

Will Laurance - Criminology Journals

Rand & Rennison Accounting for NCVS & UCR Differences

Week 1

The UCR and NCVS are two sources of crime data. Living in relatively low crime area, my family and I have never been selected for the NCVS survey so I do not have any personal experience with NCVS surveys.

The differences between the two data sources are similar and different in certain areas. I find it interesting that UCR data only counts the most serious crime, but I can see its reasoning. Obviously the police would focus on a conviction for a murder rather than the breaking and entering charge the suspect committed during the murder.

NCVS data relies on the honesty in the survey respondents. I know if I was victim of abuse and the abuser was present in the household, I would not report this in my victimization report. NCVS attempts to find a representative sample of the entire country, therefore there exists a large potential for sampling error.

If I was looking for the most accurate data, I would use the UCR reports because they are a compilation of all police precincts in the US. With electronic means more the data is available and the accuracy of the data is increased.

UCR and NCVS use different methods and measure different aspects of crime. At first I believed that these two data sources were competing to show the same results. But after reading this article and learning more about the two, I know they are both attempting to show the big picture of crime symbiotically. This explains why the two sources will differ in crime rate estimates. Using the Apple and Oranges metaphor, UCR and NCVS are two different things that cannot be compared as the same type of object. Thus we must look at each one with its own perspective independent of the other.

I am confused on why we believe that NCVS can really be representative for our entire country when it comes to crimes because only around 100,000 people are surveyed. We have over 300 million people. Even if we achieve a 'representative' sample there can still be a large number of discrepancies.

I believe in the next few decades, along with the development of smart phones, computers, and larger networks we will be able to achieve a real time crime profile rather than relying on older methods such as the NCVS.

Racial Discrimination of Disproportionate Offending

Week 2

Racial discrimination is very prevalent. If not actual discrimination is occurring, then the perception of it certainly is. Growing up any black person I talked to always had some paranoid thought that cops/law enforcement were out to get them. Perhaps this attitude led to behavior that would attract more cops. The idea "yeah come and get me!" and the thought of I am going to be suspected of a crime anyways might as well commit a few. This is certainly not limited to the black community but seems to arise in minority groups around the world.

Similar to what we spoke of in class that the southern region of the USA is historically more violent, I believe where I grew up, the black communities had a much more belief in family pride and protection than the predominately white neighborhoods I grew up in. Certain neighborhoods would rival against each other due to retaliation and family pride.

My personal accounts are referring to the gray areas of the justice system before any courts become involved. Like Blumstein says, "The U.S. displays distressingly high rates of [Black incarceration]....This is not so much due to racial discrimination, but to other factors outside of the criminal justice system. Most experts agree there is no longer any flat out racial discrimination in courts anymore or very very little.

The debate of over representation is interesting because should groups arrest and incarceration rates be proportional? What if one group is extremely violent while the others are all pacifists? I do not think this point is a strong one for arguing racial discrimination exists because there are many counter examples that prove this theory wrong like the one I proposed above.

I can also relate to the disproportional pull overs on black men. I know lots of black teens/men who refuse to drive vehicles because of the chances of them being pulled over and harassed is much greater.

I am a white male. I do not have any first hand experiences with police brutality. Thus I am not sure if the racial profiling is as high as it was 15 years ago.

From the data in the article, I can easily conclude that blacks are targeted because their involvement in crime is higher. Like any casino game wouldn't you put your money on the most likely outcome?

Propensity Theory

Week 3

What is a career criminal? Most career criminals develop at a young age and some people even believe that the criminal is born into a life a crime. *Propensity* is an innate inclination or tendency. Supporters of propensity theory believe that career criminals are more inclined to preform criminal acts than *normal*. This inclination can be caused for a variety of reasons, but most supporters lean towards the consequences of the psychopathic mind.

Without conscience of remorse there are no negative feelings about ones actions. I feel that killing or hurting someone and not feeling bad about it all impossible. Many professors like the psychology behind crime but I myself prefer the thought of crime as a life style.

Yes, it might take a certain brain to justify the actions of a criminal lifestyle, but all in all career criminals exhibit a habitual set of behaviors involving crime to support themselves and families and provide entertainment.

I personally know some career criminals and they are very intelligent, resourceful, and ever adapting. The few I know have only been caught a few times each. They are involved in burglaries, drug dealings and prostitution among other crimes but are non-violent people. I do not believe them to be psychopaths but very happy with their criminal lifestyles. They began their lives of crime in their teenage years and I would imagine will continue for the rest of their lives.

