

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2004-2019

---

2009

## The Effect Of Relative Deprivation On Delinquency: An Assessment Of Juveniles

Adrienne Horne  
*University of Central Florida*



Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Masters Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2004-2019 by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### STARS Citation

Horne, Adrienne, "The Effect Of Relative Deprivation On Delinquency: An Assessment Of Juveniles" (2009). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2004-2019*. 4132.

<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/4132>

THE EFFECT OF RELATIVE DEPRIVATION ON DELINQUENCY:  
AN ASSESSMENT OF JUVENILES

by

ADRIENNE D. HORNE  
B.A. University of Central Florida, 2007

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Sociology  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term  
2009

© 2009 Adrienne Horne

## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the impact of relative deprivation on juvenile delinquency. Though this topic has been explored by several researchers, there has not been much consistency in the research due to the operationalization of key variables. Traditionally, relative deprivation has been referenced in relation to Merton's Classic Strain Theory, using economic indicators to measure relative deprivation. Webber and Runciman however, expanded upon Merton's original premise and integrated more diverse measures of relative deprivation into their research. The current study utilizes Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST) as a means to measure relative deprivation as a broader and more subjective topic. This unique approach in the study of relative deprivation utilizes aspirations as a primary measure of relative deprivation.

This thesis is dedicated to all those who have supported my academic endeavors and have allowed me to further my education.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to take the time to acknowledge all of the faculty and staff within the University of Central Florida Sociology Department for all of the time and effort that was bestowed upon me in my pursuit of higher education. I would also like to thank my parents for their financial contributions and moral support throughout the duration of my collegiate career. Writing this thesis has been an arduous journey that has taught me the value of trial and error and encouraged me to transcend despite obstacles.

“Hold yourself responsible for a higher standard than anyone else expects of you.

Never excuse yourself.”

-Henry Ward Beecher

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	3
Relative Deprivation and Delinquency .....	4
General Strain Theory and Delinquency .....	9
Relative Deprivation, General Strain Theory, and Delinquency .....	13
Research Questions/Hypotheses .....	15
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	16
Data .....	16
Dependent Variables: Delinquency and Substance Use.....	16
Independent Variables: Relative Deprivation, Strain, and Aspirations .....	17
Controls: Age, Race, Gender, Class, Family Composition, and Neighborhood.....	19
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	21
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS .....	27
Summary of Findings .....	27
Limitations.....	30
Future Research .....	32
REFERENCES .....	35

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics.....	22
Table 2 OLS Regression (Juvenile Delinquency and Relative Deprivation) .....	23
Table 3 OLS Regression (Alcohol Use and Relative Deprivation) .....	24
Table 4 OLS Regression (Marijuana Use and Relative Deprivation).....	25
Table 5 Binary Logistic Regression (Other Illicit Drug Use and Relative Deprivation).....	26



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Though crime has declined, it is still a major problem in the United States (Messner & Rosenfeld, 2001; Hannon & DeFina, 2005). Crime and delinquency are particularly problematic in inner-city areas that are economically deprived (Shihadeh & Steffensmeier, 1994). Non-White minorities often inhabit such neighborhoods and are regularly exposed to criminal opportunities. Poverty-related aspects are important factors in one's propensity to engage in delinquency (Hannon, Knapp, & Defina, 2005). However, these factors alone do not pledge a life of crime, as there are many external aspects which contribute to one's decision making. The ambiguity surrounding the connection between relative deprivation and crime is an issue which needs to be further explored in its entirety.

Prior research on the connection between relative deprivation and delinquency/crime has produced mixed findings, primarily due to differences in the conceptualization of relative deprivation. With subjective definitions of variables (i.e. relative deprivation), it becomes difficult to produce consistent results. It is this quandary which has led many researchers down a path of uncertainty in regards to the relationship between relative deprivation and delinquency. Thus, the potential for explanatory causes for the lack of findings in regards to relative deprivation and delinquency are infinite.

Relative deprivation is a subjective concept. A prominent definition of relative deprivation is as follows: "Relative deprivation is (therefore) an outcome of a comparative process and can account for crimes of acquisition, of frustration accruing from blocked goals, or emotive violence, such as between individuals or factions based on territory, reputation, or respect," (Webber, 2008, p. 108). Perceived differences among peers and the comparisons that

follow are the foundation of relative deprivation. The people(s) and or ideals that one may compare themselves to are identified as their 'reference group.' A reference group is comprised of other persons and or ideals that one may feel they are able to feasibly compare themselves to in hopes of gauging their personal status and or standings in the community, financially, or within any other medium of significance (Webber, 2008). This is the basis upon which one's level of deprivation and or strain is gauged, therefore comprehending these perceptions are essential to assessing the relationship between relative deprivation and one's propensity for delinquency.

The link between crime and relative deprivation can be better understood using Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST). General Strain Theory "...is distinguished by its focus on negative relationships with others and its insistence that such relationships lead to delinquency through negative affect --especially anger," (Agnew, 1992, p. 49). General Strain Theory has the potential to offer explanations as to what factors cause delinquency, which may include criminal tendencies such as theft, elevated aggression, and or use of drugs and or controlled substances as coping mechanisms (Agnew, 1992). Thus, relative deprivation and general strain theory jointly provide a greater understanding of one's propensity for delinquency when taking external stressors into consideration.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research illustrates a connection between relative deprivation and delinquency, as individuals who experience relative deprivation are more likely to offend (Messner & South, 1969; Baron, 2006; Eitle, D'Alessio, & Stolzenberg, 2006; Webber, 2008). Several factors have been attributed to this relationship; consequently, there has not been much consistency in the research. A notable culprit behind this is the methodology that researchers use as a means of operationalizing key variables. Various criticisms of data gathering techniques have also been attributed as causes of inconsistent findings. Scholars like Baron have voiced concerns that measures were inadequately conceptualized, high-school students as representative juvenile samples have been over utilized, and general emphasis on minor offenses is not comprehensive (2006). Uniformity in the measures of relative deprivation is essential if future research pursuits are to be compatible for further analysis within the field.

Hannon et al. (2005) deem such reflections to be the product of the complex methods which are used to operationalize variables. This is a particular element that tends to be universal throughout previous research. The manner in which the variables are defined determines the nature of the empirical research, thus limiting the results one can hope to yield. More inquiry into previously used methodology may confer a more detailed explanation for the differences within these empirical studies. Numerous methodological differences may account for the lack of consistent findings in regards to relative deprivation and delinquency.

As referenced by Messner & South (1986) attempts to explain the dynamics of criminal behavior were often based on economic deprivation measures. In their study of robbery victimization, they assessed relative deprivation based on income. Stolzenberg, Eitle, &

D'Alessio (2006) also looked at the pattern of income inequality and crime from a primary economic measure. Other researchers, Harer & Steffensmeier (1992), used weighted measures to account for economic inequalities in addition to minority representation as a means of assessing relative deprivation. Hence, there is a predominance of one-sided economic measures of relative deprivation, the incorporation of race sporadically, and even more complex weighted calculations in conjunction with economic measures to assess relative deprivation. The subjectivity with which these previous studies have been conducted leaves little room for overlap, with each researcher practically "starting from scratch" and devising their own measures. Furthermore, relative deprivation is not adequately measured solely by economic factors; a more expansive inquiry into relative deprivation may yield a greater conceptualization of its relationship with juvenile delinquency.

