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CHRONIC OFFENDERS: THE MISSING CASES IN SELF-REPORT DELINQUENCY RESEARCH*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the late 1950's and early 1960's, the number of studies of delinquency relying on official statistics or incarcerated samples declined while the number of self-report surveys using community or school samples rose.¹ The major reason for this transformation was the recognition that samples of official delinquents are inherently biased, while self-report surveys of the general youth population are more representative and therefore more appropriate for the study of delinquent behavior. This development has been useful, but the research still is flawed. Although criminologists have developed increasingly superior self-report scales and have implemented rather sophisticated sampling designs,² the reliance on general youth sam-

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¹ See, e.g., Short & Nye, *Extent of Unrecorded Juvenile Delinquency: Tentative Conclusions*, 49 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 296 (1958); Short & Nye, *Reported Behavior as a Criterion of Deviant Behavior*, 5 SOC. PROB. 207 (1957).

² See, e.g., R. O'BRIEN, CRIME AND VICTIMIZATION DATA (1985); M. HINDELANG, T. HIRSCHI & J. WEIS, MEASURING DELINQUENCY (1981); Elliott & Ageton, *Reconciling Race and Class Differences in Self-Reported and Official Estimates of Delinquency*, 45 AM. SOC. REV. 95

ples has resulted in a serious under-representation in these studies of what we term serious chronic offenders. Serious chronic offenders are those youth involved in serious and repeated violations of the law who are most visible to the police and courts and who are feared most by the community itself.³

In order to gauge the upper limits of delinquent behavior found in our general youth sample, we used an institutional sample as a comparison group. Our data challenge the underlying assumption of much self-report research that there is no behavioral difference between institutionalized offenders and those delinquents who manage to avoid contact with the official system. The data lead us to conclude that institutionalized youth are not only more delinquent than the "average kid" in the general youth population, but also considerably more delinquent than the *most delinquent* youth identified in the typical self-report survey. We contend that incarcerated youth are institutionalized not merely because they are victims of system bias and differential processing (although these factors certainly are involved to some unknown extent), but primarily because they persist in committing serious offenses.

Arguably, any comparisons between institutionalized and noninstitutionalized offenders are inappropriate because they involve comparing "apples and oranges." Yet, previous self-report research based upon samples of apples (the general youth population) has been used to generalize to the population of oranges (chronic offenders). We assert that the validity of such generalizations is questionable because of the omission or under-representation of chronic offenders in general youth samples. The result is a serious gap between delinquency as it is defined for research purposes, and delinquency as it is officially encountered. Before addressing this pivotal issue, however, this Article considers several important conceptual matters that impact on the definition of chronic offender.

II. BACKGROUND

Assume there is a relatively small but identifiable group of chronic offenders who account for the vast majority of serious delin-

(1980); Hindelang, Hirschi & Weis, *Correlates of Delinquency: The Illusion of Discrepancy Between Self-Report and Official Measures*, 44 AM. SOC. REV. 995 (1979); Hindelang, *Race and Involvement in Common Law Personal Crimes*, 43 AM. SOC. REV. 93 (1978); Tittle, Villemez & Smith, *The Myth of Social Class and Criminality: An Empirical Assessment of the Empirical Evidence*, 43 AM. SOC. REV. 643 (1978).

³ Hereinafter we will use the term "chronic offender" to denote "serious chronic offender."

quent acts.⁴ An important question emerging out of this assumption is the kind of sample which should be drawn to study delinquency. The alternatives are (1) a sample that is representative of the general youth population, which allows an examination of the epidemiology of delinquency and of the typical delinquent, or (2) one that concentrates on, or at least includes sufficient numbers of chronic offenders, those atypical delinquents about whom the community and justice system is most concerned. Both objectives appear worthwhile and certainly are not mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, self-report researchers generally have opted for the first kind of sample, excluding chronic offenders.

Elliott and Ageton note that "the youth population represented in official statistics is not a representative sample of all youth."⁵ They suggest that official statistics constitute a more "restrictive" sample and that self-report studies are "capturing a broader range of persons and levels of involvement in delinquent behavior than are official arrest statistics."⁶ While these assertions are true for typical, low frequency minor offenders, we contend they are inaccurate in regard to chronic offenders. Even quite sophisticated samples of the general youth population do not locate meaningful numbers of chronic offenders and thus do not provide reliable estimates of the prevalence and incidence of their behavior. This is because their number is relatively small, they are less likely to be in school, they are difficult to locate via standard survey research techniques, and they are less likely to cooperate once they are located.

Still, general youth samples are essential for a variety of reasons, including gauging the prevalence and incidence of delinquency among adolescents and determining whether specific delinquent behaviors are increasing. In this sense, the emphasis on the "typical delinquent" is not misplaced. But delinquency researchers also should be interested in the extreme case—the chronic offender. Although this has become increasingly apparent among criminologists, it typically has been assumed that since general youth samples represent such a broad range of youth, chronic offenders *must*, as a function of good sampling, be included as well. We contend that these offenders will not be included in very large numbers, if at all, as an automatic function of sound sampling techniques. While it may appear—*relative to others in such samples*—that such a group has been located, we believe this is rarely the case.

⁴ See M. WOLFGANG, R. FIGLIO & T. SELLIN, *DELINQUENCY IN A BIRTH COHORT* (1972). See also L. EMPEY, *AMERICAN DELINQUENCY* 111-22 (Rev. Ed., 1982).

⁵ Elliott & Ageton, *supra* note 2, at 107.

⁶ *Id.*

In addition to sampling problems, a number of characteristics of self-report delinquency (SRD) scales mitigate against measuring adequately the behavior of those small numbers of chronic offenders who are included in general youth samples. Five problems have contributed to inaccurate measurement: lack of item representativeness, item overlap, non-actionable items, non-specifiable items, and response format and coding conventions.

A major criticism of SRD instruments concerns the representativeness of the items that comprise the measures. Most self-report inventories over-represent relatively nonserious and trivial offenses, while under-representing truly serious infractions. This problem continues despite experts' recognition that it exists. The self-report method was devised to study delinquency in populations where lack of variation in *serious* delinquency renders official measures inadequate. Therefore, to produce meaningful variation in delinquency in such samples, researchers have used scales that measure frequently committed, relatively nonserious, and usually officially ignored behaviors.⁷ Current self-report scales now frequently measure a number of serious as well as nonserious offenses, but even these are skewed toward the nonserious end of the continuum.⁸

Item representativity is only one of several important criteria for evaluating SRD measures. The items that comprise these scales also should be non-overlapping, actionable, and specifiable.⁹ Overlapping items result in inaccurate estimates of offense frequencies because of duplicate counts of certain events.¹⁰ Furthermore, since overlapping items lead to inflated delinquency scores, they may also result in the false identification of some youth as chronic offenders.

