

Victimization surveys reveal that victims often fail to report crimes to the police because of a belief that nothing could be done, the event was not important enough, the police would not want to be bothered, or it was a private matter. Failure to report also might be based on the victim's fear of self-incrimination or embarrassment resulting from criminal justice proceedings that result in publicity or cross-examination.⁷³

The NCVS indicates that the likelihood of reporting a crime to the police also varies by race. African Americans are slightly more likely than whites to report crimes of theft and violence to the police, whereas Hispanics are substantially less likely than non-Hispanics to report victimizations to the police. Michael J. Hindelang found that victims of rape and robbery were more likely to report the victimization to the police if there was an African-American offender.⁷⁴

Even if the victim does decide to report the crime to the police, there is no guarantee that the report will result in an arrest. The police may decide that the report is "unfounded"—in this case, an official report is not filed and the incident is not counted as an "offense known to the police." Furthermore, even if the police do file an official report, they may be unwilling or unable to make an arrest. In 2014, only about 47.4 percent of violent crimes and 20.2 percent of property crimes were cleared by the police. Moreover, differences in clearance rates vary by crime, ranging from serious crimes ranged from 13.6 percent for burglary to 64.5 percent for murder.⁷⁵

Police officer and offender interactions also may influence the inclination to make an arrest, and cultural traditions may influence police-citizen interactions. For instance, Asian communities often handle delinquent acts informally, when other communities would report them to the police.⁷⁶ Hispanic cultural traditions may increase the likelihood of arrest if the Hispanic's tradition of showing respect for an officer by avoiding direct eye contact is interpreted as insincerity.⁷⁷ African Americans who appear "hostile" or "aggressive" also may face a greater likelihood of arrest.⁷⁸

The fact that many reported crimes do not lead to an arrest, coupled with the fact that police decision making is highly discretionary, suggests that we should exercise caution in drawing conclusions about the characteristics of those who commit crime based on the characteristics of those who are arrested. To the extent that police decision making reflects stereotypes about crime or racially prejudiced attitudes, the picture of the typical offender that emerges from official arrest statistics may be racially distorted. If police target enforcement efforts in minority communities or concentrate on crimes committed by racial minorities, then obviously racial minorities will be overrepresented in arrest statistics.

A final limitation of UCR offender information centers on the information not included in these arrest reports. The UCR arrest information fails to offer a full picture of the white offender entering the criminal justice system. Specifically, additional sources of criminal justice data present the white offender as typical in the case of many economic, political, and organized crime offenses. Russell, in detailing the results of her "search for white crime" in media and academic sources, supports the view that the occupational (white-collar) crimes for which whites are consistently overrepresented may not elicit the same level of fear as the street crimes highlighted in the UCR but nonetheless have a high monetary and

moral cost.⁷⁹ (See Box 2.4 for information on the “operationalization,” or measurement, of race in crime data.)

Arrest Data

The arrest data presented in Table 2.4 reveal that the public perception of the “typical criminal offender” as an African American is generally inaccurate. Examination of the arrest statistics for all offenses, for instance, reveals that the typical offender is white; more than two-thirds (69.4 percent) of those arrested in 2014 were white, less than one third (27.8 percent) were African American, and less than 4 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander combined. Similarly, only 18.9 percent of those arrested were Hispanic. The vast majority (81.1 percent) of persons arrested were Non-Hispanic. These racial and ethnic percentages are similar when reviewing those arrested for Part 1 violent crimes and property crimes with a majority of arrestees being white (59.4 percent and 68.8 percent, respectively, for race and 76.0 percent and 83.2 percent for Non-Hispanic, respectively). In fact, the only crimes for which the typical offender was African American were murder, robbery, and gambling.⁸⁰

Box 2.4 The Operationalization of Race in Criminal Justice Data

The concept of race is measured—operationalized—in a number of ways, depending on the discipline and depending on the research question. Most biologists and anthropologists recognize the difficulties using traditional race categories (white, black, red, yellow) as an effective means of classifying populations, and most social scientists rely on administrative definitions for recordkeeping, empirical analysis, and theory testing. Given these conditions, however, the term “race” still carries the connotation of an objective measurement with a biological/genetic basis.