### Relative Deprivation and Delinquency

Relative deprivation has traditionally been deliberated via economic measures as a means of empirically assessing one's level of social inequality. Baron (2006) measured relative deprivation in terms of monetary goals, expectations for future financial success, and money satisfaction. Eitle, D'Alessio, and Stolzenberg (2006) measured relative deprivation by constructing a neighborhood sorting index and poverty concentration. Messner and South (1969) relied on the percent of white or black families with incomes below \$4,000 in 1969 as provided by the Census as a means of measuring relative deprivation. Several other studies mirror economic dependences when assessing relative deprivation. These studies fail to acknowledge that relative deprivation is primarily an outcome of social processes opposed to solely economic measures (Webber, 2008).

W.G. Runciman is a criminological theorist whose primary research efforts clarify the social processes in which relative deprivation occurs and its relationship to delinquency (Webber, 2008). Craig Webber (2008) expanded upon Runciman's works in his article "Reevaluating Relative Deprivation Theory," the emphasis being that "Relative deprivation is less a theory than an outcome of processes of social comparison..." (Webber, 2008, p. 107). Relative deprivation pertains to perceived differences that one may feel in relation to their peers. Further, relative deprivation is a subjective concept which relies on one's reported feelings rather than more concrete data. In order for one to conduct such a comparison, they must identify their reference group or those with whom they feel they are compatible.

Runciman identified three primary reference groups used to assess oneself on several planes (1966). First, the comparative reference group is the group that one uses to compare their own traits to others within the group. Second, the normative reference group is the group from which one's standards in terms of finances and or social values originated. Finally, the membership reference group has a more fluid composition with some of the memberships being more permanent (e.g., physical attributes) whereas others are more changing and flexible (e.g., occupation) (Webber, 2008). Collectively these reference groups comprise an 'internal continuum' on which individuals can gauge their status within their own group, a means of assessing their individual traits, and the ability to maintain or alter their membership within the group.

Runciman also identified three measures of social inequality upon which society is satisfied: class, status, and power (1966). In terms of class, one's economic standing (i.e. income) along with their type of occupation is considered collectively. Status is comprised of "one's style of consumption" more so than their income (Runciman, 1966, p. 39). Education is

related to status when referencing relative deprivation. Education is a means of heightening one's societal standing raising their aspirations for their future or that of their families (Runciman, 1966). Power is assessed not necessarily by identifying the higher class and esteemed members of society, but those who occupy trade unions and such. These three measures of social inequality are sources of relative deprivation which ultimately have the potential to influence the propensity for delinquency.

Although relative deprivation is the end result of a social process, expectation and aspiration play a vital part in one's perception of injustice (Webber, 2008). Those who perceive themselves as experiencing or being exposed to relative deprivation are likely to have fewer aspirations as a result of their shortcomings. Further, if one expects something to happen (e.g., a promotion or attending college) and it does not happen, one will feel disappointed or disconcerted. However, if one only aspires to have or become something (e.g., a home, a professional, a graduate) and it does not happen, the upset will be less detrimental (Webber, 2008).

Aspirations and expectations can be influenced by many factors which are typically linked to relative deprivation. For example, the age at which one is when composing their aspirations is of great importance. Those with lower achievement had higher aspirations during their youth, compared to those who had been successful at a younger age that had higher aspirations due to their past achievements (Runciman, 1966). One's class and status can shape their futures both physically (e.g., upper-class family wealth) and emotionally (e.g., aspiring to achieve more). When relative deprivation is conceptualized as an outcome of these social processes one's potential for delinquency changes dynamically. Thus, a person experiencing

relative deprivation is more likely to have aspirations opposed to expectations; however, their aspirations tend to be lower and not as central to their identity.

Consequently, expectations and aspirations are key distinctions when measuring relative deprivation. Aspiration is generally a more subjective concept due to its reliance on the subject's perception of their potential (Webber 2008). While expectation is generally more objective due to certain factors (e.g., social status or qualifications) which may make one privy to more opportunities (Webber 2008). Relative deprivation is a highly subjective concept due to the identification of such via one's perceptions; hence, aspirations can be an effective measure of relative deprivation. It is the comparative processes of relative deprivation which are responsible for the envy and or frustration that is felt due to blocked opportunities which can result in affecting violence (Webber 2008).

One's attitudes and aspirations are largely derived from the reference groups with which they conduct comparisons (Runciman, 1966). Hence, if a family in a working-class neighborhood compares themselves to another family within the same class (i.e. same reference group) and notices that they have more money for luxuries etc., they may feel deprived. The former family then aspires to have more money due to the comparison of themselves to the latter family; one who aspires but does not have is relatively deprived. These intra-group comparisons are the source of relative deprivation; though this perception of deprivation is subjectively significant to the affected party, in reality they may not be deprived objectively (Runciman, 1966). The introduction of a foreign frame of reference can have a detrimental affect socially. This new source of comparison may alter one's aspirations as a result of such exposure (Runciman, 1966).

As explored by Runciman and Webber, relative deprivation is a subjective concept that transcends purely economic measures. One's aspirations as a result of their social class and or status have the potential to create feelings of resentment which may cause one to retaliate via delinquency. This study aims to expand Webber's work on relative deprivation by examining a broader notion of relative deprivation that utilizes aspiration as a means of quantifying one's perceived deprivation. These measures will allow for a broader perspective of relative deprivation as a subjective concept by utilizing aspiration as a means of quantifying one's perceived deprivation. One's social environment, economic standing, and class and or status shape their perception of themselves within their reference group(s). Thus "Issues of aspiration, group membership, and comparison are all central to relative deprivation," (Webber, 2008, p. 114). Furthermore, relative deprivation is a factor that can heighten one's tendency for delinquency (Webber, 2008).

Relative deprivation is more than limited economic resources; relative deprivation is a broader concept which includes deprivation of important (non-monetary) resources. Expanding the conceptualization of relative deprivation to incorporate more extensive measures should further our understanding of the relationship between relative deprivation and delinquency.

The work of Runciman and Webber have allowed for relative deprivation to be assessed as a more expansive concept compared to the initial perception of relative deprivation being a solely economic measure. Relative deprivation is the outcome of social processes which are conducted via comparisons among reference groups. When taking one's aspirations and exposure to relative deprivation into account, these perceived injustices can be predictors of delinquency. Further, this extension of Webber and Runciman's prior research incorporates the use GST as a medium for furthering the concept of relative deprivation. The use of Agnew's general strain



theory opposed to Merton's classic strain theory was largely due to Agnew's incorporation of alternate social measures (e.g., aspirations, parental education, and social class) as a means of assessing the effect of relative deprivation on delinquency. Agnew's general strain theory acts as the theoretical explanation which links relative deprivation and delinquency.

