

On Exploring the "Dark Figure" of Crime*

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ABSTRACT: The history of criminal statistics bears testimony to a search for a measure of "criminality" present among a population, a search that led increasingly to a concern about the "dark figure" of crime—that is, about occurrences that by some criteria are called crime yet that are not registered in the statistics of whatever agency was the source of the data being used. Contending arguments arose about the dark figure between the "realists" who emphasized the virtues of completeness with which data represent the "real crime" that takes place and the "institutionalists" who emphasize that crime can have valid meaning only in terms of organized, legitimate social responses to it. This paper examines these arguments in the context of police and survey statistics as measures of crime in a population. It concludes that in exploring the dark figure of crime, the primary question is not how much of it becomes revealed but rather what will be the selective properties of any particular innovation for its illumination. Any set of crime statistics, including those of survey research, involve some evaluative, institutional processing of people's reports. Concepts, definitions, quantitative models, and theories must be adjusted to the fact that the data are not some objectively observable universe of "criminal acts," but rather those events defined, captured, and processed as such by some institutional mechanism.

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STATISTICAL criminology began with the development of *moral statistics*.¹ No subject has dominated the field of criminal statistics more since its inception than the search for the key moral statistic—a measure of the “criminality” present among a population. This search led increasingly to a concern about the “dark figure” of crime—that is, about occurrences that by some criteria are called crime yet that are not registered in the statistics of whatever agency was the source of the data being used.²

The history of criminal statistics testifies to continuing contention between those who sought to bring more of the dark figure to statistical light and those who deplored elements of invalidity in each such attempt. The major object of this contention for over a century was police statistics. Both official and scholarly comprehensions of the incidence of crime were almost exclusively based on statistics of indictments or adjudications. There were those who sought the development of police sta-

tistics to supplement, if not supplant, them. The contending arguments were fundamentally between what we can loosely term “realist” as opposed to “institutionalist” emphases.³ The former emphasized the virtues of completeness with which data represented the “real crime that takes place.” The institutionalist perspective emphasized that crime could have valid meaning only in terms of organized, legitimate social responses to it.

The ultimate juristic view is that a given crime is not validly known to have taken place until a court finds someone guilty of that offense. Only at that point in the process has there been an irrevocable decision as to the evidence regarding the objective facts in relation to their legal significance. Outside the United States, there was little resistance to utilizing data from earlier stages in the adjudicatory process, such as prosecution, indictment, arraignment, or even investigation, particularly in legal

¹ The French are generally credited with the early development of moral statistics. Especially noteworthy is the work of A. M. Guerry, *Essai sur la statistique morale de la France* (Paris, 1833). Guerry calculated rates of crimes against persons and against property for 86 departments of France and age-sex specific crime rates for seventeen crimes against the person and seventeen against property. The rates were presented in tabular, graphic, and cartographic forms.

² The earliest published discussion of the dark-figure problem that we have been able to find is that of Bulwer. In his two-volume treatise on France, published in 1836, Bulwer devoted an entire chapter to crime in France, based primarily on A. M. Guerry's major work. Bulwer (pp. 174-175) discusses the problem of using either offenses known or of the accused as measures of crime and concludes that, despite their limitations, they are more accurate than calculations based on convictions. See Henry Lytton Bulwer, *France, Social, Literary, Political*, Vol. I, Book I: *Crime* (London: Richard Bentley, 1836), pp. 169-210.

³ William Douglas Morrison stated the distinction rather well in a paper before the Royal Statistical Society in 1897: “If . . . we are anxious to know how the criminal law is being administered, we shall analyse and classify the contents of the statistics from that point of view. If on the other hand we desire to know the movement of crime, the criminal conditions of the community, and the relative value of the several methods by which these methods are to be ascertained, we shall adopt a somewhat different method of classifying the contents of criminal statistics. I have ventured to classify criminal statistics into police statistics, judicial statistics, and prison statistics because I desire, at least in the first place, to point out the amount of weight to be attached to each of these methods of recording the nature and proportions of crime.” —“The Interpretation of Criminal Statistics,” *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Vol. LX, Part I (March 1897), pp. 1-24, at pp. 1-2. Also: “But it would be a mistake to suppose that the number of crimes known to the police is a complete index of the total yearly volume of crime. The actual number of offenses annually committed is always largely in excess of the number of officially recorded crimes” (*Ibid.*, p. 4).

systems where there are police magistrates.⁴ In all countries, however, most criminologists were less ready to credit the competence of the police to make determinations of the objective facts and to classify them validly—police competence being judged in terms of legitimacy, skill, and the adequacy of information available to the police. Presumably, the lower social status of the police than of the bench—and, correlatively, the greater political power of the judiciary—together with the loose fashion in which police systems were for long grafted on the legal-institutional systems, has much to do with these views.⁵