As Knepper⁸¹ notes, the recording of race in the UCR can be traced to a practice that has no formal theoretical or policy relevance. From available accounts, this information was recorded because it was “available” and may be a side effect of efforts to legitimize fingerprint identification. Currently, the UCR manual gives detailed information on the definitions for index offenses and Part 2 offenses and provides specific instructions about the founding of crimes and the counting rules for multiple offenses. What is lacking, however, are specific instructions on the recording of race and ethnicity information. Administrative/census definitions provided by local law enforcement agencies on agency arrest forms are calculated and reported, but no criteria for the source of the information are given. Thus, some records will reflect self-reporting by the offender, whereas others will reflect observations of police personnel. Some police arrest reports have black, white, American Indian, Asian, and possibly, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, whereas many use the category of “other.” A new convention is the attempt to add ethnicity to arrest reports. The terms Hispanic and Non-Hispanic are now reported to the FBI by a small percentage of agencies. The FBI’s National Incident-Based Reporting System does log additional information based on race and ethnicity for victims and offenders, but the information available in that data set for 2014 reflects reporting for just over 6,000 agencies in 33 states representing only 25 percent of the U.S. population in 26 states.⁸²

TABLE 2.4 Arrest Rates by Race and Ethnicity, 2014

Offense Charged	Percentage Arrests Race ^a					Percentage Arrests Ethnicity ^b	
	White	African American	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Hispanic or Latino	Non-Hispanic or Latino
TOTAL (100%)	69.4	27.8	1.6	1.1	0.1	18.9	81.1
Part 1 offenses (crime rate)							
Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter	46.3	51.3	1.0	1.3	0.1	21.6	78.4
Rape ^c	67.2	29.9	1.3	1.4	0.2	27.2	72.8
Robbery	42.3	55.9	0.8	0.8	0.1	20.5	79.5
Aggravated assault	63.7	33.1	1.5	1.5	0.2	24.8	75.2
Burglary	67.6	30.2	0.9	1.1	0.2	20.1	79.9
Larceny-theft	69.1	28.0	1.6	1.2	0.1	15.5	84.5
Motor vehicle theft	66.5	30.7	1.2	1.3	0.3	25.6	74.4
Arson	73.1	23.4	1.9	1.3	0.2	18.5	81.5
Violent crime ^d	59.4	37.7	1.4	1.4	0.2	24.0	76.0
Property crime ^d	68.8	28.4	1.5	1.2	0.1	16.8	83.2
Part 2							
Other assaults	65.4	31.9	1.6	1.1	0.1	17.9	82.1
Forgery and counterfeiting	63.8	34.0	0.6	1.5	0.1	16.2	83.8
Fraud	66.1	31.8	1.0	1.0	0.1	10.0	90.0
Embezzlement	61.9	35.6	0.7	1.7	0.1	10.3	89.7
Stolen property; buying, receiving, possessing	65.5	32.2	0.9	1.2	0.1	19.6	80.4

(Continued)

TABLE 2.4 (Continued)