### General Strain Theory and Delinquency

Relative deprivation, though often referred to as a theory, is more so a concept related to the outcome of social processes (Webber, 2008). General Strain Theory (GST) is used to supplement relative deprivation (i.e. a type of strain) as its theoretical foundation. Like relative deprivation, GST is a broad concept which encompasses several types of strain which affect one's means to cope with life events and occurrences (Agnew, 2001). Traditionally, when referencing strain and relative deprivation, Robert Merton's classic strain theory is utilized. Classic strain measures deprivation based on "income or socioeconomic inequality" which is the basis for strain and frustration (Agnew, 1999, p. 123). Robert Agnew's general strain theory is better suited to measure relative deprivation as an outcome of social processes. Agnew's general strain theory is more comprehensive than Merton's in that it acknowledges that there are multiple sources of strain (not just monetary) and that strain has a wide range of adaptive forms (e.g., cognitive, behavioral, emotional) (Broidy & Agnew, 1997). Furthermore, by utilizing Agnew's general strain theory, a more complex measure of relative deprivation can be attained. Broadening the assessment of feelings of deprivation to include measures of aspiration allows for a more in depth analysis of relative deprivation, general strain theory, and delinquency.

Robert Agnew clearly states that "strain refers to relationships in which others are not treating the individual as he or she would like to be treated," (1992, p. 48). In correlation to his

definition of strain, Agnew's GST is unique in that it acknowledges that there are multiple sources of strain. Further, the individual experiencing such strain can adapt in various ways which do not necessarily lead to delinquency (Broidy & Agnew, 1997). The theory in itself is founded upon three main sources of strain: the failure to achieve positively valued goals, the loss of positive stimuli, and the presentation of negative stimuli (Agnew, 1992).

The failure to achieve positively valued goals can be associated with "blocked" opportunities which elicit feelings of injustice and relative deprivation due to the individuals perceived unfair treatment and or opportunities denied (Akers & Sellers, 2004). The removal of positively valued stimuli can be associated with negative experiences and or circumstances (e.g., the loss of a romantic partner or loved one) which can create overwhelming stress (Ostrowsky & Messner, 2005). The presentation of negative stimuli can be attributed to habitation in unsafe, crime ridden neighborhoods, and abusive family relationships. Each of these measures of strain collectively heighten the probability that the afflicted individual will experience negative emotions or affect which may result in delinquent behaviors (Ostrowsky & Messner, 2005).

According to Hay, "...There appears to exist a significant, positive relationship between strain and delinquency," (2003, p. 109). There are three main ways individuals can cope with strain: cognitive, behavioral, and emotional coping strategies (Agnew 1992). Cognitive coping strategies involve minimizing one's hardships as a means of escaping from their troubles and alleviating them. Behavioral coping strategies may lead the offended individual to engage in "vengeful" behaviors as a result of their perception of being wronged and blaming a second party for their injustices (Agnew, 1992). Finally, emotional coping strategies often include the use of various drugs and or substances as a means of lessening their negative emotions (Agnew, 1992).

Negative affect is referenced regularly within Agnew's works and is described as negative feelings, emotions, and or outcomes which may have resulted from exposure to strain (Agnew, 1999). It appears that those who engaged in behavioral and or emotional coping strategies would be more prone to externalize their feelings of negative affect due to their elevated strain levels. Hence, "Anger results when individuals blame their adversity on others, and anger is a key emotion because it increases the individual's level of felt injury, creates a desire for retaliation/vengeance, energizes the individual for action, and lowers inhibitions..." (Agnew, 1992, p. 60). These individuals are more apt to engage in criminal endeavors (e.g., behavioral coping and vengeful behaviors) and to use drugs (e.g., emotional coping strategies) as a means to dealing with strain that results from perceived injustices encountered within their social networks. Therefore, negative affect is the catalyst. The anger and frustration that is derived from the individual's exposure to strain leads them to seek coping mechanisms. Delinquency is an external outlet for their frustration, envy, or perceived injustices; negative affect enables individuals to express their anger and frustrations hence alleviating their stress.

Strain is most likely to lead to delinquency when the individuals lack the appropriate skills and or resources to allow them to cope with strain conventionally (Agnew, 2001). When an individual lacks the ability to cope with strain, they are more likely to blame their strain on others and resort to delinquency. Agnew states that this is especially true when analyzing the four types of strain most likely to lead to delinquency: strain that is seen as unjust, strain that is seen in a high magnitude, strain that is associated with low social control and strain that creates some pressure or incentive to engage in criminal coping (2001). When strain is seen as unjust, it is more likely to lead to delinquency due to the subsequent anger that is felt. Anger interrupts rational decision making which would normally hinder an individual from engaging in

delinquency. This perceived “injustice” blinds the individual to any consequences which may be associated with their criminal activity. They are driven by anger to seek revenge and or retribution at any cost. Second, when strain is exposed to an individual in high concentrations or magnitudes, its influence reduces the likelihood that one will be able to cope with strain conventionally due to their disposition. This severe concentration of strain further strengthens their own feelings of anger which heightens their propensity for delinquency.

Third, when strain is caused or associated with low social control, the ability to cope with strain in a non-criminal manner is diminished. This lack of control, attachments to conventional commitments, goals, and or values, further promotes non-conventional and illicit criminal behaviors. Social control is an essential factor when assessing one’s ability to cope with strain. Social control often acts as a “potential buffer” in terms of preventing delinquent responses to strain (Robbers, 2004, p. 546). When ties are in place, an individual is less likely to react angrily against strain and are more interested in maintaining their relationships and commitments thus refraining from delinquent acts. Finally, when strain creates some pressure or incentive to engage in criminal coping, delinquency and or deviance may seem like the only effective way to attend to perceived injustices. “Thus each type of strain increases the likelihood that individuals will experience one or more of a range of negative emotions. Anger however is the most critical emotional reaction for the purposes of the general strain theory,” (Agnew, 1992, p. 59).

According to Agnew, “Delinquency may be a method of alleviating strain, that is, for achieving positively valued goals, for protecting or retrieving positive stimuli, or for terminating or escaping from negative stimuli,” (1992, p. 60). When faced with strain, those affected are likely to experience a myriad of negative emotions; the individual’s reaction to negative affect can be non-criminal (e.g., depression or frustration), or criminal (e.g., delinquent acts) in nature,

such is dependent on the individual's coping mechanisms (Agnew, Brezina, Wright, & Cullen, 2002). The presence of conventional coping mechanisms, especially social ties, can act as an internal safeguard against negative responses to strain; thus reducing one's likelihood of turning to delinquency to alleviate their negative affect (Robbers, 2004).