There has been a long contest to gain institutional acceptance for police statistics over opposition from legalistic traditionalism. In England, a plan was worked out for the collection of police statistics on a uniform and national basis in 1856, and they have been a regular part of the annual report of criminal statistics since 1857. While from the outset, police statistics were logically placed prior to judicial statistics in the published volumes, in 1893

⁴ In France, for example, early statistical compilations of crime provided information on *accusations, accusés, acquités, and condamnés*. See *Recherches statistiques sur la ville de Paris et le département de la Seine* (A Paris de l'Imprimerie Royale, 1821–1830). See also Guerry, *op. cit.*

⁵ The *Report on Criminal Statistics*, U.S. National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931) stated contemporary views in the United States: "If it took the highly centralized English Government 66 years to get its famous and highly efficient police to report correctly crimes known to the police, it is evident that it will be many years before our decentralized and nonprofessional police forces can be induced to make trustworthy reports of crimes known to the police" (p. 55). After more than a third of a century, patience is still being counseled: see Peter P. Lejins, "Uniform Crime Reports," *Michigan Law Review*, 64 (April 1966), pp. 1011–1030.

they were placed after court statistics with the statement:

The tables of the results of judicial proceedings, which are at once the most important, the most definite, and the most accurate of all criminal statistics, occupy the first place. The tables as to police action . . . are of less statistical value, and follow in a subordinate position.⁶

Not until 1923 did the argument over their merit abate sufficiently in England so that they were accepted as a valid basis for estimating crime.⁷ Even today, in England, police statistics are considered less reliable than judicial statistics.

An additional difficulty inhered in the localistic nature of police organization in the United States. Not only did this make for dubiousness about the judgment and record-keeping capabilities of police in all but the larger jurisdictions, but producing national series also posed formidable problems of standardization and compilation of data from a multitude of jurisdictions having a myriad of laws, definitions, and practices. The present voluntary system of national crime reporting in the United States owed its form and many of its limitations to the fact that the national government cannot (at least not readily) compel local governments to report on their operations.⁸

As police statistics were legitimated, statistics on arrests generally gained acceptance earlier than those based on

⁶ Great Britain, *Judicial Statistics, England and Wales*, 1893, Part I: *Criminal Statistics*, p. 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1923, p. 5.

⁸ For a good history and discussion of the problems of uniform crime reporting in the United States during the formative period, see U.S., Department of Justice, *Ten Years of Uniform Crime Reporting, 1930–1939: A Report by the Federal Bureau of Investigation* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939), esp. chap. v.

citizen complaints or reports of offenses known to the police. Arrests involve the legal authority system, while the status of a citizen complaint is moot. Eventually, however, realist perspectives prevailed, and the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR's) from the outset gathered information on all offenses reported or known to the police. Nonetheless, there is a strong disposition to count as offenses only those that are substantiated by police investigation—a process of “unfounding” citizen complaints. Published reports of UCR count only the number of “actual offenses” that survive police “unfounding” procedures.

To a considerable degree, precisely what the institutional view regarded as the vices of police statistics, the realist one regarded as sources of virtue. This was the absence of any “institutional processing” of the data—the selecting, defining, and winnowing of records of events by legitimate organizations of the legal system in accordance with legally established evidentiary and evaluative criteria and procedures. The classical statement for American police statistics by Sellin sums up why police statistics of “offenses known” provide the “best index” of crime:

In general, it may be said that the value of a crime rate for index purposes is in inverse ratio to the procedural distance between the commission of the crime and the recording of it as a statistical unit. An index based on crimes reported to or known to the police is superior to others, and an index based on statistics of penal treatment, particularly prison statistics, is the poorest.⁹

Each remove from the crime, in terms of official procedures, leaves more of the actual crime taking place in a community submerged in the dark figure. Each procedural step, furthermore, is so selective that the “visible tip of the

iceberg of crime” looks progressively different from the huge submerged mass.

The classically realist view in the use of police statistics as an index of criminality attaches greatest emphasis to those police data which are least dependent on agency action. Arrests, which vary with the extent, skill, and discretion of police activity, thus are regarded as a less satisfactory basis for an index of criminality than complaints, reports, and directly observed (“police on-view”) “crimes.” The realist view, at the same time, held that even police statistics distort the “real crime problem.” An “index” of “crime,” therefore, was devised that would provide a measure of the “crime problem” least subject to effects of jurisdiction. The UCR annual report states the case:

Not all crimes come readily to the attention of the police; not all crimes are of sufficient importance to be significant in an index; and not all important crimes occur with enough regularity to be meaningful in an index.¹⁰

Among all offenses known to the police, those were selected for index purposes for which, in theory at least, the police function most nearly as passive recorders and nondiscretionary classifiers of events that take place. Index crimes are, in each case, offenses which largely come to the attention of the police by complaints from those victimized by the event. Violations which do not involve specific victims, or which largely or wholly come to be registered only as a result of police action, such as disorderly conduct, assaulting an officer, and receiving stolen property, are excluded from the measure. Of-

⁹ *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 4, p. 565.