Offense Charged	Percentage Arrests Race ^a					Percentage Arrests Ethnicity ^b	
	White	African American	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Hispanic or Latino	Non-Hispanic or Latino
Vandalism	70.1	27.0	1.8	1.0	0.1	19.0	81.0
Weapons, carrying, possessing, etc.	57.3	40.7	0.7	1.2	0.1	23.5	76.5
Prostitution and commercialized vice	53.7	41.8	0.5	3.9	0.1	19.3	80.7
Sex offenses (except rape and prostitution)	72.5	24.3	1.5	1.6	0.1	25.6	74.4
Drug abuse violations	68.9	29.1	0.8	1.1	0.1	20.9	79.1
Gambling	35.8	58.9	0.4	4.4	0.6	19.6	80.4
Offenses against the family and children	64.4	32.9	1.9	0.7	*	11.7	88.3
Driving under the influence	83.7	13.0	1.4	1.8	0.1	23.5	76.5
Liquor laws	80.2	14.5	3.9	1.3	0.1	15.6	84.4
Drunkennes	80.9	15.7	2.1	1.1	0.1	23.8	76.2
Disorderly conduct	63.0	33.9	2.3	0.7	0.1	13.1	86.9
Vagrancy	68.7	28.3	2.1	0.8	0.1	15.7	84.3
All other offenses (except traffic)	67.8	29.5	1.7	0.9	0.1	17.2	82.8
Suspicion	52.7	44.7	1.4	1.2	0.0	4.5	95.5
Curfew and loitering law violations	51.4	46.2	1.1	1.1	0.2	24.6	75.4

^a Because of rounding, the percentages may not add to 100.0.^b The ethnicity totals are representative of those agencies that provided ethnicity breakdowns. Not all agencies provide ethnicity data; therefore, the race and ethnicity totals will not equal.^c The rape figures in this table are aggregate totals of the data submitted based on both the legacy and revised Uniform Crime Reporting definitions.^d Violent crimes are offenses of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Property crimes are offenses of burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.

* Less than one tenth of 1 percent.

SOURCE: Adapted from Crime in the United States, 2014; Table 43A.

Examining the percentage of all arrests involving members of each racial group must be done in the context of the distribution of each group in the general population. In 2014, whites comprised approximately 83 percent of the U.S. population, African Americans comprised 13 percent, Native Americans comprised less than 1 percent, and combined Asian and Pacific Islanders comprised 3 percent. A more appropriate comparison, then, is the percentage in each racial group arrested *in relation* to that group's representation in the general population, rather than simply stating the "typical offender" by the largest proportion of offenders by racial group.

Although whites are the people most often arrested in crime categories reported in the UCR, it appears that African Americans are arrested at a disproportionately high rate for *nearly* all offenses. The total combined rate for all offenses, 27.8% (see Table 2.4), indicates that the arrest rate for African Americans is two times higher than would be predicted by their representation in the population. The disproportion is even larger for the most serious Part 1/index offenses reported in the UCR; the arrest rate is two and a half times higher for African Americans than predicted by their representation in the population.

Among the individual offenses, however, the degree of African-American overrepresentation varies. The largest disparities are found for robbery and murder. The arrest rate for African Americans is nearly four times what we would expect for murder and robbery, given their representation in the population. These differences also are pronounced for rape, motor vehicle theft, gambling, vagrancy, prostitution, stolen property offenses, and weapons offenses.

Table 2.4 also presents arrest statistics for whites, American Indians/Alaska Natives, Asians, and Native Hawaiians/Other Pacific Islanders. Whites are overrepresented for some UCR offenses. Specifically, whites are overrepresented for driving under the influence (DUIs) and typically liquor law violations (though not in 2014) compared to their representation in the general population. Whites are found in numbers consistent with their representation in the population for drunkenness arrests.

The overall pattern for American Indian/Alaska Native arrest figures is a slight overrepresentation compared to their representation in the population (1.6 percent of those arrested versus 0.8 percent in the population); however, the pattern across crimes is more erratic. For Part 1/index crimes, Native Americans are slightly more likely to be arrested for violent crimes (particularly forcible rape and aggravated assault) and for property crimes (particularly larceny-theft) and arson than their representation in the population suggests. Native Americans are overrepresented in several Part 2 offenses, including other assaults, vandalism, sex offenses (not rape and prostitution), offenses against family and children, driving under the influence, liquor law violations, drunkenness, disorderly conduct, and vagrancy. Conversely, the proportion of Native American offenders arrested for a number of offenses—forgery and counterfeiting, embezzlement, prostitution/commercialized vice, and gambling—at lower than what is expected given their proportion in the population. Additionally, the arrest figures for a number of other offenses—murder, robbery, burglary, and drug abuse violations—are consistent with their proportion in the general population.