One's response to strain can be conventional or unconventional and lead one to seek retaliation as a medium to express themselves. Substance use is a means of both escaping one's strained and or poor urban environment and numbing oneself from the toils of everyday life. When these negative emotions are coupled with controlled substances and or alcohol, the juvenile's judgment is further impaired and their feelings of injustice and frustration are unbridled (Hoffman & Su, 1997). Their actions from this point on are driven by these feelings of inequality not rationality.

#### Relative Deprivation, General Strain Theory, and Delinquency

General strain theory is the theoretical explanation that links relative deprivation and delinquency. GST is rather remarkable, "Virtually all tests reveal a significant, positive relationship between the experience of strain and involvement in delinquency," (Hay, 2003, p.108). Relative deprivation is grounded in one's perceived differences and feelings of injustices in comparison to their peers. Moreover strain "...refers to negative or adverse relations with others [...] such relations are ultimately defined from the perspective of the individual," (Agnew, 1992, p. 61). Hence, as previously referenced by Webber (2008), the frustrations which may occur due to blocked goals (i.e. strain) that can result in delinquent behaviors are outcomes of relative deprivation. Agnew argues that strain or stress is a major catalyst for criminal behaviors

(1999). Therefore, the determining factor in whether one utilizes unconventional means of coping with strain can be attributed to their aspirations and social environment.

GST is based on perceived disparities which may provoke retaliation. The concept of strain being seen as “unjust” for example is based on the perception of relative deprivation in which an individual feels that they are deprived. GST is relative to this application of relative deprivation due to its emphasis on the failure to achieve positively valued goals. Previous research attempts focused primarily on economic or monetary measures which do not fully assess the more extensive nature of relative deprivation that the research pursuits of Webber and Runciman have emphasized. Relative deprivation is a form of strain which is based on perceived injustices and shortcomings. Assessing relative deprivation in relation to strain allows for a broader illustration of the relationship which exists between relative deprivation and juvenile delinquency.

When it is perceived that one has been treated unjustly or denied/blocked from attaining a goal or opportunity comparatively to one’s peers they are relatively deprived. This feeling of injustice provokes feelings of envy and frustration. If these negative feelings are not dealt with accordingly they are very likely to lead to delinquency. People who experience relative deprivation feel that they are being treated unjustly; this perception gives them a greater incentive to engage in criminal coping mechanisms. Hence, perceived injustice can be a detrimental aspect which can affect one’s coping mechanisms as a response to relative deprivation.

Delinquency is seen as an equalizer in which those in their reference group are brought down to the level of those who are deprived; hence their “supremacy” is diminished. Relative

deprivation is highly subjective, hence when strain is seen as unjust there is more initiative for one to retaliate via delinquency; perception is an essential factor within this social comparative process. From their perspective, society has failed them and left them to fend for themselves. Consequently, prompting juveniles to cope with strain via unconventional or illicit means, thus embracing a life of delinquency and deviance in the process.

#### Research Questions/Hypotheses

As a general statement of interest, it should be noted that relative deprivation, a form of strain, is positively correlated to juvenile delinquency. This study aims to incorporate a new measure of relative deprivation along with reiterating common research findings referencing poverty, strain, and delinquency into the burgeoning research literature on relative deprivation. There are three hypotheses, one for each scale of relative deprivation. My hypotheses are as follows: 1.) *Relative deprivation in the familial context is predictive of juvenile delinquency*, 2.) *Relative deprivation in the school context is predictive of juvenile delinquency*, and 3.) *Relative deprivation in the peer context is predictive of juvenile delinquency*. These hypotheses should verify that there is a connection between relative deprivation, strain, and delinquency.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between relative deprivation and delinquency. A major focal point was the perception of relative deprivation, which was viewed as a form of strain.

### Data

The data used for this study, the National Youth Survey (NYS), is a seven wave longitudinal study of adolescents. These data were collected from a probability sample of the U.S. population and yielded a total of 1,725 cases. The current study used wave 1 (1977) of the NYS, which included youths ages 11-17 and their parents. Respondents were asked about particular events and or behaviors (e.g., economic status, neighborhood problems, stigma associated with labeling, discipline, drug use, etc.) which occurred during the previous year.

### Dependent Variables: Delinquency and Substance Use

Piquero, Macintosh, and Hickman (2002) assessed the validity of self-reported delinquency measures in a prominent article on juvenile delinquency. Using the 24 item self-reported delinquency scale (SRD) originally created by Huizinga and Elliott (1986). The participants self-reported their delinquency on a nine point scale as follows: (1) Never, (2) Once or twice a year, (3) Once every 2-3 months, (4) Once a month, (5) Once every 2-3 weeks, (6) Once a week, (7) 2-3 times a week, (8) Once a day, and (9) 2-3 times a day. Piquero et al. employed this SRD scale as a means of heightening the overall reliability of self-reported measures (2002). In order to create a scale of juvenile delinquency that was not compromised by self-reported measures, nine of the 24 original measures were utilized to record juvenile



delinquency within this study. A scale of the nine original ordinal response categories was recoded into a three point scale for delinquency assessment. The scale is as follows: (1) Never, (2) Once or twice a year through once every 2-3 months, and (3) Once a month through 2-3 times a day. The following questions were measures of juvenile delinquency which could be measured via the NYS: *joyriding, strong-armed teachers, stolen something <\$50, disorderly conduct, aggravated assault, runaway, gang fights, panhandled, and hit parent*. Juvenile delinquency will be assessed using OLS regression.

The following questions from the youth interview inquire as to the use of drugs and or alcohol. The responses related to use range from never (1) to 2-3 times a day (9), in the past year. The following items were used to measure alcohol and other drug use independently: *alcoholic beverages (beer, wine and hard liquor); marijuana-hashish (“grass”, “pot”, “hash”); hallucinogens; amphetamines; heroin (“Horse”, “Smack”); and cocaine (“Coke”)*. The variable “alcohol” copies the old values, as did the variable “marijuana.” A new variable was also comprised by collapsing all of the other illicit drugs (hallucinogens, amphetamines, heroin, and cocaine) into one variable. The responses were coded as a dummy variable; never was coded as 0 and all other responses were coded as 1.

#### Independent Variables: Relative Deprivation, Strain, and Aspirations

Relative deprivation was conceptualized as a form of strain, the failure to achieve a positively valued goal. Several variables were used to measure relative deprivation by assessing one’s aspirations. Robert Agnew’s General Strain Theory (GST) was utilized as a means of defining strain. However, Agnew’s measures of strain differed from those used within this study. Agnew assessed strain in terms of parental rejection, child abuse and or neglect, and negative

secondary school experiences (Agnew, 2001). This research takes a novel approach to the application of strain when viewed as a form of relative deprivation. Relative deprivation has the potential to inflict anger and frustration in juveniles. The means used to cope with this strain can be conventional (legal) or unconventional (illegal). The following questions will assess the role strain has on one's propensity to engage in delinquency.