¹⁰ U.S., Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States: Uniform Crime Reports* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1930—[annually]). The above quotation is taken from the annual report for 1964, p. 48.

fenses also deemed unsuitable for an index are those unlikely to be reported to the police either because they involve only persons disinclined toward police action, as is usually the case for gambling, prostitution, and other illegal services, or because the offenses are frequently too trivial to be "worth the bother" of reporting, such as petty larcenies and acts of malicious mischief. An additional criterion of the realist position was that the criminal act should be uniformly classifiable, independently of the varying local laws and practices. Miscegenation, until recently, afforded a clear example of an offense unsuitable for an index.

Realist views in the United States became predominant, first in criminological theory and then in practice, with the establishment in 1929 of the compilation of a national crime statistics series by the Federal Bureau of Investigation from voluntary reports by police agencies. The UCR index of crime that resulted from the application of these "realist" criteria consists of counts of offenses known to the police falling in seven predatory, common-law classifications: homicide, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny (\$50 and over), and automobile theft.

Although police statistics gained acceptance largely as a result of realists' efforts to achieve more comprehensive and less selective indexes than were provided by institutional data, the victory of police statistics had barely begun to be consolidated before some realists attacked these statistics on the same grounds. Police statistics were challenged as not reflecting "the real crime picture." The criticism, as had been the case with older dissatisfactions with court and prison statistics, concentrated on the "real crime" that *escaped* the police data rather than on *invalid* classification of events as crimes. Critics

pointed out that police statistics reflected only an unknown and selective portion of "all crime" and that they distorted in many ways the kinds of crime they did reflect. Interestingly, defenses of police statistics have come to rest increasingly on institutionalist arguments, rather than the realist ones to which they largely owe their acceptance. In rebutting criticisms of UCR, for example, Lejins writes:

The existence of serious offenses not reported in the police statistics should not be accorded exaggerated meaning in the sense of detracting from the significance of the criminal activity that *is* reflected in the *Reports*, since the latter do encompass the bulk of the conventional, serious behavior to which society chooses to react through its public law enforcement agencies.¹¹

It is beyond the scope of this essay to recapitulate the many criticisms and defenses that have been made of police statistics, generally, and the Crime Index, in particular.¹² It is important here, however, to formulate the thrust of these criticisms with respect to the misleading social implications that were seen in police statistics.

Because of the partial and selective nature of the police data, comparisons based on them of variations in "actual

¹¹ Lejins, *op. cit.*, p. 1010.

¹² For recent criticisms, see Daniel Glaser, "National Goals and Indicators for the Reduction of Crime and Delinquency," *Social Goals and Indicators for American Society*, Vol. I, *THE ANNALS*, Vol. 371 (May 1967), pp. 104-126; Stanton Wheeler, "Criminal Statistics: A Reformulation of the Problem," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, Vol. 58 (September 1967); Marvin E. Wolfgang, "Uniform Crime Reports: A Critical Appraisal," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, Vol. 111 (April 1963), pp. 708-738. For a defense, see Lejins, *op. cit.*, pp. 1011-1130. See also Albert D. Biderman, "Social Indicators and Goals," in Raymond A. Bauer (ed.), *Social Indicators* (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T. Press, 1966).

crime" over time, between places, and among components of the population, are all held to be grossly invalid. Furthermore, because of the fundamental subordination of police statistics to the particular normative perspectives and workings of this institution, it is contended, there are limitations and distortions inherent in the significance drawn from them for social policy.

Barely masked in these contentions regarding statistics have been more fundamental ideological cleavages.¹³ It is useful to make explicit that much of the argument over appropriate indexes of criminality tends to array on one side those who regard a person's social status as largely a product of his own vices and virtues, and on the other, those who interpret status, as well as vices and virtues, as largely a product of socially conferred advantages and disadvantages. With regard to measures for dealing with crime, the cleavages are, for example, between deterrence and social amelioration, or between punishment and therapy.

