that a substantial part of the "dark figure of crime" involves relatively trivial criminal acts. The studies indicate that class, race, sex, and age are related to crime in the direction reported by official statistics of arrest rates, and the study by Thornberry and Farnworth (1982) suggests the strength of the relationship is roughly consistent with that found in official statistics. However, these analyses focus on offender characteristics and provide no direct evidence of the factors determining what the police record as a crime; they only tangentially touch on the central issue raised by Kitsuse and Cicourel (1963)—namely, the factors that determine how the official statistics are constructed. These studies do not tell us what the UCR mean and how we should interpret them. How do the unreported crimes differ from the reported crimes? Are there systematic differences? Unless we have a fair understanding of the characteristics of crimes that become official and those that do not, we are on very tenuous ground when we use official statistics to try to determine if crime is related to such things as income, racial inequality, urban density, city size, governmental structure, or a variety of other variables, for we do not know what the crime rates measure (Booth et al., 1977; Decker, 1980; Decker et al., 1982; O'Brien, 1983).

A CRITICAL ISSUE: UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE VICTIMIZATION SURVEYS MEASURE

In attempting to determine the validity of the UCR and to interpret what they mean, we will draw heavily on the victimization surveys, analyses of the surveys, and studies of police behavior. In many respects victimization surveys can be seen as an attempt to estimate the amount of criminal behavior contrast, Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis (1982: 433-434), using a reverse record check as well as standard validation procedures, "found no evidence of differential self-report validity by social class." However, they report that black male offenders are three times as likely as whites to fail to report the commission of a known crime.
using techniques that are entirely independent of the process that leads to officially recorded crime. The first victimization survey of a normal population was conducted in the U.S. in 1966 (Biderman and Reiss, 1967; Biderman, 1967).

Since 1973, the U.S. Census Bureau has fielded a large national victimization survey of households (Pennick and Owens, 1976; Garofalo and Skogan, 1977). There have been attempts to relate changes over time in the rates found in the national victimization survey with changes in the national rates in the UCR. Although an early study by Eck and Riccio (1978) interpreted the data as indicating that the variations over time in the UCR did not reflect real difference in the crime rate, the more recent study by Biderman, Lynch, and Peterson (1982) suggests that the variations over time in the UCR correspond to variations in the national victimization survey and thus reflect real differences.

From 1971 to 1975, the Bureau of the Census performed victimization surveys in the 26 largest United States cities, each survey consisting of a sample of 10,000 households (approximately 22,000 individuals). Residents were asked if they had been victims of certain types of crime during the preceding year. Persons over 12 years of age were questioned about crimes against the person (rape, robbery, aggravated and simple assault, and personal larceny) and one adult in each household was questioned about crimes against the household (burglary, auto theft, and household theft). Information about the circumstances surrounding each incident and about characteristics of the respondent and the household were collected. Similar data were obtained from businesses, except that no questions were asked about larceny. The number of businesses sampled ranged from 1,000 to 5,000 depending on the city sampled. It should be noted that 13 of the 26 cities were sampled twice.

Because data were obtained from both individuals and businesses in the 26 cities surveyed, it is relatively easy to compare victimization crime rates with the UCR (except for larceny). Furthermore, it is possible to compare characteristics of the cities with the two crime indexes, something that is not possible with the national victimization surveys. We know of eight comparisons of the UCR and the city victimization surveys (Skogan, 1974; Clarren and Schwartz, 1976; Decker, 1980; Booth et al., 1977; Nelson, 1979; Decker et al., 1982; Cohen and Lichbach, 1982; Cohen and Land, 1984). Although Skogan (1974) in his preliminary analysis is relatively optimistic about the implications of the victimization survey for the UCR, most of the other investigators have concluded that the city victimization surveys raise serious questions about the UCR.

Cohen and Land (1984) take a position that is substantially different from those of previous investigators and from our position. At the statistical level the study by Cohen and Land (1984) is quite sophisticated. They start out
with the explicit assumption that survey estimators provide more valid estimates of the crime rate in the city than official estimates. They begin by using 21 urban structural variables which load on seven factors. They then take the seven urban structural indicators, and after introducing them as controls, find a much closer correspondence between the two types of rates for motor theft, robbery, burglary, and (to a lesser extent) rape, but not aggravated assault and larceny-theft. They explain these results by suggesting that they identified some critical “suppressor” variables in variables that are positively associated with one type of rate and negatively associated with the other. One of the major conclusions is that “provided sufficient urban structural control variables are utilized such analysis of official rates may produce results that are in reasonably close correspondence with what would be obtained with victimization rates for certain index crimes” (1984: 26). They suggest that this will allow us to look at causes of inter-city variability in crime using official rates and that such analysis may plausibly be generalized to smaller cities or other units of analysis. However, the procedure suggested by Cohen and Land (1984) is of little practical or scientific value, because the procedures they suggest would make it virtually impossible to look at the causes of the inter-city variability in crime. This is because the urban structural characteristics of cities considered by Cohen and Land, which clearly include most relevant variables, are used to “correct” for the flaws in official statistics and thus they cannot be simultaneously used to explain differences in inter-city crime rates.4

The studies cited above vary in the degree that they are critical of the UCR; however, with the partial exception of Clarren and Schwartz (1976) which draws no conclusions, none focuses on the data which bear on how the UCR and the victimization rates are constructed, or on the types of crime which tend to be filtered out in the creation of the UCR and in the victimization survey crime rates. As a consequence, the studies are difficult to evaluate.

Before turning to how the Uniform Crime Reports are constructed, and particularly the light that the victimization surveys shed on the UCR, it is

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4. Note that Cohen and Land (1984) suggest no reason why their structural variables should be a cause of bias in official rates (have supressor effects) and in fact the variables were selected solely because they were believed to be causally related to a crime. We would also note that contrary to Cohen and Land’s interpretation, their results can be as easily interpreted as indicating that the victimization rates have adjusted so that they are reasonably close to the official rates. We will show later in the paper that much of the variation in the victimization surveys as opposed to official rates across the 26 cities is due to (1) factors which affect the willingness of persons from cities to report crimes (see especially Skogan, 1976) and (2) the relation of the city to the larger environment (the SMSA, the country). Many of their variables appear to be related to these two factors and it is easier to make a case that controlling for their structural variables makes the victimization rates more consistent with the UCR than the reverse.
necessary to discuss what the victimization surveys measure. It is particularly important to focus on the methodological problems characteristic of the victimization surveys, because they are generally viewed as a more valid indicator of the crime rate than the UCR (Decker et al., 1982; Cohen and Land, 1984).

**CONCEPTUAL ISSUES**

In the victimization surveys, "victimizations" are conceptualized as discrete incidents with a beginning and an end, which are sharply bounded in time and space. As a result the surveys do not measure well continuous processes that are not clearly delineated discrete events but that instead resemble enduring conditions. Furthermore, they only measure events that can be uniquely described and ignore classes of crimes for which victimization is quite prevalent but the frequency of individual incidents is unknown. This procedure of operationalizing victimizations implies that crimes can be understood apart from their social context, that they are discrete events which are bounded in time and space, and that crimes are knowable as discrete individual incidents (Skogan, 1981a: 7, 1981b; Biderman, 1981).

*Context.* The victimization survey presupposes that through description behavior can be identified as criminal or noncriminal. However, criminality is a concept which in law is not strictly defined in terms of behavior. An example will help to illustrate the problem. The UCR definition of "aggravated assault" is an unlawful attack by one person against another for the purpose of inflicting severe bodily injury, usually accompanied by the use of a weapon or other means likely to produce death or severe bodily harm (United States Department of Justice, F.B.I., 1973: 11). A number of sources of potential confusion lie in this definition. The "attack" does not have to produce any injury or even harm, since the definition includes attempts (as we will see, the inclusion of "attempts" is especially problematic in the victimization surveys). Furthermore, the issue of intent is crucial. Yet the establishment of intent is often difficult for the average citizen and the uniformed patrolman (who usually acts on secondhand information). Whether an attack is "unlawful" is likewise a difficult decision for the average citizen to make, particularly in the case of heated disputes where both parties (and their respective friends) feel aggrieved or threatened by the other. In fact, the victimization surveys do not determine who is the "aggressor" and who is the "victim," because the issue is never even broached in the interview. It would appear that most "aggressors" would be categorized as "victims" in the surveys. Furthermore, what is a "severe injury"? Injuries obviously fall along a continuum of seriousness and gray areas will always exist. The issue is complicated by the fact that the categories such as aggravated assault, simple assault, assault and battery, and fighting specifically exclude consideration of injury (United States Department of Justice, F.B.I., 1973: 55). One should
note that a study in Portland showed the police were much more likely than victims to see assaults as less serious, that is, as simple assaults and not aggra-
vated assaults (Schneider, 1977). With regard to assault the issue of “intent” is particularly serious for purposes of comparison because it is not dealt with in the victimization surveys.\footnote{Evidence that victims frequently do not equate physical injury caused by others with “criminal” behavior is provided by Biderman (1975). He interviewed over 600 injured persons about their physical condition. He found that 18% experiencing pain or suffering attributed their condition to a criminal event. However, there were many more persons who were victims of trauma inflicted by others, because they attributed the incident to carelessness or error, and hence thought the injury was not intentional, viewed it as not criminal.}

Such serious definitional problems exist for almost all crimes. Among the index crimes, rape and minor burglary are almost as difficult (in some cases more difficult) to define and apply to concrete situations than are definitions of aggravated assaults (Clarren and Schwartz, 1976). In fact, it is not clear that a definition of a crime can refer only to objectively measurable behavior without some reference to intent of the offender, the unique circumstances, and the general attitude or condition of the victim.

The problem of social meaning is not as important a methodological issue with street robbery or anonymous assaults, but physical aggression among family and friends, and theft and robberies in which the offender is known to the victim are much more difficult to interpret. The “criminality” of such incidents depends heavily on the attitudes of those involved. Victimization surveys find such incidents tend not to be reported to the police and the most common reason given for not reporting is that “it was not a police matter,” which suggests the victim did not wish to treat it as a crime. Nevertheless, such incidents are reported as crimes in the surveys (Hindelang, 1976; Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1980.)