The aspirations of juveniles are influenced by several factors. Webber noted that "By asking people what they would like to do in the future or where they would like to be in life we key into aspiration..." (2008, p. 99). Thus, in terms of aspirations and current successes, the following questions asked respondents about a variety of school, family, and peer related goals. Each question was comprised of two parts. The first asked respondents how important each goal was, and responses were coded as follows: 1) not important at all, (3) somewhat important, and (5) very important. Whereas the second part asked how well the respondent was doing at that goal; responses were coded as follows: (1) not well at all, (3) o.k., and (5) very well. The following questions comprised said selection (Part 1: How important? and Part 2: How are you doing?): *have family that does things together; have other students think of you as a good student; have lots of dates; have parents you can talk to; do well in hard subjects; included in friends' activities; parents who comfort you when you're unhappy; do your own schoolwork without help; have a special boyfriend/girlfriend; have your parents think you do things well; have teachers think of you as a good student; have friends ask to spend time and do things with you; have a high grade point average; and get along well with your parents.*

Assessing aspiration(s) via a two-part question allowed the respondent to state how important school, family, and peer related goals were compared to how they were actually doing. Each set of goals was divided respectively into the following categories: family (Alpha .573),

educational (Alpha .407), and social (Alpha .416). The two-part answers were then recoded separately for each category as a dummy variable. Those not affected by relative deprivation were coded 0 and those who reported relative deprivation (i.e. answered that a goal was very important (5) yet they were not doing well at all (1)) were coded as 1. Hence, these questions helped to assess the current level of aspirations juveniles had for themselves thus far and their success in achieving said goals.

#### Controls: Age, Race, Gender, Class, Family Composition, and Neighborhood

The age of the respondents was used as a control variable. The NYS, wave 1 assessed juveniles aged 11-17; juveniles' ages were recorded by having the respondent circle their age early on in their interview. The race of the juveniles was also assessed as a control. The race of juveniles was recorded via NYS by asking; *which one of these groups best describes you?* Caucasians or Anglos were predominantly represented within this study and accounted for 1358 respondents or 79% of the population. Blacks only comprised 259 respondents which equated to 15.1% of the population. Chicanos were represented via 75 respondents and accounted for 4.4% of the population. American Indians were comprised of 8 respondents and .5% of the population. Asians were represented via 16 respondents and accounted for .9% of the sample population. As a result of the minimal minority representation, Caucasians or Anglos were assessed as a variable and all other races and ethnicities were collapsed into a variable named non-white. Gender was another control variable being evaluated in this study. The majority of respondents in previous research attempts have been male. Questions established the sex of the juveniles by having them to circle male or female as their sex.

The class and or status of one's family affected one's current and future aspirations. Hence one's income was of relevance as a reflection of one's social status. A question within NYS asked the annual family income of the following year; responses were as follows: (1) \$6,000 or less, (2) \$6,001-10,000, (3) \$10,001-14,000, (4) \$14,001- 18,000, (5) \$18,001-22,000, (6) \$22,001-26,000, (7) \$26,001- 30,000, (8) \$ 30,001- 34,000, (9) \$ 34,001- 38,000, and (9) \$38,001 or more. Family composition can be very influential in the home environment to which a juvenile is regularly exposed. This variable was dummy coded and labeled as "intact." Families that were "intact" or had both biological parents residing in the home were coded as *1* and those in which one or both biological parents did not reside in the home were coded as *0*. The neighborhood in which one resided can also have an influence on their perception of relative deprivation. Hence, neighborhood location was taken into consideration. The original NYS variable "NYS URBAN/SUB/RURAL" recorded whether the neighborhood of residence was urban (1), suburban (2), or rural (3).

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The juvenile participant's ages ranged from 11-17 years of age. The mean age of the sample was around 14 years old. Males accounted for 53% of the population. Non-Whites accounted for 20.9% of the population, and whites accounted for the remaining 79.1%. Race was coded as a dummy variable due to the under-representation of minorities as referenced in detail within the methods. The mean income was 4.169 or \$14,001-18,000.00. Juveniles from intact homes accounted for 70% of the population. The majority of juveniles resided in suburban neighborhoods which accounted for 44.8% of the population. Additionally, 11.1% of juveniles reported that they experienced some aspect of family relative deprivation, 29.4% of juveniles reported that they experienced some aspect of school relative deprivation, and 52.9% of juveniles reported that they experienced some aspect of peer relative deprivation. Moreover, 48.6% of the sample reported engaging in at least one act of juvenile delinquency. Alcohol use "once or twice a year" was reported by 20.4% of the population. Marijuana use of any kind was reported by 17.3% of the juveniles. Additionally other illicit drug use of any kind was reported by 5.6% of the population. These descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
<b>Age</b>	13.876	(1.944)	11.00	17.00
<b>Gender (male)</b>	.532	(.499)	.00	1.00
<b>Race (non-white)</b>	.209	(.406)	.00	1.00
<b>Income</b>	4.169	(2.315)	1.00	10.00
<b>Family Composition (intact)</b>	.701	(.458)	.00	1.00
<b>Neighborhood</b>	2.03	(.742)	1	3
<b>Family R.D.</b>	.163	(.538)	.00	5.00
<b>School R.D.</b>	.173	(.493)	.00	5.00
<b>Peer R. D.</b>	.128	(.422)	.00	4.00
<b>Juvenile Delinquency</b>	1.108	(.154)	1.00	3.00
<b>Alcohol Use</b>	2.126	(1.650)	1.00	9.00
<b>Marijuana Use</b>	1.572	(1.552)	1.00	9.00
<b>Other Illicit Drug Use</b>	.056	(.230)	.00	1.00

Table 1 includes means and standard deviations in brackets.

Table 2 displays the results between the dependent variable juvenile delinquency and relative deprivation using OLS Regression. Five models were estimated to assess the impact of the controls, family, school, and peer relative deprivation, along with all three scales collectively. In Model 1, all of the controls were related to juvenile delinquency in the expected direction, except family income. In Model 2, the family relative deprivation measure was significantly related to juvenile delinquency. In Model 3, the school relative deprivation measure was significantly related to juvenile delinquency. However, peer relative deprivation in Model 4 was

not significantly related to juvenile delinquency. Model 5, which included all three measures of relative deprivation, illustrated that family and school relative deprivations were still significantly related to juvenile delinquency while peer relative deprivation was not.

Table 2 OLS Regression (Juvenile Delinquency and Relative Deprivation)

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>	<b>Model 5</b>
<b>Age</b>	.011*** (.002)	.010*** (.002)	.007*** (.002)	.010** (.003)	.006 (.003)
<b>Gender (male)</b>	.046*** (.008)	.043*** (.008)	.041*** (.008)	.057*** (.011)	.050*** (.011)
<b>Race (non-white)</b>	-.033** (.010)	-.032** (.011)	-.020 (.011)	-.053** (.016)	-.034* (.016)
<b>Income</b>	.002 (.002)	.002 (.002)	.004* (.002)	.002 (.003)	.003 (.003)
<b>Family (intact)</b>	-.034*** (.009)	-.028** (.009)	-.024** (.009)	-.052*** (.014)	-.035* (.014)
<b>Neighborhood</b>	-.020*** (.005)	-.018** (.005)	-.014** (.005)	-.015 (.008)	-.012 (.008)
<b>Family R.D.</b>		.024** (.008)			.024* (.011)
<b>School R.D.</b>			.038*** (.008)		.036** (.011)
<b>Peer R. D.</b>				-.003 (.013)	-.017 (.014)
<b>F-Test</b>	18.429***	14.471***	13.306***	8.556***	6.257***
<b>R-Square</b>	.065	.065	.067	.067	.076
<b>N=</b>	1604	1476	1306	838	689

Table 2 includes unstandardized coefficients and standard errors in parenthesis.