Ideological cleavage had clear expression in Sutherland's denunciation of the failure of conventional crime statistics to reflect "white-collar crime." In prevalence and in economic and social effects, Sutherland sought to show, law violations by a person of "the upper socioeconomic class in the course of his occupational activities" were more consequential than the typically lower-class crimes that comprised the index. Something of the same thrust was inherent in the innovation of self-reporting studies. The high proportions of middle-class persons who admit having committed serious delicts indicated both that the dark figure of crime must be of vast proportions and, at the very least, that "criminal" behavior was not nearly as exclusively a lower-class

property as suggested by arrest and juvenile delinquency statistics.¹⁴

Despite the great effort devoted to developing and operating a uniform reporting system, the use of the police data for interarea comparisons has also been subject to vigorous criticism on a variety of grounds. One form of criticism pointed to the many instances in which abrupt and vast increases of crime figures for cities occurred when police reforms curtailed the practice of "killing crime on the books." Police departments and political administrations controlling them, it is often alleged, frequently have too great a stake in the effects of their crime figures on their "image" to be trusted to report fully and honestly. Beyond these qualms regarding "statistical conflicts of interest," there was evidence that police departments with effective and centralized controls over the reporting by individual officers and divisions reflected more of "true crime" in their communities than did less tightly organized departments.¹⁵

In recent years, the strongest complaint against police statistics has suggested that much of the rapid and extreme reported increases in the extent of criminality are spurious, being but a surfacing of what has heretofore been

¹⁴ For a recent summary, see Harwin L. Voss, "Socioeconomic Status and Reported Delinquent Behavior," *Social Problems*, 13 (Winter 1966), pp. 314-324. See also Albert J. Reiss, Jr. and Albert Lewis Rhodes, "The Distribution of Juvenile Delinquency in the Social Class Structure," *American Sociological Review*, 26 (October 1961), pp. 720-732.

¹⁵ In U.S., President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*, hereinafter referred to as General Report (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), of the two recommendations concerning the measurement of crime, one was that each city adopt centralized procedures for handling crime reports from cities (pp. 27, 293).

¹³ Lejins, *op. cit.*, pp. 1029-1030.

in the dark figure. The most general argument takes the form that crime statistics are as much (and perhaps more) a product of modern urban social organization as are the so-called urban forms of criminal behavior.¹⁶ For example, it is suggested that the professionalization and bureaucratization of police forces with centralized command and control leads to improved record-keeping and greater use of formal, as opposed to informal, police procedures, with consequent increases in figures of offenses and arrests. And it is maintained that as larger proportions of the population become integrated into the dominant society and come to share its normative conceptions, more people mobilize the police to enforce middle-class norms regarding property, violence, and public deportment. At the same time, these public agencies become less disposed toward a tolerant view and informal processing of deviance.¹⁷

That improvements in law enforcement frequently have the effect of decreasing the dark figure, and consequently inflating statistics used to judge the magnitude of the crime problem, can be disconcerting for those planning innovational reforms. The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (hereinafter referred to as the National Crime Commission), for example, produced a table illustrating reporting-system changes in a dozen major cities that resulted in Crime Index increases of from 27 per cent to more than 200 per cent over the immediately preceding report.¹⁸ The nation's two largest cities,

¹⁶ For a discussion, see Albert D. Biderman, "Social Indicators and Goals," in Bauer (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 124-125.

¹⁷ John Kitsuse and Aaron Cicourel, "A Note on the Use of Official Statistics," *Social Problems*, 11 (Fall 1963), pp. 131-139.

¹⁸ U.S., President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, General Report, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

it went on to say, in this way, "have several times produced large paper increases in crime."¹⁹ Current attempts at improving police-community relations conceivably could produce sharp "paper increases" in some classes of crime were they to result in a greater disposition of citizens to report offenses.²⁰

But no basis exists for forming proportionate estimates of what kinds of criminal behavior are reported to the police. Primarily with this problem in mind, the National Crime Commission undertook exploration of the use of cross-sectional survey methods.²¹ A central idea was that one could discover crimes not known to the police by screening random samples of the population to find the victims of these crimes.

SAMPLE SURVEYS AND THE DARK FIGURE

Given the growth of what is literally a vast citizen-interviewing industry in the United States, it perhaps is surprising that the sample survey had not hitherto been applied to systematic examination of the crime problem.²² Perhaps, the very availability of the captive populations in correctional institutions (if we include educational institutions as such), and of the neatly

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁰ Neil Rackham, "The Crime-Cut Campaign," *New Society*, 238 (April 1967), pp. 563-564.

²¹ Albert D. Biderman, "Surveys of Population Samples for Estimating Crime Incidence," in this issue of *THE ANNALS*, pp. 16-33. Subsequently, a similar survey was undertaken by the Government Social Survey of Great Britain. The results of this work were not available at the time of writing. (Personal communication from Louis Moss, Director, Great Britain Government Social Survey, July 18, 1967.)

²² A search of the Roper Public Opinion Research Center poll repository disclosed that, until 1964, public opinion surveys had given little attention to crime, except for polling sentiments regarding capital punishment and juvenile delinquency.

compiled agency statistics, diverted attention from such possibilities.