Actionable items specify behaviors that ordinarily would warrant official action. Perhaps survey measures of delinquency must include a high proportion of minor offenses, but it is problematic

⁷ See G. NETTLER, *EXPLAINING CRIME* (1974); Elliott & Ageton, *supra* note 2, at 96-7; Farrington, *Self-Reports of Deviant Behavior: Predictive and Stable?* 64 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 99 (1973); Hindelang, Hirschi & Weis (1979), *supra* note 2, at 996-98.

⁸ See, e.g., Cernkovich & Giordano, *A Comparative Analysis of Male and Female Delinquency*, 20 Soc. Q. 131 (1979); Hindelang, Hirschi & Weis (1981), *supra* note 2; Hindelang, Hirschi & Weis (1979), *supra* note 2, at 996-97; D. Elliott & D. Huizinga, *The Relationship Between Delinquent Behavior and ADM Problems*, National Youth Survey, Project Report No. 28 (1984).

⁹ Hindelang, Hirschi & Weis (1981), *supra* note 2, at 45-47, 88-92.

¹⁰ Elliott & Ageton, *supra* note 2, at 97. Some SRD scales (see, e.g., Elliott and Ageton, *supra* note 2) include all four of the following items: attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting or killing him; hit or threatened to hit someone; involved in a gang fight; and thrown objects at cars or people. Participation in a single gang fight logically could entail positive responses to all of the items which ask about attacking people, hitting people, or throwing objects at them.

when an overabundance of items reflect events that typically would not call for an official response from recognized authorities. This concentration on minor offenses ignores major forms of delinquency, and fails to differentiate chronic offenders from more conventional delinquents.

Specifiable items indicate behaviors in sufficient detail for classification as status offenses, misdemeanors, or felonies. For example, many SRD inventories ask respondents if they have "stolen money or other things from your parents or other members of your family."¹¹ Aside from overlapping with other standard items inquiring about stealing, this item fails to provide information sufficient to distinguish between petit theft and grand theft; as a result, the distinction between minor and major offenses, and between minor and major offenders is again blurred.

A final characteristic of SRD scales which has caused measurement difficulties is the response formats typically used. Such frequently used normative formats as "often—sometimes—occasionally—never" are subject to a wide range of interpretation by subjects, and are imprecise. Similarly, such formats as the popular "never—once or twice—three times or more" are inexact and fail to measure adequately variation at the high frequency end of the delinquency continuum. By placing all high frequency offenders in the "three times or more" category, researchers cannot make meaningful distinctions between chronic offenders and other norm violating youth, or among chronic offenders themselves.¹²

Underlying these methodological and conceptual issues are the distinctions between high and low consensus deviance, and serious and routine delinquency. While some acts almost universally are thought to be harmful and threatening, there are other behaviors which are more typical and less serious and about which there is greater disagreement as to their deviant status.¹³ It is this latter category which has become the focus of self-report delinquency research. This has important implications because the causal processes that lead to routine deviance and those that result in more serious delinquent involvement may be quite similar, or they may be very different. To the extent that general youth samples have omit-

¹¹ Elliott & Ageton, *supra* note 2.

¹² *Id.* at 97.

¹³ A. THIO, *DEVIAN'T BEHAVIOR* (2d. ed., 1983). "High consensus deviance" includes such offenses as robbery, rape, and assault. "Low consensus deviance" refers to acts in which harm is not always immediately apparent and which are relatively nonthreatening; examples include curfew violations, truancy, underage consumption of alcohol, and sexual promiscuity.

ted or under-represented chronic offenders, this important question has gone untested empirically.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

The two data sources for this study are: (1) a sample of all youth twelve through nineteen years of age living in private households in a large North Central Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area;¹⁴ and (2) a sample of the populations of three male juvenile institutions within the same state, and the entire population of the only female juvenile institution in the state. In order to obtain a cross-section of neighborhood youth between twelve and nineteen years of age geographically dispersed throughout the metropolitan area, we used a multistage modified probability sample design in which geographically defined area segments were selected with known probability. We stratified the segments, using the most up-to-date census data available (1980), on the basis of racial composition and average housing value.¹⁵

We successfully completed 942 neighborhood interviews.¹⁶ Of these, 51% were with adolescent females, 49% with males; 45% of the respondents were white with the remaining non-whites being predominantly black (50% of the total neighborhood sample). The respondents ranged in age from twelve through nineteen: 21% were either twelve or thirteen, 32% fourteen or fifteen, 32% sixteen or seventeen, and 15% eighteen or nineteen years of age.

The institutional portion of the data was derived from 254 personal interviews.¹⁷ Sixty-five percent of the institutionalized respondents were white; the remaining non-whites were predominantly black (32% of the total institutional sample). Only 2% of the incarcerated youth were twelve or their teen years of age, 24% fourteen or fifteen, 51% sixteen or seventeen, and 23% eighteen or nineteen

¹⁴ The sample design for the neighborhood portion of the study was a 2x2x2 factorial, with personal interviews equally divided among males and females, blacks and whites, and lower and middle class respondents.

¹⁵ Within the segments, we selected households and eligible respondents for interviews to fill specified sex and race quotas; no specific age quotas were allocated, although we tracked the ages of respondents as the interviews were conducted to ensure adequate representation of teens of all ages.

¹⁶ The neighborhood survey was managed by National Analysts, Inc.. Interviews were conducted from late April through late June of 1982. The National Analysts' staff validated 54% of these interviews to ensure that the interviewers followed proper protocol.

¹⁷ During the summer of 1982, we interviewed the total population (127) of the state's only institution for delinquent females, and the same number of males from three of the state's institutions for delinquent males.

years of age.¹⁸

Our SRD scale was based on items selected from the Elliott and Ageton inventory and chosen so that they would be non-overlapping, actionable, reasonably specifiable, and representative of the full range of delinquent involvement.¹⁹ We included twenty seven offense items in the SRD scale. Subjects indicated how many times during the past year they had committed each act.²⁰

IV. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Our analysis begins with the construction of an offender index based on the qualitative distinction between major and minor offenses.²¹ Minor offenses are behaviors that legally are no more serious than a misdemeanor, while major offenses are behaviors that ordinarily would be treated as felonies. Due to obvious behavioral differences between the neighborhood and institutional youth revealed in our preliminary analysis, we employed only the neighborhood sample in the construction of the offender index. The institutional offenders will be reintroduced into the analysis after construction of the index.

