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Abstract

Recent claims that juvenile delinquency is declining and that there is no juvenile crime wave rely heavily on official reports of juvenile arrests for serious offenses such as aggravated assault and murder. While the study of these types of offenses is certainly important, the majority of juvenile offending is of a much less serious nature. I propose that a more complete picture of juvenile offending trends should incorporate a more broad range of juvenile behaviors including a substantial focus on minor offending.

The Uniform Crime Reports are virtually the only source of official information on long-term trends in officially recorded juvenile crime in the United States. Perhaps the most important advantage of these data, in terms of this project, is the ability to compare arrest rates of juveniles over approximately the last 40 years. Although arrest data have been used to study trends in violent offending, they also provide longitudinal information on more minor offending such as runaway, curfew violations, drunkenness and vandalism. In comparison, self-reports of delinquent behavior have been underutilized in the study of national crime trends due to a lack of nationally representative samples as well as a focus on more minor offending. Since it is important to study crime trends with as many methods as possible, this study will also examine estimates of time trends in self-reported offending based on the Monitoring the future Survey, an annual national survey of high school seniors. Like the UCR the MTF survey measures range of serious offending, but its main strength lies in its measurement of minor offending including many forms of drug use, truancy, and traffic tickets. Second, the MTF survey offers the advantage of covering offenses that are knowingly committed by juveniles, whether or not they are detected by victims or reported to authorities.
Findings from this study indicate that 1) self-report data show that longitudinal trends in both juvenile arrest rates and self-reports of delinquent behavior vary considerably by offense type; 2) an even greater amount of variation exists in trends for arrest rates than for rates of self-reported delinquency; 3) trend patterns for individual offenses vary across self-report and official data, with the exception of assault and arson; 4) trends for serious offenses such as assault and robbery show a moderate amount of similarity over the last 37 years; 5) trends for minor offenses have shown very disparate patterns over the last 37 years.
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CHAPTER ONE
JUVENILE DELINQUENCY TRENDS

1.1 INTRODUCTION (RESEARCH QUESTIONS)

Since the pioneering works of Guerry and Quetelet in the early 1800s, criminologists have utilized aggregate level crime statistics as a means of gauging the moral health of nations. More recent historical analyses of crime trends present a picture of how offending patterns have changed over time, as well as insight into how offending patterns might look in the future. Increased arrests of juveniles today will have clear implications for future demands placed on both the adult and juvenile justice systems. Historically, research has focused on overall rates of juvenile delinquency as well as whether juveniles of that day were more delinquent than juveniles were in the past (Bernard, 1990).

This dissertation will focus on time trends for juvenile offending. The inverse relationship between age and crime is one of the most well established associations within criminological research. The pattern that most individuals increase their offending throughout adolescence, reach peak offending levels in their mid teens, and then gradually decrease their offending as they enter adulthood has long been the established foundation for many studies explaining the etiology of criminal behavior. Because of the existence of the age-crime curve, trend analyses consistently reveal that rates of juvenile offending are an important component of more general offending rates in the United States (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983; Osgood, O’Malley, Bachman & Johnston, 1989; Steffensmeier & Allen, 2000). When researchers claim that the overall crime rate in the
United States has either increased or decreased over time, it is likely that a substantial portion of this change is the result of variations in juvenile rates.

Since well before the inception of the first juvenile court in 1899, the general public believed that juveniles are not only committing more crime than in the past, but that they are committing more serious crimes than the cohorts of juveniles who came before them (Bernard, 1992). In his analysis of the history of the juvenile justice system, Bernard (1992) refers to this belief as the “myth of the good old days.” The belief that juveniles are currently committing more frequent and more serious crimes than in the past is not necessarily a myth because it is empirically false. Instead, such a belief is a myth because the public is skeptical of empirical evidence that would reveal whether or not such a belief is accurate. Bernard argues that beliefs about the amounts and nature of the delinquency of past cohorts of youth are myths because, while these beliefs are held strongly, they are based on little actual information (1992, p.3).

While the public may not require empirical support for their beliefs about past or current levels of delinquency, criminologists should be making better use of trends in juvenile delinquency to help further the development of criminological theory as well as to inform policy makers in the juvenile justice system. Analyses of juvenile crime rates not only illustrate how juvenile offending has changed over time, but these rates can also help inform policy makers of potential future trends in offending.

Researchers have utilized three main methods to assist them in gaining an accurate measure of past and current rates of delinquency. Various studies of official offending (Steffensmeier & Harer, 1999; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999; Zimring, 1998), self-reported offending (Jensen & Rojek, 1998; Osgood et al., 1989), and victimization
data (Bernard, 1999; Perkins, 1997) have all attempted to make sense of variations in historical delinquency trends. While this research established a general portrait of trends in delinquent behavior over time, different methods have yielded conflicting conclusions as to the extent of delinquency as well as the direction of movement for specific offense trends over time.

Much of the disparity between different studies of delinquency trends is attributable to the ways in which researchers have defined their dependent variable. Research typically combines diverse sets of individual offense categories into larger subcategories such as “violent” or “property” offending. As a result, studies that focus mostly on property crimes come to quite different conclusions about the nature and extent of “delinquency” trends than studies that limit their analysis to “status” or “violent” offenses. Many recent studies of delinquency trends have focused solely on what most people would consider serious crimes, especially serious violent offenses. Few would argue that serious violent crimes such as homicide and aggravated assault should not be a concern of criminological research. However, these types of delinquent acts account only for a small proportion of all juvenile arrests. Because of this focus on serious offending, most trend research has overlooked the great majority of crimes that young people commit. To some extent then, criminological research has only furthered the myth of the good old days. Today, inquiry into the origin and consequences of juvenile offending has shifted away from minor forms of delinquency and antisocial behavior toward a more limited effort to explain the small proportion that are more serious offenses.

Aggregating individual offense categories into broader groups such as “violent” or “property” offending also has the potential of concealing the more dramatic trends of
individual offense categories. This concealment is in part the result of a small number of offense categories with high frequencies that mask the trends of offenses that may not be as common. For example, to claim that juvenile “property” offending has remained stable over the last fifteen years may be misleading if certain individual offense categories that make up the broader category have actually been quite erratic. Many of the trends for offenses that juveniles are more likely to commit, such as larceny-theft, end up distorting trends found for less frequent offenses, such as motor-vehicle theft. Therefore, even if there were an increase or decrease in rates of motor vehicle theft, they would not be discernible within the broader “property” category. Researchers and policy makers could then mistakenly perceive that these actual shifts in rates of motor-vehicle theft are quite stable because they are hidden within the larger category of “property” offending.

A related concern with the creation of aggregate categories is the ways in which researchers create such categories. On the surface, it may appear to be common sense to group two separate offenses, such as larceny-theft and motor vehicle theft, together into the more general category of “property” offenses. However, theories of crime would not necessarily predict that trends in motor-vehicle theft would follow the same trends over time as larceny-theft. If fact, one of the major ways that theories of delinquency can be distinguished is by comparing those that explain specific types of offenses to those which are more general in their attempt to explain all types of delinquent behavior. By grouping offense categories together based on a single criterion that is often nothing more than a restatement of criminal laws, researchers may be ignoring other theoretically meaningful dimensions and associations between seemingly diverse and disparate offense types.
The objective of this dissertation is to analyze national estimates of time trends in juvenile offending in the United States, with a specific focus on disaggregating broader categories of juvenile offending trends. This research will address the following issues: 1) What are the salient short-term and long-term trends in both minor and serious juvenile offending over the last four decades? 2) Which offenses have seen the most significant movement during that time? 3) Which offense categories have had similar trends over time? 4) Are trends in serious and minor offending correlated with each other over time? By addressing these questions, I will find out whether one theoretical model of criminal offending is able to explain these trends or instead whether a more multifaceted explanation is required.

Since there has not generally been complete agreement across different methods on the extent and patterns of delinquency, a second focus of this dissertation will be to compare patterns found in data obtained from both official and self-report sources. While the study of juvenile offending trends has relied heavily on official measures of data, many critics argue that official data reflect little more than the workings of official police and court agencies rather than the actual behavior of young people. An important question then is to what extent studies of offending trends reflect real changes in the behavior of juveniles as compared to changes in the behavior of criminal justice agencies. While there have been few nationally representative, longitudinal studies of the self-reported behavior of juveniles, one well-established study, the Monitoring the Future study, has surveyed independent samples of youth annually about their offending behavior since 1975. When compared to official data, self-reports help present a more complete portrayal of offending trends since they include many offenses that go
unreported to authorities, all but eliminating the potential influence of changes in justice system practices. By utilizing both official and self-reports of offense-specific juvenile offending trends, this study will provide a deeper understanding of many inconsistencies, as well as potentially unexpected parallels, in juvenile offending trends over time.

Therefore, the advantages of this dissertation include: (1) the examination of trends in serious, minor, and status offenses in order to gain a more complete picture of delinquency trends over time, (2) the analysis of offense-specific trends to further explore the ability of criminological theories to explain observed historically contingent patterns of offending, (3) a research design that allows for a comparison of offense-specific trends between different methods of data collection, and (4) a test of the utility of general theories of crime in explaining aggregate level juvenile crime rates.

This chapter will continue with a review of prior literature on trends in juvenile delinquency, with a specific emphasis on differences in studies using self-report as compared to official data, as well as on differences in trends across different offense types. Next, the discussion will focus on issues regarding the use of self-report and official data for the study of crime trends. Finally, the debate over offense specific versus general models of offending will be discussed, including how each type of theoretical model would explain aggregate level delinquency rates.

1.2 STUDIES OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY TRENDS

While changes in aggregate levels of juvenile offending over time have always been a concern for criminologists (Quetelet, 1842; Glueck & Glueck, 1930), surprisingly few studies have attempted to measure such phenomena empirically. Criminologists have not yet established a common language for describing patterns found within crime
trends. Distinctions between increases in crime or delinquency that are considered “waves” and those that are simply “substantial increases” are often arbitrary (LaFree, 1998). Many researchers rely on statistical support for their claims that an increase in offending is significant while others simply make visual comparisons of trends plotted in graph form. Although part of the goal of this dissertation is to show that there are many biases in the interpretation of delinquency trends, there are still some general conclusions that can be drawn from the established research on historical trends of delinquency.

Probably the most well established review of trends in arrest rates of juveniles over time is a series of national reports by Howard Snyder and Melissa Sickmund at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention or OJJDP (Snyder, 1999; Snyder & Sickmund, 1995, 1999). In an attempt to inform legislators and policymakers about the rates of juvenile offending over time, Snyder’s reports are a comprehensive analysis of a variety of data sources, including official data from the FBI’s Uniform Crime reports. In his most recent analysis of data from 1973 to 1998, Snyder reveals that: (1) The juvenile arrest rate for both grouped violent index offenses (murder and non-negligent manslaughter, robbery, forcible rape, aggravated assault) and grouped index property offenses (burglary, larceny-theft, motor-vehicle theft, arson) followed similar paths, increasing consistently until 1975 and then stabilizing in 1988. After 1988, trends for the violent index rate began to diverge from the more stable property index rate. (2) In 1988, the juvenile arrest rate for the violent index began to increase substantially to an all time peak in 1994, and has been declining ever since. (3) Arrest rates over time differed slightly across individual violent offenses, with arrests for rape being the most stable and arrests for aggravated assaults driving the overall growth of the violent index rate. (4)
Since the early 1970s, the arrest rate for grouped property index crimes remained steady with the exception of a notable increase in the mid 1970s. (5) Arrest trends for specific property crimes differed substantially more than for specific violent offenses. In particular, there has been a recent dramatic decrease in the rates of burglary arrests. Additionally, there have been substantial fluctuations in motor-vehicle theft and larceny-theft.

Although the OJJDP report does not examine trends for every individual Part II offense category, Snyder points out that there have been recent increases in arrest rates for curfew and loitering violations, as well as for drug abuse violations. The OJJDP analyses consistently reveal that juveniles commit substantially more Part II offenses than Part I offenses (Snyder, 1999). Accordingly, analyses of juvenile offending trends should incorporate these Part II offenses into their examinations of delinquency.

Although the UCR provides the longest uninterrupted series of crime data for the United States, longitudinal self-report surveys are becoming increasingly useful for assessing historical delinquency trends. Although they do not always correspond to trends found in official data, some basic conclusions can also be drawn from self-reports of offending for both serious and minor offending.

Using longitudinal data from the Monitoring the Future survey, Jensen & Rojek (1998) and Osgood et al. (1989) reach similar conclusions about historical trends in self-reported offending behavior since 1975. First, property crime was relatively stable over the entire period of 1975-1998. There was a modest increase in self-reported property offending in the late 1980s, followed by a decrease since 1995. These trends do not follow the same patterns as those found in the arrest data just discussed, which reveal
more stability in property offending over time. Second, analyses over the same time period reveal that a large portion of the decrease in a combined index of all property offending was due to a decrease in self-reports of shoplifting. Third, self-reports of an index for all violent offenses have been generally stable over time with a gradual increase in self-reported violent behavior since 1975. Similar to arrest data, self-reports of indexed violent offenses reveal an increase in violent offending in the late 1980s, but they do not reveal the substantial decline found in arrest data since 1995. Finally, self-reported drug use peaked in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and then entered a long-term decline until 1992. In 1992, self-reported drug use for all types of illicit drugs began increasing, reaching a peak in 1997, and then becoming more stable. This trend was similar for all types of illicit drugs. However, contrary to recent trends in illicit drug use, self-reported alcohol use has steadily declined from 1978 until 1992 where it has been stable ever since.

The preceding summaries reveal that the answer to the question “are juveniles more delinquent today than they were in the past?” is much more complex than it may seem. While there is a substantial amount of consistency across methods in certain trend patterns, many of the conclusions suggested by self-report data conflict with patterns suggested by official UCR data. In particular, two issues in previous investigations of delinquency trends are noteworthy.

While criminologists interested in the etiology of delinquency have access to several data sets to help them examine their diverse research questions, researchers interested in studying historical juvenile crime trends have had only a limited range of data sets at their disposal. Understanding long-term trends in juvenile delinquency in the
United States requires nationally representative, age-specific data on a variety of delinquent behaviors. While researchers can agree on some limited conclusions regarding patterns of juvenile offending over time, inconsistencies across different studies are generally the result of two major issues. The first matter involves the type of data used to examine delinquency trends over time and the second matter entails the type of delinquency that researchers define as their dependant variable.

1.3 TYPES OF DATA: MEASURING DELINQUENCY OVER TIME

1.3.1 Official Arrest Data: The Uniform Crime Reports

Until the 1960s, the only data that met the aforementioned research requirements had been official data, specifically police arrest data compiled within the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports. Although these data had historically provided insight into aggregate characteristics of particular types of offenses, the ability of the UCR to accurately measure trends in the entire scope of delinquent behavior came into question and spawned the development of self-reports surveys. Early studies utilizing self-report data revealed that arrest data vastly underestimated the extent of delinquency in the U.S., especially for minor crimes, which are less likely to become known to the police or result in an arrest. The result was the recognition that the study of delinquency arrest trends ignored a substantial amount of “hidden delinquency” or delinquency that official data simply did not recognize.

In response to concerns among criminologists that official measures of crime were measuring trends in police and reporting behavior rather than actual changes in offending behavior, the development of self-report studies of delinquency gained popularity in the late 1950s with the work of James F. Short and F. Ivan Nye (1958).
Short and Nye’s use of self-report data challenged many conventional assumptions about the extent and nature of delinquency, especially when it came to the study of less serious offenses. Studies of police behavior at that time revealed that the majority of interactions between juveniles and police were for non-serious violations (Lundmann, 1966), and that police were arresting juveniles in only about 15 percent of the situations where a legitimate arrest could be made (Black & Reiss, 1970). Self-report surveys have given researchers a more complete picture of delinquency trends by revealing estimates of a greater proportion of the delinquency committed by juveniles, both serious and minor, regardless of whether those behaviors are ever reported to police or result in an arrest.

Studies of historical delinquency trends should not view official and self-report data as incompatible, but instead they should see the strengths of each method as complementary to the weaknesses of the other. Together, both methods yield a more complete picture of trends for all types of juvenile offending. As Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis (1979) state:

This evidence suggests to us that: (1) official measures of criminality provide valid indications of the demographic distribution of criminal behavior; (2) self-report instruments typically tap a domain of behavior virtually outside the domain of official data; (3) within the domain they tap, self-report measures provide reliable and valid indicators of offending behavior; (4) the self-report method is capable of dealing with behavior within the domain of official data; and (5) in practice, self-report samples have been inadequate for confident conclusions concerning the correlates of offending behavior comparable in seriousness to that represented in official data. (1979, p.1009)
A major component of this study utilizes data from arrest statistics compiled in the FBI’s annual Uniform Crime Reports. These data are virtually the only source of official information on long-term trends in officially recorded juvenile crime in the United States. Before 1930, police in the United States did not collect reports of crime in any systematic fashion across jurisdictions, nor did the classifications of crimes conform to any one legal definition. Ironically, the original intention behind the creation of the UCR was for police departments to combat the perception of crime waves that the media had helped to create. Police departments anticipated that the UCR would dispel the notion that both juvenile and adult crime in the United States was out of control and reinstill confidence in police efforts to control crime (Maguire & Uchida, 2000).

Beginning in 1930, official crime reports were obtained from 1,127 cities and towns, representing almost 80 percent of the population of the United States. Today, the FBI collects information from approximately 16,788 law enforcement agencies, covering 97 percent of the United State population (Mosher, Miethe, & Phillips, 2002). However, it should be noted that the estimated population of the United States covered by the UCR has varied from year to year. Issues such as non-reporting, as well as problems with the collection of data on the part of some agencies, often lead to the elimination of some, or even the entirety of a state’s crime data to become ineligible for recording in the UCR.

While it would appear then that there are now over seventy years of arrest trend data available for examination, comparisons of UCR data collected before 1952 have not been very useful in estimating earlier historical trends due to the utilization of fingerprint cards for both evidence as well as reporting purposes. Since police officers did not fingerprint many juveniles arrested at that time, data before 1952 would well
underestimate the period’s extent of delinquency (Bernard, 1999). Since 1952 however, the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting program has received city, state, and county level information on the number of offenses known to police, arrest statistics, as well as characteristics of persons arrested by police.

In 1958, the FBI constructed a composite offense index that sums eight individual offense categories into an overall crime index – murder, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, motor-vehicle theft and arson (which was added in 1979). The International Association of Chiefs of Police originally chose these eight offenses for the total crime index because they were generally serious in nature, widely identified by victims and witnesses as crimes, and because victims were most likely to report them to police (Wolfgang, Figlio, Tracy & Singer, 1985). However, while some victims base their judgments on how serious a crime is by the harm done to the victim, other victims base their judgment on offense seriousness on the culpability of the offender (Warr, 1989). Besides the issue of victim reporting, there is little other theoretical reasoning as to why these offenses should be lumped together in one aggregated category. All of the remaining offenses are included in a list of 20 categories, which are also known as Part II offenses. Part II offenses include both offenses against the person and offenses against property, ranging in seriousness from loitering to embezzlement. The category of “other offenses” is also included in the Part II offenses category encompassing those offenses not adequately covered by any other category.

In an attempt to ensure uniformity in reporting, the FBI has developed standardized definitions of offenses and provides training to local reporting agencies to illustrate the rules for classifying and scoring criminal offenses. Still, there is variation in
counting and scoring across different police officers and jurisdictions in their interpretation of incidents of crime (Klein, Labrin Rosensweig, & Bates, 1975). For example, even though the theft of a car stereo is technically larceny theft, some police departments may classify the event as a motor-vehicle theft, which is a separate index category. Similarly, there are definitional issues with offenses such as larceny-theft and aggravated assault. The reported increase in juvenile assaults in the late 1980s may in fact be due to changes in the interpretations of these events by police. The difference between definitions of an aggravated assault and a simple assault involves the use of a weapon or the intent of inflicting severe bodily injury. Since no physical injury is required for an aggravated assault, threats and assaults in the context of delinquent peer groups or gangs are subject to various interpretations. For instance, some police officers may consider the act of brandishing a weapon an aggravated assault while others may not.

Additional problems exist in the different interpretations between the Part I offense of burglary, and the Part II offenses of trespassing and vandalism. The UCR defines Burglary as a trespass of a building with the intent to commit a felony or theft. However, definitional problems arise when a burglary is merely attempted or police catch the burglar before he/she could complete the offense. A youth who breaks a window, but is then caught by police before he/she enters the premises can be charged with either burglary or trespass. Police may also define an individual caught breaking through a fence and stealing a bike sitting in a yard as a burglary. Because there was no trespass of a building, it instead should be classified as a larceny-theft. Burglary is also a unique offense in the UCR in that it is the only offense that is covered in what is referred to as
the “hotel rule.” Under this rule, if a manager of a hotel reports a burglary from more than one unit, the FBI instructs police to record the crimes as one single incident with the reasoning that there will be only one report of the incident to an insurance company. However, the hotel rule only applies to burglary. If a different offender goes to three hotel units and commits three separate robberies of individuals rather than three burglaries, the hotel rule does not apply and police record three separate incidents since there are clearly three separate victims.

An additional indication of how the FBI gives Part II offenses less consideration than Part I offense can be seen in what is referred to as the “hierarchy rule”. The UCR’s hierarchy rule states that police are to record only the most serious offense in a series of offenses for a particular individual, and to ignore all other offenses. Interestingly however, the offense of arson, which is a crime committed mostly by juveniles, is excluded from the hierarchy rule.