Caution is required when interpreting Native American arrest figures because arrests made by tribal police and federal agencies are not recorded in UCR data. Using information from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, K. Peak and J. Spencer⁸³ found that although UCR statistics revealed lower-than-expected homicide arrest rates for Native Americans, homicide rates were nine times higher than expected across the 207 reservations reporting.

For overall figures and each index offense, Asian Americans and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islanders are underrepresented in UCR arrest data (1.7 percent of arrests in 2014 compared to 3 percent of the population). The notable exception to the pattern of underrepresentation is the Part 2 Offense with Asians significantly overrepresented in gambling arrests. The arrest rate for this offense can reach twice what is expected given the representation of Asians in the population. Notably, Asian Americans and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islanders are underrepresented in arrest figures for nearly all Part 1 and Part 2 offenses.

UCR arrest rates offer a limited view of Hispanic offenders, as not all agencies are reporting this information (see Table 2.4). Given that caveat, Hispanics are overrepresented in arrest statistics if they represent more than 17% of arrests in a particular category. Thus, Hispanics are overrepresented in the total arrest figures, representing 18.9% of arrests for all Part 1 and Part 2 offenses compared to their percentage in the population. Hispanics are overrepresented for violent Part 1 offenses, but not for property offenses. They are overrepresented for murder, rape, and motor vehicle offenses. Further examination of Part 2 offenses reveals that Hispanics are underrepresented in arrest figures for fraud, embezzlement, offenses against family and children, liquor laws, and disorderly conduct. However, Hispanics are overrepresented in arrest figures for stolen property, vandalism, weapons, prostitution, sex offenses, drug violations, gambling, and drunkenness.

Homicide offenders. In 2009, Alexia Cooper and Erica Smith released a report based on FBI/SHR that in the near 30-year period of their study (1980–2008) homicide reports revealed significant changes.⁸⁴ This study highlights that the profile of homicide offenders is different from the characteristics of the general population. African Americans are overrepresented as arrested homicide offenders. Arrest figures are used to estimate an offending rate that is eight times higher than the offending rate for whites (34.4 per 100,000 population vs 4.5 per 100,000 population). Offending rates for African Americans was at its lowest in 2004 at 24.1 per 100,000 population and at its peak in 1991 at 51.1 per 100,000 populations. Another snap shot of homicide offending can be seen in UCR arrest rates, with 52.5% of homicide arrests are of African Americans, compared to 45.3% of homicide arrests are of whites.

Supplemental homicide reports from 2014⁸⁵ reveal that the peak age for homicide offending for males is between 17 and 24; it drops significantly after the age of 30. Women are identified as committing less than 10 percent of homicides, and their offending patterns mirror those of males with the peak offending years between 17 and 24 and a significant decline after age 30. While whites are identified as homicide offenders in more than 50 percent of cases where the offender

FOCUS ON AN ISSUEImmigration and Crime: The Mythical Connection

Many researchers and social critics are concerned that the information we "know" about crime is distorted. The negative images of immigrants being criminals and immigration rates causing crime rates to rise are commonly presented by both news figures and politicians. These messages are numerous and constant, especially in light of fears that the number of immigrants is rising and the quality of immigrants is changing (drug dealers and radical Islamic terrorists).