(\*)  $p < .05$ , (\*\*)  $p < .01$ , (\*\*\*)  $p < .001$

Table 3 shows the results between the dependent variable alcohol use and relative deprivation using OLS Regression. Older recipients, males, whites, and respondents from broken homes were more likely to report alcohol use. In Model 2, relative deprivation in the familial

context was significantly related to alcohol use. Relative deprivation within the school was also significantly related to alcohol use, as shown in Model 3. Peer relative deprivation, once again was not significantly related alcohol use in Model 4. Only school relative deprivation was found to be significantly related to alcohol use when all three measures of relative deprivation were assessed in Model 5.

Table 3 OLS Regression (Alcohol Use and Relative Deprivation)

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>	<b>Model 5</b>
<b>Age</b>	.381*** (.018)	.372*** (.019)	.342*** (.019)	.424*** (.029)	.375*** (.031)
<b>Gender (male)</b>	.295*** (.071)	.278*** (.074)	.262*** (.074)	.292** (.109)	.301* (.116)
<b>Race (non-white)</b>	-.374*** (.098)	-.380*** (.104)	-.253* (.103)	-.507** (.157)	-.381* (.167)
<b>Income</b>	.032 (.017)	.028 (.018)	.032 (.018)	.008 (.026)	.019 (.028)
<b>Family (intact)</b>	-.323*** (.085)	-.318*** (.089)	-.210* (.088)	-.453** (.130)	-.354* (.140)
<b>Neighborhood</b>	-.090 (.049)	-.064 (.051)	-.042 (.051)	-.065 (.074)	-.006 (.077)
<b>Family R.D.</b>		.283*** (.075)			.173 (.111)
<b>School R.D.</b>			.299*** (.074)		.266* (.112)
<b>Peer R. D.</b>				-.090 (.125)	-.092 (.146)
<b>F-Test</b>	81.845***	65.764***	52.946***	34.661***	20.910***
<b>R-Square</b>	.235	.239	.222	.226	.217
<b>N=</b>	1604	1476	1306	838	689

Table 3 includes unstandardized coefficients and standard errors in parenthesis

(\*) p<.05, (\*\*) p<.01, (\*\*\*) p<.001



The relationship between the dependent variable marijuana use and relative deprivation is shown within Table 4 using OLS Regression. The controls were found to be significantly related to marijuana use in the expected direction except income, as seen in Model 1. In Model 2 relative deprivation in the familial context was significantly related to marijuana use. Relative deprivation within the school was also found to be significantly related to marijuana use in Model 3. As with juvenile delinquency and alcohol use, peer relative deprivation was not related to marijuana use in Model 4. When all three measures of relative deprivation were assessed in Model 5, only school relative deprivation was found to be significantly related to marijuana use.

Table 4 OLS Regression (Marijuana Use and Relative Deprivation)

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>	<b>Model 5</b>
<b>Age</b>	.239*** (.018)	.221*** (.019)	.170*** (.017)	.263*** (.031)	.167*** (.029)
<b>Gender (male)</b>	.140* (.070)	.130 (.071)	.104 (.065)	.171 (.115)	.211* (.106)
<b>Race (non-white)</b>	-.266** (.097)	-.249* (.099)	-.108 (.091)	-.378* (.165)	-.096 (.154)
<b>Income</b>	-.008 (.017)	-.010 (.017)	.004 (.016)	-.015 (.027)	.016 (.025)
<b>Family (intact)</b>	-.302*** (.084)	-.239** (.085)	-.236** (.078)	-.519*** (.137)	-.410** (.129)
<b>Neighborhood</b>	-.260*** (.049)	-.232*** (.049)	-.181*** (.045)	-.275*** (.078)	-.207** (.071)
<b>Family R.D.</b>		.216** (.072)			.140 (.102)
<b>School R.D.</b>			.209** (.066)		.204* (.103)
<b>Peer R. D.</b>				-.134 (.132)	-.101 (.135)
<b>F-Test</b>	37.288***	28.679***	20.244***	15.423***	8.204***
<b>R-Square</b>	.123	.120	.098	.115	.098
<b>N=</b>	1604	1476	1306	838	689

Table 4 includes unstandardized coefficients and standard errors in parenthesis.

(\*) p<.05, (\*\*) p<.01, (\*\*\*) p<.001

Table 5 illustrates the relationship between the dependent variable other illicit drug use and relative deprivation using Binary Logistic Regression. In Model 1 older, white, males from broken homes in urban neighborhoods were significantly more likely to use illicit drugs. In Model 2, relative deprivation in the familial context was not significantly related to other illicit drug use. In Model 3, relative deprivation within the school was significantly related to other illicit drug use. Once more, peer relative deprivation (Model 4) was not significantly related to other illicit drug use. Model 5, shows none of the deprivation measures to be significantly related to other illicit drug use.

Table 5 Binary Logistic Regression (Other Illicit Drug Use and Relative Deprivation)

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>	<b>Model 5</b>
<b>Age</b>	.598*** (.078)	.581*** (.082)	.579*** (.114)	.538*** (.103)	.500** (.149)
<b>Gender (male)</b>	-.036 (.238)	.012 (.257)	.053 (.363)	.029 (.301)	-.267 (.482)
<b>Race (non-white)</b>	-1.185*** (.402)	-1.108* (.431)	-1.053 (.604)	-1.258* (.535)	-1.082 (.759)
<b>Income</b>	-.006 (.057)	-.028 (.062)	.035 (.081)	-.004 (.069)	-.012 (.105)
<b>Family (intact)</b>	-.752** (.270)	-.560 (.292)	-.748 (.405)	-.829* (.335)	-.503 (.504)
<b>Neighborhood</b>	-.585** (.169)	-.551** (.179)	-.557* (.260)	-.450* (.213)	-.672* (.326)
<b>Family R.D.</b>		.252 (.176)			-.121 (.357)
<b>School R.D.</b>			.535* (.238)		.388 (.298)
<b>Peer R. D.</b>				-.661 (.540)	-.628 .815
<b>Chi Square</b>	101.747***	86.263***	45.572***	51.762***	61.475***
<b>Cox &amp; Snell R Square</b>	.061	.057	.034	.060	.085
<b>N=</b>	1605	1477	1307	839	690

Table 5 includes unstandardized coefficients and standard errors in parenthesis.