For the eight offenses that make up the Part I or serious-crime index, the UCR report provides statistics on both crimes known to police and arrest statistics. For the Part II offenses, the UCR only provide arrest data for both adults and juveniles. Most important for my purposes, only at the point of arrest do police record the actual age of the offender. Therefore, only juvenile offenses that result in an arrest are available for examination. Rather than giving an accurate or representative picture of all juvenile offenders then, the UCR more realistically offers a picture of how many juveniles are caught by police and are then arrested.

Information from the UCR is often reported either as absolute numbers, as rates per 100,000 population to control for changes in the population composition, or as crimes
cleared by arrest. Crimes are considered by police to be “cleared” when there is either an arrest of a suspect or there are exceptions that are beyond the control of law enforcement, such as the death of a suspect, which makes a future arrest implausible. In other words, a clearance rate refers to the proportion of reported crimes that have been “solved.” The arrest of one juvenile often clears several crimes, such as a burglar who had broken into several homes. Conversely, the arrest of several juveniles may clear only one crime, as would be the case if the police arrested three youth for a motor-vehicle theft. Despite public perception, police only clear about half of all violent crimes and twenty percent of property crimes. As many authors have pointed out, the group nature of delinquency leads to a substantial discrepancy between the police clearance rates and the arrest rates of juveniles (Bernard, 1999; Snyder, 1999; Zimring, 1998). For example, in 1997, juveniles accounted for 30 percent of all robbery arrests. However, this did not mean that juveniles were responsible for 30% of all robberies in the U.S. in 1997. The group nature of juvenile delinquency leads to an over-representation in arrest statistics as compared to adults. As a result, clearance rates for robbery in 1997 suggest that juveniles accounted for only 17 percent of all robberies that police cleared by arrest (Snyder, 1999).

While clearance rates may be a more accurate measure of the total amount of crime by juveniles as compared to adults, the purpose of this research is to obtain a measure of the changes in rates of only juvenile offending. While the proportion of crime that juveniles commit as compared to adults is important, it is not well suited to the aims of my present study. Clearance rates are perhaps a better measure of the investigative
effectiveness of police than they are of changes in the behavior of juveniles. As a result, the present study utilizes arrest rates as calculated per 100,000 juveniles.

No measure of delinquency is perfectly reliable. Despite its limitations, comparisons of self-report and victimization surveys reveal that the UCR is both a reliable and valid indicator of most serious crimes such as homicide, motor vehicle theft, robbery, and burglary (Hindelang, Hirschi & Weis, 1981; Gove, Hughes & Geerken, 1985). Repeated use of a measuring instrument will always produce some variation from one year to another. The assertion that arrest trends are not necessarily the most reliable indicators of the underlying trends in juvenile crime rates is outweighed by the fact that the UCR contains data on a large variety of offenses and that these data have been collected by many police departments over a very long period.

1.3.2 Self-Reports of Delinquency: The Monitoring the Future Survey

Reliance upon official measures of data such as the UCR to estimate delinquency is in part due to a lack of alternative sources of longitudinal data. There are a substantial number of longitudinal self-report surveys of delinquency, such as the National Youth Survey (Elliot, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985). The majority of these types of studies are panel studies where one cohort of youth is repeatedly given a similar survey each year over several years. While these panel studies have improved on previous self-report surveys by separating serious from minor forms of delinquency, they also have the increased potential of suffering from testing or panel effects. Testing effects are any alterations of the respondent’s own response to an item or scale that are caused by the prior administration of the same item or scale (Thornberry, 1989, p.351). As youth fill out the surveys each year, there is the potential that many juveniles will eventually learn
that the more delinquency they admit to, the longer it will take them to fill out their questionnaire. As a result, many juveniles who would otherwise admit to delinquent acts will underestimate their delinquency simply to quicken the lengthy survey process. Even without the testing effects, many self-report surveys such as the National Youth Survey cover only a selection of specific years, and do so with a small sample with a shifting range of ages.

Difficulties not only occur with juveniles not wanting to fill out the survey as they get older, but a confounding maturation effect in which the content validity of the self-report questions may vary with age (Lauritsen, 1998). For example, an 11 year-old youth may recall a recent scuffle in the schoolyard and indicate on the survey that he has gotten into a serious fight at school within the last 12 months. However, as that individual gets older, the types of behavior considered relevant or severe enough to mark down on a survey as a “serious fight” may be quite different. While researchers have only documented these types of testing effects in the NYS (Menard & Elliot, 1993; Lauritsen, 1998), it can be safe to assume that other longitudinal panel studies suffer from many of the same biases.

One of the few surveys to contain independent samples of juvenile respondents each year needed to eliminate testing effects is the Monitoring the Future study (Thornberry, 1989). This study is an annual national survey of high school seniors conducted by the University of Michigan’s Institute for Social research. While both researchers and policy makers often cite the survey for its analysis of trends in adolescent drug use (Bachman, Johnston & O’Malley, 1998; Johnston, O’Malley, & Bachman, 1999; Caulkins, 2000), it also provides less often examined information on trends in both
minor and serious adolescent self-reported delinquency. Since the survey utilizes a repeated cross-sectional design, it avoids biases due to testing effects found in the repeated measures of other self-report surveys such as the NYS.

Researchers designed the MTF project to explore changes in values, behaviors, and attitudes of youth across the United States (Johnston, O’Malley, & Bachman, 1999). The survey provides an organized description of the youth population of the United States in a given year, and helps to quantify the direction and rate of the changes taking place among that population. The research design involves annual data collections from high school seniors during the spring of each year, beginning with the class of 1975. The survey is distributed to approximately 130 public and private high schools to provide an accurate cross-section of high school seniors across the United States. Sampling is in multiple stages with stage 1 including the selection of particular geographic regions, stage 2 involving the selection of one or more high schools in each area, and stage 3 determining which seniors will be surveyed within each school. In major metropolitan areas, the study includes more than one high school and usually selects a single school in all other areas. In all cases, the selections of high schools ensure that the probability of drawing a school is proportionate to the size of its senior class. The larger the senior class, the higher the selection probability assigned to the school. Not all schools selected are willing to participate, and in such cases, a replacement school similar to the unwilling school is selected from the same geographic area. Within each selected school, up to about 400 seniors may be included in the survey. In larger schools, a subset of seniors is selected by either randomly sampling classrooms or another unbiased method that is convenient. If the school has less than 400 students, attempts are made to
include all seniors. Obtained sample sizes for each grade level totaled approximately 15,000 to 19,000 students each year. Schools participate in two years of data collections (two senior classes) to make administration more efficient. Questionnaires are administered in classrooms during normal class periods when possible by a local Institute for Social Research survey representative following standardized procedures. Teachers remain in the classroom, but only to maintain order, and are encouraged to avoid observing respondents while they complete questionnaires.

The Monitoring the Future survey is most well known for its extensive coverage of issues dealing with adolescent drug use. Every questionnaire contains a set of the same “core” questions, including demographic variables and some measures of drug use. The remaining questions, which include subject areas such as attitudes about government, educational aspirations, interpersonal relationships, occupational aims, and self-reports of delinquency, are divided among six different questionnaire forms. As a result, a random one-sixth of each annual sample completes a version of the questionnaire dealing with delinquent behavior beyond the standard drug use questions. Accordingly, most analyses of senior level data involved samples of approximately 3,000 students each year. Exact numbers of cases for each year will be reported in tables throughout this dissertation.

The authors of the study began their research with a focus on high school seniors in 1975 and began collecting information from 8th and 10th grade students in 1991. Since information on the latter samples has been available for less than a decade, my analyses will utilize only the more extensive senior data.

With very few exceptions, schools that have participated in one data collection have agreed to participate in a second data collection. There may be biases in the types
of schools that refuse to participate. For example, if schools with acknowledged drug or
delinquency problems refuse to participate, rates derived from the sample may be
underestimates. The majority of students who do not complete the survey do so because
they were absent from school on the day the surveys were distributed. During the last few
months of school before graduation, many students are busy with other planned events
such as sporting meets or graduation events. It is estimated that about one percent of
students refuse to complete or simply never turn in a questionnaire (Bachman, Johnston

Student response rates decline with age with seniors having an 87 percent
completion rate, 87 percent for the 10th graders and 90 percent across the 8th graders.
Related to the participation of schools is the fact that the MTF design does not include
adolescents who drop out of high school before graduation. According to census
estimates, this dropout population account for approximately 15-20 percent of the
population. When studying trends in delinquency, this population is quite important since
many delinquent behaviors tend to be higher among this group (Jarjoura, 1993, 1996).
Despite this perceived limitation, research has shown that for behaviors such as
marijuana use, which is prevalent among dropouts, the inclusion of absentees in all
surveys would increase overall usage rates by less than three percentage points (Bachman
et al., 1998).

1.3.3 Victimization Surveys

A final method used to study trends in juvenile offending has been victimization
surveys. A typical victimization survey asks victims of all ages whether they saw the
person or persons who victimized them. Then, if the victim saw the offender, he or she is
asked to estimate that person’s age. Most commonly, victimization surveys, such as the National Crime Victimization Survey, show general agreement with official and self-report data on the *types* of crimes juveniles are most likely to commit. While victimization surveys include a substantial amount of crime that goes unreported to police, a common critique is that for the majority of crimes that juveniles are likely to commit, victims are not able to accurately identify the age of offenders. For a substantial proportion of crimes that juveniles commit, such as property crimes, the victim never sees the offender. Additionally, for so-called “victimless” juvenile offenses, such as truancy or drug abuse, there simply is no victim available to report the offense, severely limiting the use of the NCVS for this type of offending. Therefore, while comparisons of official and self-report data to the NCVS may be appropriate for violent offenses (Lynch, 2002; Cook & Laub, 2001, 1998), victimization surveys are simply unable to provide reliable estimates of trends for the majority of crime that juveniles commit.

**1.4 TYPES OF DELINQUENCY: SERIOUS VERSUS MINOR OFFENDING**

Coupled with questions about the types of data used to study delinquency trends over time is a second issue involving the type of delinquency commonly studied in trend research. A substantial criticism of self-report surveys is that they employ measures of delinquency that focus on mostly minor offenses. Even those questions that researchers might consider to be tapping into delinquency that is more serious only examine the most serious end of a limited number of offenses. One highly controversial debate in criminology was the result of a study that used self-report data to argue that there was little relationship between social class and criminality (Tittle, Villedes & Smith, 1978). While official data indicated this relationship was becoming smaller and smaller over
time, self-report data revealed that the relationship was rather stable. However, further research pointed out that this discrepancy between self-report data and official data was nothing more than an “illusion” and that once researchers took type of offense and seriousness of offense into account, conclusions using self-report data looked very much like those using official data (Hindelang, Hirschi, & Weiss, 1979). While research has shown that it is unwise to compare the two methods when studying the correlates of crime such as age, sex, race or social class, it is exactly the less serious or “trivial” items contained in the MTF that make it a valuable companion to the more serious range of offenses measured in the UCR.

Although arrest data and self-report data both agree that the majority of crimes that juveniles commit are minor in nature, the majority of research on delinquency trends has focused almost exclusively on serious delinquency. In their response to the increase in the punitive nature of the juvenile justice system as well as the growing number of predictions about increases in violent offending, many researchers have overlooked the majority of offenses that juveniles commit. As Bernard states in his analysis of official data, “I largely ignore status offenses, because I am exploring whether there is a wave of juvenile crime rather than a wave of truancy or running away” (Bernard, 1999, p.338). Most violent acts are clearly undesirable by the norms of conventional society. However, non-violent and even minor acts of deviance are also undesirable and, if detected, usually elicit at least some form of social control response. Ever since the days of the first juvenile court, the notion of dependency as a natural state of juveniles still can be found within laws for many minor forms of offending. As a result, studies of juvenile crime trends should attempt to include a wide range of deviant behaviors, as well as isolate
offense specific patterns, in order to uncover the potential forces that may be driving such trends.
2.1 GENERAL THEORIES OF CRIME

Different types of delinquency are of interest to different researchers. A particular researcher’s area of interest could be burglary, while another might prefer to study homicide. For a researcher focused on burglary, historical trends in rates of arrest for burglary would certainly be of interest. However, a burglary researcher would also be interested in examining various correlates of burglary as a means to determine which individuals are more likely to commit burglary, and under what social conditions rates of burglaries are most likely to increase. Increases in juvenile murder arrests in the late 1980s encouraged many criminologists to utilize criminological theory to help explain why juveniles were killing more during that specific historical period than they had been during other historical periods. Many traditional explanations were put forth to explain the increase in murders, such as lack of educational opportunities (LaFree & Drass, 1996), concentrated poverty (W.J. Wilson, 1987), and access to handguns (Blumstein & Cork, 1996). However, two general explanations of delinquency emerged in the 1990s to argue that murder, as well as all types of other juvenile delinquency, could be explained by a single underlying process.

The following discussion begins with an overview of two general theories of delinquency that attempt to explain all forms of deviant juvenile behavior. Specifically, I focus on Gottfredson and Hirschi’s (1990) general theory of self-control, and Bennett, DiLulio, and Water’s (1996) theory of moral poverty. While the former has been the most well tested criminological theory in the last decade, the predications made by the latter
have had an overwhelming influence on the creation of new juvenile justice system policy in the 1990s. The discussion will then focus on the extent to which these general theories could explain historical trends in juvenile offending.

2.2 MORAL POVERTY AND THE “SUPERPREDATOR”

In what might be one of the most influential books to coincide with the punitive shift in juvenile justice system policy in the mid 1990s, William Bennett, John DiIulio and John Waters published *Body Count*, a book that they referred to as “an attempt to explain America’s violent crime plague.” In *Body Count*, the authors theorized that the root cause of violent juvenile crime in the United States was the result of an increase in national levels of a factor they label “moral poverty” (Bennett et al., 1996). Moral poverty is an aggregate level phenomenon referring to societies where children grow up without responsible adults in their lives who can teach them right from wrong and teach them to feel empathy toward others. The authors believed that more and more children were growing up in the United States without parents who could properly socialize them into adulthood. Because of the inadequate socialization, increased numbers of children were growing up without internal impulse control or empathy and as a result would eventually engage in crime.

While the main purpose of *Body Count* was to explain increases in violent crime, the book suggests that moral poverty was responsible for a variety of antisocial behaviors including burglary, prostitution, drug and alcohol use, truancy, vandalism, and suicide. Bennett and his colleagues perceived levels of morality in the United States to be at all time lows, and predicted that these low levels of societal morality would continue to decrease over the next few years. Increases in the juvenile population combined with low
levels of societal morality would then merge to create a “ticking time bomb” of juvenile crime. As the authors state:

A new generation of street criminals is upon us – the youngest, biggest, and baddest generation any society has ever known…America is now home to thickening ranks of juvenile “super-predators” radically impulsive, brutally remorseless youngsters, including ever more preteen age boys, who murder, assault, rape, rob, burglarize, deal deadly drugs, join gun-toting gangs, and create serious communal disorders. (1996, pp. 26-27)

The overall message of *Body Count* was not only that juveniles are more violent now than in the past, but also that moral poverty had made today’s juveniles worse on every measure of deviant behavior. In reference to historical trends then, Bennett and colleagues imply that since morality in the United States has been consistently declining over time, delinquency rates will necessarily increase with the decreased morality. In terms of specific offense types, the prediction is that all types of antisocial behaviors are increasing, but especially more serious types of offenses such as murder, robbery, and assaults. While the United States should witness increases in all types of deviant behavior with increases in moral poverty, it should experience the greatest increases specifically in these violent crimes.

The idea that a single underlying process can help to explain individual and/or aggregate changes in levels of delinquency is not new to criminological theory. Whether the trait be unconventional attitudes (Donavan & Jessor, 1985), insulation from shame (Braithwaite, 1989), negative relationships with others (Agnew, 1992), or enduring personality traits (Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985), general theories of crime and delinquency
such as the theory of moral poverty view seemingly diverse adolescent problem behaviors as merely manifestations of a common underlying trait or process. Probably the most well established general theory of crime emerged at the same time the United States was experiencing perhaps some of its highest rates of violent crime arrests in U.S. history.

2.3 Gottfredson & Hirschi: Low Self Control and Opportunity

While Bennett et al’s theory of moral poverty made a large impact on the general public and policy makers, some of its basic tenants were proposed in a much more developed fashion six years earlier in one of the most recognized pieces of criminology in the last decade. Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi’s A General Theory of Crime, made the claim that low self-control in childhood is “for all intents and purposes, the individual level cause of crime” (1990, p. 232). Individuals can be ranked on a continuum from having high levels to having low levels of self-control. Those individuals with low levels of self-control will be less able to resist engaging in acts that involve simple and immediate gratification of desires, whether they are criminal or otherwise. According to the general theory, the major cause of low self-control is ineffective child rearing by society, especially by the family. For Gottfredson and Hirschi, most socialization occurs early in life through familial institutions. The majority of children who possess low self-control do so because of inattentive and lax parental supervision. For adequate child rearing to occur parents must monitor children’s behavior, recognize deviant behavior when it occurs and punish that behavior. Parents who fail to observe deviant tendencies in their children early on and who then fail to administer the proper controls will give rise to children are who impulsive, insensitive,
physical (as opposed to mental), risk-taking, short-sighted, and nonverbal, and will tend therefore to engage in criminal and analogous acts. Further, Gottfredson and Hirschi argue that once established, an individual’s level of self-control will remain stable throughout the life course and will be relatively unaffected by other institutions such as marriage or parenthood.

It is quite apparent that Bennett et al.’s theory of moral poverty in many ways is a restatement of the theory of low self-control. Both theories explain the underlying cause of all crime, not just violent crime, with a single underlying process. While Bennett and colleagues view this process as a general deficiency in national levels of morality for both adults and children, Gottfredson and Hirschi take a more social scientific stance. As Gottfredson and Hirschi state:

Our perspective emphasizes the considerable diversity of acts and behaviors that flow from low self-control and the extent to which such acts therefore have a common etiology….the motive to commit crime is inherent in or limited to immediate gains provided by the act itself. There is no larger purpose behind rape, or robbery, or murder, or theft, or embezzlement, or insider trading. (1990, p. 256)

Gottfredson and Hirschi go beyond the theory of moral poverty, both in their explanation of why not all children with low self-control commit delinquency, as well as in their reasoning for why juveniles with low self-control only engage in certain types of delinquency. The theory of moral poverty makes the prediction that all juveniles whose parents are unable to engage in proper socialization techniques will engage in delinquency. However, Bennett and his colleagues failed to account for the fact that
many juveniles growing up “morally deprived” families never engage in deviant activities to any significant extent. In contrast, Gottfredson and Hirschi do not attempt to predict what delinquency rates will look like in the future. Instead, the general theory of crime attempts to explain why crime rates may change in the future, or why they may have changed from previous years. This is different from the moral poverty prediction that changes in self-control will necessarily lead to increases in all forms, but especially violent forms of delinquent behavior.

For Gottfredson and Hirschi, delinquency is not an automatic or necessary consequence of low-self control, as is implied in the theory of moral poverty. A lack of self-control will only express itself as delinquency and other antisocial behavior when individuals encounter the appropriate opportunities to engage in such behavior. Aside from the opportunity to do so, Gottfredson and Hirschi consider no other reasons that suggest why an individual engages in one type of behavior over another.

Gottfredson and Hirschi take the conditions necessary for crimes in general to be those stated in the opportunity theory of Cohen and Felson (1979). The idea that offenders who desire to commit crimes must also have the opportunity to do so has long been established in criminological theory (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). More recently, the routine activity approach of Cohen and Felson explains variability in crime by variations in structural conditions that create opportunities for its occurrence. Crimes occur because people or goods are exposed, unguarded, and viewed as attractive targets by offenders who are already motivated to commit criminal acts. Changes in the routine activity structure of American society will limit the opportunities to engage in some types of offenses but also increase the ability of motivated offenders to engage in other types of
offenses. For example, Felson argues that the sale of whiskey in larger gallon and half
gallon bottles has made it easier for adolescents to “water down” the larger bottles when
they sneak portions without their parent’s permission. Juveniles with low self-control
will require even less effort to drink alcohol, and that could result in increasing aggregate
level rates of consumption (Felson, 1998).

In reference to more serious offending, researchers have suggested that the major
changes in crime markets over the last few decades have diminished the attractiveness of
burglary for juveniles (Steffensmeier & Harer, 1999). As new drug markets emerged in
the 1980s, drug trafficking became a more appealing option than burglary because it
required less skill and produced greater rewards than juveniles could achieve through the
resale of widely available household goods.

For Gottfredson and Hirschi, motivation to commit delinquent acts can be found
within all individuals. Those juveniles whose families do not properly socialize them to
delay short-term gratification will be less able to resist the benefits of delinquent acts than
those who have high levels of self-control. This interaction between low self-control and
an available opportunity will result in the commission of a delinquent act. Self-control
theory then views all delinquency as “a consequence of relatively stable characteristics of
people and the predictable situations and opportunities they experience” (Gottfredson &
Hirschi, 1990, p.249). As a result, individual offenders are likely to engage in a wide
variety of deviant acts, with opportunity being the only distinguishing factor between
which types of offenses different individuals actually choose to commit. Any evidence of
individuals specializing in one particular form of criminal activity is explained by simple
opportunity to commit that specific act. For this reason, Gottfredson and Hirschi specify
that “the frequency with which individuals participate in criminal events may vary over
time and place without implying change in their self-control” (1990, p.137).

At the individual level then, Gottfredson and Hirschi’s theory of low self-control
states that correlations among a variety of deviant behaviors exist as a result of each type
of offense having the same underlying etiology of low self-control. The theory predicts
that youth with low levels of self-control will engage in a variety of behaviors
interchangeably, as long as each offense type provides benefits with similar qualities such
as immediate and effortless gratification or the desire for excitement or thrills.