\textit{Discrete events versus continuous processes.} Several crimes such as child abuse, spouse abuse, and robberies of children at school are perhaps better viewed as ongoing processes than as discrete events. Consider the family in which the father regularly comes home drunk, beats his wife, and threatens to beat his children. Occasionally, the conflict may escalate so that a family member or neighbor calls the police, so the police are apt to have an episodic record of such events. In the crime surveys these processes are treated as “series offenses.” Series offenses are those incidents that are so frequent, similar in character, or otherwise difficult to separate that the victim cannot disentangle them during the interview into concrete events occurring at specific times. About 100 series incidents are recorded every month in the National Crime Survey and they make up about 3% of all incident reports (Dodge, 1975). Overall, series incidents are disproportionately violent crimes. In the National Crime Survey and in the City Victimization Surveys, series incidents
are completely excluded when the data are processed to produce crime rate estimates (Skogan, 1981a: 9). Reiss (1978) has calculated that including the series incidents would increase the estimated number of crimes in the United States by 18%. The data reported in Shenk and McInerney (1978) show that the elimination of series victimization may lower the number of assault and rape victimizations by 30% to 40% and the number of robbery and burglary victimizations by 15% to 20% (see also Pennick and Owens, 1976; Dodge and Lentzner, 1978; Dodge, Lentzner, and Shenk, 1976: 88).

Reliance on the victims' definition of criminal acts. Because victimization surveys rely only on the report of the victims, the data may be distorted by variation in how respondents define crime. This appears to be a key issue with assaultive behavior. As Skogan (1981a: 10) notes, victimologists have always assumed the bulk of victims of assault come from the lower reaches of the social ladder because lower status persons are heavily overrepresented among victims of such crime on police files. However, in survey data, education is typically positively associated with victimization by assault. In 1976, for example, persons with college degrees recalled three times as many assaults as those with only an elementary education (U.S. Department of Justice, 1979: Table 15). This finding is extremely stable, being found in the United States (Dodge et al., 1976), Germany (Stephan, 1976), the Netherlands (Steinmetz, 1979), Norway, Finland, and Denmark (Wolf, 1976).

Skogan (1981a: 10) notes there are two competing explanations for this relationship, both of which assume that assaults tend to be more common in the lower class. The first is that educated persons are better respondents and give more complete information, and there is evidence to support this position (Skogan, 1981a: 22; Sudman and Bradburn, 1974; Sparks, Genn, and Dodd, 1977). However, it seems unlikely that this characteristic of respondents is sufficient to account for the relationship observed with education. The second is that persons in a lower-class environment may see a certain act as a normal aspect of daily life, while persons who have had very little contact with physically assaultive behavior may see the same act as a brush with criminal violence. Not only has this argument been used to explain the relationship between crime and education (Skogan, 1981a; Stephan, 1976), but Stephan (1975) has used it to explain why Germans, who live in a relatively low crime environment, recall more unsuccessful crimes than Americans, and Skogan and Kleck (1977) have suggested it as a possible explanation for why the assault rates found in victimization surveys are higher for San Diego than for New York City.

Subcultural differences in the salience of aggressive behavior may also explain some of the perplexing racial differences in reported assault victimization. For example, white residents of Washington, D.C., reported a rate of assault victimization that was two and one half times what blacks reported, a
That most assaults reported in victimization surveys are relatively trivial events is supported by data from the national victimization survey for the years 1973-1979. The majority of aggravated assaults, simple assaults, and rapes were committed by strangers. Of the aggravated assaults reported, 70% were only attempted (no injury) and serious injury was inflicted in only 6% of the reported aggravated assaults by strangers. Among simple assaults 79% were only attempted and in no cases were serious injuries inflicted. Among rapes by strangers that were reported, 62% were attempted but not completed, and only 5% of the victims received a serious injury (U.S. Department of Justice, 1982). The very high level of reported aggravated assaults without injury clearly raises the question of whether the perpetrator actually intended to inflict serious bodily harm (one of the legal requirements for aggravated assault) or if the victims were often inferring such an intention. One should note that although it has been asserted that many of the assaults were trivial, that assertion is not being made with regard to rape.

SAMPLING AND INTERVIEWER EFFECTS

Sample size. In surveys attempting to sample rare events, it is necessary to obtain very large samples in order to obtain estimates that have a respectable standard error. The 60,000 households employed in the national crime sample appear to be an adequate number. However, the 10,000 households (and approximately 2,500 commercial establishments) in the city surveys did not produce estimates which were large relative to the standard error. For example, in Philadelphia the rape victimization rate is based on only 29 actual interviews with rape victims (Jacob, 1975). Thus, Skogan (1981a: 2) notes that while the data from the city surveys have been used to estimate victimization rates for each city, these rates may vary enormously within the confidence interval which surrounds them.

Interviewer effects. The categorization of many crimes is quite sensitive to individual discretion at the lower end of the seriousness scale, whether the discretion is of police officers (in the UCR crime estimates) or of respondents and their interviewers (in the victimization surveys). In an excellent discussion of the problem, Clarren and Schwartz (1976: 129) conclude that "the upper bound for the number of 'crimes' that could be elicited is limited only by the persistence of the interviewer and the patience of the respondent." Bailey, Moore, and Bailer (1978) show that a considerable amount of the variation in reported crime in the victimization surveys is due to interviewer effects—that is, variation due to the fact that some interviewers elicit more and/or different kinds of information from respondents than others. The
extent of these effects varies both across cities and across crimes. In Baltimore, for example, it is necessary to multiply estimates of sampling variance by 1.6 to calculate confidence intervals which take into account both sampling and interviewer variance. The rate of victimization there was 110 per 1,000 with a sampling error range (with a 95% confidence interval) from 40 to 180 per 1,000. These differences become even more extreme if one considers the effects of correlated response variance or looks at specific crimes (Bailer, Bailey, and Stevens, 1977). The city victimization surveys manifest substantial interviewer effects with the strength of those effects varying substantially across cities (Bailer et al., 1977; Bailey et al., 1978; Skogan, 1981a). Bailey et al. (1978) recommend that in the city victimization surveys the confidence intervals based on samplings be substantially increased to protect against the fact that interviewer effects vary substantially across cities. The crimes most affected by interviewer effects are petty theft, rape, assault, and series incidents (Bailey et al., 1978; Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo, 1978; Dodge and Lentzner, 1978; Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1980; Skogan, 1978, 1981a, 1981b).

The issue of the distribution of crime. While crime is relatively infrequent in the general population, this is not the case among certain subgroups. For example, in 1970 two thirds of the reported robberies in the United States were concentrated in 32 cities which contained 16% of the national population. Within those cities crime was very heavily concentrated within a few places (Skogan, 1979). As a result, a very small proportion of the population is exposed to extremely high levels of risk and contains a disproportionate number of victims. The relatively extreme spatial concentration of victims, especially victims of violent crime, poses a serious problem in drawing probability samples that will accurately reflect the proportion of criminal victimizations. As Skogan (1981a: 5) indicates, this problem has not been solved. A further difficulty is that factors associated with the victimization rates are also associated with the nonresponse rate, which tends to be particularly high among crime victims (Martin, 1981).

The target population. Victimization surveys have a particular problem in the definition of their target population. They measure incidents of criminal victimization of the residents of a city, including victimizations which occurred when the residents were outside the city area. They do not, however, measure victimization of nonresidents (transients, commuters, visitors) which occur in the city and which, when reported to the police, appear in city police statistics. Evidence from the city victimization surveys indicates substantial variation among cities in the extent to which this geographical problem introduces error (Dunbow and Reed, 1976; Gibbs and Erikson, 1976; Wolfgang and Singer, 1978).
UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS

RESPONSE BIAS

Nonrecall. One way of checking the accuracy of victimization surveys is to take incidents from police files and to interview the victims. The San Jose reverse record check found that violent crimes of assault and rape were much less likely to be reported in the survey than property crimes (Turner, 1972); the prime determinant in whether the violent crimes were reported to the police was the relationship of the offender to the victim. The following percentages were reported: (1) offender was a relative, 22.2%; (2) offender was friend or acquaintance, 57.7%; (3) offender was a stranger, 74.7%. The relationship between the offender and the victim was particularly critical in assaults and rapes, and much less important in robbery (Turner, 1972). A record check conducted in Canada found very similar results: 71% of stranger assaults were recalled, 56% of “known party” assaults were recalled, and only 29% of related party assaults were recalled (Catlin and Murry, 1979: Table R). The record checks conducted by Yost and Dodge (1970) and Dodge (1970) yielded generally similar results (see the discussion in Sparkes et al., 1977; Hindelang, 1976), although they suffer from serious methodological problems (Pennick and Owens, 1976: 37; Schneider, 1981).

Classification. Another key finding of the record checks is that the police frequently classify a crime differently than the victims do in the survey. In general, the police tend to classify the crimes as less serious than do the victims. For example, in the San Jose study 5 of the 59 robberies were classified as assaults by police and 12 of the 103 survey burglaries were classified as larceny. The study by Schneider (1977), which went from victim reports to police records, also found a tendency for the police to classify the crime as less serious than did the victims. A major reason why the police classification may differ from the victim’s is that the data from police records and police decisions reflect information gathered from a variety of sources other than the victim, including their own observations and reports of witnesses (Skogan, 1978, 1981a: 13).

Other sources of error. It has consistently been found that interviewing a single informant in a household produces considerably fewer victimization reports than if all residents were interviewed (Biderman and Reiss, 1967; Sudman and Bradburn, 1974; Ennis, 1967; Stephan, 1976; Dodge, 1977). This is a source of some error in the city interview, because not all household respondents were interviewed, and even when all household respondents were interviewed, not all were asked about certain crimes (Dodge, 1977; Skogan, 1981a). Furthermore, a substantial number of crimes are not recalled unless they occurred in the very recent past, and the rate at which incidents are forgotten increases with time (Skogan, 1981a; Woltman, Bushery, and Carstensen, 1975; Pennick and Owens, 1976). In addition to respondents forgetting or not telling about some crimes, other crimes that occurred prior to the
time frame covered in the interview (one year in the city surveys) tend to be telescoped in the interview. There is considerable evidence that city victimization surveys, which were not bounded, contain a number of victimizations that occurred prior to the period covered in the interview (Dodge, 1970; Woltman et al., 1975; Neter and Woksberg, 1964; Schneider, 1977; Skogan, 1981a). It should also be noted that in victimization surveys the interviewers usually attempt to obtain personal interviews, but in practice a number of interviews are obtained by telephone, which has an unknown effect. Telephone interviews were particularly common in the city victimization surveys (Skogan, 1981a).