Gottfredson and Hirschi oversell the age crime curve and the universality with which offenders discontinue their offending careers. I am sure there are career criminals who *grow out* of their crime days and become less violent. For some that I know, the crime tax of their industry is ever increasing and the profits grow and grow from their illegal trade. I see these individuals working the same crime jobs into their retirement and never stopping. Perhaps the criminals have become wise to law enforcement tactics and reduced their risks of being caught.

I think this is why there exists a steeper drop off in the crime age curve. Propensity theory is a theory I support because for what ever reasons people differ in their levels of propensity to commit crimes.

Trait Theory

The second topic is trait theory. One passage from *Control Theories of Crime and Delinquency* I found somewhat confusing. It reads, "The diagnostic between psychopathy and self-control is alarming, and both constructs denote a generally problematic disposition that does not lead to happy endings". How do we know 100% that if one doesn't follow a life plan or is unresponsive to relationships that they will have criminal tendencies. The idea of a psychopath always resulting in a life of crime seems naive. What if a psychopath used her abilities of to build a large business because she was able to manipulate the right people? I suppose this type of person might not meet the true definition of a psychopath but I believe it does.

Rational Choice Deterrence Theories

Week 4

Do people really weigh all of their options before performing a specific action? I would like to think so, but it seems that sometimes situations limit our ability to do so. Specifically in terms of crime, outside forces outside of our control do not let us analyze all of our options.

Personally I do not commit serious crimes, (crimes of than speeding), because I am fearful that such acts will lead to convictions and ruin my ability for success in the future among other reasons. I am also fearful of going to jail. It is portrayed in the media as place of violence, gangs, and sexual dominance. Whether this is true or not, I would rather never find out from personal experience.

However it seems that these fears I have are not emphasized or recognized by some criminals. Why do they not have the same fears? Perhaps their rational choice is to commit this crime to achieve their goals out weighs the potential consequences.

I suppose by the low chance of getting caught for a particular crime would allow the action to be rank more positively in my TRDM process. In the paper by Paternoster, Pogarsky and Zimmerman, they discuss a person' rational thinking is a matter of degree. They explain that "different people have different abilities to engage in ration decision making or TRDM at different times." This could explain a criminal's though process who is stealing valuables or money to help support their family. If they were not supporting their family they wouldn't steal. But when they are stealing for their family, their TRDM allows them to rationalize those actions.

Rational Choice Theory upon initial inspection, appears to target the individual, but it becomes a more interesting theory when the environment limits the choices the individual has. I am always torn on the argument of nature versus nurture but I like to think both have a role in the decisions people make. A particular environment will make most people hostile but some might break before others because of certain traits cause this to happen.

Deterrence is a way to affect people's TRDM process or how they come to rationalize a particular action. By having the overhanging idea of deterrence whether it be incarceration, shaming, or other punishment these sanctions are intended to deter people from committing a particular action.

Social Control Theory & Self-Control Theory

Week 5

Bill McCarthy and Teresa Casey's article "Love, Sex, and Crime: Adolescent Romantic Relationships and Offending" discusses the idea of teenage romantic relationships having negative consequences for the criminal life of the teen.

I agree that relationships can lead to stress, disappointed, anger, as well as every other emotion in the book. This article was trying to justify that teenage relationships share much with that of adult relationships. I personally don't think they needed to make this distinction because people regardless of age are in different stages of their relationship history.

At first one could argue that sex would make people happier and less depressed. Yes, the physical/biological act of intercourse releases dopamine, oxytocin, and other endorphins, but the labels of being a 'slut' or a 'player' or the jealousy or anger that results is not healthy. On numerous occasions males would fight in my high school over a girl. We are animals so it seems only natural to fight for females.

Social Control is interesting medium because of the community and the variables it has to play with. The agent of social control can emphasize certain actions as stigmatizing and provide labels accordingly; such as slut, player, etc.

Self Control takes the 'blame' to the individual and attempts to explain the cause of crime through an individual's lack of self control. Pratt and Cullen discuss gratification and delaying this feeling is what contributes to high self control.

"He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man." -- Dr. Samuel Johnson

Being a fan of HST and a Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas fan boy, I have heard this quote by Dr. Johnson many times. At different points in my life it meant many things to me. Looking at this quote today I see it relates greatly to a man's ability to delay gratification and indulgences to remain a good man and not a deviant beast. The context of this quote is drinking and the depression that often becomes a man indulging in drink. This quote tells us that it's easier to be the deviant beast than the upstanding citizen because it is difficult to resist temptations. Although we are animals, humans attempt to divide themselves from their inner beasts and use high levels of self control to lock the beast away.