According to self-control theory, crime is the result of an individual’s “pursuit of
immediate, certain, and easy benefits” (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990, p.42). Gottfredson
and Hirschi concur with the tenants of a routine activity framework, suggesting that the
temporal and spatial correlates of crime are not the same today as they were in the past.
Self-control theory would predict that aggregate changes in levels of self-control would
produce collective changes in all types of offenses, so long as the opportunity to engage
in these offenses remains constant. However, unlike the theory of moral poverty that
suggests juveniles will be more likely to engage in all types of offenses as aggregate
levels of morality decrease, Gottfredson and Hirschi’s theory allows for divergence
across the aggregate level rates of specific offense types.

Despite the fact that Gottfredson and Hirschi make little reference to aggregate
level crime rates, their theory does have aggregate level implications in terms of offense
trends. Similar to the theory of moral poverty, self-control theory would predict that
increases in the number of children in a given society who possess low levels of self-
control, as a result of inadequate socialization, should cause rates in all categories of
delinquency to increase. Increases in aggregate level rates of delinquency should follow changes in parent’s overall inability to adequately socialize their children and establish sufficient levels of self-control. Gottfredson and Hirschi do not present any empirical evidence of familial changes over time, and they do not make any assertions as to whether there are actually more or less children in the United States today with low self-control than in previous years. In contrast, Bennett and colleagues blame the increase of juvenile arrest rates in the early 1990s entirely on a decreased ability of families to socialize children. At no point in their writing do the authors even acknowledge the possibility that families today might be better able to socialize their children than in the past.

To illustrate, a self-control theory of crime predicts that children raised in single parent households or “broken” homes are more likely to be delinquent than those raised by both biological parents as the result of an overall lack of monitoring and punishment resulting in poor socialization (Hirschi, 1991). There is clear evidence that the family structure of the United States is shifting toward more single parent homes (Pong & Ju, 2000). Such changes in family size should presumably decrease the ability of families to socialize their children with the eventual increase in the numbers of children with low self-control. The result should then be a higher proportion of more children in the United States with low levels of self-control than in the past.

On the other hand, increases in the ability of families to socialize their children to possess self-control should lead to decrease in all types of offenses. Since the average size of families in the United States is getting smaller and smaller in terms of the number of children parents choose to have, parents may actually be better able to socialize their
children than in the past. With fewer children in the household, the ability of parents to socialize children would become an easier task, both in terms of conserved resources (Astone & McLanahan, 1991), as well as monitoring of behavior (Patterson, Reid & Dishion, 1992). With fewer children in the household, parents would be better able to recognize evidence of low self-control at early ages and punish such behavior accordingly.

Existing differences in aggregate level trends would suggest that broader societal changes have affected the extent to which crimes still provide immediate and certain benefits to individual offenders. Shover (1996) offers a similar account of historical changes in criminal opportunity structure in his ethnographic account of aging persistent thieves. In Great Pretenders, Shover examines both historical and contemporary changes in criminal opportunities, as well as changes in the skills needed to exploit these opportunities. Shover illustrates how the opportunity structure of specific offenses, such as train robberies, has gradually changed over time. For example, when train robberies were at their peak levels in the early 1900s, Shover illustrates how robberies were relatively uncomplicated tasks since security on trains was extremely disorganized, and very large amounts of cash were being transported. These opportunity factors made train robbery an appealing crime in the sense that relatively little effort yielded quite substantial benefits. However, these conditions gradually changed over time with the addition of more security and less cash available on each train and train robbery became a less attractive crime. Not only were there no longer economic gains to be earned, but also robberies became much more complicated undertakings than in the past. As Shover states:
The attractive or bountiful criminal opportunities of one place or time can be transformed or even disappear in a few short years…Baggage cars (on trains) were equipped with ramps and stalls containing fast horses for the immediate pursuit of bandits; detectives and guards rode unobtrusively in coaches. Technology provided more efficient communication and transportation, and forensic science made identification and apprehension less difficult. (1996, p. 50)

While train robberies are not exactly typical juvenile crimes, the ways in which American society has changed over time would also influence the opportunities juveniles have to engage in specific types of crime over others. In their research, Gottfredson and Hirschi describe the fundamental characteristics and general patterns of many common crimes based on considerations of both self-control and opportunity structure. Self-control theory then allows for changes in rates to emanate from both overall changes in levels of self-control, as well as changes in the opportunity structure to commit specific offenses. Gottfredson and Hirschi would explain positively correlated historical trends for all forms of deviant activity as the result of changes in aggregate levels of self-control. However, if the these correlations are insignificant and the rates of specific offenses are increasing while others are decreasing, Gottfredson and Hirschi would put greater emphasis on changes in the opportunity structure to commit these crimes to explain the divergent trends.

2.4 OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE: CRIMINAL & ANALOGOUS BEHAVIORS

In *A General Theory of Crime*, Gottfredson and Hirschi spend a significant amount of time discussing the conditions they feel are necessary for specific criminal acts to occur. In their discussion of the logical structure of typical crimes ranging from
homicide to drug use, the authors repeatedly point out that there are two basic elements that must be present for any type of offense to occur, an obvious opportunity coupled with an offender with a lack of self-control. While it is not clear whether Gottfredson and Hirschi believe that the number of children with low-self control in the United States has changed over time, they make very clear that the opportunities to engage in many specific crimes has changed. The following discussion will examine how the opportunity to engage in specific forms of deviance may have changed over time. While there is no reference to the exact point in time when these changes may have occurred, the point is simply to argue that the opportunity to engage in different crimes has changed over time and that the extent of these changes may vary across offense types. While Gottfredson and Hirschi believe that changes in the opportunity structure of specific offenses may cause either increases or decreases in that type of offense, they consistently point out that long-term reductions in all types of deviant behavior can be achieved by reducing the level of criminality (levels of self-control) in the population.

**Burglary**

Burglary is defined by the FBI as “the unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft” (U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000). For a burglary to occur there must first be a building or a structure for offenders to enter unlawfully. In addition, the specific building must not have a guardian, such as a security system, a dog, or an occupant who could observe the offender and interrupt the commission of the offense. The building must also have an item, or items, in it that are attractive to the offender. Rates of burglary are highly susceptible to broader societal
changes such as the mass manufacture of goods like computers or television sets. For example, there were about 4 million personal computers in the United States in 1983; today there are more than 50 million (Moore & Simon, 2000). This increase in the number of computers that are available for motivated offenders to steal should have an effect on the rates that such items are taken from homes when burglaries occur, and may increase the chances that a motivated offender will want to break into a home to obtain one. Despite the potential to obtain personal computers however, Gottfredson and Hirschi argue that offenders gain very few benefits from burglaries and often only take small amounts of change or bottles of alcohol that they are consumed rather than resold.

Robbery

Robbery is defined as “the taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force, or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear” (U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000). Compared to burglary, robbery is an uncomplicated crime. While burglary involves undertaking several tasks such as entering a building, finding available goods to steal, and then being able to fence those goods for cash, obtaining cash or personal belongings through robbery involves only one step. However, robbery requires different skills than burglary. Even more so, the emotional aspect of robbery, via the use or threat of direct force, is what distinguishes robbery as a violent crime (Katz, 1988). Many offenders who commit robberies view burglary as boring or too risky and hence an unappealing crime (Shover, 1996).
Similar to burglary however, the opportunities to engage in robbery have changed substantially over time. America’s shift toward a cashless society has made the financial rewards gained from robbery less attractive than in the past when people carried greater amounts of cash. Similarly, changes in the specific cash handling and staffing procedures in convenience stores have attempted to decrease potential gains of motivated offenders. For example, the convenience store 7-11 instituted a series of crime prevention measures to reduce robberies in their stores including putting clerks and registers on raised platforms to take the cash drawer out of the offender’s line of vision and eliminating all alley exits (Felson, 1998). Despite these target-hardening efforts, the confrontational element of robbery still makes it attractive to many potential offenders who may find benefits from the thrill of robbery in of itself (Katz, 1988). There is also little evidence to suggest that the thrill seeking gains earned from the confrontational element of robbery have declined over time. The thrills of the crime may actually be increased by the challenges that security cameras and armed clerks may provide.

Aggravated Assaults and Homicide

Aggravated assault is defined as “an attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or forced bodily injury” (U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000). Aggravated assaults are usually accompanied by the use of a weapon or by means likely to produce great bodily harm. Homicide is the willful (nonnegligent) killing of one human being by another (U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000). The difference between aggravated assault and homicide may simply involve factors such as the intervention of a bystander, the
accuracy of the shooter, or the speed of the ambulance taking an assault victim to the hospital (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). For both crimes, there must be an offender and a victim in interaction with each other. Many assaults and homicides are the result of grievances against something or someone (R. Felson, 1993).

There is certainly reason to believe that the routine activities of juveniles have changed over time in ways that could increase encounters that could lead to some sort of grievance. For example, as the average school size increases, so to will the chances that there will be some type of dispute among juveniles, whether it is a show of masculinity over a member of the opposite sex or a dispute on the sports field. However, the majority of assaults by juveniles occur away from school grounds. Recent research reveals that violence at school is not increasing (Kaufman, Chen, Choy, Ruddy, Miller, Chapman, Chandler, Rand & Klaus, 1999). Such findings suggest that juveniles are better able to resolve disputes than they may have been in the past, at least in the school environment.

Another larger societal change that researchers believe may lead to increases in violent crimes is access to firearms. It is clear that the increase in juvenile homicides in the early 1990s was almost entirely the result of the increase in gun homicides (Zimring, 1998, Wintemute, 2002). However, what is not as clear is whether access to guns was the actual cause of the increase in homicides or whether there was some other factor, such as low societal levels of self-control or morality, which influenced gun homicide rates. Cook and Ludwig (1996) found that the percentage of households keeping a handgun had increased modestly from the 1970s to the 1990s from 20 to 25 percent. The same study found that 48 percent of homes that had handguns had three or more guns in their home and that only 1/3 of all handguns were stored loaded and unlocked. While critics argue
that increased gun control laws will limit juveniles’ opportunity to purchase guns, thereby
decreasing gun homicides, Gottfredson and Hirschi point out that the majority of youth
obtain guns from alternative sources. Whether guns are obtained through the black
market on the street, or the gray market through relatives and friends, limiting legitimate
gun purchases will have little effect on how juveniles actually obtain firearms. As a
result, laws making it harder to obtain guns through legal markets may have a little effect
on gun homicides, while limiting the actual number of handguns in homes and in the
illegal market could possibly lead to decreased rates. Gottfredson and Hirschi argue that
the best way to prevent homicide and assaults is by reducing the number of people who
tend toward criminality.

While official homicide rates are an almost perfect indicator of the total number
of homicides in the United States, official trends in aggravated assaults may change over
time, regardless of any real change in juvenile behavior. For example, Steffensmeier and
Harer (1999) argue that increase in arrests for aggravated assault in the 1990s may simply
be the result of the nation’s decreased tolerance for violent disputes. An offense police
would at one time record as a disorderly conduct may instead be recorded today as an
assault. Zero-tolerance policies for weapons and greater surveillance of juveniles in
school by teachers and in-school police and probation officers may increase the
likelihood that juveniles who engage in violent behavior are caught and processed.

The best example of this phenomenon would be the traditional schoolyard fight.
Not more than 5 years ago, a schoolyard fistfight would most often land a student in the
principal’s office or, in the most extreme cases result in an arrest. However, with today’s
sensitivities to bullying and other forms of victimization at school, a fight in the
schoolyard can frequently result in the school calling the police and a juvenile arrest being made. The eventual result of such definitional change would be a possible increase in arrests for juvenile assault, with no actual increase the actual behavior (Feld, 1999).

Larceny-theft/Shoplifting

Larceny-theft is defined as “the unlawful taking, carrying, leading or riding away of property from the possession of another” (U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000). Examples are thefts of bicycles or automobile accessories, shoplifting, pocket-picking, or the stealing of any property or article which is not taken by force and violence or by fraud injury. Similar to burglary, larceny theft requires an actor insufficiently restrained from engaging in the behavior, an item or items that are attractive to the offender and capable of being removed from wherever they may be (store, car, etc), and a lack of guardianship of the property of interest to the offender. Unlike burglary however, for larceny offenses such as shoplifting, the offender often has permission to be in close contact with the item being stolen. Increased security measures at stores where juveniles are likely to steal goods may have an impact on larceny-theft rates. New technologies have certainly made shoplifting a more complex task than simply taking an article out of a store unnoticed. However, the number of available larceny-theft targets has grown substantially over time. While 25 years ago a juvenile may have merely a handful of stores from which to take goods, today’s youth have an unlimited number of potential targets from which to choose. In addition, the increased number of juveniles who work part-time jobs may lead to an increase in thefts from the workplace.
Arson

Arson is defined as “any willful or malicious burning or attempting to burn, with or without intent to defraud, a dwelling house, public building, motor vehicle or aircraft, personal property of another” (U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000). Even more than burglary or shoplifting, if there were any crime that could be considered a crime of the young, it would be arson. Most arsons are committed by juveniles aged 12 and under. This fact makes the search for the influence of specific opportunity factors for arson a challenge. There is very little reason to expect that juveniles have more or less opportunity to engage in arson today than at any other time in recent history. Other than the availability of something to set fire to, arson requires nothing more than an offender seeking the excitement arson provides. Arson is also unique in that the motivation for juveniles is probably not financial gain, as is clearly the case for a substantial portion of adult arsons. Juveniles have nothing to gain from setting fire to a house or a car, other than the emotional satisfaction gained by the sense of power and control offered by engaging in such activity.

Motor-vehicle theft/Joyriding

Motor-vehicle theft is defined as “the theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle” (U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000). Joyriding is defined in this study as the taking of a car that does not belong to someone in your family without permission of the owner (Bachman, Johnston & O’Malley, 1998). Legally, a youth who is joyriding can be arrested for motor-vehicle theft. In terms of opportunity, there is little difference between joyriding and motor vehicle theft, other than a place to store the
stolen vehicle or someone available to buy the vehicle. There will be an association between auto theft and the overall number of automobiles in a society each year, ease of access to those automobiles, and the attractiveness of the automobiles to the offenders. New technology over the last decade has increased security devices on vehicles, with many new vehicles sold with some sort of anti-theft device such as an alarm or tracking device. Despite these new target hardening innovations, a large proportion of cars that people steal have the keys in them or are stolen with the owner inside the vehicle, making alarms or locks ineffective as a deterrent. Potential offenders must be old enough to know how to drive a car in order to steal it, or at the very least, have the physical capabilities to press the vehicle’s accelerator while steering. While a six-year-old may not possess these capabilities, a ten year old certainly could at least perform both tasks at the same time.

Illicit Drugs and Alcohol

Transformations in drug use and sales are probably the most commonly cited explanation for the recorded decrease in violent juvenile arrests in the late 1990s. (Blumstein & Wallman, 2002). Many of the opportunities to engage in drug selling are similar to those of drug use. For drug use to occur there must be an available drug that is attractive to an offender who is unrestrained. The attractiveness of using drugs can be lessened through many means. First, drugs can be made more difficult to obtain through ID checks at liquor or convenience stores, as well as enforcement of such policies. Second, the financial cost to buy drugs can be increased by means of taxes, or by limiting the availability of the drugs on the street. Many liquor companies have been criticized
for making their product too inexpensive, thereby encouraging alcohol use and addiction, especially in young black males to whom such products are usually marketed. Finally, the substantiated health costs of using the drugs can be made known through education programs at schools or on televisions. Gottfredson and Hirschi propose that aggregate levels of drug use may be in part be prevented by reducing the percentage of people in society who have low self-control.

Status Offenses: Truancy, Runaway and Curfew Violations

Status offenses refer to those specific juvenile behaviors and patterns of behavior that are illegal for juveniles but would not be criminal for an adult. Such offenses include truancy, runaway, and curfew violations. School district policy usually defines what constitutes truancy from district to district, and typically that entails an unexcused absence from school or class. For truancy to occur there must be an unrestrained individual who is expected to be at school and who finds benefits in leaving school rather than staying in class. An attendance clerk at each school usually monitors school attendance. Truancy will likely decline to the extent that truant officers are able to keep adequate records of which students have excused and unexcused absences and who are then able to punish accordingly or have parents who are willing to punish the behavior. The long term costs of truancy, such as less education and fewer job and post secondary prospects, will be of little importance to those in search of the short terms benefits of avoiding what might be an antagonistic school climate. With schools increasing in size and limited staff to keep track of such students it can be argued that the opportunities to engage in truancy have increased over time. Similarly, the increase in dual income
parents could result in more juveniles able to avoid parental supervision when they are truant.

Curfew violations, like truancy violations, vary from community to community. The intent of curfew laws is to limit the opportunity for juveniles to engage in all types of crimes. For a curfew violation to occur, an unconstrained juvenile must have the opportunity to violate an existing curfew law. Youth who remain on city streets after specified evening hours (usually 11pm-6am), and who are not in the company of a parent or guardian will be in violation of most curfew laws that exist. Similar to rates of aggravated assaults then, runaway arrest rates are extremely sensitive to criminal justice legislation and processing.

Runaway offenses are limited to those juveniles taken into protective custody under provisions of local statutes. In a broad sense, runaways are children who leave home without permission and who stay away overnight. From a policy standpoint, youth are generally considered runaways if they have no familiar or secure place to stay such as a relative or friends house. Studies find that runaway is a complex behavior with many runaways possessing serious mental health needs (Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Ackley, 1997). Many runaways have made sound rational choices to avoid physical abuse, sexual abuse or extreme neglect at home. Runaways often turn to other criminal activities such as theft or prostitution to finance their independence (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). If family disruptions are increasing, there is reason to expect that the rate of juvenile runaways should increase as well. More and more children will find benefits in leaving home in an attempt to avoid possible physical or emotional harm. While it may be possible, there appears to be little reason to expect that the opportunities for juveniles to runaway have
decreased over time. In fact, the increase in the number of various runaway shelters offering social support to runaways may help to increase the benefits juveniles receive from leaving abusive home environments and finding alternative shelter.

Vandalism

Vandalism is defined as “the willful or malicious destruction, injury, disfigurement, or defacement of any public or private property, real or personal, without consent of the owner or persons having custody or control” (U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000). Criminologists have traditionally looked to aggregate rates of vandalism as strong indicators of a loss of regard for society (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). Again, like runaway, it is difficult to suggest a reason why the opportunities to vandalize goods or property may have changed over time. Some research suggests that vandalism is sensitive to group norms that offer rewards of prestige within these groups for committing vandalism (Goldstein, 1996). While environmental designs such as increased lighting may deter some vandals, the majority of attempts to discourage vandalism occur after the offense has already occurred, such as consistent repainting of graffiti on walls. Since the opportunity structure of vandalism has not changed substantially, self-control theory would then suggest that the majority of changes in the rates of vandalism would then be the result of a change in the number of juveniles in the population who tend toward criminality. Any increase in this population would eventually lead to an increase in rates of vandalism.
Motor-Vehicle Accidents

According to self-control theory, certain non-criminal events will be correlated with crime because they result from pursuit of the same kinds of benefits that crime offers. For those who are eligible to drive, motor-vehicle accident rates by age of the driver, closely parallel those for most crimes (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Junger, 1994). There is an age-crime curve for accidents with the majority of traffic accidents occurring among those under 20 years of age and substantial decline in rates as drivers’ age. The idea that traffic accidents and delinquent behaviors would have a common age distributions as well as a common cause would logically follow from a self-control standpoint. Pless, Perreault, and Tennia (1989) found that levels of parental supervision of children who got into accidents while riding bicycles was 150 percent lower than levels of supervision of children who did not get into accidents. Similarly then, self-control theory would argue that all juveniles are motivated to drive recklessly but that those juveniles who are raised to be impulsive and risk-taking will be more likely to speed and take other such risks while they are driving and hence be more likely to have traffic accidents.

At first appearance there appears to be plenty of opportunity to engage in accidents. However, there also are relatively few benefits and substantial costs to engaging in behavior that could cause an accident. While, there may be few benefits in accidents, they are often the result of speed, drinking, or risk-taking which all offer the actor at least some level of immediate, easy, and certain short-term pleasure as well as the possibility for achieving status amongst peers. Increases in the minimum age for a driver’s license, as well as limitations on the hours in which probationary drivers are
permitted to be behind the wheel could reduce the opportunity some juveniles have to get into traffic accidents. Finally, self-control theory predicts that the greatest reduction of traffic accidents for juveniles occur by reducing the number of people in society who have low self-control.

2.5 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following discussion will illustrate how this dissertation will specifically address four main research questions. The first purpose of this research is to address the “myth of the good old days” proposed by Bernard (1999). The broader question then is: According to official and self-report data on offending behavior, are juveniles more delinquent now than they were in the past? To address this question, this research will compare rates of official delinquency for juveniles in the year 2000 to those of the same aged juveniles thirty-six years prior in 1964. I will also examine similar self-reported offense trends of juveniles in 1976 to juveniles in 2000. While comparisons between cohorts of youths in the year 2000 and those of juveniles 25-35 years ago are useful in examining long-term changes in juvenile offending, the data also allow for short-term comparisons of arrests and self-reported behavior. Since the theory of moral poverty made explicit predictions of an increase in the new millennium for all forms of deviant behavior, much of the focus will be on offense rate changes of that period compared to the late 1980s and early 1990s, when violent crime rates were already at, or approaching, all time peaks. However, I will also include short-term delinquency rates for five year intervals from 1976 until 2000 in an attempt to distinguish the time periods when juveniles really did have the highest and lowest rates of arrests and self-reported delinquency.
In order to present a more complete picture of juvenile offending over time, these comparisons will include a wide variety of offending behaviors rather than focusing only on violent offending. Since the majority of crimes that juveniles commit are minor in nature, the examination of rates of offending for more minor offenses will offer a more complete picture of juvenile offending help to offer a more comprehensive empirical analysis of the myth of the good old days.