The evidence consistently suggests that minor variations in wording and timing have substantial effects on responses (Reiss, 1967; Wolfgang and Singer, 1978). The report by the National Academy of Sciences (Penick and Owens, 1976: 85-86) evaluating the victimization surveys (including the city surveys) finds a number of serious problems not already noted. Among them is the fact that the screening interview (1) involves unnecessarily complex screening questions; (2) adopts a priority ordering that results in key screening questions never being posed at all to certain respondents; and (3) incorrectly assumes a discrete dramatic unity of person, place, time, and action in the meaning of the word “incident” for the respondent.

**ASSESSMENT OF THE VICTIMIZATION DATA**

*Property crimes.* As it is presently constructed, the National Crime Survey appears to measure serious property crimes adequately—that is, successful robberies, burglaries, and auto theft. The measure of larceny appears to be much less satisfactory because (1) most larceny involves offenses of small value, and (2) data on larceny are not obtained from businesses (Skogan, 1981a; Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1980). For these crimes the city victimization surveys are much more problematic, in part because they occurred before many of the refinements in the current victimization surveys were made. Nevertheless, for serious robberies, burglaries, and auto thefts the estimated crime rates should have a rough correspondence with reality. By using the term seriousness we are concerned with such issues as the success of the crime, who committed it, the loss incurred, where the crime was committed, and, with robbery, such issues as the weapon used and the extent of bodily harm. Most cases of larceny where substantial loss is incurred are probably reported. However, because larceny primarily involves items of little value (Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1980), it is not clear that the relatively few cases of “serious larceny” that occur in a city will be closely related to the rates estimated in the victimization survey.

*Assault and rape.* There is substantial evidence that the data from the victimization surveys substantially underreport assaults and rapes among
acquaintances, friends, and relatives. In the national survey 60% of the assaults were attributed to strangers and in the city survey 70% of interpersonal violence was attributed to strangers. As Skogan (1981a: 29) notes, these data do not correspond to what is known about the dynamics of interpersonal violence, namely that a much higher proportion of assaults and even rapes take place among family, friends, and acquaintances. Numerous studies of police homicide files suggest that strangers account for only 25% of all urban murders; homicide and assault typically are very similar in origin although the processes differ in outcome. (For review of the evidence, see Zimring, 1972; Curtis, 1974; Ennis, 1967; Skogan, 1978, 1981a; U.S. Department of Justice, F.B.I., 1971.) Skogan (1981a: 30) indicates that the victimization surveys are particularly suspect because police files contain three and one half times more violence between acquaintances than is reported in interviews. A study conducted in Washington, D.C., by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA, 1977) found that in 1973, according to the victimization survey, 30% of the victims were assaulted by nonstrangers, whereas 75% of the persons arrested for assault were nonstrangers. The LEAA data on rapes are even more striking. They found that only 9% of the rapes reported in the victimization survey included nonstrangers whereas the official statistics indicated that 57% of the rapes included nonstrangers. In fact, based on the victimization data in 1973 there should have been 54 victims of nonstranger rapes whereas there were 222 arrests for nonstranger rapes. Note also that in the recall studies reported earlier, assaults and rapes committed by acquaintances tended not to be reported in subsequent interviews.

The LEAA (1977: 19) study concludes that the data are “substantial enough to cast serious doubt on the victimization surveys’ ability to measure the incidence of assault and rape between nonstrangers.” The report goes on to assert that “either the survey should be restructured to obtain better information on nonstranger violence or estimates from the survey should be limited to data about assault and rape between strangers” (1977: 19). (A similar position, although not as strongly asserted, is made by Skogan, 1981a: 30-31; Pennick and Owens, 1976: 39-42; Block, 1981; Hindelang et al., 1978.) We would also note that the difficulty of measuring rape and assaults in the victimization surveys has been used to explain why whites report more nonserious assaults than do blacks (Skogan, 1981a: 30-31).

It should be quite clear that for rape and assault, the measures of “crime” in the victimization surveys and in the UCR are completely different. We have focused on the issue of stranger/nonstranger violence, and to a lesser extent on the differences between blacks and whites, but probably a substantial part of the difference is due to the nature of the instruments used. In the UCR, the police must determine to their satisfaction that an assault or rape occurred. To do so they must conduct an investigation to determine if the
incident fits the criteria for that particular crime. For aggravated assault, these criteria are (1) an unlawful attack of one person upon another, (2) for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury, which (3) usually involves the use of a weapon or by means likely to produce death or severe bodily injury. In the victimization surveys, an aggravated assault is defined as having occurred if the respondent answers survey questions which indicate that he or she was (1) attacked with a weapon resulting in any injury, or (2) attacked without a weapon resulting either in serious injury (e.g., broken bones, loss of teeth, internal injuries, loss of consciousness) or an undetermined injury requiring two or more days of hospitalization, or (3) attacked in an attempted assault with a weapon. Note that in the victimization definition there is no determination of lawfulness or of intent.

For rape, the factors the police must determine to their satisfaction before a rape incident appears in the UCR are that a man must have had (1) carnal knowledge of a woman, (2) forcibly, and (3) against her will. In the victimization surveys a woman is never asked if she has been raped. To be recorded as rape the woman had to answer that she was raped to one of the following questions: (1) “Did anyone threaten to beat you up or threaten you in some other way?” or (2) “Did anyone try to attack you in some other way?” In the interview rape is never mentioned, no definitions are given, and no follow-up or probing questions are asked to find out the nature of the rape. This may be why in the San Diego recall study 5 of the 30 rapes that were recalled were recorded as assaults and not rapes (Turner, 1972).

In summary, there is little if any reason to believe that across cities the victimization rates for aggravated assault and rape will correlate with the UCR rates. (For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Skogan, 1978, 1981a; LEAA, 1977).

THE CONSTRUCTION OF UCR OFFENSE RATE STATISTICS

UCR Index offense rates can be conceptualized as the final product of a filtering process which selects from a wide range of illicit behavior those specific acts reported to the FBI as serious crime. The most crucial step in the creation of an official crime statistic is the police becoming aware that a crime has been committed. The evidence consistently indicates that in this process the police are primarily reactive rather than proactive; that is, the crime is detected by a citizen who then notifies the police. For example, in 1973, only 1.6% of the robberies and 0.4% of household burglaries were discovered at the scene by the police (Skogan, 1976: 107; see also Hagan, 1972; Hindelang, 1978: 101; Black and Reiss, 1970; Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1980). Thus, the process can most conveniently be considered as occurring in two stages: (1) a citizen detecting the offense, deciding to report it to police, and
actually doing so, and (2) a police officer interpreting the reported offense, deciding to record it as an official crime, and later reporting it to the FBI under some UCR category. It should be stressed that until quite recently considerable emphasis was placed on the role the police played in the initiation of reporting a crime (e.g., Miller, Dawson, Day, and Pornas, 1971), but with the development of the victimization surveys it is now very clear that citizens play the key role in initiating the process and reporting a crime (Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1980: 21-59).

CITIZEN REPORTING AND NONREPORTING

Detection of a criminal offense involves both observing an event and defining that event as a criminal act. An attempted burglary where the burglar leaves no sign of an attempted entry or where the potential victim misinterprets the sign will not be labeled as a crime. Further, an event might be observed, yet not reported as a crime either (1) because the illegal nature of the act is not known, (2) because the citizen disagrees with the legal definition of an act as criminal, or (3) the cost of reporting the crime is not worth the benefit. It should be noted that citizens quite often cannot make the proper legal classification of an incident; Black (1970: 735), for example, reports that the labels given by citizens in telephoned complaints of incidents often prove to be inaccurate. Furthermore, Gibbs and Erickson (1979) have shown that citizens frequently are unable to categorize criminal behavior correctly. Among other things, this suggests that citizens in an interview may describe an incident as in a different category than police would have. This finding is supported in the reverse record checks; it is also found in studies which attempt to match victims' reports with police records (e.g., Schneider, 1977).

Reporting. Two issues crucial to deciding if there is a systematic bias in citizen reports of crimes to the police are whether among the different segments in our society (1) there are differences in the perceived severity of various crimes, or (2) there are differences in how serious a person must perceive a crime to be before reporting it to the police. By now there are numerous studies of the perception of the severity of various crimes, how such perception varies among different segments of society, and the reliability across different segments of society of the Sellin-Wolfgang seriousness scale (Sellin and Wolfgang, 1964; Rossi, Waite, Bose, and Berk, 1974; Schrager and Short, 1980; Cullen, Link, and Pozanzi, 1982; Figlio, 1975; Hawkins, 1980; Pontell, Granito, Keenan, and Geis, 1984; Akman, Normandeau, and Turner, 1967; Velez-Dias and Megargee, 1970; Hsu, 1973; Newman, 1976). These studies consistently report a widespread agreement in the rankings of seriousness across sex, social class, race, age, and ethnic groups (Miethe, 1982: 516). In short, with regard to the first issue it appears that the different segments of society agree on the severity of the various crimes covered by the FBI index
crimes and that differences in perceived severity would not be a source of systematic bias affecting citizen reports of crime to the police.\textsuperscript{6}

Gottfredson and Hindelang (1979) utilized the National Crime Survey for the years 1974-1976 to investigate who reports crimes to the police and who does not, measuring the seriousness of the offense by the Sellin-Wolfgang (1964) scale. Among their other independent variables were family income, the degree of poverty in the respondent’s neighborhood, the town or city size in which the respondent resided, the marital status of the resident, the education of the respondent, and the number of persons in the respondent’s neighborhood who were college graduates. In all cases, seriousness was a much more powerful predictor of reporting the crime to the police than were any of the other independent variables. Similarly, Schneider, Burcert, and Wilson (1976) found that in the victimization survey conducted in Portland, Oregon, 24\% of the crimes that were categorized as being low on seriousness as measured by the Sellin-Wolfgang scale were reported to the police, whereas 80\% of the crimes that were categorized as high on seriousness were reported to the police.

Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1980: 35) analyzed data on an estimated 208,000 personal victimizations in the city surveys and found that the factors associated with the seriousness of the crime were the best predictors of whether the police were called. In particular, they found that the most important predictors of whether the police were called were (1) the use of a weapon (particularly a gun), (2) injury to the victim (particularly if it was serious), and (3) financial loss (particularly if it was great). When these factors were combined, the probability of a crime being reported became very high.

The person who has perhaps done the most work with the victimization surveys is Skogan. Based on a variety of studies, including the national and city surveys, Skogan (1976: 108) concludes that the key determinants of whether the crime was reported to the police were (1) the amount of financial loss, (2) the use of force, (3) the use of a weapon, (4) the extent of injury, (5) the assailant being a stranger, (6) the invasion of one’s home, and (7) the threat of death. In contrast, the individual attributes of the victim had only a minor effect on whether victims reported a crime (among the individual attributes the age of the victim is clearly the most important). Very similar findings are reported by Hindelang (1976), Ennis (1967), Block (1974),

\textsuperscript{6} Miethe (1982) argues that perhaps some of the apparent consensus on the perceived seriousness of crimes may be a methodological artifact. However, because his argument only applies to minor crimes, which are not part of the FBI index crimes, this possibility has no relevance to the present discussion.
Thus, the evidence from the victimization surveys provides very strong support for the view that perceived seriousness of the crime is the key determinant of reporting a crime to the police and the attributes of the individual and where the person lives play only a very minor role.

Another way to assess the reasons for citizens not reporting crimes is simply to ask the respondent why the crime was not reported. The two most frequently given reasons are that the offense "was not serious enough" to report and that "the police could not be effective." For the crimes of rape, assault, and motor theft a large percent of the victims reported that the victimization was "a private matter." Fear of reprisal is infrequently given as a reason for not reporting a crime (Biderman, Johnson, McIntyre, and Weir, 1967: 154; Ennis, 1967: 44; Hawkins, 1973; Hindelang, 1976; Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1980; U.S. Department of Justice, F.B.I., 1974: 5). Hindelang (1976) also analyzed the reasons for failing to report a crime to the police, looking at crimes where (1) the offender was known to the victim and (2) the offender was a stranger. For crimes involving strangers, the major reason the crime was not reported was because "nothing could be done," whereas for crimes between nonstrangers the major reason was that "it was a private matter." These reports of victims suggest that most of the crimes they do not report they perceive to be either trivial or not a legal matter. It is also important to note that Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1980: 40) found little variability in reporting to the police by victim characteristics, and Garofalo and Skogan (1977) found that the victim's perception of police performance had at most a very weak relationship to whether a victim reported a crime to the police.

To our knowledge, there have been three other studies which provide hard evidence on the factors which are often held to be related to whether crime is reported. These papers have focused on a specific offense in a special situation: the decision of department store detectives to refer shoplifters to the police. The findings show that age, sex, and race of offender—the characteristics of interest—are unimportant in the decision to refer. Hindelang (1974a) found that the value of the object stolen was more important than the age, race, and sex of the offender combined. Similarly, Cohen and Stark (1974) found that controlling for the value of the goods taken eliminated any relationship between age, sex, race, or class and official referrals. If the shoplifter was unemployed, this was related to referral, although the relationship was not as strong as for the value of the goods stolen. These studies were replicated by Lundman (1978), who again found that the value of the shoplifted goods was the strongest correlate of the decision to call the police.

In summary, the perceived seriousness of a crime appears to be the prime determinant of whether it is reported to the police. Furthermore, there is no evidence in the studies reviewed to suggest that different segments of society
differ in the level of perceived seriousness (of the FBI index crimes) required before a crime is reported to the police.7

POLICE RECORDING AND NONRECORDING

The second major filter through which crime counts pass is the police organization itself, from the first patrolman's contact with the complaining citizen through the final classification of a crime into UCR categories for official recording and publication. It is the alleged bias in this screening process which has traditionally caused the most concern about the usefulness of official police statistics. As was noted, the initiation of the recording process is almost always in response to a citizen's complaint.

There are a number of ways of measuring law enforcement bias in the recording of crime. One is to look at characteristics of individuals and see if they are treated differently by legal officials. Another is to look at police departments and their reporting behavior. A third is to look at independent indicators of the crime rate.

Characteristics of individuals and police behavior. Perhaps the best direct-observation study is that of Black and Reiss (1970). The study consists of systematic observation of police-citizen transactions occurring in lower-class areas of Boston, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., during the summer of 1966. Black and Reiss (1970: 76) found that

(1) Most police encounters with juveniles arise in direct response to citizens who take the initiative to mobilize the police to action.

(2) The probability of arrest increases with the legal seriousness of alleged juvenile offenses, in particular as that legal seriousness is defined in the criminal law for adults.

7. A reviewer of this paper has suggested that different segments of society (blacks and possibly persons from the lower class in general) are less likely to report comparable crimes to the police, with those segments requiring a higher "threshold level" (that is, a more serious crime) before reporting a crime to the police. This argument suggests that, because blacks (and possibly members of the lower class in general) are less likely to report comparable crimes to the police than other members of the population, and because there are class and ethnic variations across cities, there could be a systematic bias in the UCR statistics across cities. The studies just reviewed appear to contradict such an argument. However, many assaults and some rapes that are reported to the police are not reported in victimization surveys, and many of those reported come from educated whites, so these data do not conclusively address the issue of whether there is a variation in the threshold among the different components of society in whether such crimes are reported to the police. This does not appear to be an issue for auto theft, burglary, robbery, or homicide. We argue later in the paper that with regard to reporting assaults and rapes to the police, at the time the crime is committed the threshold level is relatively comparable across the different components of society. However, the evidence for this proposition is largely inferential.
(3) Police sanctioning of juveniles strongly reflects the manifest preferences of citizen complainants in field encounters.

(4) The presence of situational evidence linking a juvenile to a deviant act is an important factor in the probability of arrest.

Note that the key determinants of official action were perceived seriousness of the offense and the desires of the complainant. In no instance did the police initiate official action when the complainant manifested a preference for informal action. When no complainant was present, the police very rarely initiated official action even though the suspect was found with incriminating evidence of some sort (Black and Reiss, 1970: 76). Second, there was no evidence of racial discrimination on the part of the police. Third, the deference of the offender had little effect on police action, with 22% of the antagonistic suspects and 22% of the very deferential suspects being arrested. These findings have recently been replicated by Lundman, Sykes, and Clark (1978).

In a separate paper, Black (1970) describes the conditions under which the police decided to report a crime in the relatively rare cases (approximately 10%) where there was a complainant but no suspect. Although Black's criterion for the legal seriousness of the crime was crude (felony or misdemeanor), he found that the police were much more likely to report serious crimes. He also found that the complainant's preference for official or unofficial action was of critical importance; no official reports were made when the complainant manifested a preference for informal action. The police were also much more likely to fill out a report when the adversaries were strangers than when they were friends, neighbors, or acquaintances, and were less likely to complete a report when the complainant and suspects were members of the same family. Berk and associates (Berk, Loseke, Berk, and Rauma, 1980, 1982; Berk and Loseke, 1981) have recently provided an excellent discussion of the tendency of police not to become involved in incidents of family violence, and Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1980) report that when the victim and the offender know each other the authorities make every effort to reconcile the two rather than incarcerate the offender. This pattern is maintained even after controlling for the desire of the complainant for official or unofficial action. The evidence presented by Black (1970) clearly indicates that the complaints of blacks and whites were treated in the same fashion.

8. In an earlier study, Piliavin and Briar (1964) reported that the demeanor of the juvenile had a very strong effect on the field disposition of the suspect, even stronger than the type of offense. However, as Hirschi (1980: 282) notes, because offenses did not vary in this study, "anything and everything will be more important than offense in determining the severity of disposition."

Block and Block (1980), using secondary data from a victimization survey and police records in Chicago, look at the process by which robbery is transformed into statistics. Rates of victimization are based on a survey conducted in 1974 and the rates of official records are based on a sample of police records for different months in 1975, with the rates projected for the entire year. The analysis thus assumes that 1974 and 1975 can be compared, and because the comparison is based on rates, there are limits to the conclusions that can be drawn (Block and Block, 1980: 625). There are three decision points in the analysis: (1) the victim reported he or she notified the police; (2) the police have a record which indicates they responded to the report of a robbery; and (3) the police after their investigation reported a robbery had occurred. Block and Block found that (1) age, sex, and race of the victim had no effect on the decision probabilities at any stage in the decision process; (2) victim and police decisions are primarily affected by the seriousness of the incident as indicated by whether a gun was used or robbery completed; (3) most of the serious cases that are eliminated are eliminated by the victim and not by the police, and in fact no crimes were eliminated by the police when a robbery was completed and a gun was used; and (4) upon responding to a robbery reported by a victim, the police "found" 79% (officially reported a robbery had occurred), while 21% received a different categorization (this most frequently occurred when the victim reported a completed robbery with no gun, and it is likely that many of these were categorized as burglaries).

By far the best studies of the validity of UCR figures regarding race, sex, and age characteristics of offenders are those by Hindelang (1978, 1981). Hindelang (1978) compared UCR estimates of the racial distribution of offenders for four common-law personal crimes—robbery, rape, aggravated assault, and simple assault—to those obtained from the national victimization survey. The rates were identical for the crimes of robbery: 62% of the victimization survey offenders and 62% of the UCR arrestees were reported to have been black. For rape, in relation to the victimization reports, blacks are overrepresented by about 10 percentage points in the UCR arrest data (1978: 100). However, if only NCS victimizations where the victims told interviewers the rapes were reported to the police are considered, blacks are found to constitute 47% of the NCS rape offenders as compared to 48% of the UCR rape arrestees. Hindelang (1978: 101) concludes that "these data suggest there is virtually no criminal justice system selection bias for either rape or robbery."