Neglect of the interview survey represents some discontinuity in the history of social research on crime, however. In the nineteenth century, a far more prominent place was accorded surveys of populations for knowledge. Henry Mayhew and Charles Booth, who often are credited with having set the path for the survey movement, were, for example, very conscious that the significance of crime for the poor of the city resided as much in their being its victims as in their being its contributors.²³ Booth's systematic survey sought to investigate "the numerical relation which poverty, misery, and depravity bear to the regular earnings and comparative comfort, and to describe the general conditions under which each class lives."²⁴

Although there has been an occasional specific suggestion of using "Gallup Poll" methods²⁵ as a specific check on official statistics, the current turning to the cross-sectional survey method probably has received greater impetus from recent comments that criminology has been neglecting the victim in its concentration on the criminal. These writings argue that attention in criminology has been misdirected by the usual tendency to regard the victim of crimes as a purely passive and accidental target of the criminal act. A science of "victimology" is proposed to explain social, psychological, and behavioral characteristics that predispose

some individuals to victimization, including factors considerably more subtle than such commonly recognized contributing acts as negligence and provocation by which some persons precipitate criminal acts toward themselves.²⁶

Attention to the victim has also been urged from a quite different evaluative standpoint. In prefacing the 1963 volume of *Crime in the United States: Uniform Crime Reports*, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation wrote:

Statistics herein are published in terms of the number of crimes reported and persons arrested. At the same time, they also represent a count of millions of victims. While some of these victims may have been "merely inconvenienced," the vast majority suffered property losses they could ill afford and many lost their physical or mental health while others lost their lives. Nevertheless, many impassioned and articulate pleas are being made today on behalf of the offender tending to ignore the victim and obscuring the right of a free society to equal protection under the law.²⁷

In the 123 pages of "general United States crime statistics" in the 1963 *Uniform Crime Reports*, however, the equivalent of only two pages provides any information on the victims of crime—and this only if we include categories of property as "victims." But two tables dealt with persons as victims: one on "Murder Victims [by age]—Weapons Used" and one on "Murder Victims by Age, Sex and Race."

In sponsoring cross-sectional interviewing surveys, the National Crime Commission hoped to be able to develop

²³ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: Cyclopedia of the Conditions and Earnings of Those That Will Not Work* (London: Charles Griffin, 1861); Charles Booth, *Labour and Life of the People* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1891).

²⁴ Booth, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 6.

²⁵ Inkera Anttila, "The Criminological Significance of Unregistered Criminality," *Excerpta Criminologica*, Vol. 4 (1964), pp. 411-414.

²⁶ See selected bibliography in B. Mendelsohn, "The Origin of the Doctrine of Victimology," *Excerpta Criminologica*, Vol. 3 (May-June, 1963).

²⁷ U.S., Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States: Uniform Crime Reports, op. cit.*, 1963, p. vii.

data on the characteristics of victims that would go considerably beyond the scant information available from police sources. Since the same surveys were directed toward developing data on citizens' behavior and attitudes toward the crime problem and toward law enforcement, it would also be possible to relate such attitudes to actual experience with crime as contrasted with secondary influences such as the mass media.

HOW MUCH CRIME IS THERE?

It should be apparent that the answer to the question of how much crime there is depends to a great extent upon whether one phrases the question from an institutionalist or a realist position. The choice of indicators and their labels, to a great extent, bears marks of these positions. The hallmarks of the realists are the prevalence of criminals and their acts of crime; more recently, of victims. The hallmarks of the institutionalists are the prevalence of only such of these as survive institutional validation.

But there are no rates without some organized intelligence system, whether that of the scientist, the police, or the jurist. The sample survey, the citizen's mobilization of the police, and the pre-trial and trial proceedings are all organized intelligence systems that process events and people to determine their crime status. The criteria of knowing, defining, and processing lie in organization.

Given the diversity of sources and types of information on crimes, the procedures that one develops for determining whether an event has occurred and who was involved in it must vary. It is doubtful, therefore, whether, logically, any currently organized way of knowing makes possible the computation of a measure of crime that can serve equally all purposes and perspectives.

Kitsuse and Cicourel state the pur-

poses and perspectives of a sociologist institutionalist:

Indeed in modern societies where bureaucratically organized agencies are increasingly invested with social control functions, the activities of such agencies are centrally important sources and contexts which generate as well as maintain definitions of deviance which produce populations of deviants. Thus, rates of deviance constructed by the use of statistics routinely issued by these agencies are social facts *par excellence*.²⁸

This quotation discriminates the use of agency data from the perspective of the institutional processing of observations from that of the realist. Realists use agencies as a tool for observations of realities external to them.

The ideal mechanism for a realist would be a universal surveillance of time and space by recording mechanisms completely sensitive to all pertinent phenomena. Yet any organization confronts technical limitations to observation. Inherent in any observational system are errors from sampling probability, faulty observation and measurement, imperfections in operational translation of observational categories, and impedance to flow and feedback in communication.