It would be naïve to expect to find that rates in both self-reported and official offending have remained constant over time, in part due to the many biases already discussed that can affect rates over time. However, this research will show that without disaggregating grouped offense categories such as “property” or “violent” offending into separate offense categories such as “motor-vehicle theft” or “arson,” many researchers may be perpetuating an assumption of stability in crime rates over time that is overly simplistic and misleading. Therefore, the second research question examined in this dissertation is: Which specific juvenile offenses have experienced the most substantial proportional change in rates over time? While criminologists may have yet to develop a common language to describe changes in offending trends, this research will focus on significant long-term increases and decreases in offending rates in an attempt to distinguish particular historical periods where a substantial amount of change in offending has occurred. I will examine 5-year segments of time, again from 1964 for official and 1976 for self-reported data. Each of these five-year intervals will be examined to determine which offenses have had the most volatility in rate changes as well as reveal when those unstable periods were occurring. By illuminating the particular time periods when specific offences are varying the most, I will be better able to seek out
broader corresponding changes in social institutions, which may influencing such offense specific patterns. For example, I may find that arrests for assault were stable from 1980 to 1985, but burglary arrest rates were quite volatile. With such a finding, I could then focus on searching for similar changes occurring within society more generally that would influence burglary rates, but not assault rates, such as increases in the number of home security systems, or increases in the number of new homes being built.

The third research question asks: To what extent are official measures of delinquency and self-reported measures of delinquency congruent with each other in terms of their depictions of rates and patterns of offending over time? While many researchers have compared findings using both self-report and official data in the past, the majority of this research has been on what these methods say about various causes of crime such as social class or race rather than how specific offense trends correlate over time. These two data sets complement the weaknesses of the other, and my analysis will identify the specific offense trends where there is agreement across methods as well as those where the methods differ. By examining these similarities and differences, I will obtain a clearer picture of the extent to which official data are measuring real changes in juvenile behavior and not simply changes in the official response to delinquent acts.

Finally, this dissertation will not only focus on the what specific trends in delinquency rates can tell researchers about juvenile behavior over time, but I will also be able to gauge the capability of individual level theories of criminality to explain aggregate level change this behavior. The comparison of specific offenses with dissimilar opportunity patterns over time will help to determine the utility of seeking one single explanation of delinquency trends that is broad enough to account for a wide range
of trends in specific crime types. Gottfredson and Hirschi’s general theory of self-control allows for two possibilities, each having separate implications for clarifying the more compelling underlying cause of delinquency. To test the utility of their theory, I will examine the correspondence of offense specific trends for over 25 years to help address the question: *To what extent do trends in specific offense categories track each other over time?*

Gottfredson and Hirschi predict that if there is an increase in the aggregate levels of individuals with low self-control, analyses should reveal that trends for a wide range of offenses will have significant positive correlations. Significantly high correlations among all offense types, as indicated by a correlation matrix, would support the notion of low self-control as a single explanation for such behavior. Low aggregate levels of low-self control should produce decreases in rates while high levels should produce increased rates of offending. However, if these offense specific trends have only modest correlations over time, more consideration would need to be given to opportunity explanations of changes in crime trends.

An investigation of the correspondence of trends for specific offenses over time has the potential to reveal other interpretable patterns of consistency across possible subsets of specific offense categories whose trends are moving together over time. While the main focus of offense comparisons in this dissertation will be between trends of serious and minor offenses, I will also explore the extent of the correlations in trends among groups of offenses such as property and violent offenses, motor-vehicle theft and larceny-theft, and among all types of status offenses.
CHAPTER 3
DATA AND VARIABLES

While offense-specific correlations of trends in juvenile delinquency are significant for the support of many criminological theories, researchers have spent little time studying them. Part of the explanation for this lack of research can be found in the fact that the examination of longitudinal offending trends at the aggregate level requires detailed national level data on a variety of juvenile behaviors. This dissertation utilizes two main sources of such data, one relying on official data, the other on data received from self-reports.

The UCR presents data in tables showing the number of arrests in a given year, the offense for which the suspects have been arrested, and the age of the suspects. Statistics have been made available since the mid 1930s. However, comparisons of the UCR data back to the 1930s are difficult due to many revisions in the way UCR arrest statistics are collected. The classification of offenses has changed over time, with some offenses being dropped and others added. For the purpose of this research only data from 1964 until 2000 will be examined. There are two reasons for choosing 1964 as a start point. First, before 1964 offense specific data was not collected on curfew and runaway violations. Second, in 1964 the definition of age groups also changed. Before 1964, the UCR only gave age specific information for juveniles who were over 15 years of age (15 and under, 16, 17, 18, etc), thereby missing age specific rates for any juveniles under 16. After 1964, the UCR began to collect data on single-year groups for juveniles who were 10 years of age and over.
Age-specific arrest rates for juveniles ages 10-17 from 1963-2000 can be calculated following the procedure outlined in Snyder and Sickmund’s, *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report*. To control for the number of juveniles in the populations who are 10-17 years of age and add stability to the arrest figures, year-specific rates will be calculated using the appropriate population estimates by age for each year from 1960-2000 using U.S. Census resident population estimates. Rates are also adjusted to account for the fact that arrest data reported in the UCR tables are the number of arrests reported by *reporting agencies* and not complete national estimates. For example, in the 1997 UCR the population covered by reporting agencies is 183,240,000, however the actual U.S. population in 1997 was 267,637,000, and therefore the UCR crime estimates are only reporting 68 percent of the total 1997 U.S. population. A typical rate equation is shown below. If \( y \) = specific year then,

\[
\frac{\text{total UCR arrest counts 10-17}_y}{\text{census 10-17 pop.}_y \times (\text{UCR pop. covered}_y/\text{entire census pop.}_y)}
\]

Arrest rates will be calculated for the range of behaviors discussed in the previous chapters. The following are definitions of offenses that will be examined in this research taken from the Uniform Crime Reports as stated by the Federal Bureaus of Investigation (2000). Of all the offenses examined in this research, only rates of truancy and motor vehicle accidents are not available from the UCR.
3.1 VARIABLE DEFINITIONS: UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS

1. **Criminal homicide** – a.) Murder and non-negligent manslaughter: the willful (non-negligent) killing of one human being by another. Deaths caused by negligence, attempts to kill, assaults to kill, suicides, and accidental deaths are excluded. The program classifies justifiable homicides separately and limits the definition to: (1) the killing of a felon by a law enforcement officer in the line of duty; or (2) the killing of a felon, during the commission of a felony, by a private citizen. b.) Manslaughter by negligence: the killing of another person through gross negligence. Traffic fatalities are excluded. While manslaughter by negligence is a Part I crime, it is not included in the calculation of the crime index.

2. **Robbery** – The taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force, or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear.

3. **Aggravated Assault** – An unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury. This type of assault usually is accompanied by the use of a weapon or by means likely to produce death or great bodily harm. Simple assaults are excluded.

4. **Burglary** (breaking or entering)- The unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft. Attempted forcible entry is included.

5. **Larceny-theft** (except motor-vehicle) – The unlawful taking, carrying, leading or riding away of property from the possession of another. Examples are thefts of bicycles or automobile accessories, shoplifting, pocket-picking, or the stealing of any property or article which is not taken by force and violence or by fraud. Attempted larcenies are
included. Embezzlement, confidence games, forgery, worthless checks, etc., are excluded.

6. Motor-Vehicle Theft – The theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle. A motor vehicle is self-propelled and runs on the surface and not on rails. Motorboats, construction equipment, airplanes, and farming equipment are specifically excluded from this category.

7. Arson – Any willful or malicious burning or attempting to burn, with or without intent to defraud, a dwelling house, public building, motor vehicle or aircraft, personal property of another, etc.

8. Vandalism - Willful or malicious destruction, injury, disfigurement, or defacement of any public or private property, real or personal, without consent of the owner or persons having custody or control. Attempts are included.

9. Drug Abuse violations – State and/or local offense relating to the unlawful possession, sale, use, growing, and manufacturing of narcotic drugs. The following drug categories are specified: opium or cocaine and their derivatives (morphine, heroine, codeine); marijuana; synthetic narcotics – manufactured narcotics that can cause drug addiction (Demerol, methadone); and dangerous non-narcotic drugs (barbiturates, benzedrine).

10. Curfew and Loitering – Specifically record arrests made for violations of curfew and loitering laws intended to regulate the behavior of juveniles.

11. Runaways – involve leaving the custody and home of parents, guardians, or custodians without permission and failing to return within a reasonable length of time in violation of a statute regulating the conduct of youth.

12. Truancy: not available in the UCR.
13. *Motor-vehicle Accidents*: not available in the UCR.

Although the UCR only reports arrests for crimes that are known to police, self-report data have the potential to encompass all offenses that are knowingly committed by juveniles, whether they are reported to police or not. Still, the UCR is a valid measure of more serious crimes such as murder and motor vehicle theft. In contrast, minor offenses such as vandalism and drug violations, are more likely to be subject to changes in the administrative practices of individual police departments.

### 3.2 VARIABLE DEFINITIONS: MONITORING THE FUTURE SURVEY

In an attempt to compare offending trends across different methods as well as to better examine trends in more minor offending, this study will also utilize data from self-reports of delinquency. The Monitoring the Future survey is an annual, nationally representative, survey of high school seniors in the United States. This current analysis of time trends is based on responses from the high school senior classes of 1976 through 2000. While the MTF survey collects data on the delinquent behavior of 8th and 10th graders, this data has only been collected since 1991 and does not allow for a meaningful comparison of long term delinquency trends. With a few exceptions, the majority of MTF respondents who were seniors at the time of the administration of the survey were aged 16 or 17 at the approximate time of their reported behavior. This focus on 16 and 17 year olds in the MTF allows for a more specific comparison to youth who comprise a majority of the total arrests recorded in the UCR.¹

Survey questions ask how many times the respondents have engaged in each act during the previous 12 months, except for the truancy question which asks about the last

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¹ While juveniles aged 16 and 17 account for the majority of arrests in the UCR, one exception is for the offense of arson for which juveniles aged 10-14 are arrested disproportionately to older juveniles.
4 weeks. Response choices are “not at all,” “once,” “twice,” “three or four times,” and “five or more time.” Rates will be reported in terms of percentages of individuals who engaged in an act at least once.

The self-report questions in MTF do not include measures of burglary. Instead, the analogous question to the UCR definition of burglary is a question on trespassing. For example, the MTF survey asks respondents whether they have “gone into some house or building when you were not supposed to be there.” While this behavior could certainly result in an attempted burglary charge if the police officer suspected that the juvenile was attempting to take property from the building, many survey respondents may record substantial amounts of incidents that would be more accurate recollections of trespassing than burglary. Additionally, the MTF does not ask respondents if they have ever committed a homicide, broken a curfew, or run away. However, the MTF survey does include data on traffic accidents as well as truancy and comparable data on all other nine offenses.

1. **Criminal Homicide**: no analogous question available.

2. **Robbery** – During the last 12 months how often have you used a knife or gun or some other thing (like a club) to get something from a person?

3. **Aggravated Assault** – During the last 12 months how often have you hurt someone badly enough to need bandages or a doctor?

4. **Burglary/Trespass**: During the last 12 months how often have you gone into some house or building when you were not supposed to be there?
5. Larceny-theft - During the last 12 months how often have you taken something not belonging to you worth over $50?

6. Joyriding - During the last 12 months how often have you taken a car that didn’t belong to someone in your family without permission of the owner?

7. Arson – During the last 12 months how often have you set fire to someone’s property on purpose?

8. Vandalism – During the last 12 months how often have you damaged school property on purpose?

9. Drug Abuse (3 separate questions) - On how many occasions, if any, have you used cocaine/marijuana/alcohol during the last 12 months?

10. Curfew and Loitering Laws - no analogous question available

11. Runaway - no analogous question available.

12. Truancy - During the last 4 weeks, how many whole days of school have you missed because you skipped or “cut”?

13. Motor-vehicle Accidents – During the last 12 months, how many accidents have you had while you were driving (whether or not you were responsible)?
CHAPTER FOUR
LONGITUDINAL TRENDS IN OFFICIAL ARREST DATA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The main goal of this dissertation is to examine longitudinal trends for a broad range of offenses, including both Part I and Part II offenses. This section begins with a presentation of time trends in the Uniform Crime Report’s measure of total annual rates for murder, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, motor-vehicle theft, larceny-theft, vandalism, arson, driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI), drunkenness, narcotics/drug abuse violations, runaway, and curfew/loitering violations. In order to investigate the importance of disaggregating grouped indexes of offenses such as the “violent” and “property” index created by the UCR, the following analysis also includes summary trends for a violent index (murder, robbery, and aggravated assault), a property index (burglary, larceny-theft, motor-vehicle theft and arson), and a “total offense” index that displays a trend for all 13 offenses combined. These violent, property, and total indexes contain the same offense categories as the indices presented by the FBI, with one exception. Since my analysis does not include the offense of forcible rape, this offense is not included in my overall violent index. Figure 1 reveals that the removal of forcible rape trends from the total violence index in no way alters the overall longitudinal trend pattern.²

For each offense in this analysis, I begin with a summary description of its specific arrest rate trend over the last 37 years, beginning in 1964 and ending in 2000.

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² All figures and tables referred to in each chapter can be found at the concluding pages of that specific chapter.
Next, I describe time specific trends found during segments of this 36-year period, with special attention to periods of time when the trend has increased substantially, decreased substantially, or remained relatively stable for at least three consecutive years. Although there is considerable overlap for many of the prominent offense trends, much of my focus will be on three separate ten-year intervals from 1964-1974, 1974-1984, 1984-1994, and one six-year interval from 1994-2000. Prior researchers’ attempts to find clear demarcation points for examining short-term offending trends have often been indiscriminate and generally resort to simple numeric decades (i.e. 1960-1970, 1970-1980, etc.) or instead choose meaningless or ambiguous markers, such as the years under which a certain president has served in office (Cook & Laub, 2001; Steffensmeier & Allen, 2000; Steffensmeier & Harer, 1999; Snyder, 1999). Resulting theoretical claims about the causes of trends during such demarcation points are difficult to interpret since what drives crime rates has little to do with which governmental party occupies the White House (Steffensmeier & Harer, 1999, p. 269). Since the main objective of this research is to reveal an overall picture of historical juvenile offending trends, I have chosen the four periods as a convenient way to isolate the longitudinal picture of offending into four separate snapshots of offending.

A second area of focus in these analyses will be the extent to which arrest rate trends for individual offenses vary across categories. Here I will present comparisons of time trends for offenses of similar seriousness (i.e. murder vs. assault) as well as comparisons of trends for offenses with varying levels of seriousness (i.e. murder vs. vandalism). These trend comparisons will reveal the degree to which specific offense
trends move in the same direction and at what time period these similar or divergent trends occur.

4.2 TRENDS IN JUVENILE ARRESTS

One of the central aims of this research is to disaggregate trends found for combined indices of offending such as violent, property, or total categories into trends for specific offense categories. I argue that these broader indices of offending potentially conceal many of the differences in the trends of specific offense categories and impede progress in the advancement of explanations for increases or decreases in these trends. Figure 2 shows an aggregated total index of the arrest rates over time for all thirteen offenses included in this analysis. This figure reveals two rather distinct periods of arrest increases that are both followed by two distinct periods of decline. In the first decade of analysis, there is a rather substantial increase in the aggregated total arrest rate of over 165 percent. When I combine all offenses into one total index, the peak of offending for juveniles occurred in 1974. After 1974, there was a small decline in the overall total arrest rate of about 30 percent over the next 9 years ending in 1983. From 1983 until 1993, the total arrest rate began a second ten-year increase, although this time the change was not as large (36 percent) and much more gradual than the first ten-year increase. A second period of decline occurred from 1994 until 2000 when almost all of the increase that occurred over eleven years in the 1980s and into the 1990s was erased in only six years.

A combined index of total offending is a reasonable measure of changes in juvenile offending over time and begins to address the question of whether youth today are more or less delinquent than youth in the past. However, the presentation of an
aggregate offense index may hide trend patterns of specific offense categories that may be exhibiting quite differing patterns over time. In order to present a more complete picture of juvenile offending it is necessary then to disaggregate these broader indexed offense trends and analyze the arrest rate trends of the individual offenses that these indices represent.

4.2.1 Part I Offenses

Murder

Figure 3 presents trends for UCR murder arrest rates for juveniles from 1964-2000. Beginning in 1964, murder arrest rates began a gradual and consistent increase for ten years until 1974. During this ten-year period, the murder rate increased almost four times over its 1964 level from approximately two arrests per 100,000 youth to almost 7.5 per 100,000 youth. For the next ten years after 1975, the arrest rate for murder remained relatively stable at around seven arrests per 100,000 youth. In 1984, the murder rate began a second steady upward trend, increasing almost 200 percent between 1984 and 1993. The 37-year high for juvenile murder arrests occurred in 1993 when police arrested approximately 13.7 out of every 100,000 juveniles for murder. Prior research has suggested that the most important reason for this escalation in homicide was the growing number of juvenile murders that occurred with firearms (Zimring, 1998). However, during the next ten years following this peak, murder arrests began an equally large decrease from 1994-2000. In the six years after 1993, the juvenile arrest rate for murder fell just as quickly back to levels found in the mid 1960s. The substantial and dramatic increase in murder arrest rates that occurred in the late eighties and early nineties had reversed back more quickly than it had increased the previous ten years. The 2000
juvenile murder arrest rate was the lowest it has been in thirty-five years at just under four arrests per 100,000 juveniles.

It is very difficult to find any previous research exploring juvenile murder trends in the early and mid-1990s that even came close to predicting the immense decline in murder arrests for juveniles that has occurred over the second half of the 1990s. While no criminologists were willing to make the prediction that murder rates would decline to the extent that they have, one group of researchers (Fox, 1996; J.Q. Wilson, 1995; Bennett et al., 1996), were not hesitant to make predictions of impending increases in juvenile offending rates. Some of these predictions were very specific including Wilson’s (1995) prediction of 6000 more individual juvenile murderers by the end of the 1990s. Other projections, such as those made by James Fox (1996), were quite broad yet clearly predicted a juvenile homicide “blood bath” by 2005. This analysis clearly reveals that such predictions were quite premature and have now been shown to be incorrect (Steinberg, 1999). The largest proportional declines in murder arrest trends have clearly taken place over the last 15 years. As this research shows, no other single offense category in the UCR declined so dramatically in such a short period.

**Robbery**

Figure 4 reveals that arrests for robbery steadily increased from 1964 until 1974. During this ten-year period robbery rates increased over 350 percent from 41 per 100,000 youth to a 1974 level of 186 per 100,000 youth. After 1974, robbery rates began to decline rather slowly, yet consistently, until 1988 decreasing to levels found back in the late 1960s. However, in 1989, robbery arrest rates again began to rapidly increase and by 1994 had reached an all time high of 200 arrests per 100,000 youth. Although the 75
percent increase in the arrest rate for juvenile robberies over this short 6-year period may seem dramatic, it is a far smaller proportional increase than occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Robbery rates fell dramatically after 1994, decreasing 52 percent by 2000 and returning to levels found in the late 1960s. The entire increase in robbery arrest rates that occurred in the late 80s and early 90s was erased by 1998. By 2000, the juvenile arrest rates for robbery had fallen to levels lower than those found in 1967 with 87 arrests per 100,000 juveniles.

Table 1 shows the bivariate correlations for the arrest rate trends of specific offenses in the UCR from 1964 until 2000. This table reveals that the longitudinal trend for robbery arrest rates from 1964 until 2000 was very highly correlated with the arrest rate trend for murder at .819\(^3\) over the entire 37-year period. A visual representation of this correlation is also presented in Figure 5. A second question regarding the correlation of arrest rate trends is the extent to which high correlations represents a similar pattern over all 37 years or instead whether high correlations are due to only specific periods of time when trends may be similar. Table 2 reveals that not only are robbery and murder arrest trends moving in similar directions over the entire 37-year period, but that changes in arrest rates for both offenses appear to be both in the same direction as well as of a similar magnitude over four isolated time periods. The only exception is for the ten-year period between 1984 and 1994 where although both murder and robbery arrest rates increased overall, murder arrest rates increased to a much greater extent (+188 percent vs. +57 percent).

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\(^3\) All correlations reported in the following discussion are significant at the .01 level unless otherwise stated.
Aggravated Assault

According to UCR juvenile arrest data, the rate of arrests of juveniles for aggravated assault increased steadily and consistently for the first twenty years of the period presently under examination from 1964 until 1994. No other single offense category in the UCR exhibited such a consistent increase in arrest rates, over such a long period, as did those for aggravated assault. Figure 6 reveals that over this thirty-year period, the rate of juveniles arrested increased from 45 arrests per 100,000 juveniles in 1964 to 295 arrests per 100,000 youth in 1994, a 555 percent increase. This dramatic increase began slowly throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and then became more rapid in 1987. A comparison of all three violent index offenses in Figure 7 shows that it was at this same time in 1987 that both robbery and murder arrest rates also began their steep upward trend. Another trend that assault rates have in common with robbery and murder trends is the steep decline that began in 1994 and continued until 2000. From 1994 to 2000, the aggravated assault rate finally began a consistent decline back to levels found in 1989, yet still substantially higher than any year before 1989. Therefore, while assaults have declined since 1994, they have not declined as substantially as either murder or robbery rates. The bivariate correlation between these offense trends for the last decade of analysis reveals a correlation between aggravated assault trends and murder trends of .888 and correlation of assaults with robbery over those last ten years of .932.