Individual-level research based on self-report data fail to support the immigration and crime link that some fear. Specifically, first-generation immigrants are less likely than native born people to commit crime. The pattern changes with second-generation (socialized) immigrant populations to reflect offending patterns similar to native born populations. Piquero and colleagues suggest that this connection can be explained by unique perceptions of immigrants who "tend to have more positive views of the law, less cynical attitudes toward the legal system, and report more social costs associated with punishment."⁸⁶

The immigration and crime link is not supported at the community level either. An examination of crime rates reported by the FBI reveals that over the last few decades crime rates have fallen in most cases, remained stable in others, and even declined dramatically in other areas. On a community level, two recent studies

come to the same conclusion about the crime benefit of immigrant populations. First, a California study revealed that "California cities with large populations of recently arrived immigrants showed no significant relationship between immigrant inflows and property crimes, and a negative relationship with violent crimes."⁸⁷

Second, Stowell and colleagues' research asserts that the multivariate findings from their multijurisdictional data set "indicate that violent crime rates tended to decrease as metropolitan areas experienced gains in their concentration of immigrants. The inverse relationship is especially robust for the offense of robbery. Overall, our results support the hypothesis that the broad reductions in violent crime during recent years are potentially attributable to increases in immigration."⁸⁸ Schnapp's findings, conversely, fail to support a negative influence of immigration on homicide rates but also do not find a positive effect. He was also unable to isolate the influence of particular country of immigrant origin on homicide rates.

In short, the most accurate assessment of the data and research on the immigration and crime link is that first-generation immigrants are less likely than native born people to commit crime. Consistently, self-report data and incarceration data present a similar picture of crime by immigrants as less likely than native born and second-generation (socialized) immigrant populations.⁸⁹

race is known, the peak age of offending varies little by the race of offender. The main difference by age and race is that black offenders start offending at high levels at an earlier age than white offenders (13–16 years of age); however, white offenders continue to offend at a significant rate until a later age range (into their 40s).

Perceptions of Offenders by Victims

Clearly African Americans and sometimes Hispanics are arrested at a disproportionately high rate. The problem, of course, is that we do not know the degree to which arrest statistics accurately reflect offending. As noted previously, not all crimes are reported to the police and not all of those that are reported lead to an arrest.

One way to check the accuracy of arrest statistics is to examine data on offenders produced by the NCVS. Respondents who report a "face-to-face" encounter with an offender are asked to indicate the race of the offender. If the percentage of victims who report being robbed by an African American matches the percentage of African Americans who are arrested for robbery, we can have greater confidence in the validity of the arrest statistics. We can be more confident that differences in the likelihood of arrest reflect differences in offending.

If, however, the percentage of victims who report being robbed by an African American is substantially smaller than the percentage of African Americans who are arrested for robbery, we can conclude that at least some of the disproportion in the arrest rate reflects what Hindelang refers to as "selection bias" in the criminal justice system. As Hindelang notes, "If there are substantial biases in the UCR data for *any* reason, we would expect, to the extent that victimization survey reports are unbiased, to find large discrepancies between UCR arrest data and victimization survey reports on racial characteristics of offenders."⁹⁰

Problems with NCVS Offender Data

There are obvious problems in relying on victims' "perceptions" of the race of the offender. Respondents who report a victimization are asked if the offender was white, African American, or some other race. These perceptions are of questionable validity because victimizations often occur quickly and involve the element of shock. In addition, victim memory is subject to decay over time and to "retroactive reconstruction" to fit the popular conception of a criminal offender. If a victim believes that the "typical criminal" is African American, this may influence his or her perception of the race of the offender.

Relying on victims' perceptions of offenders' race creates another potential problem. If these perceptions are based on skin color, they may be unreliable indicators of the race of an offender. There are many very light-skinned African Americans and dark-skinned "white" people. Hispanics are of a wide range of skin colors. A person may self-identify in a way not reflected by his or her skin color. Thus, individuals may appear in different racial groupings in victimization reports than they do on a police arrest report. A light-skinned offender who identifies himself as Hispanic and whose race is thus recorded as "other" in arrest data might show up in victimization data as "white." If this occurs with any frequency, it obviously will affect the picture of the offender that emerges from victimization data.