We divided each of the frequency distributions for minor and major offenses into three categories (none, low frequency, and high frequency) in Table 1. We consider the 81 juveniles who reported no major offenses and no minor offenses to be *nonoffenders*. Those 333 juveniles who reported no major offenses and a low rate of minor offenses are *low frequency minor offenders*. The next level of more serious delinquent involvement includes the 222 juveniles who re-

¹⁸ The interviewers obtained informed consent and written permission prior to the beginning of every interview. Consent was obtained from both the respondent and the parent/guardian for the neighborhood youth. The institutionalized youth were wards of the state, therefore, permission from the state Department of Youth Services was the equivalent of parental permission; consent from the youth, of course, also was required.

¹⁹ Elliott & Ageton, *supra* note 2.

²⁰ The coding scheme for self-reported participation in each act was as follows: never = 0, once or twice a year = 2, once every 2-3 months = 5, once a month = 12, once every 2-3 weeks = 22, once a week = 52, and 2-3 times a week or more = 130. We derived these numerical codes by extrapolating the implied frequency over the period of one year.

²¹ Twenty-one of the twenty-seven SRD items were used to construct major and minor offense subscales. The composition of the two scales is as follows:

MAJOR: motor vehicle theft, grand theft, aggravated assault, selling hard drugs, rape, robbery, and breaking and entering (gang fighting has not been included in this subscale because of the likely overlap with and duplication of the aggravated assault item).

MINOR: throwing objects at cars or people, running away, lying about age, petit theft, prostitution, sexual intercourse, cheating on tests, simple assault, disorderly conduct, public drunkenness, theft \$5-\$50, truancy, drug use, and alcohol use.

TABLE 1
CROSS-CLASSIFICATION OF NEIGHBORHOOD YOUTH ON
MAJOR AND MINOR OFFENSE SUBSCALES

<u>MAJOR OFFENSES</u>	MINOR OFFENSES			TOTALS
	NONE	LOW FREQUENCY*	HIGH FREQUENCY*	
None	81	333	222	636
Low Frequency**	0	80	98	178
High Frequency**	0	18	110	128
Totals	81	431	430	942

NOTES: * Low frequency = 1-47 minor offenses; High frequency = 48 or more minor offenses. This is the median cutoff for those reporting any minor offense involvement in the neighborhood sample. Those reporting no minor offenses were excluded from the calculation of the median.

** Low frequency = 1-4 major offenses; High frequency = 5 or more major offenses. This is the median cutoff for those reporting any major offense involvement in the neighborhood sample. Those reporting no major offenses were excluded from the calculation of the median.

ported no major offenses and a high rate of minor offenses: *high frequency minor offenders*. Of the 306 adolescents reporting any major offense involvement, the vast majority (68%) also reported a high rate of involvement in minor offenses. Our assumption that seriousness of offense is more salient than frequency of offense permits a functional reduction of the table by collapsing the three columns (none, low frequency minor, and high frequency minor) for rows two and three (low frequency major and high frequency major) so that the 178 cases become *low frequency major offenders*, and the 128 cases become *high frequency major (i.e., chronic) offenders*.

The data in Table 1 lead to several important conclusions. First, there are a significant number of youth reporting virtually no delinquency involvement.²² This finding is consistent with other surveys,²³ and contradicts the common assumption of sociologists and criminologists that delinquency is universal. Second, there are a substantial number of youth with high rates of minor offense involvement who refrain, however, from participation in serious delinquent activities. This suggests that there is an important empirical

²² Even though non-delinquents constitute only 8.6% of the neighborhood sample, we believe that the existence of such a distinctive group is significant.

²³ See, e.g., Hindelang, Hirschi & Weis (1981), *supra* note 2, at 218; O'Brien, *supra* note 2.

difference between youth who commit major offenses and those who commit only minor offenses—even if the latter are involved in many minor violations. Third, the vast majority of high frequency major offenders also report high rates of participation in minor offenses. While there are only 128 of these youth (representing less than 14% of the neighborhood sample), they account for almost 95% of all the major offenses reported by the noninstitutionalized respondents.

In the next stage of the analysis, we examine the extent to which our offender groups prompted official reactions to their misbehavior. We are especially interested in whether those youth identified as high frequency major offenders in the neighborhood sample are the youth who come to the attention of local authorities more frequently than others. To investigate this question we constructed three societal reaction indices, two official and one informal. The informal reaction index was created by asking the respondents whether they had been grounded by their parents during the past year. The first official contact index probed sanctioning by school authorities, and asked respondents if they had been sent to their principal's office for disciplinary action, or had been suspended or expelled from school in the past year. The second official index was based on responses to questions which asked whether subjects had been apprehended by the police, appeared in juvenile court, or had been placed on probation or institutionalized in the past year.

The data presented in Table 2 indicate uniformly linear increases across the five offender groupings for each of the sanction categories. Especially interesting are the differences between the high frequency major and high frequency minor offenders, where the ratios are at least 2:1 for most of the sanction categories. This is consistent with our assumption that seriousness of offense is more important than frequency in eliciting societal reactions to delinquent behavior.

High frequency major offenders report the greatest contact with official control agencies, therefore this group should contain the most likely candidates for institutionalization. To the extent that the sanctioning process acts accordingly, we would expect the majority of institutionalized youth to be high frequency major offenders. The data in Table 3 address this issue and are based on the theory of *known group validity*: groups known to differ in official delinquency status should also differ in the same ways on self-report measures. A good self-report index should be able to identify as delinquent, for example, all individuals who currently are confined

TABLE 2
PERCENTAGE OF NEIGHBORHOOD YOUTH REPORTING PARENTAL, SCHOOL, AND OFFICIAL SANCTIONS

	NON-OFFENDERS (n=81)	LOW FREQUENCY MINOR OFFENDERS (n=333)	HIGH FREQUENCY MINOR OFFENDERS (n=222)	LOW FREQUENCY MAJOR OFFENDERS (n=178)	HIGH FREQUENCY MAJOR OFFENDERS (n=128)
<u>PARENTAL SANCTIONS</u>					
Grounded by parents	43.2	45.9	50.9	56.2	56.3
<u>SCHOOL SANCTIONS</u>					
Sent to principal's office	28.8	40.0	45.4	64.8	70.4
Suspended from school	16.3	17.6	25.2	34.1	37.6
Expelled from school	0.0	2.1	2.8	5.7	7.2
<u>OFFICIAL SANCTIONS</u>					
Picked up by police	0.0	3.3	7.2	8.4	17.2
Appeared in juvenile court	1.2	4.5	8.1	9.0	18.0
Placed on probation	0.0	1.8	2.7	5.6	10.2
Institutionalized	0.0	0.6	1.4	3.4	7.0

in state institutions.²⁴ In addition to suggesting strong known-group validity, these data are informative with respect to the kinds of behaviors which are prerequisites to institutionalization.