Differential Association and Social Learning

Week 6

Both of the articles focus around peers and what kind of influence the peers might have.

Mark Warr and Mark Stafford focus on the influence of Delinquent peers. They start the article admitting that by having delinquent friends will lead to delinquent behavior. I agree that "to Sutherland, then, the social transmission of delinquency occurs specifically through the dissemination or transference of attitudes about such conduct through peer networks" because a person, most of the time, must believe in the actions they are doing for a long term deviance period to occur. Just because a child has deviant friends doesn't mean that the child will experience long term periods of deviance. It could be argued that the child will most likely try a few deviant acts with said friends, but unless a transmission of attitudes occurred, the child would not continue the deviant behavior.

Haynie and Osgood 'reconsidered' Peers and Delinquency and asked the general question How do Peers Matter? I particularly am drawn to the 'Peers as a Source of Opportunity for Delinquency' section of this article. I agree and can personally attest to the fact that peers aid in the opportunity for delinquency. Whether providing marijuana for the rest of the group to smoke or helping plan a burglary, peers easily give each other the opportunities necessary. I can recall (sort of) many times hanging out at the bus stop after the bus had drop us off and passing the bowl around and smoking. I wasn't a big smoker and never had any drugs of my own and probably would have never done it had it been for my peers providing me the opportunity.

In general, interactions with people have influence in your decision making. Teenagers are a great case study for this type of peer interactions because their minds are still mold-able and full of surprises.

I believe the same argument can be made that peers can provide positive opportunities to each other as well. Teenagers especially want to be popular and one of the cool kids. If the cool kids are eating healthy and exercising then the other peers will follow suit. Likewise, if the peers are into deviant behaviors, the peers will follow.

Fear of Crime Disorder Broken Windows

Week 7

The fear of crime is an interesting variable in the amount of crime that is actually committed. One of my favorite sayings is that perception is reality. Anything we perceive to be true is in our minds true, even if it does not agree with the consensus. An example would be if everyone in the United States awoke tomorrow morning believing that our economy was back on track and spent and made decisions like it was, the economy would most likely behave accordingly.

This same idea applies to crime. If everyone wakes up tomorrow believing that there exists mass amount of crime in their community, people will act like this is true. Policing would increase, paranoia flourishes, and crime might actually increase depending on the type of people in the community.

One way that 'everyone' might get this idea is from the media. The media has a vast influence on people that is uncanny to any other mediums of news transfer. I suppose the images and sounds are highly attention grabbing and captivating.

Broken window policing can increase the fear of crime. Police presence in general makes people suspicious. I know when I see three or more state troopers pulling over a car(s), I immediately think that this person(s) must be involved with drug trafficking.

When police use broken window policing, the little crimes and disorders are taken care of. But is this worth the increase in the fear of crime?

In software development, I use the same idea of broken window policing. The reasoning for this policy is if a piece of code has a hole in it and it is not fixed, it will cause entropy to the rest of the software by its unstable or dangerous implementation. By addressing and fixing these problems while they are in a incubating state and haven't affected other modules in the program.

However, if I am broken window policing my code, if I find many offenders, I will become suspicious that there are larger problems that have already slipped through the cracks. This increase in 'code policing' will often times make my co workers more fearful of 'crime' in the code. Although this fear doesn't have the same effects of fear for your physical safety, it certainly does give fear for the reputation of one's business, grade (if its a school project), or monetary success.

The Paradox of Social Organization

Week 8

Neighborhood crime is an interesting topic because the social organization and social structure can sometimes facilitate crime and make it worth while to the offender to invoke these crimes.

The collective efficacy in a crime stricken neighborhood is very low in my opinion. Typically where gangs exist or mob mentalities are in play, neighbors are highly unlikely to stick their necks out for a fellow neighbor if they are getting jump in the street. This study took place in Chicago where a lot of neighborhoods are crime stricken.

I find interesting Whyte's 1937 classic account of an Italian American community in Boston showed that active/dense social ties and neighborhood attachment promotes the regulation of local crime. I would think that close neighborhood ties would led to peace and little crime for said neighborhood. Wilson adds to this to say in low social control neighborhoods, networks serve to disseminate potentially detrimental behavioral orientations. Wilson discusses, how children are at a disadvantage because the "social interaction among neighbors tends to be confined to those whose skills, styles, orientations, and habits are not as conducive to promoting positive social outcomes."