Organizations such as the police have their own surveillance purposes. For processors inside the organization, an ideal surveillance mechanism is not an alien concept. However, action and observational mechanisms are inextricably linked one to the other.

From a realist point of view, this linkage makes the organization serve observational purposes poorly. For example, operational organizations such as the police or courts choose not to observe more than they can process with given resources, and they selectively screen observations to fit organizational goals, strategy, and tactics. Further-

²⁸ Kitsuse and Cicourel, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

more, organizations suffer from their own form of deviance, the subversion of organizational goals by their members. Three strategies are open to realists in overcoming these organizational barriers to information. First, they can insulate the surveillance apparatus from operations, as, for example, through the creation of central communications, intelligence, and records divisions.²⁹ Second, they can undertake independent surveillance of the operating system, by monitoring through outside observers either the operations or records of the organization.³⁰ Third, they can develop surveillance completely independent of the organization. The sample survey of the public is one of a variety of such devices.³¹ A separate intelligence organization is another.

The deviance of members of the system from system norms, with respect to reporting as well as technical limitations to observation that are errors from a realist point of view, negates the social-choice interpretations of organizational data made by institutionalists. From a radical institutionalist point of view, these errors are treated, in part, as irrelevant, in that the differential sensitivity of surveillance reflects, to a substantial degree, social choices of what

it is important to observe. Nonetheless, technical limitations as well as social choice reflect what is responded to. Indeed, realism itself is a system norm for members of organizations.

From the standpoint of a scientific criminology, a defect of the institutionalist point of view is that it uses concepts and data derived exclusively from those employed by formal organizations of the law-enforcement and legal systems. There is more to social life than its formally organized aspects. For scientific purposes, independently organized observations employing appropriate concepts and tools of measurement are necessary.

Thus, attacking the institutionalist point of view, Glaser points out that:

Variation in the public definition of most predatory crimes is not appreciable, especially outside of so-called "white-collar crimes." The categories of predatory crimes most commonly distinguished in the law—for example, murder, robbery, burglary, theft, fraud, and rape—have almost everywhere and always been employed to denote essentially the same types of behavior as criminal. In almost all societies, they comprise the majority of acts for which severe negative sanctions are imposed.³²

But, clearly, a large proportion of these "crimes" are "processed," if at all, only by informal mechanisms. "The criminal offense" itself is an important social transaction, quite apart from social transactions that ensue thereafter. It should be evident that police data, whether on offenses or arrests, exaggerate the incidence of those kinds of offenses for which an identifiable person is suspect, in that these are more likely to be reported to the police and processed by the department through investigation.

The neglect of victims in processing

²⁹ For a discussion of this strategy by police chiefs, see David J. Bordua and Albert J. Reiss, Jr., "Command, Control, and Charisma: Reflections on Police Bureaucracy," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 72 (July 1966), pp. 68-76.

³⁰ For an organized observational study of the police, see Donald J. Black and Albert J. Reiss, Jr., "Patterns of Behavior in Police and Citizen Transactions," in Albert J. Reiss (ed.), *Studies in Crime and Law Enforcement in Major Metropolitan Areas*, U.S. President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice Field Survey III (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967).

³¹ See Albert D. Biderman, "Surveys of Population Samples for Estimating Crime Incidence," in this issue of *THE ANNALS*, pp. 16-33.

³² Glaser, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

by law-enforcement, legal, and correctional agencies is another case in point. Offense rates, today, are based on data from the police; victim rates, on data from independently organized means.

OFFENSE RATES AND VICTIMIZATION RATES

Any simple incidence rate consists of but two elements, a population that is exposed to the occurrence of some event (the denominator) and a count of the events (the numerator). Both of these events are measured for a given point or period of time. An offense rate states the probability of occurrence of an offense for a given population while a victimization rate states the probability of being a victim of some offense.

There is no simple relationship between offense and victimization rates, however. Consider an event occurring that is to be defined as a crime or a criminal offense. A single social encounter may involve more than one offense leading to multiple indictments of an offender or offenders in the event. This is the case, for example, when one is charged with larceny of an auto and larceny from an auto or when one is charged with armed robbery and simple assault. A single encounter may involve one or more persons as victims or it may involve no persons as victims. An offense against public order or decency may be observed only by a police officer, while the robbery of patrons in an establishment may involve large numbers of victims. Similarly, the number of offenders may vary, and indeed there may be mutual victimization and offending, as is the case in assaults that give rise to cross-complaints. Furthermore, for a given period of time over which the rate is calculated, any person may be a victim of one or more crime events—one's house may be burglarized on several occasions, for instance.