The pattern is quite different with assault, particularly aggravated assault. The UCR arrest rate for aggravated assault is 41% black, and the victimization survey rate is 30% black (Hindelang, 1978: 100). When we look at the respondents in the victimization surveys who said they had reported the crime to the police, the percent black drops to 26 (Hindelang, 1978: 102), and so the disparity between the UCR and the NCS increases. Hindelang's
(1978: 107) explanation for the disparities in the assault rate revolves around the “subculture of violence” thesis, which suggests that much violent crime is intraracial and largely involves blacks victimizing blacks. According to this view, rape, and especially assault, are more accepted and expected by blacks and hence are less often construed as crime and/or reported to the police or to survey interviewers as crimes. He also notes that victims who know their assailants are much more common among blacks than whites (Hindelang, 1978: 103). In addition to the “subculture of violence” thesis, there are a number of reasons for believing assaults among blacks are particularly likely to be underreported in victimization surveys while assaults are probably over-reported by whites.

More recently, Hindelang (1981) compared offender characteristics using the victimization surveys and the UCR. He looked at crime rates by sex, race, and age for personal crimes (rape, robbery, assault, and personal larceny) and for household crimes (burglary, household larceny, and vehicle theft). On the personal crimes of rape, robbery, and assault, the offender is usually seen by the victim. In contrast, in the household crimes, the criminal is seen in only 6% of the burglaries, 6% of the auto thefts, and 4% of the household larcenies. However, even with these latter crimes, the sample size is sufficiently large, approximately 6,000, and there are enough crimes that detailed statistical analysis can be performed. Hindelang demonstrates a remarkable correspondence between the survey data and official statistics. Hindelang (1981: 473) concludes, “the general agreement between UCR and NCS (National Crime Survey) on the offenders’ sex, race, and age characteristics increases the probability that both are acceptably valid.” We would note that earlier, using a different set of data, Curtis (1974: 20) comes to a very similar conclusion regarding victim-offender racial characteristics.

Studies of police departments. Skogan (1976) used the 26 largest American cities—the only cities for which there are good victimization data—to study the variation in the police recording rate across cities. He estimated the rate for each city by comparing the number of robberies and burglaries counted in official police statistics to the estimated number of robberies and burglaries respondents said they reported to the police. Such an approach is problematic, for it assumes that (1) the universe of crimes that each purports to measure is the same, (2) the survey-based incident measure counts it relatively accurately, and (3) we can trust respondents to tell us which crimes were reported (Skogan, 1976: 111). As is clear from the earlier discussion of victimization studies, all these assumptions are invalid. Nevertheless, his analysis is suggestive. Skogan (1976: 111) found that the data collected in the 26 communities indicate “intercity variation in levels of violence, stranger crime, use of weapons, financial loss, breaking and entering, and racial fear are sufficient to explain much of the variation across cities in the ‘willingness’ of the citizen to report the crime to the police” and hence account for much of the
discrepancy in the rates produced by the victimization surveys and the UCR. Skogan (1976: 134) found that police departments in cities where crimes are more frequently serious generally recorded more incidents relative to the victimization survey estimate. In particular, he found that the police recorded more crime (1) where the use of guns was frequent, (2) more burglaries involved forcible entry, (3) thefts involved higher financial loss, and (4) where whites were victimized more often by blacks. Furthermore, as noted above, Block and Block (1980) found the police tend to focus on more serious robberies (that is, when a robbery was completed and/or when a gun was used). Thus, the evidence indicates that just as citizens are more likely to report more serious victimizations, police departments are somewhat more likely to record incidents as crimes in their community as the incidents become more serious (Skogan, 1976: 134).

Other evidence also suggests that professionalism is related both to more complete and more accurate crime reporting. Seidman and Couzens (1974) indicate that the introduction of a centralized complaint handling system, changes in the standard form for incident reports, revision of departmental guidelines for reporting specific offenses, and changes in training program curriculum result in more accurate and complete reporting. (See also Beattie and Keeney, 1966; Biderman, 1966; Skogan, 1976; Wilson, 1976.) With the increase in both federal money and federal guidelines for police departments across the country during the 1970s, it is likely there was an increase in the level and uniformity of the professionalism of police departments, and that this variable is less important as a determinant of variation in the official crime rate across cities than it was in the past. Note also that in the past three decades there has been a very sharp increase in the number of agencies reporting to the FBI and at the present time virtually all relevant agencies report. Furthermore, it has already been well established that the introduction of centralized radio dispatching systems made it very difficult to disguise crime reports, has resulted in more uniform and accurate reports, and has had the effect of generally increasing the official crime rates (Bordua and Reiss, 1967).

In summary, there are four factors which appear to play a significant role in whether the police, upon responding to a complaint, report a crime. The first is whether upon investigation the police conclude that the evidence fairly clearly indicates a crime has occurred (remember that the police and the citizens often differ regarding the appropriate categorization of a crime). Second, the police very rarely report a crime if the victim would prefer to treat the matter informally. Third, the more serious the crime, the more likely the police are to report it; with regard to this point it is worth emphasizing that police and citizens use very similar criteria for the “seriousness.” Fourth, the more professional the police department, the more likely its officers are to report a crime. There has been a substantial increase in the professionalism
of the police departments over the past four decades. In evaluating police behavior in the reporting of a crime, it is very important for the reader to keep in mind that the key determinant of whether a crime is officially recorded is the decision of the victim to notify the police, while police behavior plays a much more modest role.

A COMPARISON OF UCR AND VICTIMIZATION ESTIMATES

The best way to answer questions about the validity of the UCR is to relate them to the "true" crime rate. Since one can only estimate this rate (it can never be measured directly) and since all estimates of the true rates contain error, the next best test is to compare the UCR rates to another, maximally different indicator of the same variable, that is, to compare it to another flawed measure of the true rate. If the two measures share no method variance, if there is no common source of error which will bias both measures (in the same or in opposite directions), then the relationship between the two can be treated as a validity coefficient because the only source of common variance is taken to be the true rate (Skogan, 1974).

Method variance refers to the techniques of data collection and recording. For the uniform crime reports the initiation of the recording process almost invariably begins with a complaint by a citizen; the next step typically is the decision of the citizen to press charges; this is followed by the decision of a policeman that a crime has been committed and that it is serious enough to report; next comes a decision as to the type of crime that has been committed (which often does not correspond to the victim's definition); and this is followed by the actual filing of a report. In the victimization surveys a random sample is first drawn from the community; an attempt is then made to contact selected respondents; next is the decision by the contacted respondents to respond to the interview; the respondents then reply to a set of structured questions and those replies are then interpreted and recorded by the interviewer. As discussed there are problems in the victimization surveys in the definition of crime categories, particularly with assault and rape. In the two situations the persons responsible for actual coding would likely have very different attributes (for example, interviewers are almost always females, policemen are almost always males). Thus, the strategies used in these two types of data collection are very different and the two procedures of data collecting and recording would not produce any common form of systematic bias.

It should be emphasized, however, that citizens' reporting rates reflect some common error because in both the UCR and the victimization survey estimates, citizens fail to report certain kinds of crimes both to interviewers
and to law enforcement agencies. However, if lack of seriousness is the reason crimes are not reported, and as long as the same criteria for seriousness are used in the victimization surveys and the UCR, the rate of not reporting should not seriously distort the correlation between the victimization surveys and the UCR across the 26 cities. As will be described, this statement is true even if the seriousness threshold before reporting occurs differs between the UCR and victimization surveys. With regard to seriousness, the same general criteria appear to be applied in the victimization surveys and the UCR for motor theft, robbery, burglary, and larceny, but not for assault and rape.

The crimes not reported to either the police or the victimization surveys can be viewed as missing cases that usually fall on the low end of the seriousness continuum, and their exclusion should have only a modest effect on the overall UCR-victimization survey correlation. For example, if one makes the simplifying assumption that for a particular index crime the ratio of serious and reported crime to nonserious nonreported crime is the same across cities for the UCR and the victimization survey estimates (the ratios may be different for the UCR and the victimization surveys), then the UCR-victimization survey correlations for that index crime would be identical regardless of whether the nonserious nonreported crimes were included in the analysis. That is, the correlations between the UCR rates and victimization rates with nonserious nonreported crimes included in the data will be identical to the correlations between the UCR and victimization rates with a substantial proportion of the nonserious nonreported crimes excluded for the analysis as long as the ratio of serious and reported crime to nonserious nonreported crime is the same across cities for the UCR and victimization survey estimates (note again that the ratios may be different for the UCR and the victimization surveys). It is, of course, unlikely that the rates of underreporting, controlling for seriousness, would be identical for each city. However, if this variation in underreporting is random in nature, its only effect would be to weaken the strength of the correlation.

Alternatively, if for a particular index crime the ratio of serious and reported crimes to nonserious and nonreported crimes varies by city, and if instead one assumes that the only common variance in the crimes reported is the (perceived) severity of the crime, then for these index crimes the correlation would be the measure of the rates of serious crimes as measured by the UCR and the victimization surveys. In this case it is assumed that inclusion of "nonserious" crimes in the UCR and/or victimization survey rates is haphazard and hence essentially random in nature. Under these conditions the UCR and the victimization surveys, instead of being treated as flawed measures of the true crime rate, would be treated as flawed measures of "the true

10. We would like to thank Michael Swafford for providing us with the proof for the assertion.
rate of the serious crimes" within each of the index crimes. The degree to which the measures are "flawed" can be treated as measurement error, which will reduce the correlation between the two measures. Here the tendency of the victimization surveys to include a relatively high rate of nonserious crimes would lower the correlation between the two crime rates. In short, contrary to what Nelson (1979: 27) asserts, the underreporting of nonserious crimes in both victimization surveys and the UCR does not pose a serious problem in comparing the two.