I suppose this makes sense. If you live in neighborhood where the Adults are ex-felons, criminals, and just bad people, the children in the neighborhood who make bonds with these people, their neighbors, are likely to fall into the same patterns of crime and bad behavior.

Cultural transmission works well in favor of crime for network density areas where attitudes tolerating deviance are shared.

I can definitely relate to the story of the woman who did not call the police on the boy from Groveland because she knew the boys mother. Growing up a neighborhood kid would do something stupid but rather than calling the police a parent would contact the 'offenders' parent and handle it that way. In some instances the kid learned and did not offend anymore. There were a few kids in my neighborhood that perhaps if the cops punished them they would not be in jail today.

Luckily I lived in a neighborhood growing up that had a lot of positive influences. We had a large range of people including newly weds to older retired couples. There were children living in the neighborhood from just born to 25+ and for the most part everyone was a great influence. Thus our neighborhood had a positive cultural transmission that did not promote deviant behavior.

Anomie Strain Theory

Week 9

Anomie strain theory points to the individual as causes of crime. In particular it nails down the cause as the individual's pathology.

Being a William and Mary Student I have faced the road blocks and overcame them so far. However I have a friend who went a different path to go around the same road blocks I encountered.

My friend, we'll call him Larry, and I were friends since middle school. We got into trouble together throughout high school, but senior year we finally got our act together. We took the advance classes and studied together and both resulted with all A's that year. Larry and I went on to attend a local community college where we both entered the Comp Sci program. We challenged each other for the first year and we both had 4.0 GPA. After the first year Larry had run out of money for school. He comes from a lower income family and could have easily applied for scholarships/grants to get help for school. He didn't want to take anyones charity so he made the money for himself by dealing drugs. At first it was just to help pay for school, but eventually greed got the best of him. I continued on the plan Larry and I had set out our first year at community college, that is to earn bachelor's degrees in comp sci from William and Mary. Larry dropped out of community college to pursue his career as a criminal.

He was fairly successful in the local drug trade and stealing items of value such as GPS, laptops, and other electronics. To my knowledge he has not been caught for any serious crimes except for possession charges.

I know Larry and I both want monetary success. I could have easily gratified myself in the drug trade with Larry but I chose a different path. We faced similar roadblocks and hurdles but in the end our paths diverged.

I believe the biggest reasons for the divergent paths is Larry and I's different social structure. Larry did not have the best home life. His parents do drugs and also are involved in some light criminal acts. My family is involved in the community and well educated.

This is a good example of what Merton believes, "...Merton argued that the system of stratification in the United States is a source of both social and income inequality." Larry simply innovated in a deviant way to achieve his American Dream.

One section I found interesting was the "Personal Traits of Conditioning Variables". I find it intriguing that we can lump human traits into a master set of variables or a top 5. Negative emotionality is most most relevant to GST. I feel that negative emotionality is more of a gateway that allows the other traits to overtake the person. That said I believe that constraint should be the 'master variable'.

I feel that the future with strain theory will highly rely on advancements in computing and biology, particularly high performance cluster computing and the human genome project. Rather than these 5 master traits, which are most likely caused by specific genes and environmental factors, we will be able to analyze people and better predict their traits and their likeness to commit crimes.

Shifting Approaches to Punishment Control of Crime

Week 10

America loves the death penalty. Growing up in Virginia, I observed a competition like environment for how many convicts were executed. The main competition was Texas and Virginia is the runner up.

These articles investigated the alternatives to corporal punishment, incarceration, and the reactions there of.

One alternative to incarceration, at least first time offending youths, is family group conferencing. FGC helps youths fight Deviance theory and helps them realize the harm they have caused their victims. Growing up I had peers in public schools who had committed minor crimes and went to counseling rather than a direct route to a trial. Personally I think this route helped prevent a majority of them steer to the right path. It gave them the ability to not suffer 'labeling' by a conviction.

FGR is just one way the punishment control can shift. I believe for non hardened criminals, a different approach needs to be taken. Similar to Europe, the U.S. needs to not treat simple drug charges as if the person has committed murder or another violent crime.

It is interesting to reflect back on the first weeks of class and think about the self reporting surveys. Those surveys concluded that everyone does something wrong or illegal big or small in their lifetime at least once. Are all of those actions worthy of incarceration or capital punishment?