TABLE 3
KNOWN GROUP VALIDITY TEST FOR OFFENDER INDEX

<u>OFFENDER INDEX</u>	<u>OFFICIAL STATUS</u>	
	<u>Neighborhood</u>	<u>Institution</u>
Non-offender	8.6	0.0
Low frequency minor offender	35.4	2.4
High frequency minor offender	23.6	6.9
Low frequency major offender	18.9	10.6
High frequency major offender	13.6	80.0
TOTALS	(942)	(245)
Gamma = .88		

Low frequency minor offenders are the largest offender group in the neighborhood sample (35.4%), but comprise less than 3% of the institutional sample. Similarly, while high frequency minor offenders constitute almost 24% of the neighborhood sample, they make up less than 7% of the institutionalized sample. Furthermore, while only 13.6% of the neighborhood youth are high frequency major offenders, 80% of the institutionalized youth are. Finally, less than 11% of the institutional sample is comprised of low frequency major offenders. Thus, the surest route to institutionalization is to achieve a *high frequency* of committing *major* offenses. Minor offenses may be troublesome and may lead to official contacts, but they apparently are not sufficient provocation for institutionalization.

The data presented in Table 3 do not imply that the high frequency major offenders in our neighborhood survey are comparable to institutionalized youth. Indeed, the data presented in Tables 4 and 5 demonstrate there are major differences between the youth in the neighborhood sample and those who are institutionalized.

²⁴ Hindelang, Hirschi & Weis (1981), *supra* note 2, at 92-98.

TABLE 4
DELINQUENCY INVOLVEMENT OF MALE CHRONIC OFFENDERS BY OFFICIAL STATUS

DELINQUENT ACT	PERCENT REPORTING								N	Mean	SD	t-value
	Never (0)	Once or Twice a Year (2)	Once Every 2-3 Months (5)	Once a Month (12)	Once Every 2-3 Weeks (22)	Once a Week (52)	2-3 Times a Week or More (130)					
1. Vandalism	46.3	26.3	12.5	3.8	1.3	6.3	3.8	80	10.00	26.97	3.94#	
Neighborhood												
Institution	25.4	18.4	12.3	9.6	10.5	4.4	19.3	114	31.82	49.57		
2. Motor Vehicle Theft	80.0	16.3	2.5	—	—	—	1.3	80	2.08	14.52	3.08**	
Neighborhood												
Institution	48.2	25.4	8.8	6.1	—	4.4	7.0	114	13.09	33.99		
3. Grand Theft	68.8	13.8	6.3	3.8	3.8	—	3.8	80	6.74	24.94	6.42#	
Neighborhood												
Institution	8.8	21.9	15.8	10.5	8.8	5.3	28.9	114	44.79	55.84		
4. Bought, sold, held stolen goods	46.3	23.8	8.8	7.5	5.0	1.3	7.5	80	13.31	34.31	4.64#	
Neighborhood												
Institution	11.4	16.7	13.2	14.9	11.4	6.1	26.3	114	42.69	53.82		
5. Thrown Objects	22.5	15.0	18.8	11.3	10.0	2.5	20.0	80	32.09	50.19	0.98	
Neighborhood												
Institution	28.1	14.0	10.5	10.5	5.3	6.1	25.4	114	39.49	54.55		
6. Ran Away	86.3	10.0	1.3	1.3	—	—	1.3	80	2.04	14.57	2.03*	
Neighborhood												
Institution	56.1	26.3	7.0	2.6	1.8	1.8	4.4	114	8.19	27.26		
7. Lied About Age	43.8	11.3	5.0	17.5	1.3	7.5	13.8	80	24.62	44.47	4.28#	
Neighborhood												
Institution	20.2	8.8	4.4	12.3	10.5	6.1	37.7	114	56.41	58.81		

(Continued)

TABLE 4 (CONT'D)
DELINQUENCY INVOLVEMENT OF MALE CHRONIC OFFENDERS BY OFFICIAL STATUS

DELINQUENT ACT	PERCENT REPORTING										N	Mean	SD	t-value
	Never (0)	Once or Twice a Year (2)	Once Every 2-3 Months (5)	Once a Month (12)	Once Every 2-3 Weeks (22)	Once a Week (52)	2-3 Times a Week or More (130)							
8. Concealed Weapon Neighborhood Institution	43.8	20.0	6.3	6.3	—	3.8	20.0	80	29.41	51.58	3.94#			
9. Petit Theft Neighborhood Institution	28.1	10.5	4.4	3.5	6.1	2.6	44.7	114	61.73	62.38				
10. Aggravated Assault Neighborhood Institution	57.5	13.8	11.3	7.5	2.5	3.8	3.8	80	9.11	26.21	5.33#			
11. Prostitution Neighborhood Institution	36.8	10.5	11.4	6.1	1.8	4.4	28.9	114	41.82	57.55				
12. Sexual Intercourse Neighborhood Institution	20.0	22.5	16.3	17.5	5.0	6.3	12.5	80	23.96	42.24	0.48			
13. Gang Fight Neighborhood Institution	36.0	19.3	8.8	6.1	7.9	6.1	15.8	114	27.02	46.62				
14. Sold Marijuana Neighborhood Institution	85.0	3.8	3.8	1.3	3.8	—	2.5	80	4.49	20.71	0.42			
	86.0	5.3	0.9	0.9	2.6	0.9	3.5	114	5.85	24.54				
	32.5	16.3	12.5	10.0	8.8	6.3	13.8	80	25.20	44.07	4.04#			
	31.6	3.5	5.3	7.0	7.0	8.8	36.8	114	55.18	59.12				
	46.3	26.3	8.8	5.0	3.8	2.6	7.5	80	13.44	34.61	3.31#			
	29.8	14.9	10.5	11.4	7.0	5.3	21.1	114	33.84	51.30				
	67.5	5.0	10.0	3.8	1.3	1.3	11.3	80	16.60	41.17	7.66#			
	16.7	11.4	3.5	8.8	1.8	5.3	52.6	114	73.00	61.35				