Eight studies—Skogan (1974), Clarren and Schwartz (1976), Nelson (1979), Decker (1980), Booth et al. (1977), Cohen and Lichbach (1982), Cohen and Land (1984), and Decker et al. (1982)—all directly compare UCR data to those obtained from victimization studies. Skogan's (1974) study was based on only 10 cities, with low samples in each city (193 to 157), and presented data for only two types of crime, robbery and auto theft. He found a correlation of .94 between UCR and victimization survey estimates of auto theft offense rates, but only a .39 correlation with robbery. All of the remaining studies present correlation estimates using the 26 cities surveyed by the Bureau of the Census for LEAA and the correlations of the victimization rates are all based on the full sample of households and businesses.

In calculating the correlation between the victimization surveys and the UCR, one must make a number of decisions, each of which will affect the results. The decisions involve the criteria to be used in constructing the victimization survey and UCR rates in an effort to make the two rates as comparable as possible. It appears that there was considerable variation in the care taken by the various investigators in their analysis regarding the choice made. We are inclined to assume that where there is variation among investigations in the correlations found, the correlations which are the largest generally reflect better decisions by the investigator(s) and probably tend more accurately to reflect the actual correlations that would occur if the procedures had been made as comparable as possible. Nelson (1979: 24), for example, along with other changes, modified the base population for the data from the FBI (but not in the victimization surveys) to take into account the proportion of persons commuting into the city on a daily basis. As Clarren and Schwartz indicate (1976: 125), such a modification makes the base of the rates for robbery and auto theft more similar because commuters tend to be victims of such crimes, whereas such change makes the base of the rates for burglary less similar because burglaries tend to occur in residences and businesses. Thus, Nelson is likely to have a relatively high correlation with robbery and motor theft and a relatively low correlation with burglary. However, the difference in the relationships found will in part reflect the fact that although the investigators studied the same cities, in 13 cities two surveys were conducted, the first being in 1971-1972, and the investigators used different sets of surveys. Some investigators do not report which set they used, while Cohen
and Lichbach (1982) treated each of the surveys in the 13 cities which were surveyed twice as independent. The correlations presented by Cohen and Land (1984) are those that occur after both sets of rates have undergone a natural log transformation.

Decker (1980), Decker et al. (1982), Cohen and Lichbach (1982), and Cohen and Land (1984) have presented a correlation for larceny-theft. However, they have correlated the personal/household larceny rate of the victimization surveys which does not include larceny from commercial establishments; the exclusion of commercial larceny in the rates from the victimization surveys but not from those in the UCR would appear to be particularly problematic because commercial establishments are much more likely than individuals to report other forms of property crime to the police (Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1980: 26-27). Thus, these correlations are very difficult to interpret since they clearly lack face validity.

The correlations are presented in Table 2. The correlations are higher for crimes involving theft (including robbery) than for purely personal crimes (aggravated assault and rape), and there tends to be less agreement among the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decker et al. (1982: 30)</td>
<td>$r = 0.90$ Motor Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.79 Robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.69 Burglary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.01 Rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.39 Aggravated Assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson (1979: 26)</td>
<td>$r = 0.91$ Motor Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.81 Robbery with Weapon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.69 Burglary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.56 Robbery without Weapon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.04 Rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.36 Aggravated Assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohen and Land (1984)</td>
<td>$r = 0.82$ Motor Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.78 Robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.74 Burglary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.13 Rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.36 Aggravated Assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohen and Lichbach (1982: 262)$^b$</td>
<td>$r = 0.82$ Motor Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.72 Robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.73 Burglary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.10 Rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.39 Aggravated Assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>$r = 0.86$ Motor Theft</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.65 Robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.81 Burglary</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.38 Rape</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.12 Aggravated Assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarren and Schwartz (1976: 124)</td>
<td>$r = 0.85$ Motor Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.66 Robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.76 Burglary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.06 Rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.56 Aggravated Assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booth et al. (1977: 119)</td>
<td>$r = 0.70$ Auto Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.62 Robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.60 Burglary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$Correlation after natural log transformation
$^b$The surveys in the 13 cities which were surveyed twice were treated as independent; thus, n = 39.
investigators regarding the correlations for purely personal crimes. One can interpret this lack of agreement for the personal crimes among investigators as due to different decisions about the proper categorizations in the victimization surveys. Motor theft is consistently found to have the highest correlation and all the studies find burglary and robbery to have relatively high correlations. As expected, Nelson (1979) finds higher correlations with motor theft and robbery than most of the other investigators, while Clarren and Schwartz (1976) and Decker (1980) find a higher correlation with burglary. Nelson also found the correlation with robberies committed with a weapon to be substantially stronger than robberies without weapons, which is consistent with the fact that when weapons are used the crimes are much more likely to be reported to the police and the police are much more likely to record that a robbery occurred. Except for the study by Decker (1980), all of the studies found essentially no correlation between the measures of rape, and all studies found a negative correlation between the two measures of aggravated assault.

**MOTOR THEFT, ROBBERY, AND BURGLARY**

It is known from the city victimization surveys that (1) due to sample size and interviewer effects, the standard error of the crime rates is very large; (2) crimes previously reported to the police are often not recalled (this is true of all crimes, but especially true of nonstranger violence) while other crimes that occurred outside the time frame are inappropriately reported; (3) except for motor theft the crime rate from victimization surveys is much larger than the UCR rate, mostly because of fairly trivial crimes; (4) the crimes reported in the victimization surveys, when aggregated, show considerable variation in the likelihood that citizens will report crimes to the police in different cities; and (5) the police fairly frequently disagree with the victim about how a crime should be categorized, with the police tending to categorize a crime as less serious than does the victim. Furthermore, there is a substantial difference in the “population” of crimes measured by the victimization surveys and the UCR, with the UCR measuring crimes committed in the city (including commuters and tourists) and victimization surveys measuring victimizations that occurred both inside the city and outside the city to persons residing in the city.

Given these facts, the correlations for auto theft, burglary, and robbery appear surprisingly large. Figure 1 demonstrates more clearly what the correlations actually mean. (The figure is not a fully drawn path diagram but is presented for illustrative purposes only.) In general, the higher the coefficient $t_1$, the greater the validity of the UCR offense rate estimate. The coefficient, however, can never be directly measured because the “true rate” cannot be measured and in fact is hard to define. The coefficient $t_2$ is a measure of the validity of the victimization survey. The only source of common variance in
the victimization surveys and the UCR would appear to be the actual occurrence of crime in the city surveyed. If this is true, then $t_1 t_2 = r$, where $r$ is the correlation between UCR and victimization rates. If we further assume that $t_1$ and $t_2$ are positive and that $r$ cannot be greater than $+1.0$, then neither $t_1$ nor $t_2$ can be less than $r$. If either $t_1$ or $t_2$ is less than $1.0$, then either $t_1$ or $t_2$ will be greater than $r$.

Although the victimization rates are estimates of crimes committed to the residents residing in a city and not crimes committed in the city, for the purpose of this analysis $t_2$ is used as a proxy for the crimes actually committed in the city. If one assumes—in spite of all the measurement problems in the victimization surveys and the lack of correspondence in the two populations—that there is only moderate error in $t_2$, one can calculate the correlations between the true crime rate (of serious crimes) and the UCR by making an estimate of $t_2$. For example, if the correlation between the true rate and the victimization survey estimate is .80 (that is, $t_2 = .80$), then given Clarren and Schwartz's correlation of $+.76$ for burglary, the correlation between the true rate and the UCR estimate for burglary will be $+.95$ ($+.76/.80 = .95$).

The victimization surveys and the UCR have similar rates for motor theft, and in the victimization surveys the respondents almost always indicated that
they reported the crime to the police; however, with burglary and robbery the victimization rate is approximately three times as large as the UCR and the majority of the crimes are not reported to the police (Decker, 1980: 50). We would thus expect the correlation between the victimization survey and the UCR to be higher with motor theft than with burglary and robbery. Table 3 gives the correlations between the “true” crime rate and the UCR \(t_i\) based on different estimates of \(t_2\). If we assume that \(t_2\) is between .85 and .90 for motor theft and \(t_2 = .80\) for burglary and robbery, which is a rather stringent assumption, then for motor theft \(t_i\) is very close to 1.0 and for robbery and burglary \(t_i\) is at least .90 and probably larger. In short, for these crimes our analysis indicates the UCR rates are very highly correlated with the true crime rates and are a valid measure of serious motor theft, robberies, andburglaries.

This conclusion is supported by another validation study. Using 1960 FBI data, Price (1966) compared official estimates of these three crimes with the insurance premiums for 10 kinds of theft insurance for 118 areas covering most of the United States. There are a number of problems with this design, including comparability of measures (insurance typically covers losses from more than one type of crime). Nevertheless, since premiums are set independently of FBI crime rates (they are based solely on insurance companies’ past experience), they do seem to share no “method variance” with crime rates. The results are roughly similar to those from the victimization surveys. Using a number of premium rate measures, Price obtained a correlation of about .74 for robbery, .71 for burglary, and .90 for auto theft. It is probable that nonserious crimes (for example, those involving very minor financial loss or auto thefts committed by nonstrangers where the car is recovered) tend not to be reported to insurance companies. Furthermore, there is the issue of where the crime occurred and the place the person lived. However, the correlations achieved appear to be very similar to those produced with the victimization surveys, and thus provide fairly strong support for the validity of the UCR with regard to auto theft, robbery, and burglary.