(\*) p<.05, (\*\*) p<.01, (\*\*\*) p<.001

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

### Summary of Findings

A link between relative deprivation and juvenile delinquency has been shown in previous research. However, with relative deprivation being a subjective concept, it is hard to establish a concrete definition, making comparisons and further advancements in relation to relative deprivation difficult. In the past relative deprivation has been measured predominantly via economic measures. Thus, methodology restricted the bounds of relative deprivation due to numerous factors which could collectively contribute to relative deprivation as a whole. For this reason, Agnew's GST was utilized as the theoretical foundation for relative deprivation theory. Agnew's GST acknowledged that relative deprivation was the outcome of social processes.

As explored by Runciman and Webber, relative deprivation is a subjective concept that transcended purely economic measures. This study expanded upon Webber's work on relative deprivation by examining a broader notion of relative deprivation that utilized aspiration as a means of quantifying one's perceived deprivation. My hypotheses were as follows: 1.) *Relative deprivation in the familial context is predictive of juvenile delinquency*, 2.) *Relative deprivation in the school context is predictive of juvenile delinquency*, and 3.) *Relative deprivation in the peer context is predictive of juvenile delinquency*. My first two hypotheses were generally supported, and relative deprivation was significantly related in the expected direction with a few exceptions. Peer relative deprivation however was not a significant predictor of juvenile delinquency in any context throughout all five models.

Family, school, and peer relative deprivation were jointly used as measures of aspirations as a means of assessing strain and the connection between juvenile delinquency, alcohol use,

marijuana use, and other illicit drug use. In Model 2, which incorporated family relative deprivation, found this measure to be significantly related to juvenile delinquency, alcohol use, and marijuana use; however, family relative deprivation was not significantly related to other illicit drug use. Model 3, which incorporated school relative deprivation, were found to be significantly related to all four dependent variables. Model 4 which incorporated peer relative deprivation was found to not be significantly related to any of the dependent variables. Finally, Model 5, examined familial, school, and peer relative deprivation together. Family relative deprivation was only significantly related to juvenile delinquency; whereas school relative deprivation was significantly related to juvenile delinquency, alcohol, and marijuana use. Peer relative deprivation was not significantly related to any of the dependent variables.

Relative deprivation in the school context proved to be the strongest correlate to juvenile delinquency, alcohol use, marijuana use, and other illicit drug use when compared to that of family or peer relative deprivation. This factor can be attributed to several potential causes. Juveniles spend a vast majority of their time in the school setting among other juveniles who are from similar backgrounds. This is the reference group (comparative, normative, and or membership) with which they conduct their comparisons. These groups comprised the scale with which juveniles can gauge their status within their own group. If there is perceived deprivation among intra-group comparisons then the individual reported that they were relatively deprived. Hence, relative deprivation within the school context was significantly related to all four dependent variables.

School relative deprivation was a prominent correlate to juvenile delinquency due to the relationship between school performance and future outcomes. If one was successful academically, they were more likely to pursue higher education, and hence were more likely to

be successful in the career field. In comparison, if one did poorly in school, they were more likely to have fewer aspirations and had a harder time finding employment and being financially stable. As a result of said shortcomings, a person who did poorly in school and had fewer aspirations was more likely to feel relatively deprived and turned to delinquency as a coping mechanism. Furthermore relative deprivation in the school context did not only assess the perceived deprivation that participants had in the academic field; it also measured the implied affect that school performance had on one's future abilities (e.g., career prospects, financial stability etc.) and their potential to turn to non-conventional means to cope with said strain.

Relative Deprivation among peers was not significantly related to juvenile delinquency consistently. This may be attributed to the fact that these juveniles were minors and may not have parental consent to engage in dating. If these juveniles were not currently dating then these questions would be non-applicable to them and they were often omitted. Many of the questions pertaining to peer relative deprivation reference boy/girl friends and dating, which could be a possible explanation for the lack of a significant correlation. Another potential explanation is that when peer relative deprivations were incorporated into the models, there was a notable drop in the sample size (e.g., the participants who omitted dating questions etc.). This was attributed to numerous missing cases in which juveniles were asked about dating and or boy/girl friends; roughly one-third of the sample did not answer said questions which limited peer relative deprivation representation within the study.

I found the fact that peer relative deprivation was not a significant predictor to be interesting. I assumed that due to the intra-group comparisons that were conducted within reference groups that said comparisons would be determining factors in one's perception of relative deprivation. Though the non significance of peer relative deprivation was attributed to

several factors, which were discussed above, I feel that it should be noted that comparisons amongst peers are very influential tools that juveniles use when shaping their perceptions of themselves in comparison to those which they feel they are similar to. Furthermore, though peer relative deprivation was not significant within the context of this study, further inquiry into peer relations is essential in order to fully comprehend the impact of intra-peer relations in conjunction to relative deprivation and juvenile delinquency.

This research also illustrates the need for a broader conceptualization of relative deprivation. This concept is not given the empirical attention needed to further the empirical grounds of relative deprivation. The race and gender relations which differ when assessed in conjunction to relative deprivation could provide insight into the macro (e.g., society as a whole) and micro (e.g., reference groups) workings of human relations. Reiterating the fact that there is a link between deprivation and delinquency should prompt future researchers to further inquire as to the reasons behind this correlation, expanding their notions beyond economic measures. While these findings are not original, it is hoped that this study has introduced an innovative perspective of measuring relative deprivation in conjunction with GTS that will induce further empirical research.

### Limitations

This study was influenced by several limiting factors which ultimately determined the bounds of this empirical research. Collectively there were four predominant limitations within this study: use of the NYS which was recorded in 1977, reliance on self-reported data, missing cases, and the lack of a measure of negative affect.

This study utilized the NYS, wave 1, which was originally collected in 1977. The use of 30 year old data may incite some to question the validity of said research. Though the data is quite aged from empirical standards, the trends within youth behavior and delinquency are not notably different from these of youth today. The relevance of the NYS should not be questioned solely due to comparisons and contrasts between the past and the present. The NYS is a popular data source within juvenile delinquency and criminology research that is still referenced in present studies. Thus, the use of NYS should not compromise the validity of any empirical findings within this study.

Additionally, the NYS was a general population survey which relied on the reported data of a limited population to predict the behaviors of many. This presented limitations due to the lack of diversity within such a sample. Basing research on a limited general population study could also be an explanation as to why the data was not as equally representative of minorities which resulted in them collectively being collapsed into a non-white category. While utilizing a data source of this nature is sound, it is important to note that the NYS was just reflective of a limited population which may have altered the relativity of results derived from a data source of this nature.

The reliance on self-reported data was another dilemma in terms of empirical validity. When relying on participants to report their delinquency, there is a high margin of error. To help counter this shortcoming, Huizinga and Elliott's (1986) self-reported delinquency scale (SRD) was employed, as referenced by Piquero et al. (2002), as a means of heightening the overall reliability of self-reported measures. The use of said scale indirectly measures one's reported delinquency by creating a composite of their reported activities and behaviors for a more accurate measure of delinquency.