Given the fact that a single event may produce multiple victimization and multiple offenses and that, over time, there is repeated victimization, it is difficult to calculate *a priori* the relationship between offense and victimization rates. For some types of crimes, the number of crime victims exceeds the number of offenses, particularly if one makes rather simple assumptions that "collective property" *ipso facto* defines "collective victimization." Thus, if one defines all members of a household as victims of a burglary, a single breaking and entering of a household involves all of its members as victims. Indeed, it may involve more than members of the household. A breaking and entering, for example, that does damage to property, may involve a landlord as victim of a breaking and tenants as victims of burglary. On the other hand, repeated victimization of a person by offenses over time and multiple offenses against a victim in a single event lead to conditions where the number of offenses exceeds the number of victims. While, in the aggregate of all crime events, it would appear that the victimization rate should be higher than the offense rate, assuming that the number of crime victims exceeds the number of offenses, it is by no means clear what the magnitude of the difference is. Indeed, much depends upon how one counts the offenses and victims in a situation and upon the time interval over which one is calculating the event. The problem may not be unlike that for morbidity, where, in a relatively short time interval, the number of visits to a physician exceeds the number of persons who are ill.

SALIENCE OF EVENTS AND THEIR RECALL

Applying the sample-survey method to the realist's objective of illuminating

the dark figure of crime assumes that events are salient to persons as real experiences and that what appear to be socially salient events, such as crimes, will be readily recalled and recounted. The organized processes of the mind are regarded as providing more valid and reliable information than the organized processes of organizations, the armament of the institutionalists.

Yet, recent research on recall of events assumed to be salient and significant to persons clearly indicates that, even in the very short time interval, there is selective recall of events. There is a significant amount of underreporting noted in studies of hospitalization and visits to doctors, for example.³³ These studies and others where the sample survey is used to recall events that organizations record as having taken place lead to several generalizations. First, underreporting increases with

³³A study of visits to doctors for the National Health Survey showed that 30 per cent of the known visits to doctors during a two-week period prior to the week of interviewing were *not* reported in response to a standard National Health Survey question; 23 per cent remained unreported after three special probe questions had been asked. The study also shows that underreporting was greater for less recent visits, that women reported better than men, and that persons with more serious health conditions and more visits during the two-week period were more likely to report. See Charles F. Cannell and Floyd J. Fowler, "A Study of the Reporting of Visits to Doctors in the National Health Survey," Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, October 1963, p. 8.

The study of hospitalization of persons showed that hospitalized persons in the sample underreported for themselves by 7 per cent, while the rate for both proxy adults and children was twice as high. The underreporting rate was lowest for women reporting the birth of a child, being but 2 per cent. See U.S., National Center for Health Statistics, *Comparison of Hospitalization Reporting in the Health Interview Survey*, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Series 2, No. 6 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 1965), p. 8.

length of time between the event and the interview. Second, the degree of social threat or embarrassment is negatively related to rate of reporting. Third, the greater the involvement in institutional processing, the more likely it is to be recalled. Episodes that involve surgical treatment and long stays are more likely to be recalled, for example.³⁴ Fourth, respondents report their own experiences better than those of others. Fifth, the more events to which one has been subject, the more likely one is to report a known event.

Perhaps the crucial matter is that underreporting is selective among classes of persons and events, and by time. For analysis, then, the problem of separating truth from differences in reporting rates is confronted precisely as in any other organizationally processed data. Survey interviewing, in fact, has become an institutionalized device, with its own meanings for the population. Consequently, rates of mentions of events can be subject to institutional interpretation. One such interpretation might be the salience of a type of experience to different classes of respondents.

The study of crime events makes apparent each of these conditions affecting recall. Indeed, it is likely that institutional processing of an event is an important factor in recall; yet it clearly is not a sufficient condition, as events where institutional processing occurs—calling the police, for example—prove to be insufficient conditions for recall. What does seem obvious is that, provided individuals can be brought to report events to organizations, organi-

³⁴U.S., National Center for Health Statistics, *Comparison of Hospitalization Reporting in Three Survey Procedures*, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Series 2, No. 8 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 1965), p. 7

zational intelligence is superior to recall. The weight of the argument, in that sense, lies with the institutionalists.

COMPARABILITY OF POLICE AND SURVEY STATISTICS

Many of the limitations of police statistics, for which the survey has been claimed as a corrective, are not inherent in the theoretical capabilities of law enforcement as a system. Indeed, police agencies today collect far more information than they process statistically or publish. They collect, but rarely publish, information, for example, on victims, multiple offenders and offenses, suspects, the nature of criminal transactions, and the time and place of their occurrence. It is primarily the failure to process information, rather than inherent limitations in collection, that renders comparison between survey and police data difficult.