(Continued)

TABLE 4 (CONT'D)
DELINQUENCY INVOLVEMENT OF MALE CHRONIC OFFENDERS BY OFFICIAL STATUS

DELINQUENT ACT	PERCENT REPORTING							N	Mean	SD	t-value
	Never (0)	Once or Twice a Year (2)	Once Every 2-3 Months (5)	Once a Month (12)	Once Every 2-3 Weeks (22)	Once a Week (52)	2-3 Times a Week or More (130)				
15. Cheated on Tests Neighborhood Institution	22.5 33.3	20.0 9.0	12.5 6.3	15.0 10.8	6.3 5.4	8.8 8.1	15.0 27.0	80 111	28.25 42.33	45.33 55.37	1.93*
16. Simple Assault Neighborhood Institution	13.8 4.4	10.0 8.8	15.0 14.9	10.0 8.8	10.0 9.6	7.5 7.9	33.8 45.6	80 114	52.12 67.50	57.43 58.82	1.82
17. Disorderly Conduct Neighborhood Institution	22.5 12.3	16.3 14.9	10.0 8.8	12.5 9.6	7.5 8.8	11.3 10.5	20.0 35.1	80 114	35.82 54.91	49.89 57.33	2.47**
18. Sold Hard Drugs Neighborhood Institution	91.3 58.8	2.5 6.1	— 6.1	3.8 4.4	1.3 4.4	— 2.6	1.3 17.5	80 114	2.40 26.10	14.82 49.05	4.85#
19. Joy Ride Neighborhood Institution	81.3 37.7	7.5 22.8	2.5 12.3	6.3 5.3	— 5.3	1.3 4.4	1.3 12.3	80 114	3.30 21.11	15.72 42.44	4.10#
20. Rape Neighborhood Institution	77.5 90.4	7.5 3.5	6.3 2.6	1.3 1.8	1.3 —	— —	6.3 1.8	80 114	9.01 2.69	31.58 17.18	-1.63
21. Robbery Neighborhood Institution	50.0 41.2	21.3 19.3	12.5 14.9	6.3 7.0	1.3 6.1	3.8 1.8	5.0 9.6	80 114	10.52 16.78	29.42 38.13	1.29

(Continued)

TABLE 4 (CONT'D)
DELINQUENCY INVOLVEMENT OF MALE CHRONIC OFFENDERS BY OFFICIAL STATUS

DELINQUENT ACT	PERCENT REPORTING								N	Mean	SD	t-value
	Never (0)	Once or Twice a Year (2)	Once Every 2-3 Months (5)	Once a Month (12)	Once Every 2-3 Weeks (22)	Once a Week (52)	2-3 Times a Week or More (130)					
22. Public Drunkenness Neighborhood Institution	61.3 24.8	13.8 9.7	2.5 5.3	6.3 4.4	7.5 7.1	2.5 11.5	6.3 37.2	80 113	12.92 56.85	32.15 58.60	6.78#	
23. Theft \$5 - 50 Neighborhood Institution	66.3 14.0	21.3 16.7	3.8 11.4	2.5 14.9	3.8 11.4	— 7.0	2.5 24.6	80 114	4.99 40.78	20.65 52.75	6.56#	
24. Breaking and Entering Neighborhood Institution	62.5 17.5	22.5 14.9	11.3 15.8	3.8 10.5	— 13.2	— 4.4	— 23.7	80 114	1.46 38.32	2.66 52.54	7.48#	
25. Truancy Neighborhood Institution	35.0 13.2	12.5 8.8	7.5 2.6	10.0 5.3	13.8 4.4	7.5 7.9	13.8 57.9	80 114	26.62 81.27	43.88 58.76	7.41#	
26. Drug Use Neighborhood Institution	62.5 16.7	3.8 1.8	7.5 0.9	3.8 —	3.8 3.5	2.5 7.0	16.3 70.2	80 114	24.15 95.73	47.80 54.12	9.72#	
27. Alcohol Use Neighborhood Institution	37.5 13.2	15.0 4.4	8.8 5.3	7.5 2.6	5.0 6.1	8.8 8.8	17.5 59.6	80 114	30.04 84.12	48.57 57.49	7.07#	
28. Total Delinquency Neighborhood Institution								80 110	454.01 1147.16	389.49 631.14	9.33#	

(Continued)

TABLE 4 (CONT'D)
 DELINQUENCY INVOLVEMENT OF MALE CHRONIC OFFENDERS BY OFFICIAL STATUS

DELINQUENT ACT	PERCENT REPORTING						N	Mean	SD	t-value
	Never (0)	Once or Twice a Year (2)	Once Every 2-3 Months (5)	Once a Month (12)	Once Every 2-3 Weeks (22)	Once a Week (52)				
29. Property Neighborhood Institution							80 114	50.99 274.41	88.84 253.98	8.67#
30. Personal Neighborhood Institution							80 114	125.04 175.72	113.80 143.29	2.74**
31. Status Neighborhood Institution							80 111	136.78 322.33	144.83 165.62	8.22#
32. Drugs Neighborhood Institution							80 113	85.41 333.66	148.25 206.21	9.73#
33. Minor Neighborhood Institution							80 110	311.78 717.86	279.62 350.67	8.87#
34. Major Neighborhood Institution							80 114	56.18 168.78	80.22 168.21	6.21#

(Continued)

TABLE 4 (CONT'D)
 DELINQUENCY INVOLVEMENT OF MALE CHRONIC OFFENDERS BY OFFICIAL STATUS

DELINQUENT ACT	PERCENT REPORTING						N	Mean	SD	t-value
	Once or Twice a Year (2)	Once Every 2-3 Months (5)	Once a Month (12)	Once Every 2-3 Weeks (22)	Once a Week (52)	2-3 Times a Week or More (130)				
35. Illegal Services Neighborhood Institution							80	23.49	55.24	7.47#
36. Public Disorder Neighborhood Institution							114	104.95	95.86	
							80	80.14	91.58	4.64#
							113	150.74	119.43	