Perceptions of Offenders

With these caveats in mind, we compare the NCVS data on the perceived race of the offender for single-offender violent victimizations for a recent year where

TABLE 2.5 Perceived Race of Offender for Single-Offender Crimes of Violence

Type of Crime	Perceived Race of the Offender			
	White	African American	Other	Race not known
All Crimes of Violence	59.0%	22.4%	10.8%	7.9%
Rape/Sexual Assault	48.8	18.1	16.2	17.0
Robbery	39.7	37.0	15.2	8.9
Assault	61.1	21.4	10.1	7.4
Aggravated	56.2	24.1	12.0	7.6
Simple	62.8	20.5	9.5	7.3

SOURCE: Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Criminal Victimization in the United States—Statistical Tables, 2006* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2008). <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/cvus0602.pdf>.

this information is available. As Table 2.5 shows, although the typical offender for all of the crimes is white (or is perceived to be white), African Americans are overrepresented as offenders for all of the offenses listed. The most notable disproportion revealed by Table 2.5 is for robbery, with 37 percent of the offenders in single-offender robberies identified as African American. Also, African Americans are overrepresented as offenders for rape/sexual assault, aggravated assault, and simple assault. Note that the “not known” category ranges from 17.0 percent of respondents for rape/sexual assault to 7.3 percent of respondents for simple assault cases.

We argued earlier that one way to check the accuracy of arrest statistics is to compare the race of offenders arrested for various crimes with victims’ perceptions of the race of the offender. These comparisons are found in Table 2.6. There is a relatively close match in the figures for white offenders for robbery and aggravated assault between victim perception data and arrest data. These comparisons also suggest that whites may be overrepresented in arrest data for rape and underrepresented in arrest data for simple assault. For African Americans, however, the pattern is more consistent—that is, African Americans are represented in arrest figures in much higher proportions than the perception of offenders from victim interviews for all offenses examined, with more than one-third higher representation in arrest figures than in victim-perception percentages. These comparisons indicate that the racial disproportion found in arrest rates for these four offenses cannot be used to resolve the dilemma of differential arrest rates by race versus a higher rate of offending among African Americans. It may be reasonably argued that such evidence actually suggests the presence of both differentially high offending rates by African Americans for serious violent offenses and the presence of differentially high arrest rates for African Americans, particularly for rape offenses.

The comparison of “other” race offers a consistent pattern of underrepresentation of “other” race in arrest figures compared to the victim-perception figures. This observation could mean that Asian/Pacific Islander and Native American

TABLE 2.6 A Comparison of UCR and NCVS Data on Offender Race, 2006

	Whites		African Americans		Other	
	Arrested	Perceived	Arrested	Perceived	Arrested	Perceived
Rape	65.3	58.8	32.5	21.8	2.2	19.5
Robbery	42.2	43.2	56.3	40.3	1.6	8.8
Aggravated	63.2	60.1	34.5	26.0	2.3	12.9
Assault						
Simple Assault	65.2	67.8	32.2	22.1	2.6	10.2

SOURCE: Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2006*. http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2006/data/table_43.html; Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Criminal Victimization in the United States—Statistical Tables, 2006*. <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/cvus0602.pdf>.

Alaska Native are committing crimes at a higher rate than they are arrested for. However, these figures also suggest that NCVS respondents may be classifying offenders they perceive as Hispanic/Latino/Mexican in appearance to be of “other” race. Citizens commonly assume that Hispanic is a racial category, not an ethnic category. It may be argued, then, that dark-skinned offenders who do not appear African American may be classified as “other” because Hispanic is not an option for the race-identification question. Additionally, NCVS respondents are not asked to identify the perceived ethnicity of the offender.

Hindelang used early victimization data to determine which of these explanations (differential offending versus differential enforcement) was more likely. His initial comparison of 1974 arrest statistics with victimization data for rape, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault revealed some evidence of “differential selection for criminal justice processing”⁹¹ for two of the offenses examined. For rape and aggravated assault, the percentage of African-American offenders in the victimization data was smaller (9 percentage points for rape, 11 percentage points for aggravated assault) than the proportion found in UCR arrest statistics.