Aggravated assault arrest trends were highly correlated with trends for murder arrests. Over the 37-year period, these offenses had a correlation of .815. Figure 7 shows that the arrest rates for these offenses tracked closely with each other over time with both
offenses showing large increases in the 1980s and similar declines in the 1990s. The increase in assaults began a few years before the increase in murder and began declining a few years after the decline in murder. Although assault trends correlated significantly with robbery trends (.519), the correlation over the entire time period was not very high due to short periods of diverging trends in the mid 1970s and mid 1980s.

Property Offenses

Although changes in the rates of violent juvenile crimes have traditionally been the focal concern for policy makers, the public, and researchers, juveniles commit many more property offenses. The UCR property crime index combines four property crimes: burglary, motor vehicle theft, larceny-theft and arson. Figure 9 reveals that the property index is relatively stable over time compared to the violent index. The highest arrest rates for the property index occurred between 1975 and 1980, with the 2000 rate over 40 percent lower than the rate in 1980. Analysis of the individual offenses that make up the violent offense index revealed little variation among specific violent offenses. However, when the property crime index is disaggregated into trends for individual offense categories, a substantial amount of variation can be found between specific offense trends.

Burglary

Figure 10 reveals a 165 percent increase in arrest rates for burglary from 1964 until 1975. At the end of this ten-year increase burglary arrest rates reached an all time peak of 936 arrests per 100,000 juveniles. Burglary arrest rates showed the most change during this early period. After a few years of instability, burglary arrest rates began to steadily decline in 1978 and have not shown any substantial increase in any year since
then. From 1978 until 2000, the burglary rate declined almost 70 percent. This 22-year decline began with quite a dramatic decrease of almost 40 percent in only the first six years from 1978 to 1984. From 1984 until 1994 burglary rates were quite stable and showed little change, although they still continued to decline.

From 1994 until 2000 the decline in burglary rates fell to a period low in 2000. Although murder and auto theft rates were very close to an all time low in 2000, burglary is the only offense for which offense rates in 2000 are the lowest for the entire 36-year period under study. Almost the entire decline in burglary rates is concealed in an overall property index that instead indicates a rather stable pattern of arrest rates beyond 1980.

Trends in arrest rates for burglary did not significantly correlate with trends for any of the three individual violent offenses. In fact there were small negative correlations with trends for burglary arrests over the 37 year period and arrest trends for murder and assault. The small, and sometimes negative, correlations for burglary arrests and other violent offense arrests were mostly the result of the decline in burglary arrests during the period from 1984 until 1994. During this time, assault and robbery arrests increased by over 100 percent while burglary arrest rates fell by 16 percent. Similarly, the decline for burglary arrests after 1994 was nowhere near the size as the decline for the violent offenses since burglary arrests never increased in the early 1990s.

Larceny-theft

Of the four property crimes measured by the UCR, larceny-theft is the most common. In 2000, for example, the larceny-theft rate was almost four times that of the burglary rate, seven times higher than the auto-theft rate and fifty times higher than the arson rate. This high frequency of arrests for larceny-theft accounts for most of the
increase in the overall property index. As a result, trends in larceny-theft over time appear similar to the broader property index trends.

Figure 11 reveals that trends in the larceny-theft arrest rate differed from burglary trends. Where the burglary arrest rate began a long and steady decline after 1980, the larceny-theft rate revealed no such pattern until 1994. Table 2 reveals that in the first ten years analyzed from 1964-1974, larceny theft rates were similar to burglary rates, increasing by almost the exact same percentage as burglary rates for the ten-year period. In fact, from 1964 until 1974 burglary and larceny-theft arrest rates correlated with each other at .96. Similarly, arrest trends for these two offenses had an almost perfect correlation of .99 from 1994 until 2000. However, over the entire 37-year period, larceny-theft rates correlated more highly with the three violent offenses than with burglary. While larceny-theft trends only had a correlation of .334 with burglary trends, they had a correlation of .771 with murder trends and .848 with assault trends.

From 1974 until 1980 there was a slight decline in larceny-theft rates with a decrease of about 20 percent over 6 years. The larceny-theft arrest rate then climbed very slowly from 1980 until 1994 including periods of instability over the 14-year period. During this time, the larceny-theft rate increased 20 percent, almost returning to 1974 levels. From 1994 until 2000, the larceny-theft rate has showed its most consistent and substantial decline in the 37-year period. During this time, the arrest rate dropped from approximately 1700 arrests to 1100 arrests per 1000,000 youth, a decline of almost 35 percent in 6 years.

Even though larceny-theft arrests account for the majority of property arrests in the property offense index, larceny-theft arrest rate trends over the entire 37-year period
are more highly correlated with individual violent offense trends than they are with individual property offenses. For example, larceny-theft trends over the entire period had correlation of .711 with murder arrest trends and .848 with assault arrest trends. However, larceny theft arrest trends and burglary arrest rate trends only had a correlation of .334 over the entire 37-year period. As the analysis of the remaining property offenses will reveal, arrest trends for larceny-theft account for much of the similarity between the overall property offense index and violent offense index from 1964 until 1990.

**Auto-theft**

Like trends in burglary, dramatic shifts over time in the arrest rate for auto-theft are also hidden within the broader property index. Figure 12 shows that auto-theft arrests rose sharply from 1964-1965, rising over 40 percent in just one year. After this initial rise, auto-theft arrest rates fluctuated to some extent, but generally declined overall from 1965 to 1974. While all other categories of property offense arrests increased from 1964 to 1968, there was an overall decline from 1968 until 1983 in the auto theft arrest rate, falling just over 60 percent to an all time low of 146 arrests per 100,000 youth in 1983. Similar to trends found for assault, robbery, and murder arrests however, auto theft arrest rates increased dramatically from 1984 unto 1990, rising to 344 arrests per 100,000 youth, an increase of over 135 percent in only 6 years. It is interesting to note that both the beginning of the rise and the eventual peak of auto theft rates during this time briefly preceded those of murder and assaults, yet followed the same general patterns of both those offenses for that time period.

Similar to the long decline sustained by violent crimes in the mid 1990s, auto theft arrest rates began to fall in 1990 and continued to decline consistently until 2000.
returning to the levels about 10 percent higher than the all time low in 1983. However, trends found over the entire 37-year period did not correlate significantly with any of the other violent or property index offenses. Auto-theft arrest rates showed an overall increase in the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s. During this decade, motor-vehicle theft rates looked more like violent offense trends, a finding that was obscured by public concern over violent offenders at that time. Over the entire 37-year period however, auto-theft arrest rates did not correlate highly with any offense, property related or otherwise.

**Arson**

The frequency of arson arrests is very low, resulting in rates substantially less than those of other property offenses. Figure 13 shows that arson arrest rates more than tripled from 1964 to 1979 from 9 arrests per 100,000 youth to 29 arrests per 100,000 youth. After 1979, the rate of arson arrests declined for a few years and the stabilized at just over 20 arrests per 100,000 youth for most of the 1980s. In the late 1980s the arson arrest rate began to increase again, but this time more dramatically beyond the peak in 1979 to an all time high of 35 arrests per 100,00 youth in 1995, an increase of almost 60 percent in seven years. Again, similar to every offense analyzed thus far, arson arrest rates declined from 1995 until 2000.

Of all the individual property index offenses, arson shows the largest difference between the all time low arrest rate and the all time high arrest rate with almost a 300 percent change from the low of 8.8 in 1979 to the high of 34.7 in 1995. However, this change occurred over a very long period of 30 years. Trends in arson rates over the entire period did not correlate well with property offenses such as burglary or auto-theft. Table 1 shows that arson arrest trends do correlate highly correlated with larceny theft arrests.
trends at .834. Even more interesting is the fact that arson arrest trends correlated equally as high with trends in all violent offenses such as robbery (.805) and murder (.745).

Figure 14 shows that arson trends over the 37-year period had the highest correlation with trends in assault arrest rates (.821) with arson showing less of an increase in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Such a finding may add support to research which finds that many personality features common to violent offenders can be found also be found in arsonists. (Jackson, Hope & Glass, 1986).

4.2.2 Part II Offenses

Vandalism

Figure 15 shows that vandalism rates increased steadily from 1965 until 1994. The increase was not consistent however, with periods of higher rates found during the 1970s. By 1994, the vandalism arrest rate had increased almost 200 percent over the entire thirty-year period to an all time peak of 559 arrests per 100,000 youth. From 1994 until 2000, the vandalism arrest rate continually declined back to levels found in the 1980s.

Trends in vandalism over the 37-year period correlated with trends in both violent offenses and other property offenses. For example, vandalism trends correlated with murder trends at .808 and with assault trends at .788. However, they were even more highly correlated with larceny trends at .855 and with arson trends at .925 (see Figure 16). The only Part I offense that vandalism did not significantly correlate with were auto theft and burglary.

Narcotics/Drug Abuse Violations

Figure 17 shows that arrests for drug abuse violations increased at a staggering rate from 1964 until 1974. During this 10-year period, drug abuse arrests increased well
over 4000 percent rising from 14 arrests per 100,000 youth to 632 arrests per 100,000 youth. This is clearly the largest change in the arrest rate for any offense, over any length of time. After this immense increase, drug abuse arrest rates fell back down over 50 percent by 1983, at which point they became relatively stable for the next 10 years with only small periods of increase during this time. By 1993, arrest rates once again began to increase very quickly and in only four years had once again increased almost 135 percent by 1997. In 1997, arrest rates began to slowly decline, although they are still well above levels found for any years before 1995.

Although there were significant correlations with many arrest trends for other Part I and Part II offenses most of these correlations were quite small. One exception was for arson arrests which has a correlation of .713 with drug abuse trends. Figure 18 shows that these two offenses had relatively similar arrest trends over the 37-year period, with the exception of the period in the early 1990s when arson arrest rates were increasing as drug abuse arrests were decreasing. There was also a small negative correlation with auto theft over all 37 years, mostly in part due to the contrasting movement of trends for these offenses from 1964-1974 and from 1994-2000. However, both offenses showed the exact same percent change during the 1974-1984 period and had an almost perfect (.96) correlation in the movement of rates during that period.

**Driving Under the Influence**

Figure 19 reveals that early DUI trends were similar to arrest trends for drug abuse. Similar to drug abuse arrest rates, DUI arrest rates increased quite steadily from 1964 until 1979, although certainly not to the same extent as the over 4000 percent increase for drug abuse arrests. Even so, during this time the DUI arrest rate increased by
a substantial amount, over 1600 percent from 7 arrests per 100,000 youth to an all time peak in 1979 of 119 arrests. From 1980 until 1993, the DUI rate began to decline and finally steadied at a rate of approximately 45 arrests per 100,000 youth. Since 1993, the DUI rate began another gradual increase by about 50 percent, but begins to become more stable and even declines slightly in 2000. This increase in DUI arrests from 1994 to 1999 is not consistent with any other offenses category in the UCR, which all show overall declines during this time.

With the exception of rather small correlations with trends for larceny-theft and arson, trends in DUI arrests are unique and do not significantly correlate positively with any other offense in the UCR. DUI arrests did not significantly correlate with trends in arrests for drug abuse. Similar to trends found for drug abuse arrests however, DUI arrest trends show a significantly negative correlation with auto theft arrest rates (-.619) over the entire 37-year period. Figure 20 shows that, with the exception of a few years in the 1980s, DUI and auto theft trends were more often than not moving in divergent patterns.

**Drunkenness**

Rates of arrests of juveniles for drunkenness increased briefly during the first period of study rising almost 150 percent from 1964 until their very early all time peak in 1969. From 1969 until 1993, arrests for drunkenness generally declined with the exception of a few periods of minor rate increases. During this period arrest rates fell from 212 arrests per 100,000 youth to 58 arrests, a decrease of over 70 percent. In fact, Figure 21 reveals that juvenile arrests have yet to rise to levels even comparable to those found before 1981. From 1993 until 2000, these low levels of arrest rates for drunkenness became more stable, showing a very slight increase over this later period.
Arrest trends for drunkenness were not highly correlated with many other offense categories. However, Figure 22 shows there was a relatively large positive correlation of .751 between drunkenness trends and burglary trends. Differences in the trends between these two offenses were concentrated during the early 1970s when burglary arrest rates were approaching what would be their all time high in 1975, while drunkenness arrest rates were declining from their all time high in 1969. Additionally, there was an equally as high negative correlation between drunkenness arrest rate trends and trends for assault arrests (-.748). Figure 23 shows that these offenses had clearly divergent patterns throughout the entire 37 year period, especially after 1982 when assault arrests began to increase dramatically, while arrests for drunkenness began to decrease, and thereafter in 1992 when both of these patterns switched with each other.

**Curfew /Loitering**

Figure 24 shows that curfew/loitering arrests more than doubled in the first nine years of analysis from 1964 until 1973. During that period, the arrest rate rose from 250 to 534 arrests per 100,000 youth. However that entire increase was completely erased over the next seven years as the arrest rate for curfew/loitering fell right back down to levels that were even lower than those found in 1964. Throughout most of the 1980s, the curfew/loitering arrest rate remained quite stable, with small periods of both increases and decreases. In the late 1980s, the arrest rate again began to increase gradually at first, and then with more momentum in 1992. By 1996, the arrest rate was at an all time high of 649 arrests per 100,000 youth, an increase of over 100 percent in only four years. By 2000, the arrest rate had begun to decline yet was still at levels not seen since the early 1970s. However, while all other Part II offenses showed an overall increase from 1992
until 2000, curfew/loitering was the only to show a decrease (11 percent) over that more recent time period.

Overall, trends in curfew/loitering arrest rates from 1964 until 2000 did not positively correlate significantly with any other offense category in the UCR. There were no positive correlations with violent offenses such as murder or property offenses such as burglary. There were also no positive correlations in the trends for more minor offenses such as vandalism (.014) or drunkenness (.010). There was one significant negative correlation with trends for DUI arrests. While DUI arrests were increasing substantially in the 1970s, curfew/loitering arrests were on an overall decline. Similarly, the decline of DUI arrests was paralleled by a small increase in curfew/loitering arrests. The only long-term offense trend that significantly correlated with the trend for curfew/loitering was the trend for drug abuse arrests, which was quite small (.520).

Runaway

Similar to trends in narcotics, runaway arrests show two main peaks over the period from 1964-2000. Figure 25 shows that like most offenses, runaway arrests increased substantially during the first seven years analyzed. From 1964 until 1971 the arrest rate for runaway more than tripled from 285 to an all time peak of 909 arrests per 100,000 youth. Interestingly, from 1964 until 1974, runaway arrests increased by the exact same percentage as those for assaults. However, unlike assault rates, arrest rates for runaway fell from 1971 to 1983 by over 55 percent to levels close to the all time low of 1964. This very quick decrease in rates during the late 1970s and early 1980s that followed the very quick increase in the 1960s and early 1970s is a trend that is rather unique for the two status offenses of curfew and runaway. While other offenses such as
burglary may show similar two peak trends, the arrests rate trends for other offenses is much more gradual.

Like curfew/loitering, runaway did not have very high positive correlations with many offenses. However, there was a significant, yet still rather small, correlation with larceny-theft (.542) and auto-theft offenses (.508). Figure 26 shows that runaway offense trends correlated most strongly with robbery arrests (.630), showing an unexpected similarity over most of the 37-year period. The two offense trends diverged in the early to mid 1980s when runaway rates were increasing after having been at very low levels, while robbery rates were still decreasing and would not begin to increase with runaway arrest until five years later in 1988. Figure 27 reveals the correlation between runaway and the other status offense of curfew/loitering as being significant, yet very small (.382). The main reason for this small correlation was the comparative stability of arrest rates for runaway during the mid 1970s to the mid 1990s compared to the erratic rates of curfew/loitering arrests which showed a dramatic decline followed by a large increase during this same period.

4.3 SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM TRENDS IN ARREST

1964-2000
- Overall increases for all Part I and Part II offenses, except for burglary, auto theft and drunkenness which all had declined by no more than 35 percent;
- Most substantial increase was for drug abuse of 4479 percent;
- Very large increases for DUI arrests (779 percent) and assaults (359 percent).

1964-1974
- Increases over this period for every offense measured by the UCR.
- Extremely large increase of 4361 percent in narcotic violations and 565 percent for DUI’s;
- Large increases of 100 to 350 percent for murder, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny-theft, arson, vandalism and runaway;
- Moderately large increases of 50 to 100 percent for curfew and drunkenness;
- Small increase for auto-theft of 28 percent.
1974-1984
- Decline of 15 to 50 percent for all Part I offenses, except for assault;
- Moderately large declines of 40-50 percent for auto-theft, narcotics, and curfew violations;
- Modest declines of 17 to 38 percent for murder, robbery, burglary, larceny-theft, arson, vandalism, drunkenness, and runaway;
- Trivial increase of 3 percent for assaults;
- Moderately large increases in DUI arrest of 83 percent.

1984-1994
- Increases for all offenses except for burglary, DUI, and drunkenness.
- Very large increases in murder arrests of 188 percent;
- Large increases for auto-theft and assault trends of just over 100 percent;
- Moderately large increases in robbery, curfew, runaway, drug abuse, vandalism, and larceny-theft arrest rates of approximately 50 percent;
- Modest decrease of burglary arrest rates of 16 percent;
- Moderately large decreases for DUI and drunkenness arrest trends.

1994-2000
- Large to moderately large decrease for trends in every Part I offense category;
- Murder arrests had largest decline of 71 percent;
- Moderately large decreases of over 30 percent for both vandalism and arson;
- Moderately large increase in DUI trends of 38 percent;
- Modest increase in drug arrests and drunkenness arrests of 15 and 21 percent;
- Trivial changes for drug abuse, curfew, and runaway violations.

4.4 SUMMARY: CHANGES IN ARREST RATES OVER TIME

By comparing the lowest arrest rate for each offense category to its highest rate during the 37-year period under analysis, a picture begins to emerge as to which offenses have had the largest proportional change in their arrest rates over time. The preceding analysis of arrest rates can then help to offer a more substantiated response to inquiry into the relative volume of juvenile offending today compared to previous years.

In reference to which offenses have had the most proportional change over time, Table 3 shows that narcotics/drug abuse arrest rates have clearly experienced the most proportional change over time. Rates of drug arrests went from an all time low rate of 14
arrests per 100,000 youth in 1964 to an all time high of 730 arrests per 100,000 youth in 1997, a proportional difference of 5053 percent. Although not as dramatic, DUI arrests also experienced a large proportional increase of 1598 percent, with an all time low rate of only 7 in 1964 to a period high of 119 in 1979. While offenses such as larceny-theft, auto-theft, vandalism and curfew certainly experienced a significant amount of change over time, arrest rates for these offenses did not experience the same extreme changes as rates for drug abuse and DUI arrests all had proportional changes of less than 200 percent.

Changes in enforcement practices may certainly have contributed to the extreme rate changes for both drug abuse and DUI arrests. However, there were also rather large proportional differences between the all-time high and low arrest rates for several offenses, such as assaults, murder and robbery, that should not be as susceptible to changes in official policy. In addition, there were relatively small proportional changes for larceny-theft, auto-theft and curfew, which have all certainly been the target of police enforcement practices during at least some point in the last 37 years.

This analysis also suggests that the answer to the question of whether juveniles are more delinquent today than in the past depends on both the specific offense being analyzed as well as the historical point in time used for comparison. Arrest data clearly indicate that the cohort of juveniles aged 10-17 in 2000 are nowhere near the “biggest or the baddest” generation society has ever known, as was predicted by Bennett and his colleagues seven years ago. However, in terms of arrest rates, the current cohort of juveniles are certainly not the least delinquent group of juveniles in the U.S. over last 37 years. There are clearly periods over the last four decades when juveniles had lower rates
of arrest, even when compared to the declining rates of today. Across most offenses, arrests rates of juveniles were lower in the mid 1960s and the early 1980s than they were in 2000. Even still, there does appear to be a unique aspect with reference to more recent cohorts of juveniles more associated with decreases in delinquency rates than increases.