* = P < .05
 ** = P < .01
 # = P < .001

TABLE 5
DELINQUENCY INVOLVEMENT OF FEMALE CHRONIC OFFENDERS BY OFFICIAL STATUS

DELINQUENT ACT	PERCENT REPORTING							N	Mean	SD	t-value
	Never (0)	Once or Twice a Year (2)	Once Every 2-3 Months (5)	Once a Month (12)	Once Every 2-3 Weeks (22)	Once a Week (52)	2-3 Times a Week or More (130)				
1. Vandalism	64.6	22.9	2.1	6.3	—	—	4.2	48	6.73	26.14	1.29
Neighborhood Institution	40.2	30.5	11.0	6.1	3.7	—	8.5	82	13.79	36.04	
2. Motor Vehicle Theft	93.8	2.1	2.1	—	—	—	2.1	48	2.85	18.76	2.01*
Neighborhood Institution	58.5	23.2	1.2	3.7	4.9	—	7.3	82	12.18	34.14	
3. Grand Theft	68.8	14.6	2.1	10.4	—	2.1	2.1	48	5.44	20.08	4.65#
Neighborhood Institution	19.5	25.6	11.0	11.0	7.3	1.2	24.4	82	36.33	54.09	
4. Bought, sold, held stolen goods	52.1	20.8	6.3	10.4	2.1	2.1	6.3	48	11.65	32.03	2.60**
Neighborhood Institution	32.1	13.6	14.8	12.3	4.9	2.5	19.8	81	30.54	50.49	
5. Thrown Objects	45.8	20.8	14.6	6.3	4.2	—	8.3	48	13.65	35.81	1.02
Neighborhood Institution	43.2	21.0	11.1	8.6	—	2.5	13.6	81	20.95	44.31	
6. Ran Away	75.0	14.6	—	—	2.1	2.1	6.3	48	9.96	32.34	2.55**
Neighborhood Institution	33.3	23.5	8.6	8.6	4.9	2.5	18.5	81	28.38	49.60	
7. Lied About Age	35.4	14.6	8.3	12.5	4.2	8.3	16.7	48	29.12	47.77	4.19#
Neighborhood Institution	19.5	7.3	6.1	8.5	3.7	6.1	48.8	82	68.87	61.19	

(Continued)

TABLE 5 (CONT'D)
DELINQUENCY INVOLVEMENT OF FEMALE CHRONIC OFFENDERS BY OFFICIAL STATUS

DELINQUENT ACT	PERCENT REPORTING							N	Mean	SD	t-value
	Never (0)	Once or Twice a Year (2)	Once Every 2-3 Months (5)	Once a Month (12)	Once Every 2-3 Weeks (22)	Once a Week (52)	2-3 Times a Week or More (130)				
8. Concealed Weapon Neighborhood Institution	68.8 37.8	10.4 13.4	4.2 2.4	— 6.1	— 1.2	— 2.4	16.7 36.6	48 82	22.08 50.22	48.79 61.55	2.87**
9. Petit Theft Neighborhood Institution	64.6 40.2	12.5 20.7	6.3 6.1	8.3 7.3	2.1 4.9	2.1 3.7	4.2 17.1	48 82	8.52 26.77	26.97 48.30	2.76**
10. Aggravated Assault Neighborhood Institution	18.8 31.7	14.6 26.8	25.0 14.6	20.8 8.5	— 2.4	6.3 4.9	14.6 11.0	48 82	26.25 19.63	44.98 40.62	-0.84
11. Prostitution Neighborhood Institution	91.7 72.8	2.1 4.9	— 1.2	2.1 1.2	— 1.2	— 1.2	4.2 17.3	48 81	5.71 23.69	26.25 49.31	2.70**
12. Sexual Intercourse Neighborhood Institution	54.2 15.0	16.7 7.5	10.4 6.3	4.2 11.3	2.1 6.3	2.1 2.5	10.4 51.3	48 80	16.44 71.11	39.99 61.38	6.10#
13. Gang Fight Neighborhood Institution	52.1 46.9	22.9 14.8	4.2 4.9	8.3 3.7	4.2 4.9	2.1 4.9	6.3 19.8	48 81	11.79 30.32	32.08 51.14	2.53**
14. Sold Marijuana Neighborhood Institution	75.0 25.9	6.3 7.4	— 4.9	6.3 3.7	2.1 1.2	— 1.2	10.4 55.6	48 81	14.88 73.98	39.90 63.34	6.50#

(Continued)

TABLE 5 (CONTD)
 DELINQUENCY INVOLVEMENT OF FEMALE CHRONIC OFFENDERS BY OFFICIAL STATUS

DELINQUENT ACT	PERCENT REPORTING										N	Mean	SD	t-value
	Never (0)	Once or Twice a Year (2)	Once Every 2-3 Months (5)	Once a Month (12)	Once Every 2-3 Weeks (22)	Once a Week (52)	2-3 Times a Week or More (130)							
15. Cheated on Tests Neighborhood Institution	20.8 19.5	12.5 8.5	10.4 8.5	18.8 4.9	10.4 3.7	10.4 6.3	20.8 11.0	48 82	35.65 64.77	50.53 59.94	2.96**			
16. Simple Assault Neighborhood Institution	4.2 2.4	16.7 15.9	10.4 17.1	14.6 2.4	12.5 9.8	8.3 7.3	33.3 45.1	48 82	53.02 66.07	50.56 59.64	1.24			
17. Disorderly Conduct Neighborhood Institution	25.0 19.5	20.8 12.2	8.3 6.1	10.4 3.7	12.5 8.5	2.1 7.3	20.8 42.7	48 82	33.00 62.16	51.20 60.34	2.93**			
18. Sold Hard Drugs Neighborhood Institution	85.4 43.9	2.1 3.7	4.2 3.7	2.1 8.5	2.1 1.2	— 3.7	4.2 35.4	48 82	6.38 49.43	26.31 60.80	5.58#			
19. Joy Ride Neighborhood Institution	87.5 53.7	8.3 14.6	2.1 8.5	— 1.2	— 3.7	— 7.3	2.1 11.0	48 82	2.98 19.74	18.74 41.30	3.16**			
20. Rape Neighborhood Institution	89.6 95.1	4.2 1.2	2.1 —	— 2.4	2.1 —	— —	2.1 1.2	48 82	3.35 1.90	18.95 14.44	-0.46			
21. Robbery Neighborhood Institution	75.0 61.0	6.3 12.2	4.2 4.9	4.2 2.4	2.1 2.4	— 1.2	8.3 15.9	48 82	12.12 22.56	36.14 47.41	1.41			

(Continued)