I find David Garland's The Problem of the Body in Modern State Punishment a highly interesting because the treatment of prisoners is controversial and question of human rights in some cases. Which rights should be removed during imprisonment? Which rights should be removed/ stay removed after imprisonment. If I were to become a prisoner, I would prefer that some of my rights be removed during imprisonment, but none of my human rights. I agree that I should live without luxury but I should still be treated like a human with food and water. Prison is a way to punish a human for the wrong doing they have done. I do not feel that this punishment needs to extend past the sentence they have received. While in prison, a person's body should not be tortured, filled with disease and sickness, or assaulted. The confinement from society is punishment enough I believe.

In Television shows you hear of prisoners requesting to be in a certain prison either because they want a lower security prison or their rival gang is not there. Whatever the reason, this show us there is disparity in prisons around the country. The article talks about Martha Stewart and her adventure at Camp Cupcake. Sounds like a real hard place?

Besides the variations in incarceration locations, another large aspect is healthcare in prisons. Should prisoners have 'free' healthcare? Do we want to have our taxes paying for prisoners to have healthcare when people outside the incarceration population do not? It seems unfair that prisoners are treated so well we people on the outside live in worse conditions.

I am of the opinion that conditions should be equally bad in prisons throughout the country. The people there are being punished. However I believe that only really bad people should be there. Nobody who commits a victimless crime should go to prison.

Stigma & Collateral Consequences of Punishment

Week 11

Sequencing Disadvantage

Why were the interviewees not all given the same formatted resume? I suppose this would have caused suspicion amongst duplicate employers. I would expect the results of non-offender / ex-offender to be proportional between whites and blacks. It seems employers timidity to hire blacks is amplified when the black candidate has a criminal record. $31 / 22 = 1.4$ and $25 / 10 = 2.5$

The article discusses how the chance to talk to the person actually doing the hiring will give the ex-offender a chance to explain the charges and parole references on their resume. My consensus is that some employers wouldn't want the risk of hiring an ex-con when there are other job applicants out there. Especially in a rural setting such as Williamsburg and when local small businesses are concerned.

But perhaps those small businesses are passing up some great talent. Anthony, an African American tester, found this to be true when he interviewed with the manager of the health care company.

Personally if I owned a business that relied on proficient and hard workers I would hire an ex-con looking to get her shit together. Why not? If it turns out they are a lousy worker or they commit a crime I can fire them (depending on what state I'm in). But bottom line is they need a fresh start, a second chance and steady employment will help them keep it together.

This article unfortunately reveals racism in America's ugly head once again. This study shows that blacks are less likely to get jobs for non-offenders and ex-offenders. What will this attitude lead to? I believe it will only compound the effects and cause incarceration rates amongst blacks to increase. The article stated that 60% of inmates released go back to jail in 3 years. That is a sad fact.

Labeling, Life Changes, and Adult Crime

"First, deviant labeling may influence subsequent deviance by altering the person's self concept". So by labeling someone there exists a point where the labeled person will subdue themselves to the label and alter their self concept to match the label. If a girl is called a slattern for weeks on end and everyone thinks she is a slattern it would be much easier for the girl's self image to be that of a slattern's.

This article deals with labeling adolescents and how this can lead them to a life of crime in adulthood. I somewhat feel that we will outgrow our labels. People seem to forget about those 'labeled' people from high school. They grow up and mature (most of them) and realize the label associated with that person wasn't true to begin with. Perhaps my view of this is skewed but this is what I believe. Unless a adolescent got started early with crime and acquired a label from the courts as a 'felon' or 'criminal' or 'clinically insane' I doubt that any other peer given label would last very long.

Like the cult classic 'The Hangover' reminds us, "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas... except for herpes, that shit will come back with you." Same goes for a criminal record. As discussed in the previous article this can hurt your chances of getting a job especially if you are black and do not get to talk with the hiring manager.

One part I disagree with in the article is "Official intervention, such as being arrested, convicted, or sent to a mental hospital, does not automatically lead to deviant labeling". I'm sorry but if someone tried to kill themselves and they were sent to a mental hospital, when they returned to their peers, they will get labeled. Kids are cruel.

An interesting find in the article to me is, "...However, Bodwitch provides some evidence that may account for these effects In an ethnographic study of high school students, Bodwitch found that students who are defined as troublemakers are disciplined by school officials in ways that conspire to push students out of school". To me this sounds like a breeding ground for violent criminals. If school officials are will to kick 'trouble makers' out of school with those labels/stigmas attached, they are asking for trouble.

In the article's conclusion they say blacks are more likely to get labels because there is already a underlying stereotype associated with their race. Why do blacks have this stereotype?