While the UCR data reveal many discrepancies in the trends of specific offense categories over the last 37 years, the last ten years have shown remarkably similar trend patterns for almost every offense category. With the exception of only certain drug related offenses and curfew/loitering offenses, every single other offense category has experienced a substantial decline during the entire decade of the 1990s. The dramatic increase of arrests for all violent offenses in the late 1980s and early 1990s had all but disappeared by 2000. So while juveniles in 2000 may not have been the least likely to be arrested for most serious crimes, they certainly appear to be quickly heading toward that position for most types of offending. It is important to note however, that arrest rates for more minor offenses such as drunkenness, liquor violations, and DUI did not experience the same dramatic decline over the last ten years as rates for violent and other serious offenses. These drug related offenses have instead generally increased over the last decade rather than experiencing the decline for almost all other offenses. In an attempt to discover the extent to which these trends in juvenile offending are unique to arrest data, the next chapter of this dissertation will focus on longitudinal trends for both minor offending such as drug use, as well as serious offending, as measured by the self-reports of juveniles.
Table 1. Bivariate Correlations for Offense Specific Arrest Rate Trends (N=37)

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<td>-.276</td>
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** p < .01; * p < .05
Table 2. Periodic Change in Arrest Rates over Time by Offense Type

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Table 3: Proportional Change in Arrest Rates over Time

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<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Min/Max % Difference</th>
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Figure 1. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Violent Crime Index: 1964-2000

Figure 2. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
All 13 Offenses Combined: 1964-2000
Figure 3. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Murder 1964-2000

Figure 4. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Robbery: 1964-2000
Figure 5. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Murder & Robbery: 1964-2000

Figure 6. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Aggravated Assault: 1964-2000
Figure 7. Arrests per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Murder, Robbery, & Aggravated Assault 1964-2000

Figure 8. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Assault & Murder: 1964-2000

$r = .815**$
Figure 9. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Property Crime Index: 1964-2000

Property Index

Violent Index

r = .474**

Figure 10. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Burglary: 1964-2000

Arrests per 100,000

Year
Figure 11. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Larceny Theft: 1964-2000

Figure 12. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Auto Theft: 1964-2000
Figure 13. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Arson: 1964-2000

Figure 14. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Assault & Arson: 1964-2000

$r = .821^{**}$
Figure 15. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Vandalism: 1964-2000

Figure 16. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Vandalism & Arson: 1964-2000

$r = .925^{**}$
Figure 19. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
DUI: 1964-2000

Figure 20. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
DUI & Auto Theft: 1964-2000

$r = -.619^{**}$
Figure 21. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Drunkenness: 1964-2000

Figure 22. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Drunkenness & Burglary: 1964-2000

\[ r = .751^{**} \]
Figure 23. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Drunkenness & Assault: 1964-2000

\[ r = -0.748^{**} \]

Figure 24. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Curfew & Loitering: 1964-2000
Figure 25. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Runaway: 1964-2000

Figure 26. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Runaway & Robbery: 1964-2000

$ r = .630^{**} $
Figure 27. Arrests Per 100,000 Juveniles Ages 10-17
Runaway & Curfew/Loitering: 1964-2000

$r = .382^*$
CHAPTER FIVE
LONGITUDINAL TRENDS IN SELF-REPORTED DATA 1975-2000

5.1 INTRODUCTION
The major advantage of self-report data is that it provides an alternative estimate of the rate of delinquent acts that does not depend on whether police have recorded the offenses. The following discussion is an analysis of the rates of 13 delinquent offenses, and one non-delinquent behavior from 1975 until 2000. For each offense category, the total percentages of high school seniors reporting having committed that offense at least one time within the year will be calculated. For each of the drug offenses, as well as the offense of skipping school or truancy, the total percent of students who have reported committing the offense at least one time in the last 30 days will be reported.

5.2 TRENDS IN SELF-REPORTED OFFENDING

Assault
Figure 28 reveals that trends in the total percentage of students reporting an assault from 1975 until 2000 rose very gradually, yet rather consistently, throughout the entire 25-year period. From 1975 until 1997, there was slightly more than a 25 percent increase in the number of students reporting at least one assault, increasing from 9.5 percent to 11.9 percent. During this entire period however, there was never more than a 2 percent increase or decrease in the percentage of reports from one single year to another, resulting in a great deal of stability overall. Self-reports of assault peaked in 1997 at 14.6 percent and began to decline since then to fewer than 12 percent in 2000.
Robbery

Similar to assault trends, trends in the percentage of students reporting having committed a robbery increased very gradually overall from 1975 to 1994, with periods of both stability and change. The overall increase however, was not as steady as trends found for assault. Figure 29 shows that self-reports of robbery by high school students were quite stable from 1975 until 1982. During these eight years an average of approximately 2.5 percent students reported having committed at least one robbery each year with the percentage of student reporting that they had committed a robbery did not vary by more than .7 percent. Reports of robbery rose from 1982 until 1985 by over 50 percent from the entire period low of 2.3 percent in 1982 to 3.5 in 1985. With the exception of a few one-year fluctuations, reports of robbery stabilized again from 1985 to 1991 near 3.5 percent.

From 1991 until 1994, reports of robbery increased again, from 3.4 percent to 4.8 percent. Although the actual number of students reporting a robbery was higher at this time than it was in the 1980s, the overall percent change of the increase in the early 1990s (42 percent) was not quite as large as the increase found in the early 1980s (52 percent). However, by taking a more long-term perspective from 1982 until 1994, Figure 29 shows that reports of assault increased almost 110 percent from 1982 until 1994. After three unstable years, reports of robbery fell again from 4.5 percent in 1997 to 2.8 percent in 2000.

A correlation matrix for all offense trends measured in the MTF survey is shown in Table 4. The correlation between self-reported robbery trends from 1975 to 2000 and trends for reports of assault, the only other violent offense measured in MTF, was
significantly high (.819). However, the graphical representation of these trends as shown in Figure 30 indicates that reports of robbery peaked three years earlier than assaults, beginning their increase in 1994 and 1997 respectively. In addition, Table 5 shows that reports of assault actually declined slightly by 11 percent overall from 1994-2000 while reports of robbery increased by 42 percent during this period. Both offenses however, showed a decline after 1997.

**Theft Greater than $50**

Although there was a stable pattern of reports of theft of items greater than $50 from 1975 to 1986, this offense showed the most consistent increase over the entire 25-year period for any offense in the MTF survey. Overall, reports of thefts greater than $50 increased 123 percent from 1974-2000. Figure 31 shows that similar to robbery trends, there was only a minor increase in student reports of theft greater than $50 through the 1970s and into the 1980s. In 1986, student reports of theft began to increase more considerably than they had previously, finally peaking in 1997 at 12.8 percent. From 1986 until 1997, there was an overall increase of over 55 percent in student reports of thefts greater than $50. By 1997 then, there had been an overall increase in student reports of almost 130 percent between 1975 (6.6 percent) and 1997 (12.8 percent). While the percent of students reporting theft began to drop after 1997, in 2000 it increased right back to the elevated 1997 levels.

Trends from 1975 to 2000 for self-reports of theft of items greater than $50 correlated very highly with trends for reports of both violent offenses of robbery (.713) and assault (.813) over this same period. However, the overall increase in reports of theft
greater than $50 in the late 1980s and early 1990s was much steeper than the increase in
the trends of either robbery or assault.

**Joyriding**

Joyriding is defined in the MTF survey as “the taking a car that does not belong to
someone in your family without permission of the owner” (Bachman, Johnston and
O’Malley, 1998). Figure 32 reveals that self-reports of joyriding increased overall during
the 25-year period. As all other offenses described so far, student reports of joyriding
were very stable over the first five years of analysis. After a brief increase in the early
1980s, reports of joyriding continued to be stable for six more years. During the 1990s
however, reports of joyriding were very unstable with no clear trends over more than any
two-year period. Reports of joyriding increased 40 percent from 1975-1984. However,
during the next ten years from 1984-1994 reports of joyriding only increased by 2 percent
while many of the other offenses had much larger increases. Self-reported joyriding
trends correlated with other property crimes such as theft greater than $50 (.618).
However, joyriding trends were correlated equally as high with both violent crimes of
robbery (.682) and assault (.675). Still, the unstable patterns found in joyriding trends
compared to these other offenses made trend correlations relatively small.

**Trespassing**

Figure 33 reveals that self-reports of trespassing were clearly the most stable of
all offense categories in the MTF. Aside from a first year drop in reports of trespassing,
the number of students reporting trespassing from one year to the next never increased or
decreased by more than 10 percent. Overall, there was a 19 percent decrease in
trespassing from 1975-2000. The period low of 22.1 percent occurred in 1977 and the
high of 27.3 percent occurred in 1988. Therefore, while overall trespassing trends appeared quite stable, there was a very small gradual increase during the 1980s that had vanished by 1995. Because of this very stable pattern over time, trespassing trends did not highly correlate with any other offenses measured by the MTF survey.

Arson

Although the initial rates of self-reported arson were quite low, there was a significant upward trend in reports from 1975 to 2000. The percent of students reporting arson never went over 3.5 percent. However, despite these small percentages, other than assault, arson was the most consistently increasing offense over time in the MTF survey. Figure 34 shows that with the exception of a few brief (two year) irregularities, the number of students who reported an arson was almost perfectly stable for the first 13 years of the survey averaging at about 1.6 percent reporting rate, with a low of 1.2 percent occurring in 1979 and a high of 2 percent in 1986. In 1988, the percentage of students reporting arson began to increase until it peaked in 1993 at 3.4 percent, an increase of 100 percent from only five years prior and from levels found in the late 1970s. After 1993, the percentage of students reporting arson fell slightly, yet never fell below levels found before 1993. This increase in arson in 1993 corresponds with the increasing rates of violent arrests in the UCR. However, self-reports of arson only experienced a minor decline in the late 1990s.

The relatively consistent increase in reports of arson over 25 years contributes to very high positive correlations with period trends found for the violent crimes of assault (.789) and robbery (.860). Similarly, Figure 35 reveals that arson trends paralleled trends found for reports of theft over $50 (.850). However, while the violent offenses such as
robbery and assault show some signs of recent decreasing trends since 1997, arson trends have actually increased from 1999 to 2000.

**Vandalism**

Similar to trespassing trends, Figure 36 reveals that vandalism trends remained stable from 1975 until 2000. In 1975, 12.8 percent of students reported an act of vandalism against their school. By 2000 that number rose by only 5 percent, to 13.5 percent of students. The 25-year peak was in 1987 at 15 percent, with reports by students in the 1990s slightly higher than those of students were in previous years. While vandalism trends were significantly correlated with several offenses such as robbery (.545) and theft over $50 (.519), the rather stable pattern of reports of vandalism made most of these correlations quite small.

**Traffic Tickets**

Figure 37 shows that reports of students receiving traffic tickets increased overall from 1975 until 2000. The lowest number of reports occurred in the late 1970s and throughout most of the 1980s. From an all time low in 1982 of 25 percent, the percentage of student reporting having been given a traffic ticket increased 29 percent to 32 percent of all students by 1987. Almost all of the increase in reports of traffic tickets occurred during this five-year period. After 1987, the percentage of students reporting traffic tickets remained rather stable with a small decrease in the early 1990s. Reports of traffic tickets rose slightly in the later part of the 1990s peaking at just over 33 percent in 1999. This gradually and steady increase in student reports of traffic tickets over the 25-year period was similar to trend patterns found for reports of assaults (.675), and joyriding (.637). The highest correlation for offense trends was for trends of reports of
traffic tickets and trends for reports of theft greater than $50 (.715). However, Table 5 shows that while the overall correlation for these two offense trends was high, reports of theft greater than $50 have increased at a higher rate after 1986 than reports of traffic tickets. This increase in thefts over the last 15 years compared to tickets is also represented in Figure 38.

**Traffic Accidents**

Student reports of having been in a traffic accident showed two major declines over the 25 years, once in the early 1980s and then another small decline in the early 1990s. Figure 39 reveals that reports of traffic accidents increased over the first four years of analysis from 24.2 percent in 1976 to an all time high of 27.5 percent in 1979. In 1979, reports began to decrease to an all time low in 1982 and 1983 of 22.2 percent. Over the next five years, reports of traffic accidents by students increased again to near 26 percent. In 1990, reports began to fall to levels closer to 20 percent for a second time but quickly rose back to the 25 percent range by 1996. The percentage of students reporting traffic accidents remained stable at this level until 2000.

Longitudinal trends for reports of traffic accidents did not correlate very highly with any offense category in the MTF survey. Figure 40 reveals only a small positive correlation with trends found for reports of traffic accidents and traffic tickets (.468), which is noteworthy given the seemingly related nature of the two behaviors. The lack of positive correlations with other offenses is in part due to the fact that the other offense categories in the MTF analyzed so far have shown at least some clear evidence of a consistent increase over time, while reports of traffic accidents do not show such an apparent trend.
Truancy

The number of students reporting that they skipped a full day of school at least once in the past year was relatively stable over time, increasing very slightly over the 25-year period. Figure 41 shows that in 1975, 30.9 percent of students had reporting skipping a full day of school in the last 30 days, while in 2000 the percent reporting the this behavior was 33 percent. Student reports of skipping remained close to the 30 percent level over the entire period with a small decline in reports in the early 1980s and an all time low of 26 percent in 1984. There was a small increase in reports in the late 1990s with reports peaking during the 25-year period at 33.9 percent in 1998. These period highs and lows however do not represent significant variation from what is a generally stable pattern over time. This unique stability over the entire 25 years resulted in trends for truancy not correlating very highly with many offenses measured by the MTF survey. There were modest, but significant correlations with reports of traffic accidents (.466), as well as a negative correlation with trespassing (-.455). However, truancy trends were most closely associated with trends in cigarette use. Despite the fact that the correlation for trends in both cigarettes and truancy was rather small (.506), both offenses showed similar increases and decreases over each ten-year period of study.

Marijuana

In 1975, 27 percent of students reported having smoked marijuana at least once in the last 30 days. Over the next three years, this percentage increased to an all time high of 37.1 percent in 1978. Figure 42 shows that after 1978, the percent of students reporting marijuana use fell consistently for 13 years straight, hitting an all time low of 11.9 percent in 1992. This 13-year decline is clearly the most sustained and largest
As would be expected, patterns of reported marijuana use correlated with longitudinal trends for other drugs use such as alcohol, cigarettes and cocaine. However, the uniqueness of the sustained decline in marijuana use trends for a majority of the period being studied resulted in many negative correlations with marijuana use trends and the trends for other non-drug related offenses. In fact, marijuana trends were negatively correlated with every single non-drug related offense trend except for reports of skipping school. These negative correlations were particularly high with trends in joyriding (-.748), but also were significant with trends found in both violent offenses of assault (-.664) and robbery (-.638). Figure 43 shows that while joyriding reports were increasing in the early 1990s, marijuana reports were declining rapidly, contributing to the negative correlation for trends in these offenses.

**Cocaine**

Trends for the percentage of students reporting cocaine use were markedly different from trends in marijuana use. Figure 44 reveals that while both offenses saw an early increase in the late 1970s, the percentage of students reporting cocaine use continued to increase slightly into the 1980s while marijuana use was declining. In fact, from 1975-1985 reports of cocaine use grew by the largest percentage, increasing almost two and a half fold in this ten-year period. No other offense in the MTF experienced this level of increase over any time period, let alone this specific ten-year period. By 1985, a period high of 6.7 percent of all students had reported using cocaine within the last 30 days. After this dramatic rise in trends of cocaine use, reports finally began to fall in
In fact, while it took ten years for rates to dramatically rise, rates fell back to 1975 levels in only half the time they took to reach their highs. Within five years reports of cocaine use in 1990 were at 1.9 percent, the same level found in 1975. Since 1990, the percentage of students reporting cocaine use has been comparably stable with a slight increase to about 2.5 percent in the 1990s. Due to the early gradual increase in cocaine use trends, there were no significant correlations with trends for other offenses. Like marijuana, most correlations were in the negative direction and were quite small.

**Alcohol**

Figure 45 shows that the percentage of students reporting having used alcohol at least once in the last 30 days was quite stable from 1975 until 1987. During this twelve-year period, the percent reporting alcohol use went from 68.2 percent in 1975 to 66.4 percent in 1987. In 1987 however, the percentage of students reporting alcohol use dropped dramatically, falling to a period low of 48.6 percent in only 6 years. Over the next four years, rates of reporting remained relatively stable with almost half of all juvenile reporting use in 2000.

Both cocaine use and alcohol use experienced all time lows in 1993 according to MTF reports. Marijuana use was at its lowest point at almost the same point in 1992. Similarly, alcohol and marijuana were both near, or at, their period highs in 1979. The only offense trends with which alcohol trends correlated positively over time were marijuana (.759) and cocaine (.726). Figure 46 shows that although marijuana and alcohol trends were highly correlated over time, reports of marijuana use declined at a much greater rate throughout the entire 1980s than did reports for alcohol use. Unlike trend for marijuana use however, trends in reports of alcohol use did increase in 1992.
As was true for marijuana use, the long pattern of declining reports throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s resulted in alcohol trends having significant negatively correlations with almost every offense category in the MTF survey. Especially high negative correlations occurred with assaults (-.847), theft greater than $50 (-.924) and arson (-.918). For example, Figure 47 shows that after 1986, reports of alcohol use dropped dramatically for seven years while reports of theft greater than $50 began a 14-year increase.

Cigarettes

Finally, Figure 48 reveals that the percentage of students reporting having smoked a cigarette at least once in the last 30 days reached an all-time peak early in 1976, at 38.8 percent. After 1976, the prevalence of smoking declined by about one quarter by 1981, when the rate fell to 29.4 percent. Smoking rates remained remarkably stable for the next 11 years until 1992 at about 29 percent for the entire period. In 1992, reports of smoking began to rise for the first time, approaching peak levels by 1997 (36.5 percent). From 1997 to 2000, reports of smoking began to decline once again by about 14 percent to 31.4 percent of all students. The late 1970s and late 1990s peaks in cigarette use trends combined with remarkable stability in between resulted in only one moderate, but positive, which was with correlation with marijuana trends (.587).

5.3 SHORT AND LONG-TERM TRENDS IN SELF-REPORTED OFFENDING

1975-2000

• Reports of cocaine and marijuana experienced the largest proportional changes over 25 year period;
• Substantial stability over 25 year period for minor offenses such as traffic tickets, trespassing, and truancy;
• Overall increases in all non-drug related offenses;
• Large increase of 123 percent for theft more than $50;
• Moderately large increase of 65 percent for arson
• Only decreases over time occurred for drug related crimes of marijuana use, alcohol use, and cigarette use as well as trespassing, falling approximately 15 to 30 percent over 25 years.

1975-1984
• Moderate to large increases for all non-status offenses with the exception of trespassing and marijuana use;
• Large increase of 49 percent for joyriding and 205 percent for cocaine use;
• Moderately large increases for robbery of 19 percent and theft greater than $50 of 20 percent;
• Modest increases for assault, arson, and vandalism of about 10 percent;
• Trivial movement for traffic tickets, accidents, or alcohol;
• Small decreases for trespassing, truancy, marijuana use and cigarette use of 10 to 20 percent.

1984-1994
• Moderately large decreases for drug related offenses with moderately large increases in most other offenses;
• Large increases of over 60 percent for thefts greater than $50 and arson;
• Small increase for cigarette use, truancy and traffic tickets of 6-16 percent;
• Large decrease of 74 percent in cocaine use;
• Continued moderate decrease of 25 percent for both marijuana use and alcohol use;
• Trivial movement for joyriding, vandalism, trespassing, and traffic tickets.

1994-2000
• Comparatively less movement than in prior two decade for all offenses;
• Large increases for cocaine and robbery of approximately 40 percent;
• Small increases in truancy and marijuana use of 10 to 15 percent;
• Small decreases for assaults, joyriding, and arson of about 12 percent;
• Trivial movement for cigarette use, alcohol use, traffic accidents, traffic tickets, vandalism and trespassing.

5.4 SUMMARY: CHANGES IN SELF-REPORTED BEHAVIOR OVER TIME

By comparing the year at which the smallest amount of high school seniors reported a specific offense to the year when the highest percentage of students reported each specific offense during the 25-year period under analysis for the MTF survey, a picture begins to emerge as to which offenses have experienced the most substantial
proportional change in self-reports over time. In comparison to arrest rates, self-reports of offending were much more stable over time. While every offense in the UCR experienced a 100% change or more in its rate at least once during the period under analysis, few self-reported offences experienced such dramatic changes at any point in the last 25 years. However, there were still a few self-reported behaviors that experienced dramatic changes in rates over time. Of all 14 self-reported behaviors studied, Table 6 indicates that reports of cocaine use in the last 30 days experienced the most proportional change over time. In 1985, 6.7 percent of all high school seniors reported having used cocaine in the last 30 days. Only seven years later in 1992, that percentage fell to 1.3 percent of students, a proportional decline of change of 81 percent. Reports of marijuana use in the last 30 days also experienced a large proportional change over time of 212 percent. Reports of many of the serious crimes, such robbery, theft greater than $50 and arson, also experienced proportional changes of more than 100 percent. Aside from these offenses, however, the majority of minor offenses such as trespassing, vandalism and truancy experienced only minor proportional change over time of less than 50 percent. For example, reports of vandalism ranged from 12 to 15 percent across the entire 25-year period.

This analysis also suggests a somewhat different answer to the question of whether juveniles are more delinquent today than in the past. Similar to the arrest rates, the answer to this question depends on the specific offense being analyzed as well as the historical point in time used for comparison. Overall, the cohort of juveniles surveyed in 2000 reported either similar levels or lower levels of delinquency than the cohorts of juveniles of the mid to late 1990s. Even violent behaviors such as robbery and assault
which were both experiencing long term increases were less likely to be reported in 2000 than for any other year during the last decade. The only exception for serious offending is in terms of reports of theft greater than $50, where juveniles in 2000 were more likely to report such an offense more than almost all cohorts before them. In terms of minor offending, juveniles in 2000 reported levels of offending very similar to cohorts in the past. Juveniles were no more or no less likely to report behaviors such as trespassing, vandalism, traffic accidents, and truancy than other cohorts were over most of the 25-year period.

5.5 CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN SELF-REPORTS AND ARRESTS

This analysis provides several comparisons between juvenile offense rates based on arrests and juvenile offense rates based on self-reports. Cross-methods comparisons of offense rates allow for a more sophisticated response to the question of whether juveniles today are currently committing more frequent and more serious crimes than in the past. While no particular data source is ideal for the investigation of all delinquency trends, the use of multiple methods provide us with greater confidence that changes in offense specific trends reflect both a change in the number of juveniles being formally processed, as well as the extent to which there has been an actual change in juvenile behavior. Although the two data sources used in this study are generally measuring different types of offending behavior, there are some offense trends that can be compared across both methods.

Both methods agree in reference to the extent of generality in offending patterns. Both self-reports and arrest data reveal that longitudinal trends are for the most part offense specific. While there is some indication of a general increase in most types of
offending across both types of data from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s, these trends begin to deviate in the mid 1990s. Neither data source reveals a shared pattern of changes across all offenses over the entire 25-year period of comparison.