**LARCENY**

Among the FBI index crimes considered here, the larceny crime rate has received the least attention. However, it is clear that larceny is (1) the most frequent index crime, (2) the most difficult to detect, (3) the crime least likely to be reported to the police (Schneider, 1981) and (4) the crime most amenable to reporting manipulation in response to political pressures (Clarren and Schwartz, 1976). The victimization surveys clearly indicated that for larceny the greater the value of the object stolen, the greater the likelihood that the crime will be reported and recorded. For example, in the 1976 National Crime Survey, 15% of the larcenies under $50 were reported to the police whereas 52% of the larcenies involving $50 or more were reported to the
Table 3. Correlation Between True Crime Rate and UCR Assuming Different Correlations Between the True Crime Rate and Victimization Survey ($t_2$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$t_2 = 0.80$</th>
<th>$t_2 = 0.85$</th>
<th>$t_2 = 0.90$</th>
<th>$t_2 = 0.75$</th>
<th>$t_2 = 0.80$</th>
<th>$t_2 = 0.85$</th>
<th>$t_2 = 0.75$</th>
<th>$t_2 = 0.80$</th>
<th>$t_2 = 0.85$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motor Theft</td>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>Motor Theft</td>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>Motor Theft</td>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>Burglary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decker et al. (1982)</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson (1979)</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decker (1980)</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarrin and Schwartz (1976)</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohen and Land</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.87</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cohen and Lichbach (1982)</td>
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<td>.90</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booth et al. (1977)</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Estimated rate exceeds maximum possible value (see text).
police (Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1980: 27). This was also found to be true with the three experimental studies dealing with commercial larceny (Hindelang, 1974a; Cohen and Stark, 1974; and Lundman, 1978). However, because the vast majority of larcenies involve property of modest value, the official larceny rate will not primarily reflect stolen objects of considerable value (even though these crimes are the most likely to be reported and recorded). On reverse record recall checks, larceny is considerably less likely to be recalled than robbery or burglary but much more likely to be recalled than assault or rape (Penick and Owens, 1976: 39).

As is noted above, four of the studies (Decker, 1980; Cohen and Lichbach, 1982; Decker et al., 1982; and Cohen and Land, 1984) present the correlation between the victimization survey rate and the UCR larceny rate, but since the victimization survey rate excludes and the UCR rate includes commercial larceny, these correlations are clearly problematic. Nevertheless, one would anticipate that these correlations would be positive and that if variation across cities in the UCR rates and the victimization survey rates relatively accurately reflects changes in the two categories of larceny being measured, the correlations would be moderately strong. The correlations are reported in Table 4. As the table indicates, Decker found a relatively strong correlation ($r = .64$) and Cohen and Lichbach found a moderately strong correlation ($r = .51$), while Decker et al. and Cohen and Land found a modest correlation ($r = .32$). The sharp disparity in the correlations reported is difficult to interpret.

The second part of Table 4 gives the correlation between the "true" larceny rate and the UCR larceny rate ($t_1$) based on different estimates of $t_2$. Given the numerous difficulties the victimization surveys have in measuring larceny, and given that the official crime rate includes both commercial and personal larcenies while the victimization survey includes only personal larcenies, it is difficult to imagine that $t_2$ would be larger than .75. As Table 4 shows, the results of Decker and of Cohen and Lichbach indicate that the UCR larceny rate is fairly highly correlated with the true larceny rate. In contrast, the results of Decker et al. and Cohen and Land suggest that while the UCR larceny rate is clearly correlated with the true larceny rate, the relationship is not particularly robust. Thus, all four studies provide support for the position that the UCR larceny rate is correlated with the true larceny rate, but the results are equivocal with regard to the strength of that relationship, ranging from modest to strong.

Two other types of evidence provide support for the position that changes in the official larceny rate relatively accurately reflect changes in the true larceny rate. First is the fact that—as deterrence theory predicts—there is a strong negative correlation between the larceny crime rate and the larceny clearance rate (Geerken and Gove, 1977). Second, Cohen and Lichbach (1982: 263), using what they refer to as "the acid test of any regression
Table 4. Larceny

Part I. The correlation of the victimization survey larceny rate (which includes only household and personal larcenies) with the UCR larceny rate (which includes household, personal, and commercial larceny) for 26 cities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Correlation (r)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decker (1980: 53)</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohen and Lichbach (1982: 262)</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decker et al. (1982: 30)</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohen and Land (1984)</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part II. The correlation between the true crime rate and the UCR (both of which include commercial larcenies), assuming a different correlation between the true rate and the victimization survey rate (which excludes commercial larceny) ($t_2$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>$t_2$</th>
<th>$t_2$</th>
<th>$t_2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decker (1980)</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohen and Lichbach (1982)</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decker et al. (1982)</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohen and Land (1984)</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aThe surveys in the 13 cities that were surveyed twice were treated as independent; thus $n = 39$.
bCorrelation after natural log transformation

Overall, unlike the other property index crimes, larceny needs more research before one can conclude that the official rate is a valid indicator. In our view the evidence is sufficient to support the position that the official larceny rate is adequate as a rough indicator of the actual larceny rate, meaning that marked variation in the official larceny rate will reflect real variation. However, the evidence is insufficient to conclude that modest changes in the actual larceny rate will be reflected in the official larceny rate.

**HOMICIDE**

Hindelang (1974b) examined sources of homicide using data from the NORC, the Center for Health Statistics, and the UCR, and the comparisons indicated a high level of accuracy in the official homicide rates. More recently, Cantor and Cohen (1980) compared the UCR with the homicide rate measured by the vital statistics reports, and their analysis also shows that
(at least since 1949) the UCRs provide an accurate measure of the homicide rate.

AGGRAVATED ASSAULT

There is a relatively large negative correlation between aggravated assault reported in victimization surveys and in the UCR, and in most analyses this relationship is statistically significant. Given the small sample size \((n = 26)\), this is a remarkable finding. In the victimization surveys most of the aggravated assaults involve strangers, injury is rare, and serious injury is very rare. Furthermore, reverse record checks show that assaults by acquaintances, particularly by relatives, are rarely recalled in survey interviews. Also, official records have much higher rates of violence between acquaintances than are shown in the surveys, and many investigators have concluded that victimization surveys are unable to measure violence.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, F.B.I. (1971: 11-12), "most aggravated assaults occur within the family unit or among neighbors or acquaintances. The victim and the offender relationship as well as the nature of the attack makes this crime similar to murder." And there is an extensive literature indicating homicides and aggravated assaults typically occur among a certain segment of the population which has a very high rate of violence (Mulville, Tumin, and Curtis, 1967; Wolfgang, 1958; Curtis, 1974; Luckenbill, 1984; Skogan, 1981a: 29-31). Using the rates from the UCR, one finds a very close association between aggravated assaults and homicide, but if one uses the victimization surveys to measure aggravated assault there is no association between the two crimes for the 26 cities on which victimization data exist. Furthermore, when the victim and the offender know each other, the police generally make a very serious effort to reconcile the victim and the offender, and cases of nonstranger aggravated assault tend to be substantially underreported by the police (Berk et al., 1980; Berk and Loseke, 1981; Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1980). The evidence thus indicates that the police are likely to underreport aggravated assaults committed by acquaintances as compared to those committed by strangers. According to the Uniform Crime Reports (U.S. Department of Justice, 1971: 12), law enforcement agencies have difficulty obtaining convictions for aggravated assault because "The close family or other relationships which exist between victims and assailants in this category account for the victim's frequent unwillingness to testify for the prosecution." Thus, the evidence involving police behavior indicates that stranger assaults are more likely to be reported than nonstranger assaults; if this is correct, then the high rate of stranger assaults reported in the victimization surveys is even more misrepresentative than a simple comparison with official statistics indicates.

What may be occurring with aggravated assault is the following. Serious
assaults typically involve significant bodily injury, or at least a serious attempt to inflict such injury. Such assaults are likely to lead to police involvement due to someone else’s effort to stop a serious altercation by calling the police, or when serious injury does occur (such as a knife or gunshot wound), the police become involved when medical attention is sought. The evidence suggests that the UCR rate of aggravated assaults largely reflects such cases. Note that, if this is correct, then it is someone other than the victim of the assault who is typically reporting the crime to the police (Skogan, 1981a: 16).

It is also likely that in victimization surveys the nonreporting of aggravated assaults, particularly those committed by family members and acquaintances, occurs for the following reasons. First, such assaults typically arise over very trivial matters (Mulville et al., 1967; Curtis, 1974) and when one has a close relationship with an individual one tends, over time, to put the assault into the context of one’s overall relationship with the person and as a consequence the incident tends to become normalized.11 Second, because the assaults tend to occur in an environment where there is a high level of verbal and physical conflict, they would be fairly common experience to those involved and thus more easily forgotten and less likely to be reported to strangers.12

It is clear that many “aggravated assaults” are not recorded in the UCR. However, given the inability of the victimization surveys to measure nonstranger assaults and the very high proportion of “nonserious aggravated assaults” in the victimization surveys, it appears that the UCR provide a better measure. In fact, a solid theoretical case for the use of official aggravated assaults can be made. They comprise, after all, the total number of assaults that sufficiently transcend the bonds of social order that the police become involved in and then decide that (1) the violence is sufficiently severe that a negotiated settlement cannot (or should not) be made, and (2) the incident needs to be officially treated as an aggravated assault and not simple assault. In short, not only is the official rate of aggravated assault the best indicator, but in terms of legal and theoretical criteria it is perhaps the only valid indicator.

11. We would argue that with aggravated assault, because there is a serious threat to one’s life, the issue of stranger versus acquaintance tends to be ignored at the time the crime is committed. Furthermore, when someone other than the victim reports the assault to the police, the person reporting the crime is likely to be relatively unconcerned with the issue of the relationship between the offender and the victim. Thus, if correct, the victim’s relationship to the assailant often only becomes an issue after the crime has occurred.

12. This analysis is consistent with the hypothesis that a subculture of violence is causally linked to a high level of violence; however, these assumptions do not require that the “subculture of violence” hypothesis be correct. All we are assuming is that when violence is common (1) it tends to be normalized, and (2) people will tend to be more distrustful of strangers.
RAPE

Victimization surveys appear to be unable to measure rape adequately and, according to official statistics, they vastly undercount nonstranger rape. As with other assaults, the majority of rapes reported in the victimization surveys were attempted and not completed, and in a substantial majority of the rapes reported the victims received no physical injury. Unfortunately, because the victimization surveys contain no probes for either attempted or completed rapes, it is very difficult to grasp what the victimization surveys are measuring.