However, once Hindelang controlled for victimizations that were reported to the police, the discrepancies disappeared, and the proportions of offenders identified as African American and white were strikingly similar. Hindelang concluded that “it is difficult to argue (from these data) that blacks are no more likely than whites to be involved in the common law crimes of robbery, forcible rape, assault.”⁹²

Hindelang’s analysis of victimizations reported to the police also revealed a pattern of differential reporting by victims. Specifically, Hindelang found that for rape and robbery, those victimized by African Americans were more likely than those victimized by whites to report the crime to the police. Hindelang suggested that this is a form of selection bias—victim-based selection bias.

Hindelang concluded his comparison of UCR arrest rates and victimization survey data by separating the elements of criminal justice—system selection bias, victim-based selection bias, and differential offending rates. He argued that both forms of selection bias were present, but that each was outweighed by

the overwhelming evidence of differential involvement of African Americans in offending.

Using NIBRS arrest data (17 states), Stewart J. D'Alessio and Lisa Stolzenberg try to disentangle differential offending from differential enforcement by deriving research questions from the social threat hypothesis. They use racial composition of a jurisdiction to approximate the social threat of racial minority populations to determine if law enforcement arrest practices vary by the racial composition of reporting jurisdictions, and thus differentiate differential arrest practices from differential offending practices. They report that the odds of arrest were actually higher for whites than blacks in three of the four crime types examined. They conclude that their findings suggest that "the disproportionately high arrest rate for black citizens is most likely attributable to differential involvement in reported crime rather than to racially biased law enforcement practices."⁹³

Self-Report Surveys

Self-report surveys are another way to paint a picture of the criminal offender. These surveys question respondents about their participation in criminal or delinquent behavior. Emerging in the 1950s, the self-report format remains a popular source of data for those searching for descriptions and causes of criminal behavior. One of the advantages of asking people about their behavior is that it gives a less-distorted picture of the offender than an official record because it is free of the alleged biases of the criminal justice system. However, it is not at all clear that self-report survey results provide a more *accurate* description of the criminal offender.⁹⁴

Problems with Self-Report Surveys

One of the major weaknesses of the self-report format is that there is no single design used. Moreover, different surveys focus on different aspects of criminal behavior. Not all self-report surveys ask the same questions or use the same or similar populations, and very few follow the same group over time. Usually, the sample population is youth from school settings or institutionalized groups.

In addition to the problems of inconsistent format and noncomparable samples, self-report surveys suffer from a variety of other limitations. The accuracy of self-report data is influenced by the respondents' honesty and memory and by interviewer bias.

One of the most confounding limitations in criminal justice data sets is present with self-report surveys: the comparisons are overwhelmingly between African Americans and whites. Little can be said about Native Americans, Asian Americans, or Hispanic Americans. Some studies suffer from the additional limitation of homogenous samples, with insufficient racial representation. These limitations make it difficult to draw conclusions about how many members of a racial group commit delinquent activity (prevalence) and how frequently racial minorities commit crime (incidence).

Although self-report surveys generally are assumed to be reliable and valid, this assumption has been shown to be less tenable for certain subgroups of

offenders.⁹⁵ Specifically, it has been shown that there is differential validity for white and African-American respondents. Validity is the idea that, as a researcher, you are measuring what you think you are measuring. Reverse record checks (matching self-report answers with police records) have shown that there is greater concurrence between respondent answers and official police arrest records for white respondents than for African-American respondents.⁹⁶ This indicates that African American respondents tend to underreport some offending behavior.

Delbert Elliot and colleagues caution against a simplistic interpretation of these findings.⁹⁷ They find that African-American respondents are more likely to underreport index-type offenses than less-serious offenses. Therefore, they suggest that this finding may indicate the differential validity of official police records rather than differential validity of the self-report measures by race. An example of differential validity of police records would occur if police reported the clearly serious offenses for whites and African Americans but reported the less-serious offenses for African Americans only. In short, most self-report researchers conclude that racial comparisons must be made with caution.