Overall, offending trends measured by official arrest rates do not correspond well with trends from self-reports of offending. This analysis provided numerous comparisons between arrest rates based on self-reports and offense rates based on arrests and only found only two instances of significant correlations across the two methods over the complete 25-year period. Table 7 reveals that the correlation between trends for all offenses compared over the 25-year period was not significant. However, while the overall 25-year correlation for both methods was not significant, there were very high significant correlations for all offenses, except vandalism, during the specific period of 1984-1994 (.876). For example from 1984-1994, the trends for arson arrests and the trend for self-reports of arson had almost the exact same pattern with a correlation of .909 for the trends of found for both methods. Despite this period of agreement across methods as to the patterns of offending, the only significant cross-method correlations over the entire 25-year period were for the offense trends in assault (.840) and arson (.543).

Figure 49 shows that trends for both methods indicate a small increase in assaults throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Similarly, both methods showed an even greater increase in assaults beginning in the 1990s. However, the increase in official data was much steeper than the increase revealed by the MTF reports. Additionally self-reports showed a continued increase from 1995 to 1998 while official rates were already decreasing by that time. Although not nearly as consistent as trends for assault, trends for
arson show some periods of agreement as well as other periods of divergence. Figure 50 shows that throughout the 1970s and most of the 1980s, patterns the UCR and MTF showed substantial variation in their trends for arson, a finding previously reported by Osgood and colleagues in 1989. However, throughout the early 1990s both methods report arson trends increasing, although the UCR does not show as consistent an increase as the MTF survey. In the late 1990s however, self-reports of arson consistently show a decline, while UCR trends do not reveal any clear trends.

Like trends for arson, trends for robbery were similar across methods during certain periods and had substantial variation during other periods. For example, Figure 51 shows that there was a substantial amount of disagreement throughout the 1970s and 1980s across both measures of robbery. For example, self-reports reveal an increase in offending from 1982 until 1985, while arrest data reveal an equivalent decrease during this period. Both methods did show an increase in robbery during the mid 1990s and decline in late 1990s, although self-reported declines occurred one year before official decline. Self-reports showed much more consistent increase during the whole decade for reports of robbery, while UCR showed some periods of decline in the very early 1990s.

While there were many consistencies between methods in assault and arson trends, patterns for offenses such as larceny-theft, auto-theft, and vandalism all revealed dissimilar patterns across methods. For larceny-theft, the stability of rates in the UCR is offset by an overall 25-year increase of self-reports of theft over $50. Substantial differences were also evident for auto-theft. For example, self-reports of joyriding were in the early 1980s while official rates of auto-theft indicated that they were decreasing.
Conversely, self-reports of auto-theft stabilized throughout most of the eighties while UCR arrest rates started to increase dramatically.

At the beginning of this dissertation, I asserted that the belief that juveniles are currently committing more frequent and more serious crimes than in the past is a myth, but not necessarily because this belief is empirically false. Instead, such a belief is a myth because the public is skeptical of empirical evidence revealing whether or not such a belief is accurate. Criminologists have had a history of describing correlations found in one set of data as being “myths” or “illusions” when these same correlations are not found in alternative sets of data (Tittle et al., 1978). The present comparisons of longitudinal offending trends, as indicated by official and self-report data, yield a picture of juvenile offending over time that is both similar and contradictory. This research found that overall, offending trends exhibited by official data do not follow the same patterns over time as those shown in self-reports of offending. However, the more general finding that most offending trends do not correlate over time across different methods should not lead to the conclusion that specific trends revealed by one particular method are “myths” and trends revealed by the other are “truth”. Instead, both of the disparate trend patterns found should be viewed as equally valid measures of changes for specific aspects of juvenile offending.

The UCR may not be a completely valid measure of the absolute number of juveniles who are delinquent since it only measures the amount of juveniles who have been caught and arrested by police. The data analyzed in this project suggest that there is a substantial amount of variation in the longitudinal offending patterns across all offense types. The patterns found for many minor offenses are very sporadic, with no clear trend.
being visible for any significant length of time. However, within all of this variation, there is a substantial amount of consistency among the trends for serious crimes, specifically serious violent offenses. While arrest data may not provide a complete picture of trends for all types of juvenile offending, they appear to provide a consistent measure of serious offending as well as the behaviors for which juveniles are most likely to be arrested.

Self-report data provide a more complete estimate of the extent of delinquency since they include both offenses that have and have not been reported to police. The self-report data from the MTF is limited in terms of its coverage of serious offenses. However, it does present a more inclusive picture of trends and patterns for more minor offenses, which account for the majority of juvenile offending. As indicated by the stable trends found for many offenses, self-reports of delinquency are unlikely to be affected by police bias in enforcement and hence more likely to be a valid measure of most forms of delinquent behavior. For example, an overall shift toward a more punitive juvenile justice system in the early 1990s may have had an effect on the norms for reporting behaviors to police such as assaults (Feld, 1999). While there may not have been an actual increase in the number of juveniles engaging in these behaviors, any juvenile engaging in such behaviors would be more likely to be arrested. In contrast, stable patterns in self-reports of offenses such as burglary or runaway may be contrasted with low levels of arrests if these offenses are either not reported to police, or are defined as more serious forms of delinquency such as robbery.

When considered together, both methods combine to provide a more complete illustration of differing aspects of juvenile offending over time. Overall, the UCR
suggests that juveniles in 2000 are substantially less delinquent than a majority of youth cohorts before them. However, self-report data suggests that while juveniles in 2000 are reporting less delinquency than many cohorts of youth did in the past, the downward trend in offending is a very recent phenomenon only occurring within the last 4 years. The UCR shows an overall decline beginning in a few years before this point around 1994. In addition, the decline in the offense rates in the MTF are not nearly as dramatic as those indicated in arrest statistics. Finally, reports of offenses such as theft greater than $50, arson, and marijuana use have shown generally increasing patterns over the last decade.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Assault</th>
<th>Robbery</th>
<th>Theft &gt;$50</th>
<th>Joyride</th>
<th>Trespass</th>
<th>Arson</th>
<th>Vandal</th>
<th>Ticket</th>
<th>Accident</th>
<th>Truant</th>
<th>Marij</th>
<th>Cocaine</th>
<th>Alcohol</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.819**</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>.682**</td>
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<td>.220</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.265</td>
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<td>Vandal</td>
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<td>.545**</td>
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<td>.551**</td>
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<td>Accident</td>
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<td>.040</td>
<td>.146</td>
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<td>.079</td>
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<td>.468*</td>
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<td>-.455*</td>
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<td>.466*</td>
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<td>-.638**</td>
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<td>-.748**</td>
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<td>-.480*</td>
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<td>-.481*</td>
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<td>-.918**</td>
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<td>Cigs</td>
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<td>-.138</td>
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<td>-.009</td>
<td>-.408*</td>
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<td>.327</td>
<td>.506**</td>
<td>.587**</td>
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<td>.120</td>
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** p < .01; * p < .05
Table 5. Periodic Change in Self-Reported Behavior over Time by Delinquent Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Percent Change in Arrests</th>
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<td>Assault</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theft &gt;$50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joyride</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trespass</td>
<td>-10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arson</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traffic Ticket</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traffic Accident</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truancy</td>
<td>-15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marijuana</td>
<td>-7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cocaine</td>
<td>205</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>-1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cigarettes</td>
<td>-20</td>
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Table 6. Proportional Change in Self-Reported Behavior Over Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MTF 1975-2000</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Min/Max Difference</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>11.73</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>14.60</td>
<td>68</td>
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<td>Robbery</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>4.80</td>
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<td>Theft &gt;$50</td>
<td>8.60</td>
<td>2.43</td>
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<td>Joyride</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>0.87</td>
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<td>Trespass</td>
<td>24.75</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>22.10</td>
<td>28.10</td>
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<td>Arson</td>
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<td>0.65</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>3.40</td>
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<td>Vandalism</td>
<td>13.58</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>15.10</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
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<td>Traffic Ticket</td>
<td>29.45</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>24.90</td>
<td>33.30</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic Accident</td>
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<td>1.33</td>
<td>22.20</td>
<td>27.50</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Truancy</td>
<td>30.83</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>26.40</td>
<td>33.90</td>
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<td>Marijuana</td>
<td>24.14</td>
<td>7.17</td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>37.10</td>
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<td>Cocaine</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td>415</td>
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<td>Alcohol</td>
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<td>8.78</td>
<td>48.60</td>
<td>72.10</td>
<td>48</td>
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<td>Cigarettes</td>
<td>32.02</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>27.80</td>
<td>38.80</td>
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Table 7: Bivariate Correlations for Self-reported and Officially Recorded Offense Trends by Offense Type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>-.330</td>
<td>.817**</td>
<td>.407</td>
<td>.125</td>
</tr>
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<td>Assault</td>
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<td>-.031</td>
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<td>Auto-theft</td>
<td>-.603</td>
<td>.668*</td>
<td>-.282</td>
<td>.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arson</td>
<td>-.143</td>
<td>.909**</td>
<td>-.095</td>
<td>.543**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalism</td>
<td>-.245</td>
<td>.083</td>
<td>.416</td>
<td>.152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Offenses</td>
<td>-.452</td>
<td>.876**</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.325</td>
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** p = .01
Figure 28. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Assault: 1975-2000

Figure 29. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Robbery: 1975-2000
Figure 30. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Assault & Robbery: 1975-2000

Figure 31. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Theft >$50: 1975-2000
Figure 32. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors  
Joyriding: 1975-2000

Figure 33. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors  
Trespassing: 1975-2000
Figure 34. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Arson: 1975-2000

Figure 35. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Theft >$50 & Arson: 1975-2000

\[ r = .850^{**} \]
Figure 36. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Vandalism: 1975-2000

Figure 37. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Figure 38. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Theft >$50 & Ticket: 1975-2000

Figure 39. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Figure 40. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors

r = .468**

Figure 41. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Skipped School (last 30 days): 1975-2000
Figure 42. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Use Marijuana (last 30 days): 1975-2000

Figure 43. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Marijuana Use (last 30 days) & Joyriding: 1975-2000
Figure 44. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Use Cocaine (last 30 days): 1975-2000

Figure 45. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Use Alcohol (last 30 days): 1975-2000
Figure 46. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Marijuana & Alcohol (last 30 days): 1975-2000

Figure 47. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Alcohol (last 30 days) and Theft >$50: 1975-2000
Figure 48. Self-Reported Behavior of High School Seniors
Use Cigarettes (last 30 days): 1975-2000

Figure 49. Official and Self-Reported Trends
Aggravated Assault: 1975-2000

$r = .840**$
Figure 50. Official and Self-Reported Trends
Arson: 1975-2000

Figure 51. Official and Self-Reported Trends
Robbery: 1975-2000
CHAPTER SIX

STRUCTURAL MEASURES OF CHILD SOCIALIZATION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This analysis of juvenile offending trends for both self-reported and officially recorded behavior reveals substantial differentiation over time between individual offense categories. While there have been brief periods of time when selected groups of offense categories have exhibited parallel trend patterns, offending patterns overall have exhibited more variation than correspondence across offenses during the last 37 years.

These findings contradict the predictions put forth by the moral poverty explanation of delinquency. Bennett and colleagues made the very explicit prediction that all categories of juvenile offending would experience dramatic increases throughout at least the first decade of 2000. The current analysis shows that such predictions are clearly inaccurate and have been incorrect for several years. Very few individual offense categories, regardless of seriousness, experienced any meaningful increase since the time the authors proposed the theory of moral poverty 1996. In fact, this present analysis of both self-report and arrest data reveals that arrest rates for violent offenses such as murder, assault and robbery have all experienced rather consistent and dramatic decreases since at least 1997, as have the rates for many minor offenses including runaway, alcohol use, trespassing, and vandalism. This review of both self-reported and official data show that Bennett et al.’s prediction that the current generation of youth would be the “biggest and baddest generation society has ever known” is not only exaggerated, but is simply
false. Not only are today’s juvenile’s no more violent than those in the past, but they are less deviant on a substantial number of other types of behavior.

Unlike Bennett and colleagues, Gottfredson and Hirschi never make explicit predictions about changes in future crime rates in their 1990 statement of the general theory of self-control. However, Hirschi has previously offered one path that juvenile offending might take given the occurrence of specific aggregate changes of family structure in the United States. Hirschi (1991) states:

It seems reasonable to begin a discussion of family structure and crime with the assumption that the substantial increase in single-parent families in recent years is somehow connected to the high rate of crime and drug abuse in American society… We could go further and suggest that the connection is causal, that any loss of the instructive, protective, or supportive power of the family will eventually show itself in higher rates of deviant behavior. (p.44)

Gottfredson and Hirschi concur with Bennett et al., that a rise in the number of single parent families in the United States should bring with it a parallel rise in juvenile crime. Also similar to the theory of moral poverty, the theory of self-control would predict an increase in all types of crime, not just violent crime. Self-control theory covers a range of common delinquent behaviors, from serious crimes such as murder and assault, to reckless behaviors such as DUI and traffic accidents, to promiscuous sexual behavior, to employment difficulties, drug use and family violence. If self-control is truly the key to understanding the nature of criminality, then changes in the causes of low self-control, such as aggregate changes in family structure, should eventually bring changes in the rates of all of these criminal and analogous behaviors.
While this dissertation has not set out to directly test aggregate level change in the levels of self-control for juveniles in the United States, societal level indicators of the major cause of low-self control, ineffective child-rearing, can be examined using U.S. census data. Although Gottfredson and Hirschi state that several conditions are necessary to produce a properly socialized child, they focus much of their attention on the relationship between family conditions and delinquency. Self-control theory puts forth family variables such as single parent families, family size, mothers working outside the home, and parental supervision as among some of the most important factors in socializing children to have effective levels of self-control.

6.2 SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

Hirschi has argued that, all else being equal, one parent may be enough to properly socialize a child to have adequate levels of self-control, however he goes on to state that “all else is rarely equal” (Hirschi, 1983, p.62). Both self-control theory and the theory of moral poverty argue that children raised in single parent or “broken” households are more likely to be delinquent than children raised by both biological parents. Research supports the idea that that single parent families are at a disadvantage when it comes to their ability to properly socialize children in terms of the ability to effectively monitor and punish early anti-social behavior (Simons, Lin, Gordon, Conger, & Lorenz, 1999; Aston & McLanahan, 1991). The single parent must devote a good deal of effort to support and maintain activities that are at least to some extent shared in the two-parent home. As a result, single parents are less able to devote time to monitoring and punishment and are more likely to be involved in negative and sometimes abusive contacts with her children (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990).
Similar to the juvenile crime rate, the structure of the American family has never been completely stable. Trend analysis of the Current Population Reports from the U.S. Census Bureau data reveal substantial change in the composition of American families, specifically when it comes to parenting. Figure 52 indicates that the percent of single parent families with children under age 18 has increased consistently over the last 36 years. In 1964, 10 percent of families with children in the United States were headed by single parents. By 2000, this proportion had increased to 27 percent. Since the majority of single parents in the United States are women, most of the increase in single parents was due to the number of single parent families headed by women. However, the percent of male-headed single parent families has also increased over the last 36 years from 1 to 5 percent of all families.

While the high rates of single parent families in the early years of the 20th century were the result of high mortality of men (Uhlenberg, 1980), the increase in the amount of single-parent households over the last 50 years was driven by the number of births to unmarried women (Bianchi & Casper, 2000). Figure 53 shows that the birth rate to unmarried mothers has experienced a gradual but significant increase over the last three decades. However, this increase was not as consistent as the one for single parent families in general. The birth rate to unmarried women aged 15-44 was relatively stable throughout the 1960s and 1970s at slightly more than 20 births for every 1000 women in the U.S. Most of this increase occurred from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s. From 1984 to 1994, the birth rate for unmarried mothers increased from 31 to 47 percent. In contrast to the increase in the birth rate to unmarried women, the rate of births to married women experienced a dramatic decrease of 33 percent from 1964 to 1973 falling from
142 to 95 births for every 1000 women. Since 1973 however, the birth rate for married women has been rather ranging from 85 to 90 births for every 1000 women.

**6.3 FAMILY SIZE**

Hirschi (1999) has characterized family size as a measure of delinquent behavior as “an empiricist’s dream” (p.65). At the individual level, family size shows a consistently positive relationship with delinquency. According to self-control theory, there are two reasons why larger families will be less effective than small families in controlling the delinquency potential of their children. First, greater numbers of children strain parental resources of time and energy. Even though parents with large families may be as able to recognize deviant behavior as parents with only one child, monitoring and punishment are probably more difficult the greater number of children in the family. The inability to monitor behavior can have the additional effect of lessening parent’s effectiveness in fostering the verbal ability and academic success of children. Children in large families will spend more of their time socializing with and being socialized by other children who will be much more tolerant of antisocial behavior (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990, p.103). For self-control theory, fewer children per household should improve parent’s ability to properly socialize their children when they exhibit antisocial behavior. With fewer children in the household, parents would be better able to recognize evidence of low-self control at early ages and punish such behavior accordingly. Aggregate level increases in family size should then be associated with increases in the ability of parents to instill adequate levels of self-control in their children.

Figure 54 shows that the average number of individuals per household in the United States experienced a significant decrease through the 1970s. By 1980 however,
the number began to stabilize at approximately 2.6 people per household until 2000. Similar to the decrease in the number of individuals per household, the number of these individuals under the age of 18 also declined during the 1970s. Similarly, the average number of individuals per household under 18 has remained stable for the past 20 years.

While these estimates of trends in the average number of individuals per household are useful, a more specific focus on changes in the number of children by family type (single parent versus married parents) can help to gauge the ability of families to supervise children over time. Figure 55 shows that the average number of children under 18 per family for married couples in the United States experienced a decline during the 1970s and into the 1980s. From 1982 until 2000, the average number of children remained quite stable near about 1.8 children with a slight increase beginning to occur in 1997. Comparatively, the average number of children under 18 for single mothers fell also consistently during the 1970s. For most of this decade, single mothers were raising approximately the same number of children per family as married couples. By 1981 however, the number of children under 18 per single mother family also became stable with a fewer children in each single mother family than in each married family. The average number of children under 18 for single father homes also fell during the 1970s and then became stable until 2000. However, single fathers raised an average number of 1.5 children per family over the last 20 years compared to an average of 1.7 children per family for single mothers during the same period. In sum, while the divorce rate in the U.S. may have shown consistent increase over the last 30 years, it does not necessarily imply that parents will be less able to properly supervise their children. Along with the increase in divorce, there has been also a corresponding consistent decline.
in the number of children per family for both married and single parents that may counter the effects of more single parent families.

6.4 Economic Changes and Family Life

Gottfredson and Hirschi argue that the increase in the number of women in the labor force will have several implications for the crime rate. The theory suggests that women working outside of the home will contribute to overall levels of instability in marriages. Marital instability will increase the likelihood of delinquency by reducing the actual physical surveillance of children. Women working outside of the home will be unable to effectively supervise and hence properly socialize their children. Here they cite the Glueck’s research (1950) that found children of women who work, especially those who work “occasionally” or “sporadically” were more likely to be delinquent than children with only one working parent. The general theory of low self control not only argues that mother’s employment will have an effect on delinquent behavior, but that employment will have an effect on non-criminal acts as well such as accidents or school failure (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990, p.105).

While most single mothers are not poor, but they tend to be younger, earn lower incomes, and be less educated than married mothers (Bianchi & Casper, 2000). In recent decades, the most dramatic increases in labor force participation have not been among single women, but among those women who are married, particularly those with young children. Figure 56 reveals that the percent of women in the workforce had steadily increased over the last 30 years. However, the percentage of women with young children who are in the labor force grew even more substantially. Between 1980 and 2000, the percent of women with children under 16 in the labor force rose from 47 percent in 1980
to 66 percent in 2000. Men’s labor force participation has remained rather stable over the last 30 years with a slight decline in the 1970s. Much of the public’s perceptions regarding working women revolve around the belief that these women are neglecting their children. However, historical analysis reveals that women in the United States spend as much time with their children now as they did in the 1960s (Bianchi & Casper, 2000).

**6.5 Summary: Juvenile Crime Rates and Family Structure**

General theories of crime, such as Bennett et al.’s theory of moral poverty (1996) and Gottfredson & Hirschi’s general theory of crime (1990), explain all criminal and analogous behaviors with one single underlying process, inadequate familial socialization of young children. These general theories of delinquency predict that large-scale changes in family structure in the United States will have direct implications on the ability of families to instill adequate levels of self-control in their children. These structural changes will then have a lagged influence on aggregate level crime rates. There will eventually be a larger proportion of juveniles in the general population whose parents were disadvantaged in terms of their ability to instill adequate levels of self-control in their children. For example, a large increase in family divorce in the early 1970s should result in more children raised in the 1970s with low levels of self-control. By the early and mid 1980s, this cohort of children will have reached their most crime prone age and, given their low levels of self-control, should contribute to higher aggregate rates of juvenile crime for that period in history. These theories suggest that if the societal level factors that cause low self-control in children continue to increase, so to will future rates of both individual and aggregate delinquency.
This research has found that offending trends based on both arrests and self-reports over the last four decades do not support a general explanation of crime based on the inadequate socialization of children. There has been substantial change in family structure over the last three decades. However, all of the change in the family structure variables measured in this research formed in a linear trend. The number of single parent families for both female and male headed households, levels of labor force participation for women and for women with children under age 6, and the rate of birth to unmarried women have all been consistently increasing for at least the last 30 years.