TABLE 5 (CONT'D)
DELINQUENCY INVOLVEMENT OF FEMALE CHRONIC OFFENDERS BY OFFICIAL STATUS

DELINQUENT ACT	PERCENT REPORTING							N	Mean	SD	t-value
	Never (0)	Once or Twice a Year (2)	Once Every 2-3 Months (5)	Once a Month (12)	Once Every 2-3 Weeks (22)	Once a Week (52)	2-3 Times a Week or More (130)				
22. Public Drunkenness											
Neighborhood	66.7	8.3	4.2	2.1	8.3	—	10.4	16.00	39.78	5.34#	
Institution	19.8	9.9	6.2	2.5	9.9	9.9	42.0	62.68	59.41		
23. Theft \$5 - 50											
Neighborhood	68.8	10.4	6.3	4.2	6.3	—	4.2	7.81	26.38	3.60#	
Institution	17.1	17.1	19.5	11.0	11.0	7.3	17.1	31.05	47.12		
24. Breaking and Entering											
Neighborhood	91.7	6.3	—	—	—	—	2.1	2.83	18.75	3.30#	
Institution	42.7	25.6	6.1	4.9	4.9	2.4	13.4	21.18	44.06		
25. Truancy											
Neighborhood	31.3	12.5	10.4	14.6	8.3	6.3	16.7	29.27	47.33	7.30#	
Institution	7.3	1.2	4.9	3.7	7.3	7.3	68.3	94.90	53.00		
26. Drug Use											
Neighborhood	62.5	4.2	8.3	4.2	2.1	2.1	16.7	24.21	48.52	8.31#	
Institution	11.0	1.2	3.7	1.2	3.7	6.1	73.2	99.45	51.90		
27. Alcohol Use											
Neighborhood	39.6	14.6	6.3	4.2	6.3	2.1	27.1	38.77	56.89	4.68#	
Institution	9.8	4.9	8.5	3.7	6.1	2.4	64.6	87.60	58.26		
28. Total Delinquency											
Neighborhood	48	450.46	449.49								
Institution	76	1177.99	671.42								

(Continued)

TABLE 5 (CONT'D)
 DELINQUENCY INVOLVEMENT OF FEMALE CHRONIC OFFENDERS BY OFFICIAL STATUS

DELINQUENT ACT	PERCENT REPORTING						N	Mean	SD	t-value
	Never (0)	Once or Twice a Year (2)	Once Every 2-3 Months (5)	Once a Month (12)	Once Every 2-3 Weeks (22)	Once a Week (52)				
29. Property Neighborhood Institution							48.81 81	193.52 204.55	96.24 204.55	5.43#
30. Personal Neighborhood Institution							48 82	116.83 160.39	125.18 159.38	1.73
31. Status Neighborhood Institution							48 79	159.21 407.43	161.81 217.85	7.33#
32. Drugs Neighborhood Institution							48 80	100.23 374.05	162.36 210.73	8.24#
33. Minor Neighborhood Institution							48 78	321.12 791.21	306.24 411.02	7.32#
34. Major Neighborhood Institution							48 82	59.23 163.22	104.65 166.52	4.37#

(Continued)

TABLE 5 (CONT'D)
 DELINQUENCY INVOLVEMENT OF FEMALE CHRONIC OFFENDERS BY OFFICIAL STATUS

DELINQUENT ACT	PERCENT REPORTING						N	Mean	SD	t-value
	Never (0)	Once or Twice a Year (2)	Once Every 2-3 Months (5)	Once a Month (12)	Once Every 2-3 Weeks (22)	Once a Week (52)				
35. Illegal Services Neighborhood Institution							48	26.96	68.68	6.82#
36. Public Disorder Neighborhood Institution							80	146.15	128.66	
							48	62.65	91.99	4.24#
							80	144.84	126.04	

* = P < .05

** = P < .01

= P < .001

These data represent only those youth who "qualify" as chronic offenders (defined as high frequency major offenders in Table 1).²⁵ This represents only 13.6% of the neighborhood youth, but 80% of the institutional sample. The various comparisons, whether on the basis of specific offense or offense type,²⁶ among males or females, indicate that with virtually no exceptions the institutional offenders are significantly more delinquent than their neighborhood counterparts. For example, among males, 31% of the neighborhood high frequency major offenders report involvement in grand theft while 91% of the institutional offenders admit such involvement. Forty-one percent of the institutional offenders report breaking and entering more than once a month while none of the neighborhood offenders report this offense at such a high frequency. Thus, even when we isolate a group of *apparent* chronic offenders in a general youth sample, their levels of involvement do not approach the rates of institutional offenders. For both the male and female subsamples, approximately 78% of the differences in mean levels of in-

²⁵ We do not present the data by race-sex subgroups because doing so results in very small n's with an unacceptably high number of small and zero cell frequencies. We present the data separately for males and females because we believe it to be a substantively interesting and important breakdown. While there are some race differences among the neighborhood and institutional chronic offenders, they are considerably fewer in number, smaller in magnitude, and of lesser significance than the sex differences revealed in Tables 4 and 5.

²⁶ In addition to the twenty-seven individual delinquency items included in the SRD index, we created a total delinquency measure and eight specific subscales. We utilize these subscales because of their utility as summary measures, and because they correspond to categories of offenses traditionally of interest to researchers in this area. The total delinquency index (TOTAL DELINQUENCY) is simply the summation of the frequency of each of the 27 individual items of the SRD index. Following are the eight subscales and their component behavioral items:

MAJOR: motor vehicle theft, grand theft, aggravated assault, selling hard drugs, rape, robbery, and breaking and entering (gang fighting was not included in this subscale because of the likely overlap with and duplication of the aggravated assault item).

MINOR: throwing objects at cars or people, running away, lying about age, petit theft, prostitution, sexual intercourse, cheating on tests, simple assault, disorderly conduct, public drunkenness, theft \$5-\$50, truancy, drug use, and alcohol use.

PROPERTY: vandalism, motor vehicle theft, grand theft, buying-selling-holding stolen goods, petit theft, joy riding, theft \$5-\$50, and breaking and entering.

PERSONAL: carrying a concealed weapon, aggravated assault, simple assault, rape, and robbery (gang fighting was not included in this subscale because of the likely overlap with and duplication of the aggravated assault item).

STATUS: running away, lying about age, sexual intercourse, cheating on tests, truancy, and alcohol use.

DRUG: selling marijuana, selling hard drugs, public drunkenness, drug use, and alcohol use.

ILLEGAL SERVICES: prostitution, selling marijuana, and selling hard drugs.

PUBLIC DISORDER: throwing objects at cars or people, disorderly conduct, and public drunkenness.

volvement for the twenty-seven delinquency offenses are statistically significant.