Missing cases are often present within empirical research. These cases were comprised of incomplete surveys and or absent participants all together. Often missing cases were those juveniles that participated in more severe delinquent acts and thus are less likely to complete a survey. Official statistics are also not as representative as they are perceived (Piquero et al., 2002); many delinquent acts are not reported which results in under-representation of juvenile delinquency.

Agnew's GST referenced negative affect as a potential outcome of strain; anger and negative affect would have been ideal measures with which relative deprivation could have been assessed. Negative affect is the causal mechanism with which strain and juvenile delinquency are linked. However, the use of NYS did not allow for negative affect/anger to be utilized as measures of strain via relative deprivation. NYS did not have appropriate representation of these variables for them to be assessed thusly. Hence, aspirations were implemented as a measure of relative deprivation. Despite these limitations, this study yields pertinent information supporting the link between relative deprivation, strain and juvenile delinquency.

### Future Research

Future research pursuits pertaining to relative deprivation would benefit from incorporating numerous factors as variables. In particular uniformity in the definition of relative deprivation, incorporation of a broader concept of relative deprivation, and more racially disaggregated data would be beneficial to research advances. Collectively these variables would further the assessment of relative deprivation and strain in relation to juvenile delinquency.

As previously stated, there have been several discrepancies in relation to the definition of the variable relative deprivation which has made comparisons between empirical researches



difficult. The definition of relative deprivation needs to be a constant within research which is quite a hindrance due to the subjective nature of the subject matter. Research on relative deprivation is slowly advancing yet is hindered due to the varying methodologies; more standardized methods would benefit the advancement of research within this field substantially.

Relative deprivation is a very broad concept which is often minimally assessed solely via economic measures. This study is a prime example of the fact that evaluation of relative deprivation as a more subjective and broader concept allows for a greater assessment of strain and relative deprivation. Relative deprivation is a multi-faceted concept which is comprised of reference groups, coping measures, strain etc. These subjective factors collectively represent the foundation of relative deprivation.

Racially disaggregated data would also be beneficial to incorporate into future research. The lack of data which assesses minorities independently opposed to the black and non-white generic categories would allow for more expansive research pursuits. Initially, the goal of this study was to incorporate a racial assessment of juvenile delinquency in relation to relative deprivation. The lack of available data that was racially diverse was limited hence such an assessment was not feasible using the NYS. Race relations are very important and relevant within social science research. In conclusion, more studies need to incorporate these variables which would allow for exploration of these dynamic relationships.

Further empirical research utilizing the NYS may also benefit from inquiring about the relationship between relative deprivation and delinquency comparatively in a modern day setting. With the advances in society and technology that have occurred from the 1970s until present day, I do not believe that time has lessened the ability of relative deprivation to predict

the likeliness of one committing crimes as a result of perceived injustices. If anything, the advancements in society (e.g., technology, material items, luxury homes, vehicles etc.) have heightened the ability of relative deprivation to be predictive of crime. There will always be “haves and have-nots” in our society hence there will be always be a sense of jealousy and frustration.

However, with the higher standards of living that we are exposed to regularly it has become increasingly difficult for individuals to achieve these seemingly unattainable goals. Hence more people will feel deprived in comparison to their peers as a result of this outpouring of material displays of financial, career, and familial success and many of these individuals will turn to crime as a means of coping with negative affect. With the implementation of these future research recommendations, it is probable that a better understanding of the impact relative deprivation, strain, and juvenile delinquency have within the social sciences will be ascertained.

## REFERENCES

- Agnew, R. (1992). Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency. *Criminology*, 30(1), 47-87.
- Agnew, R. (1999). A general strain theory of community differences in crime rates. *Journal of research in crime and delinquency*, 36(2), 123-155.
- Agnew, R. (2001). Building on the foundation of general strain theory: Specifying the types of strain most likely to lead to crime and delinquency. *Journal of research in crime and delinquency*, 38(4), 319-361.
- Agnew, R., Brezina, T., Wright, J. P., & Cullen, F. T. (2002). Strain, Personality traits, and delinquency: Extending general strain theory. *Criminology*, 41(1), 43-72.
- Akers, R. L., & Sellers, C. S. (2004). *Criminological theories: Introduction, evaluation, and application*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company.
- Baron, S. W. (2006). Street youth, strain theory, and crime. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 34, 209-223.
- Broidy, L. & Agnew, R. (1997). Gender and crime: A general strain theory perspective. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 34(3), 275-306).
- Eitle, D., D'Alessio, S. J., & Stolzenberg, L. (2006). Economic segregation, race, and homicide. *Social Science Quarterly*, 87(3), 638-657.
- Elliott, D. NATIONAL YOUTH SURVEY [UNITED STATES]: WAVE I, 1976 [Computer file]. ICPSR version. Boulder, CO: University of Colorado, Behavioral Research Institute [producer], 1977. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 1994.
- Hannon, L., & Defina, R. (2005). Violent crime in African-American and White neighborhoods: Is poverty's detrimental effect race-specific? *Journal of Poverty*, 9(3), 49-67.
- Hannon, L., Knapp, P., & DeFina, R. (2005). Racial similarity in the relationship between poverty and homicide rates: Comparing retransformed coefficients. *Social Science Research*, 34, 893-914.

- Harer, M. D. & Steffensmeier, D. (1992). The differing effects of economic inequality on black and white rates of violence. *Social Forces*, 70(4), 1035-1054.
- Hay, C. (2003). Family strain, gender, and delinquency. *Sociological Perspectives*, 46(1), 107-135.
- Hoffman, J. P., & Su, S. (1997). The conditional effects of stress on delinquency and drug use: A strain theory assessment of sex differences. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 34(1), 46-78.
- Huizinga, D. & Elliott, D. S. (1986). Reassessing the reliability and validity of self-report delinquency measures. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 2, 293-327.
- Messner, S. F. & South, S. J. (1986). Economic deprivation, opportunity structure, and robbery victimization: Intra- and interracial patterns. *Social Forces*, 64(4), 975-991.
- Ostrowsky, M. K. & Messner, S. F. (2005). Explaining crime for a young adult population: An application of general strain theory. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 33, 463-476.
- Piquero, A. R., Macintosh, R., & Hickman, M. (2002). The validity of a self-reported delinquency scale: Comparisons across gender, age, race, and place of residence. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 30(4), 492-529.
- Robbers, L. P. (2004). Revisiting the moderating effect of social support on strain: A gendered test. *Sociological Inquiry*, 74(4), 546-569.
- Runciman, W. G. (1966). *Relative deprivation and social justice*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Shihadeh, E. S., & Steffensmeier, D. J. (1994). Economic inequality, family disruption, and urban black violence: Cities as units of stratification and social control. *Social Forces*, 73(2), 729-751.
- Stolzenberg, L., Eitle, D., & D'Alessio, S. J. (2006). Race, economic inequality, and violent crime. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 34(3), 303-316.
- Webber, C. (2008). Revaluating relative deprivation theory. *Theoretical Criminology*, 11(1), 97-120.