In contrast, trends in aggregate level offending for the same period showed are not consistent over the same period. Substantial variation exists, with almost all offense categories exhibiting alternating sequences of increases and decreases over time. For example, the well documented increase in arrests for juveniles occurred for almost all offenses, unlike the peak in the early 1990s. The expectation would be that this cohort of juveniles age 10-17 was poorly socialized due to changes in increases in family variables such as divorce rates and unwed mothers. However, as the rates of arrest for almost all offenses began to decline in the late 1970s, all of these socialization variables continued to increase. Given the effect of these variables on parent’s ability to socialize children we would expect continued increase in delinquency rates of juveniles well into the 1980s. Strong evidence for a general explanation of low self-control due to inadequate socialization would require a dominant offense trend following the same linear pattern over time as was found for the child socialization variables. Neither arrest data nor self-report data reveal such linear trends for any offense over time.
Recall that Gottfredson and Hirschi do not make explicit predictions about increases or decreases in aggregate delinquency rates as they relate to aggregate changes in socialization variables. While the findings of this project may not provide any evidence for Gottfredson and Hirschi’s claim that fundamental characteristics and general patterns of many common crimes should be based on considerations of self-control, the offense trends revealed by the UCR and MTF do not necessarily challenge Gottfredson and Hirschi’s emphasis on the role of opportunity structure in explaining similar trend patterns. Similarly, the fact that particular individual offense trends are highly correlated with each other over time suggests the possibility that the same underlying etiological process may be affecting at least certain groups of offenses.

6.6 A GENERAL THEORY OF CRIME AND DISPARATE PATTERNS OF AGGREGATE DELINQUENCY TRENDS

The general theory of crime suggests that societal level changes in child socialization will have an impact on aggregate levels of self-control and hence should influence rates of criminal and analogous behaviors equally. Despite the overall finding that the majority of offense trends did not share similar longitudinal trend patterns, certain groups of individual offenses did share similar trend patterns. For example, arrest trends for Part I offenses had significant correlations with each other over time. The only trend for serious arrests that did not any significantly correlation with other serious arrests over time was auto theft. This may be the result of changes in technology resulting in a substantially lower opportunity for youth to steal cars, regardless of their levels of self-control. The remainder of the offense categories shared similar trends to at least half of the other Part I offenses. Similarly, self-report trends revealed that the two
most serious offenses measured in the MTF survey, assault and robbery, had significantly high correlation of their trends over time. These similar trend patterns suggest that a similar underlying process may have affected each of these serious offenses in a similar way over time. While police reporting practices may have affected many arrest rates recorded in the UCR, these measurement biases are less likely to occur for serious offenses (Gove et al., 1985). Also, the finding that serious offenses in the MTF also followed similar patterns to each other, as well as to trends of serious offenses in the UCR, reduce the probability that such trends are driven by official agency decision making.

Although trends for a few Part II offenses had some significant correlations with each other, this analysis found very few of these instances. Additionally, any offense trend correlations found among Part II offenses were quite small. The only exception here was the trend for vandalism arrests, which correlated highly with almost every Part I offense. Unlike the UCR however, self-reported trends for vandalism did not correlate highly with any other serious offense. Trends for more minor self-reported offenses, such as truancy and traffic accidents, did not correlate very highly with any other offenses. Reports of traffic tickets however, did have significant correlations with trends for serious offenses such as assault and robbery, although these correlations were not very high. This is an important finding since the general theory of crime places emphasis on the effect of low self-control on all forms of antisocial behavior, not just serious violent crimes. While most minor offense trends did not correlate with each other, there was one exception. All self-reported drug offense trends (marijuana, cocaine, and alcohol use) correlated highly with each other. The only exception here was for trends in
cigarette use, which did not correlate highly with any offense trend. Still, drug offense trends, for the most part, negatively correlated with trends for self-reports of serious offenses.

In sum, these findings do not offer support for the general theory of crime’s emphasis on changes in family structure affecting all delinquency in a similar manner over time. However, disparate offense trends for less serious offending, as well as existing non-linear patterns for many serious offense trends may still be indicative of changes in the overall opportunity structure to commit these offenses. It may be that longitudinal trends for less serious crimes, such as drug use and traffic tickets, are more influenced by aggregate level changes in opportunity structure than changes in aggregate levels of low self-control.
Figure 52. Family Structure in the United States 1964-2000: Single Parent Families With Children Under 18 Years


Figure 53. Rate of Births to Married and Unmarried Women in the United States: 1964-2000

Figure 54. Average Number of Persons Per Household in the United States by Age: 1964-2000


Figure 55. Average Number of Own Children Under 18 per Family by Family Type: 1970-2000

Figure 56. Labor Force Participation in the United States: 1970-2000

CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSION

This dissertation examined multiple data sources in order to evaluate more precisely the declaration that the juvenile crime wave is a “myth.” This exploration of longitudinal trends in juvenile offending was guided by the premise that a more complete understanding of the causes of juvenile offending requires an examination of a more broad range of juvenile behavior than has previously been considered. By disaggregating measures of “violent” or “property” offending into trends for individual offense categories this research contributes to research and theory on: 1) patterns of juvenile offending in the United States over the last 37 years, 2) the extent to which these patterns vary by the type of offense being measured and, 3) the extent to which these patterns vary by the particular types of data being studied. Although there have been some similarities in the recent trends of various individual offense categories, there appears to be an even greater amount of disparity between individual offense trends over the entire period examined. Overall, the findings from this dissertation present a more complex view of aggregate level crime rates than can be explained fully by a theory of moral poverty or general theory of low self-control.

7.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Three major findings emerge from this research. First, both arrest and self-report data clearly indicate that the idea of a persistent juvenile crime wave is indeed a myth. With the exception of some minor offenses, arrest rates of juveniles ages 10-17 in 2000 have been declining for at least the last five years. Arrest rates for murder and auto theft
are very close to 37-year lows, and the rate of juvenile burglary in 2000 set a new all time low for the period. These recent dramatic declines in the arrest rates of most offenses are quite similar to declines in arrests rates that occurred in the late 1970s after a rather large increase in arrests rates in the mid 1970s. Whether or not there is a cycle of arrest rates that will repeat itself for a third time over the next 20 years is unclear. However, it is difficult to envision juvenile arrest rates declining for many more years given the already low number of arrests for most types of offenses.

Declines in arrest rates of juveniles are only one indication that delinquent juvenile behavior is changing. While the recent decline of juvenile arrests for almost every offense measured by the UCR may reflect a real decline in juvenile offending, the decline can just as likely be reflective of organizational changes in the juvenile justice system at the arrest level. Recent declines in the arrest rate may simply reflect the possibility that police are more hesitant to make arrests in 2000 than they were throughout the 1990s. The dramatic increase in arrest rates of juveniles for all offenses in the late 1980s and early 1990s certainly has had a dramatic effect of the juvenile justice system. Increased juvenile contacts with police officers have resulted in increased workloads for the juvenile court, juvenile detention centers, and juvenile correctional facilities. Similarly, increased numbers of youth transferred to adult court add an additional burden to an already satiated adult criminal justice system. Given the criticism that arrest data are more a reflection of police behavior than an indication of the true amount of delinquent behavior in the U.S., juveniles may still in fact be more delinquent today than in the past. Alternatively, if arrest rates present a valid measure of juvenile offending and not just police behavior, alternative forms of data such as self-reports of
offending should present a similar decline in offending trends as those found in the UCR. Findings of this dissertation reveal that trends in self-reports of juvenile offending give additional support to the conclusion that the belief in a juvenile crime wave is a myth. This agreement across multiple methods helps to provide additional support for rejecting beliefs in a current juvenile crime wave. While arrest data may not be a perfect estimate for the total amount of delinquency in the U.S., recent declines in juvenile reports of delinquency suggest that the longitudinal offending trends revealed by arrest data may not be entirely the result of changes in police behavior. 

Both arrest data and self-report data present a picture of the cohort of juveniles in 2000 being less delinquent than many previous cohorts of juveniles. Yet the second main finding emerging from this research is that a substantial amount of disparity exists in the longitudinal offending trends for specific offenses presented by both arrest rates and those found using self-reports of delinquency. While there are instances of limited agreement across methods, most notably for certain time periods, overall trends illustrate a greater amount of inconsistency than correspondence across both methods. A reliance on arrest data alone would suggest that juveniles are substantially less delinquent than in the past. In contrast, self-report data reveal that while there has certainly not been an increase in self-reports of delinquency, juvenile self-reports of delinquency have not declined nearly to the extent as declines found in arrest data. For example, trends for self-reports of assault have declined only in the last four years, and these declines have been rather small. In contrast, arrests for assault have shown a consistently dramatic decline since 1994. A stronger claim could be made that there has been an actual change in juvenile behavior over the last 10 years rather than merely a change in police behavior.
if there was more correspondence across the two methods. Instead, the fact that self-reports of offending have remained relatively stable over time while arrest rates have declined dramatically suggests that factors other than changes in juvenile behavior alone may be affecting juvenile arrest rates.

One possible explanation of the discrepancy between official and self-report data could be that norms for reporting juvenile crimes to police have changed over time, while norms for self-reports of offending have remained relatively stable over time. So while, factors that determine why people report delinquency to police and why police decide to make an arrest may change over time, these changes may have little effect on juveniles’ own self-reports of offending. If these normative changes did have an effect on juvenile reports of delinquency, we would expect a more substantial decline across all types of self-reported trends, as exhibited in trends for arrest rates.

If norms for reporting and recording delinquency are changing, they are not changing in a manner that would be expected given the perception of an increase in juvenile offending. For example, recent increases in zero-tolerance policies in schools has led to a much broader definition of delinquent acts such as “assaults” and has had the additional effect of increasing the chances of a traditional schoolyard fight being reported to police. However, the suggestion that police are more likely to make arrests for offenses such as assaults does not correspond with the dramatic decline in arrest rates for these, and most other offenses. Similarly, the examination of minor offense trends suggests that there is no evidence of arrests being displaced from serious to more minor offenses. Therefore, as arrests for serious crimes decline, there is not necessarily a
corresponding increase in arrests for more minor offenses. Over the last five years, police have simply made fewer arrests of juveniles than they have in the past.

The question is then whether juveniles are actually engaging in less delinquent behavior or whether police are making what Bernard (1990) calls a forced choice to not arrest juveniles, even when an arrest would have normally been made. The dramatic increase and decrease in arrest rates in the last 20 years, combined with rather stable self-reports of delinquency, suggests that the U.S. is currently experiencing a greater shift in juvenile justice policies than it is in its juvenile offending rates. Bernard (1990) argues that the U.S. has gone through the same “cycle of juvenile justice” three times in the last 200 years (p. 3). The cycle begins when justice officials and the public become convinced that juvenile delinquency is near record high levels. As a result of these fears, justice officials create many harsh punishments and offer few lenient treatments, forcing officials such as police officers to choose between harshly punishing a juvenile and doing nothing at all. It appears as if the U.S. may be in the midst of this part of the cycle of juvenile justice.

Fears of a juvenile crime wave that began to emerge in the late 1980s and early 1990s led to increased police enforcement of delinquent behavior. As police made increasingly more arrests, the juvenile justice system became increasingly overwhelmed. When the juvenile justice system as a whole reaches a saturation point in terms of the size, speed, and overall efficiency of processing juveniles who have been arrested, police officers are required to make the forced choice between either arresting juveniles and placing them in an already overwhelmed and punitive system, or simply not making an arrest and letting juveniles off with only a warning. Therefore, even if there is little
change in the self-reported behavior of juveniles as evidenced by the MTF survey, such
stability will not correlate highly with UCR trends that are more susceptible to external
sources of variance.

Even with all of the potential sources for differences between arrest and self-
report data, both arrest rates and self-reports agree that there has been a substantial
decline in juvenile offending for a significant amount of time. While much of the
movement in arrest rate trends may be the result of police behavior, the corresponding
small declines in self-reports for many offenses suggests that juveniles are certainly less
delinquent today than they have been over the last ten years, and than in many other
periods in the last 37 years. Since many criminological theories have focused on
explaining why crime rates increase, the recent changes in juvenile offending offers an
opportunity to examine the ability of many criminological theories to explain why
delinquency is declining. Specifically, the focus of this dissertation was to examine
whether general theories of moral poverty and low self-control can adequately explain
recent declines in juvenile offending rates.

The results of this research suggest that theoretical explanations of delinquency
can provide a more coherent and complete framework for understanding the etiology of
adolescent delinquency if they do not assume that all types of juvenile offending are
equally responsive to the same forces at the same times. A third important finding
emerging from this project is that, taking into account the full range of delinquent
behaviors that this dissertation has measured, there is a greater amount of disparity
rather than similarity in the individual longitudinal patterns of both serious and minor
offense trends over time. Findings from this project make very clear that predictions of
increasing delinquency trends into 2000 for all offenses, especially violent offenses (Bennett et al., 1996; Fox, 1996) are false. In fact, the trends in delinquency are almost the exact opposite from what the theory of moral poverty predicted. Not only have all violent crimes shown a decline in at least the last five years, all arrest rates for serious property crime have declined and almost all minor forms of delinquency have either remained stable or declined. While many criminologists may not have supported the predictions made by the theory of moral poverty when it was first stated in the mid 1990s, there was also a complete refusal of researchers to risk a false positive and make an alternative prediction of the substantial declines that would in fact occur across almost all offenses.

While the findings of this project present a challenge to Gottfredson and Hirschi’s general theory of crime, they do not necessarily demonstrate the theory to be false. Gottfredson and Hirschi never make explicit predictions about the future of juvenile delinquency trends in the United States, but data presented in this research would provide a basis for such a prediction. Relevant childhood socialization variables, which self-control theory predicts would lead to increases in aggregate levels of self-control, have been increasing in a linear fashion since the 1960s. Though there have been isolated periods of increases in the arrest and self-reported rates of delinquency, recent periods of decline in these delinquency rates are not consistent with the predicted changes that should have occurred in self-control.

An alternative explanation of the findings from this dissertation is that declines in delinquency rates may still be the result of increases in aggregate levels of self-control in the U.S. However, if aggregate levels of self-control in the United States have in fact
increased, the actual mechanisms underlying levels of self-control put forth by Gottfredson & Hirschi would have to be incorrectly specified. This dissertation shows that the most important family socialization variables that Gottfredson and Hirschi hypothesize will lead to low levels of self-control have all progressed in a direction over the last 25 years that should lead to fewer juveniles being raised with adequate levels of self-control. Factors such as number of unwed mothers, number of single parent families, and proportion of women in the work force that are predicted to lead to low levels of individual and aggregate levels of self-control have all increased while delinquency rates have shown recent dramatic decreases. If increases in self-control are to be used as an explanation for the recent declining delinquency rates, the causes of these increases must be more complex than the causes put forth by the general theory of crime.

However, it may also be the case that levels of self-control have declined in the U.S., but that it is the opportunity for juveniles with low self-control to engage in delinquency that has become more limited over time due to increases in external controls. Data from this research would suggest that to consider this opportunity explanation, one would have to explain how the opportunity to engage in almost all types of delinquency has become more limited, since there have been declines in almost all forms of delinquent behavior. While it is likely that the opportunity to engage in some forms of delinquency, such as burglary or gun related homicides has decreased, it is more difficult to explain how opportunities for acts such as vandalism, larceny-theft, truancy or arson have decreased over time. Criminologists are only now beginning to accept the idea that delinquency theories should be able to explain not only the increases in delinquency, but the uniform declines as well (Blumstein & Wallerman, 2002). Such theories need to
address both the similarities and the differences in juvenile offending trends found in this research. In addition, criminologists should begin to take a closer examination of the interaction between criminological theory, criminal statistics, and public discourse about delinquency. The trends in juvenile delinquency shown in this research are not simply valuable for what they reveal about the extent to which juveniles are arrested in the United States or how many juveniles are reporting delinquent behavior. Empirically measured delinquency trends across multiple methods can help researchers to better understand the degree to which moral panic over delinquency depends on the broader social and political context in which it occurs, rather than any actual increases in delinquency itself.

7.2 DELINQUENCY TRENDS AND CRIME DISCOURSE

While this research shows strong support for the conclusion that there is no current juvenile crime wave in the U.S. and that juveniles today are no more delinquent than cohorts of juveniles from other periods during the last four decades, a widespread fear of juvenile delinquency in the United States still exists today. Data from this dissertation suggest there is little evidence that the public or the juvenile justice system should be any more concerned with juvenile offending behavior today than at almost any other time in recent American history. The predictions of a cohort of “superpredators” envisioned by many theorists and policy makers almost a decade ago were not novel in their doomsday scenarios. Fears about the levels of risk youth pose to society have existed in the U.S. ever since the first house of refuge was established in New York City in the early 1800s. However, this more recent wave of fear is unique in that it has spread
very quickly, moving from a fear of gangs and drug users in the inner cities towards
including a wider range of juveniles who are engaging in more minor offending.

The situation today is not unlike the ‘moral panics’ described by Cohen (1972) in
his description of Mods and Rockers in 1960s Britain. Cohen argued that societies are
always subject to periods of moral panic which occur when there is a high level of
concern over the behavior of a certain group of people resulting in an increased level of
hostility toward that group. One characteristic often emphasized during moral panics is
disproportionality whereby the perceived threat of a group is more substantial than is
warranted through empirical evaluation (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). While juvenile
arrest rates seemed to validate many fears of rising juvenile violent offending in the early
1990s, most other forms of offending were not experiencing increases in arrest rates.
Similarly, self-reports of offending in the early 1990s revealed rather stable patterns of
offending that have more recently begun a small decline. Unlike many moral panics that
appear seemingly out of nowhere and that grow in the space of only a few months and
then fade just as quickly, such as the synthetic drug panics of the 1980s (Jenkins, 1998),
the overall juvenile crime panic has lasted for several years. Despite several years of
consistent declines, the claims of a juvenile crime epidemic continue to be heard in the
media and amongst politicians, with little validity for such reports.

Jenkins (1999) argues that an important aspect of moral panics is trying to
understand why societies are prepared to believe these disproportional claims with little
factual evidence. In order to answer such questions researchers need to examine the
wider cultural and political contexts of juvenile crime, rather than juvenile offending
itself. In other words, it is equally as important to study why theories of crime such as
the theory of moral poverty and the general theory of crime are such popular explanations for changing crime rates as it is to ask why juveniles are committing crime. The question then becomes one of unveiling wider social anxieties that will eventually lead to moral panic.

This research has shown that there is clearly a breakdown in the traditional family in the United States that has been occurring for several years now. For a long period of time, the effects of more single parent families, more unwed mothers, and more women participating in the work force were unclear. Those who were morally opposed to many of these behaviors had little evidence those factors such as single parent families and increased female labor force participation had any tangible effects on U.S. society. However, the increases in arrests of juveniles added moral support to widely held beliefs in the effects of family disruption. Pre-existing ideological beliefs in the moral consequences of the breakdown of the family unit could then be justified through reports of increasing arrest rates. Just as those who wish to denounce homosexuality point indirectly to the emergence of AIDS as a justification for the immorality of homosexuality (Jenkins, 1992), many policy makers as well as politicians and researchers have all indirectly argued that the breakdown of the family is causing a juvenile crime epidemic, despite several years of data suggesting otherwise.

7.3 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The results of this dissertation indicate that specific juvenile offenses do follow different trends over time. With the exception of the recent declines in most forms of delinquency, at any given time several specific forms of delinquency have shown evidence of substantial increases while other forms of delinquency were in fact declining.
at a similar rate. These findings suggest that prevention and rehabilitation programs that apply a general model of delinquency causation may be off target in terms of their focus on all types of offenses. For example, delinquency prevention programs that focus on increasing problem solving skills of juveniles may have an effect on certain types of offenses, but not others. These findings suggest that since there does not appear to be one underlying causal process that is affecting all forms of delinquency equally, prevention and rehabilitation programs are justified in taking a more narrow focus on certain types of delinquency. For example, even within the category of drug offenses, the MTF survey shows that while attempts to decrease all forms of adolescent drug use in late 1980s may have been partially responsible for generating a decline in cocaine use, cigarette and marijuana use continued to increase dramatically in the early 1990s. Such a finding suggests that even offenses that have traditionally been thought to be controlled similar prevention techniques may actually require rather different preventative approaches.

Interestingly, while the theory of moral poverty and the general theory of crime both point to familial factors to explain increases in all types of crime, policies that would help to decrease the negative effects of family disruption on child socialization, such as increased wages, free daycare and/or babysitting, and stricter divorce laws have never been put forth by policy makers as legitimate sources of delinquency prevention. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) never make the claim that stricter juvenile justice policies will have an effect on delinquency. Instead the general theory of crime support policies that would help parental management behaviors, since those are what will help to instill low levels of self-control. However, such policies are politically expensive in both the figurative and literal meaning. Instead of free daycare, policies such as work for welfare
force single parent mothers to spend even less time with at risk children. Therefore, while there seems then to be a strong belief in the general theories of delinquency, the associated policies of family support are still viewed as inappropriate for dealing with the contemptuous view of juvenile’s today.

7.4 SUMMARY

The purpose of this project was to provide a more complete understanding of juvenile delinquency rates in the United States over the last 40 years. Despite all of the intricacies that this research has revealed concerning juvenile delinquency rates, attempts to explain aggregate level offending amongst juveniles remain quite limited within the criminological literature. This project’s examination of multiple methods of data is surprisingly rare given the wealth of insight such comparisons can provide into the possible explanations of juvenile offending. This research has presented strong evidence to suggest that criminologists discontinue their consideration of the theory of moral poverty for explaining and predicting aggregate level delinquency rates. Further, this dissertation has shed light on potentially valuable prospects for understanding the complex nature of juvenile offending trends that go beyond those offered by a general theory of crime.
REFERENCES


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