In most of those instances where there are no significant differences between the neighborhood and institutional groups, the offenses are relatively minor. Some interesting exceptions, however, include non-significant differences among males and females for aggravated assault, robbery and rape.²⁷ Yet, the delinquency subscale analysis reveals very substantial differences between the institutional and neighborhood groups, among both males and females. The differences are quite large for total self-reported delinquency as well as for all of the specific subscales, with the exception of the personal offenses subscale for females. Especially interesting are the differences on the major offense subscale: for both males and females, the mean number of offenses reported for this subscale are about three times greater among the institutional than the neighborhood youth.²⁸

The group of neighborhood high frequency major offenders, who comprise less than 14% of the neighborhood sample, were responsible for approximately 42% of all the delinquent acts committed by the neighborhood respondents, 47% of all personal offenses, 62% of all property offenses, and 95% of all major offenses. By most self-report standards, they certainly would be characterized as chronic offenders. But our data indicate that such an assumption would be erroneous. Even when we isolate a group of offenders who *appear* to be chronic delinquents *relative* to the other youth in a

²⁷ For rape, neighborhood males reported a higher mean level of involvement than institutionalized males. For rape and aggravated assault, the neighborhood females reported slightly higher rates of participation than institutionalized females.

²⁸ The possibility of a differential reporting bias by official status should be kept in mind when interpreting these data. While we cannot rule out such a bias completely, there are a number of factors which lead us to believe that there is no significant reporting differential between the neighborhood and institutional groups. First, responses to the various delinquency items are distributed across all seven response categories. The neighborhood youth do not appear to be denying involvement in any general sense, nor are the institutional offenders claiming the maximum level of involvement for each and every offense type. The responses of both groups evidence "normal" variation. Second, the data reveal no significant differences between the neighborhood and institutional offenders, among males or females, in the frequency distributions and mean levels of response to three non-delinquency, response-set items included in the SRD scale ("found something like a wallet or some jewelry and returned it to the owner or the police;" "returned extra change that a cashier gave you by mistake;" and "tried to talk your friends out of doing something that was against the law"). Finally, the data in Tables 4 and 5 are consistent with the general theoretical and empirical literature, and with the expectations of most sociologists and criminologists. Differences between neighborhood and institutional offenders are small for relatively minor offenses and large for more serious ones. All of these factors lead us to conclude that the reliability and validity of the responses of both groups is quite high.

general youth sample, the level of their involvement pales in comparison to that of institutionalized chronic offenders. This is the basis for our contention that the typical self-report survey, based on either a school or neighborhood sample, is unlikely to discover more than a handful of the kind of chronic offenders generally processed by official agencies.

Finally, there is an even more "select" group of neighborhood offenders whose behavior we should examine before concluding that self-report surveys of the general youth population do not locate *any* delinquents comparable to those identified as chronic offenders in the institutional sample. In this phase of the analysis, we isolated a group of high frequency major offenders in the neighborhood sample who reported that they had appeared in juvenile court, had been on probation or had been institutionalized. We reasoned that these individuals probably were the most seriously delinquent group in the general youth sample.

Only twenty three of the neighborhood high frequency major offenders (2.4% of the neighborhood sample) had appeared in juvenile court during the past year, thirteen had been on probation, and nine had been institutionalized for their delinquency. To the extent that official reactions such as these are important correlates of chronic delinquency, this hardly represents a sufficient number of youth on which to base any analysis. Yet, the assumption contradicted by these data—that chronic offenders are represented in reasonable numbers in general youth samples—is commonplace in the self-report literature.

Next, we examined how this small group (neighborhood high frequency major offenders who have appeared in court, been on probation, or institutionalized) compares with institutionalized chronic offenders. Differences in mean levels of involvement between the two groups are significant for more than 70% of the 27 delinquent acts comprising our SRD scale, with the institutionalized youth reporting the highest rates. Nonsignificant differences occurred primarily in the relatively minor offense categories. Mean involvement levels are not significantly different, however, for a few serious items as well (motor vehicle theft, rape, and robbery). Nevertheless, the subscale analysis reveals that institutionalized offenders are significantly more delinquent in all cases. Particularly interesting are the comparisons of the means for the major (166.45 vs. 82.62) and minor (748.29 vs. 395.73) offense subscales.

Clearly, even this very "select" group of neighborhood offenders is not comparable to the chronic offenders identified in our institutional sample. Even though chronic offenders can be defined

apart from official reactions to their behavior, it is clear that very few of the neighborhood youth are the kinds of offenders who come to the attention of the authorities, and even those few who do are significantly less delinquent than their institutional counterparts.

V. CONCLUSION

While criminologists always have recognized the existence of chronic offenders, researchers rarely have taken the steps necessary to insure the inclusion of these youth in their samples. Rather, they have been most likely to study the "typical" or "average" delinquent via school or neighborhood surveys. The inclusion of official delinquents in adolescent samples has not only been defined as inappropriate, owing to various processing biases, but also as unnecessary because of the "complete" coverage of self-report surveys of the general youth population.

This focus on samples of the general youth population has resulted in many important insights about adolescents and their misbehavior. This is a reasonable and useful focus, and such research should continue. This Article contends, however, that it also is important to locate the chronic delinquent offender, to compare the behavior of this youth with that of others along the behavioral continuum, and to identify those factors and processes that lead to this extreme level of delinquency involvement. We believe that such a focus will necessitate a return to the study of official delinquents, research subjects virtually abandoned with the advent of the self-report methodology some thirty years ago. While commentators repeatedly have emphasized the hazards of using institutional or other official and quasi-official samples, we believe that these kinds of samples can locate, in a practical manner, a meaningful number of chronic offenders upon which to base criminological research.

A major assumption among many SRD researchers is that official delinquents are no different from adolescents located at various other points along the delinquency continuum. We have argued, however, that the validity of this assumption is questionable. Chronic offenders are involved in significantly more serious and more frequent delinquent activity than are the adolescents typically identified in self-report surveys of the general youth population. While criminologists should be cognizant of the extra-legal biases that affect the probability of arrest, referral to court, and institutionalization for various segments of the population, they also should recognize that the major reason most adolescents come to the attention of the justice system is because they are persistent and serious

offenders. This does *not* imply that chronic offenders are somehow intrinsically different from other youth in social background or personality. Many of their *behaviors* and the *frequency* with which they are committed, however, do differ from those of the average adolescent.

The issues raised in this article are not merely ones of sampling and methodology—our findings also have important theoretical implications. The basic behavioral differences revealed in our data challenge the assumption that factors which explain relatively minor transgressions are necessarily the same as those which account for the behavior of chronic offenders. While we are not suggesting that distinct causal and/or labeling processes are involved, these important empirical issues can be examined only after criminologists include chronic offenders in their research.