According to the UCR, rape is carnal knowledge of a female against her will through the use of force or the threat of force. In 1970, 71% of the official rape offenses involved a complete rape while the remaining 29% were attempted (U.S. Department of Justice, F.B.I., 1971: 14). According to official records rape is more likely than most of the index crimes (all except homicide and aggravated assault) to involve someone known to the victim. We have already seen that in Washington, D.C., official statistics indicated 57% of the rapes involved nonstrangers, whereas only 9% of the rapes reported in the victimization survey involved nonstrangers. The official statistics on 17 cities reported by Curtis (1974: 46) also show a high rate of nonstranger rapes. Thus, official statistics on rape are much more likely to deal with completed rapes than are victimization surveys and report a vastly higher rate of nonstranger rapes than are reported in victimization surveys.

Of all the index crimes, rape appears to be the most problematic in terms of both the willingness of victims to contact the police and the ability to establish that the incident meets the legal criteria. That rape is difficult to prove is indicated by the fact that in 1970, for the nation as a whole, 18% of the reported rapes were determined to be unfounded (U.S. Department of Justice, F.B.I., 1971: 14), and the rate appears to be relatively constant over the years. As the UCR make clear, the fact that upon investigation the police decided a citizen-reported rape was unfounded does not mean a rape did not occur, but that in most cases it was difficult to establish that force or threat of force was used because a prior relationship existed between the victim and the offender (U.S. Department of Justice, F.B.I., 1971: 14). Furthermore, in 1970 among persons formally charged with committing rape, 46% were acquitted or dismissed for prosecution problems. These problems typically revolved around the unwillingness of the victim to testify and the difficulty in establishing that force was used (U.S. Department of Justice, F.B.I., 1971: 14). This rate of dismissal or acquittal is higher than occurs with any of the other index crimes. The fact that most nonstranger rapes are not reported in victimization surveys and that many rape victims who know the offender will not testify suggests that many nonstranger rapes are simply one part of a set of events in a complex interpersonal relationship where over time the act
often becomes normalized, presumably being counterbalanced by other behavior.

It is argued that when a rape occurs it is primarily the severity of the turmoil, anguish, and bodily harm that determines whether the rape is reported to the police. Nonstranger rapes are probably less likely to be reported to the police than stranger rapes. However, it is likely that the victim's relationship with the offender tends to play a relatively modest role at the time a rape occurs but the nature of the relationship becomes increasingly important with the passage of time. Rapes reported in the UCR are probably a relatively poor indicator of rape as a social phenomenon but are probably a relatively accurate indicator of rapes which meet the established legal criteria (Lizotte, 1985).

It is not argued that only true rapes are reported in the UCR and that the victimization surveys are measuring trivial events. What is proposed is that the UCR tend to measure violent rapes where the legal evidence is clear. In contrast, many of the rapes measured in the victimization surveys may be highly traumatic to the victim, but they are probably less serious in terms of violence, and in terms of legal criteria the evidence is more ambiguous. Such rapes appear to be fairly common and to be particularly difficult to contain by formal means of social control.

CONCLUSION

For a number of decades social scientists have recognized that the UCR are the result of a set of social processes which result in some crimes becoming "official" while other crimes do not become public "social facts." Since the recognition that the UCR were the product of a social process which selected out a large number of crimes, it has not been clear what the UCR represent. This paper, drawing on recent research, has attempted to interpret the meaning of the UCR and thus to assess their validity.

Running throughout this discussion of the factors involved in the development of crime rates are a few important themes. Both citizens and the police are involved in a decision-making process concerning the classification of an incident as an official crime. In the United States and most other democracies, the primary responsibility for serious crime detection is lodged in the citizenry rather than the police. The uniformed patrol division is geared for the reaction to citizen calls for help through a centralized radio communications system. In the majority of crime situations, the police act in response to citizens' telephone calls and give great weight to the preference of the complainant for action. The key factor in the decision of the citizen to notify the

13. First, at the time they occur nonstranger rapes are likely to be perceived as less serious. Second, victims are aware that the issue of force is more difficult to establish when the victim has an established relationship with the offender.
police, as well as in the police response to the complaint, is the perceived seriousness of the incident, especially if seriousness is defined very generally.

It appears that both the citizen and the police are in general agreement as to what is a serious crime, particularly if it involves bodily injury (or serious threat of bodily injury), if the property stolen is of high value, if the act is committed by a stranger, or if it involves breaking and entering. The perceived seriousness of the crime, first and primarily as defined by the victim, and secondarily as defined by the police, appears to account for most of the variance in whether a crime is officially reported. Once the police have been contacted, the personal characteristics of the victim and the offender appear to play a rather small role. The evidence reviewed suggests little if any discrimination based on race, age, or sex. Furthermore, while in some instances the social class of the victim and the suspect and/or the demeanor of the victim may have some impact on the response of the police, it is clear that in most instances the effect of these variables is quite modest.

Legal seriousness, victim-offender relationship, desires of the complainant, and the extent to which citizen and police see an incident as a public or private matter are all criteria related to reporting. They all concern the extent to which the victim of a crime sees himself or herself as substantially injured by another citizen in a way he or she cannot control. That is, the victim's everyday experience is disrupted by a force outside his or her control. The kind of crime that tends to "get through" this citizen-police filter is that which disrupts the social bonds of trust which make a community possible. Black (1970: 739) makes the point that "the operational influence of citizens gives crime a peculiarly democratic character." Thus, official crime rates are in part a measure of the extent to which the citizens feel injured, frightened, and financially hurt by a criminal act. In this sense they may be a better measure of social disruption than are "true rates," where more objectively definable behavior is measured. In short, the rates of the index crimes presented in the UCR appear to be reasonably good approximations of true crime rates when the latter are defined as what both citizens and the police view as serious violations of the laws which codify the fundamental personal and property norms of society.14

Thus, the "dark figure" of crime uncovered in victimization surveys primarily involves rather trivial events; as Skogan (1978: 14) states, "Most victimizations are not notable events. The majority are property crimes in which the perpetrator is never detected. The financial stakes are small, and

14. It should be clear from the discussion that what most citizens and police perceive as serious crimes tend not to include most white-collar crime, which many sociologists see as particularly serious crimes (Chambliss and Seidman, 1971; Quinney, 1975, 1978; Johnson and Wasicklewski, 1982).
the costs of calling the police greatly outweigh the benefits." (See also Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1980: 28-36.) For those crimes when the victim knows the offender and does not notify the police the major reason that the police are not notified is that the victim views the "crime" as a "private matter." The aggravated assaults committed by strangers that are uncovered by victimization surveys and are not officially reported almost invariably involve no injury, and it is likely that most would not meet the legal criteria in aggravated assault. Similarly, most of the rapes committed by strangers and which are not reported by the police involve rapes that were not completed and that did not cause injury. Apparently, like self-reported delinquency, the criminal behavior picked up by victimization surveys but not reported to the police involves a different domain of behavior than that which is officially recorded (Hindelang et al., 1979).

The analysis suggests that the UCR appear to reflect fairly accurately what the citizens and the police perceive as violations of the law which pose a significant threat to the social order. For motor vehicle theft, robbery, burglary, and homicide, the evidence supporting this interpretation is also quite strong. For aggravated assault and rape the evidence is quite strong, but in reaching this conclusion one must recognize that one is making choices about the validity of various pieces of conflicting evidence. In particular, we are largely ignoring the data from the victimization surveys on assaults and rape on the grounds that they vastly underreport nonstranger assaults and rape and record a large number of aggravated assaults and rapes by strangers that do not meet the legal criteria.

Although there is general support for the utility of official larceny rates, in many respects the evidence on larceny is the most equivocal. As the rate of larceny is very high, even though most larcenies are not reported to the police, the official larceny rate is substantially higher than the other index crime rates. This means that the overall index crime rate disproportionately reflects the official rate of larceny, and given our questions about the validity of the larceny rate it is probably better not to look at the overall rate but to look at the crimes separately. In summary, it is concluded that the index crimes, with the possible exception of larceny, are valid indicators of crimes which members of society perceive as serious.

Most criminologists agree that the actual or "true" crime rate should correlate with urban structural characteristics and that if we had a valid indicator of the crime rate we could determine the relationship between crime and those structural characteristics (Shaw and McKay, 1931, 1969; Lander, 1954; Chilton, 1964; Bordua, 1958-1959; Schuessler, 1962; Land and Felson, 1976; Cohen and Felson, 1979; Hughes and Carter, 1983; Crutchfield, Geerken, and Gove, 1982; Cohen and Lichbach, 1982; Blau and Blau, 1982). Furthermore, a valid indicator of the crime rate is essential to study an etiological theory of criminality (see especially Gibbs, 1981, 1983). It is clear that the
UCR provide a valid indicator of the index crimes and can be used in studies of the relationship between crime and social structural characteristics and in etiological studies.

When the UCR are used it should perhaps be made clear that one is dealing with the relatively serious crimes which tend to pass through the citizen and the police filters and are officially reported. Finally, it is important to note that if one defines crime as criminal acts serious enough to be reacted to by both citizens and the police, then from the evidence reviewed above, the UCR are at least as valid and probably more valid than the data from victimization surveys. In fact, with regard to rape and aggravated assault the rates obtained from the UCR have much more validity than the victimization rates.15

15. In recent years the second most common source of data in the study of crime has been the victimization survey. If the analysis presented here is correct, then some of those studies are of questionable value. At the minimum investigators should be as cautious in drawing conclusions from victimization studies as they are in drawing conclusions from studies based on the UCR.
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Walter R. Gove is Professor of Sociology at Vanderbilt University. He has previously written on the labeling theory of mental illness and on the relationship of gender and marital status to mental health. His present work largely focuses on issues related to social integration and aging.

Michael Hughes is Associate Professor of Sociology at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. He is finishing a book on living alone and mental health and has started a project to make available for analysis by modern social scientists the original data from Booth's *Life and Labor of the People in London*.

Michael R. Geerken is Chief Administrative Officer for the New Orleans Criminal Sheriff and Adjunct Professor at Tulane University. He has published in the areas of deterrence, drug use, mental health, survey methodology, and family relations. He is the author of *At Home and at Work* and is engaged in research on victimization and the incapacitative effect of imprisonment.