Characteristics of Offenders

Usually juvenile self-report surveys record demographic data and ask questions about the frequency of certain delinquent activities in the last year. The delinquent activities included range in seriousness, that is, from less-serious actions like skipping class and drinking liquor to more-serious behaviors such as stealing something worth more than fifty dollars, stealing a car, or assaulting someone.⁹⁸

Early self-report studies, those conducted before 1980, found little difference in delinquency rates across race (African American and white only). Later, more refined self-report designs have produced results that challenge the initial assumption of similar patterns of delinquency.⁹⁹ Some research findings indicate that African-American males are more likely than white males to report serious criminal behavior (prevalence). Moreover, a larger portion of African Americans than whites report a high frequency of serious delinquency (incidence).¹⁰⁰

Theoretical Explanations for the Racial Gap in Offending

The traditional paradigms of criminological theory developed from Lombroso to the emergence of the general theory of crime was essentially, "one size fits all" in the sense of racial differences. While theory testing traditionally uses race of offenders as a control variable, it is given no more attention than one of the "usual suspects." Such a racial theorizing (African Americans and Hispanics commit crimes for the same reason than whites commit crime) is essentialized in the assumptions of General Strain Theory that there is "invariance" in the racial/ethnic indicators for crime. With the emergence of critical race theory and Unnever and Gabbidon's Theory of African American Offending,¹⁰¹ this thesis is being challenged. Unnever and colleagues (2016) hypothesize a racial "invariance" in the predictors of self-reported violent delinquency in a cohort of young males in Chicago.¹⁰² They find that African-American youth report a significantly higher

level of discrimination from police than other racial groups and are more likely to be negatively impacted by this action than other racial groups. Of specific focus is the influence of perceived discrimination on the delinquency of African American compared to white youth. These results support the belief that delinquent behavior (like any behavior) is impacted by the "unique lived experiences" of subordinate groups in fundamentally distinct ways compared to superordinate groups.

Deena Isom, with the same data set, more directly explores the question: Is race criminogenic?¹⁰³ If so, how? Starting with the foundation of the Theory of African American Offending, she explores the hypothesis that microaggression (five items asking were you discriminated against when you wanted services, etc.) and criminal justice injustices (have you been discriminated against in the last year?) independently increase the likelihood of offending. She asserts that "racial microaggressions and criminal justice injustices lead to negative emotions, weaken social bonds and increase the likelihood of negative outcomes (violent delinquency)."¹⁰⁴ She finds support for her hypothesis, findings that, "when considered together, microaggressions and criminal justice injustices are significantly associated with serious and violent offending, increasing the likelihood by 102% and 57%, respectively" (p. 42). Further analysis suggests that positive racial identity in the presence of racial discrimination can reduce the likelihood of serious offending.

These studies converge in their support the need to continue to develop race-specific offending theories and subsequent empirical theory test.

Community Influence on the Racial Gap in Offending Rates

Criminological theory at the beginning of the twentieth century focused on white immigrant communities with reportedly high delinquency rates to develop such theories as Social Disorganization theory and Culture Conflict theory. More recent research by Sampson and colleagues indicates that minority immigrant populations in Chicago neighborhoods have lower rates of self-reported delinquency than white and African-American populations. In their recent cohort study, Sampson and colleagues find that first-generation immigrants from Puerto Rico and Mexico have lower self-reported delinquency rates than second- and third-generation immigrants.

Theoretical explanations based on the importance of neighborhood effects as a locus for and moderator of causes of offending by race have received substantial support from the works of Anderson, Stewart and Simons, Stowell and colleagues (discussed earlier in the chapter), and Sampson and colleagues (discussed earlier in the chapter).

Furthermore, Sampson and colleagues find that self-report data collected in a cohort study of juvenile and young adults from Chicago neighborhoods indicate that there is a "racial" gap in offending between African American, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and white youth. In an attempt to explain these descriptive findings, they control for neighborhood-level effects, individual constitutional characteristics (IQ and impulsivity), and so on. They find that once controlling for