The survey is generally designed to gain data on victimization, while the police report data on complaints and observed violations, reporting them as offenses known to the police. Even when one sets the denominator in an incidence rate—the exposed population—common to both, it is no simple matter to render the two sets comparable.

To gain some comparability of victimization rates with police offense rates, it is necessary to adjust survey data for victimization occurring outside the jurisdiction sampled (a trivial problem for a national sample); victimization of more than one person in given incidents; and "false" or "baseless" reports. Furthermore, if one is interested in comparing survey estimates of offenses with police estimates of them, the survey estimates should take account of whether or not the respondent reported the event to the police.

At the same time, police data must

be rendered comparable with that from survey sources. Since police data are collected by place of occurrence rather than by place of residence of the victim, for less than national units, they must be adjusted for place of residence. Furthermore, police data include offenses against businesses and other organizations; household samples may not. Finally, if only the adult population is sampled and there is no reporting for others in the household, offenses involving persons not included in the sample must be eliminated.

The fact that the two series are not altogether comparable should make clear that institutionalist and realist perspectives are built into the data for reasons that derive from these very perspectives. Consider the fact that police statistics are for offenses by place of occurrence of the event. It should be obvious that a law-enforcement system based on a strategy and tactics of deployment of technology and manpower is interested in the location of events—events that dictate proactive and reactive strategies. Such an interest is not incompatible with exploration of the dark figure *per se*, but it is incompatible with the realist ideology of how much crime there is.

VALIDITY OF SURVEY DATA ON CRIME

The crux of the traditional realist-versus-institutionalist controversy involves questions of validity rather than reliability. The cross-section sample survey may represent an extreme pole in the movement from "institutionalist" to "realist" approaches to crime statistics, in its complete dependence on the unsupported verbal testimony of a non-official character.

This logical possibility should not obscure the fact that formal organizational processing systems similarly rely primarily on unsupported oral testi-

mony—the complaints of citizens or officers as witnesses, without other evidence. Indeed, most adjudicatory processes, such as the pretrial hearing or the decision to prosecute, rely heavily on unsupported testimony. Nonetheless, these formal systems, unlike the survey, rest on both the potential of investigation and formal sanctions to reduce fabrication. Technically, the survey might employ many of the same techniques available to the police; but these are alien to its basic premises, and the survey organization lacks formal sanctions.

The survey method, rather, tries to exploit the advantage that no material consequences ensue from testimony. The guarantee of anonymity, the relative absence of sanctions for providing information, and the general absence of consequences in giving information avoid some conditions that give rise to nonreporting to the police and other formal agencies. Such an advantage is of no little consequence in exploring the dark figure of crime.

In exploring the dark figure of crime, the survey generally has several other advantages over other organizationally processed statistics. First, it provides a form of organization that can transcend local practices by providing uniform operational definitions. Second, the survey taps the definitions of victims, independent of organizational processing, and it can compare these with those of formal processing organizations. Third, the survey can identify and compare what is institutionally labeled as crime with that consensually labeled as crime.

Although the data cannot be adduced here, problems of evidence rather than of inference probably predominate statistically in exploring the dark figure. Determining the objective character of events seems more problematic than in-

ferring the motivation and competence that make acts *legally* criminal.

CONCLUSION

Statistical criminology, from its outset, has searched for the key moral statistic, a measure of the “criminality” present among a population. Both “institutionalists” and “realists” have pursued this search. The foregoing discussion has not made explicit our key premise, that is, the question of whether this search has been a scientific one. If pragmatic objectives of criminal statistics are posed, there are no data *par excellence*, nor is there a theory *par excellence*.

Although a neat polar distinction has been employed that pits institutionalist against realist perspective, in practice, neither camp has been comfortable in, and hence rarely consistent with, its position. The neglect of the role of organization in the production of knowledge has led both camps astray. On the one hand, the realists neglect the shaping of objective reality by whatever the organizational mode of registering knowledge. On the other, the institutionalists confuse the observational efficacy of organizations with their normative functioning. Realist objectives are best served by special organizational structures for observing and recording events. Institutional goals would be best served by special organizational structures for developing and scientific processing of operational organizational activity. Concepts and operational definitions will differ depending upon formally organized or informal social processes, whether those of science, of operations, or of social policy are the primary objective.

In exploring the dark figure of crime, the primary question is not how much of it becomes revealed but rather what will be the selective properties of any

particular innovation for its illumination. As in many other problems of scientific observation, the use of approaches and apparatuses with different properties of error has been a means of approaching truer approximations of phenomena that are difficult to measure.

Any set of crime statistics, including those of the survey, involves some

evaluative, institutional processing of people's reports. Concepts, definitions, quantitative models, and theories must be adjusted to the fact that the data are not some objectively observable universe of "criminal acts," but rather those events defined, captured, and processed as such by some institutional mechanism.