**The Lost Generation: The Legalization of Abortion and the Decline in Crime**

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The dramatically steep drop in crime during 1990s baffles Sociologists and Criminologists. Several explanations for this drop in crimes were offered that ranged from innovative policing strategies to an aging population. Most of the scholars agree that the crime drop cannot be caused by just one factor. Ted Donohue and Stephen a Levitt offered an explanation of the drop in crime that steps out of the box and focuses on drops of crime as an unintentional effect from the legalization of abortions.

In order for Donohue and Levitt’s explanation to be taken seriously, several assumptions must be made. The first is the majority of the unborn children would have been more prone to a life of crime than a normal, wanted child. The second assumption is the children that were aborted were all unwanted. If they had been born they would have been subjected to mothers who did not want them, creating a negative environment for the child. The authors, believing these presumptions to be true, reinforce their theory with the statistical data around eighteen years after *Roe V. Wade*. They also compared the five states that provided legal abortions before 1973 to the rest of the country. Their enticing evidence does not take credit for the entire crime decrease. But they claim that at least half of the drop in crime rate could be the result of the Abortion hypothesis.

 Several scholars, such as Ted Joyce, have studied the assumptions and data Donohue and Levitt have published and have criticized their findings. These scholars find Donohue and Levitt’s theory inconclusive and unreliable and attempt to dismiss the theory all together. In this research project I critically examine Donohue and Levitt’s abortion thesis. I show that scholars have rightly pointed to several methodological problems with Donohue and Levitt’s abortion thesis. I conclude that these methodological problems are not necessarily fatal to the validity of the abortion thesis, but that we need more research before a definitive link between the decline in crime rates could be explained by legalization of abortion.

What led to the dramatic drop in crime rate in the United States during the 1990’s? Social Scientists have offered multiple explanations for the decrease in the crime rate that ranged from innovative policing strategies to an aging population. Ted Donohue and Stephen Levitt offer an explanation that is highly unusual because it argues that the drop in the crime rate was an unintended consequence of the legalization of abortions in the early 1970’s. While many sociologists have either objected to Donohue and Levitt’s hypothesis or have suggested alternative hypotheses, the Abortion hypothesis cannot be entirely rejected because even Donohue and Levitt claim that legalization of abortion can explain no more than half of the drop in the crime rate. This research project critically evaluated Donohue and Levitt’s Abortion hypothesis. I resolve that the Abortion hypothesis is still a possible partial explanation of the decrease in crime on grounds that Donohue and Levitt have left room to work with multiple alternative theories to solve the crime decrease question.

 The crime began its decrease in 1991. 

Chart A. United States crime decrease displayed over the time span of 1990- 2011 (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2008.)

In reference to Chart A, there is a significant drop from 1991 until 1999 where it began to level out, but continued to decline to this day. Donohue and Levitt’s article “The Impact of Legalized Abortion on Crime” theorized that the legalization of abortion has held a large part in decreasing the crime rate during the 1990’s. They came about this idea when they noticed a correlation between the increasing rates of abortions, which can be seen on Chart B,

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Chart B. Rate of legal abortions (Center for Disease Control 2011).

and the declining rates of crime during the 1990’s. The time frame between the two would have allowed the amount of time for the would-be born child to have matured and reached puberty, where they would be most likely to enter into the world of crime. Since they were not born, this lack of crime is the result. The effect is easily answered by Donohue and Levitt in their article, which consists of six sections that divide their studies. Out of these sections, they make several arguments that prove their hypothesis is responsible for a portion of the crime decrease. Donohue and Levitt mention the importance of discovering what caused the crime decrease. Donohue and Levitt make four main arguments for their theory. The first is their argument on the five states, which states that legalized abortion before the nation did. These five states were the first to show signs of crime decrease. The amount of time between the first five states and the rest of the country is similar to the amount of time that spans between the beginning years of crime decrease. The consistencies with this time period before the national legalization continue to produce the same statistics. Another argument that the two authors make is the crime statistics involving certain races that appear in the 1990’s are similar to the races that were most likely to have abortion. For example, underprivileged blacks, during the 1970’s, were living in squalor and vastly undereducated. Donohue and Levitt argue that since blacks during the 1990’s were the most prevalent in crimes, there would have been even more black crimes if the mothers had not aborted their fetuses.

The next and most important argument that Donohue and Levitt made was based on an assumption that unwanted children that were aborted would be the most likely to fall into a life of crime. The mothers would become pregnant and decide they were not at a point in their life where they could provide for their child or they simply were not emotionally ready to raise children. Regardless, under the assumption of Donohue and Levitt, if these women had been forced to complete their pregnancies, the sense of un-wanting would direct the child to mischief through their adolescence, therefore providing more opportunities for the child to commit crime. The Abortion hypothesis rests on the results of this argument. Even if the other information does match up, the argument Donohue and Levitt makes would fall apart without the connection of un-wanted children to their later, deviant behavior.

The introduction of Donohue and Levitt’s article in *Freakonomics* uses the example of Romania as a counter example to the United States where abortions used to be legal, but Romania’s Communist dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, declared abortion illegal. His main goal was to boost their population by forcing women to have children. No women in his country were exempt, except perhaps a few highly connected elite women. Ceausescu’s regime went so far as to do monthly checks at women’s work and monetarily penalized the women if they continually failed to become pregnant. Romania’s population boomed. With the population boom also came a decrease in the education quality due to over crowdedness based on Christian Pop-Eleches’ study. The study reports the negative effects that followed the poor education quality would have added to the conditions that led some juveniles to a criminal life. He also notes that “in the short-run abortion can differentially increase fertility of more educated women, but in the long-run the ban differentially increased fertility among less educated women” (Pop-Eleches, 1). Educated women, after losing their favorite form of birth control, chose instead to be celibate until they were ready to have children. Pop-Eleches also strengthens Donohue and Levitt’s hypothesis by providing statistics of Romania’s crime increase that matches perfectly with the decrease in abortions and later the increase in births. Twenty-three years after the illegalization of abortion, Nicolae was overthrown and executed by an uprising. Donohue and Levitt mention, through an assumption, the irony of the situation because the people who overthrew Ceausescu were the ones that would not have been born if Nicolae had not illegalized abortion. The importance of what happened in this country was also found to be valuable because of its complete degree of clear contrast from the United States and its legalization of abortion.

Scholars Peter Fajans, Mihai Horga, and Brooke R. Johnson completed a study on Romania and its ties to abortion in “A Strategic Assessment of Abortion and Contraception in Romania.” Their research indicates that there were no similarities between the two countries, Romania and America. The article itself focuses and describes the current situation of abortion and contraception in Romania. Their information is based off of national statistics, recent reproductive health surveys, and the findings of a strategic assessment led by the Ministry of Health in late 2001. The article did bring in more modern readings, clear up until the 2000’s, making the differences between the countries even more pronounced. They begin by telling the story of how the Romanian dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, overturned the country’s 24-year old highly restrictive abortion law. The first trimester abortion once again became legally available on request with this overturning. However, accompanying this there was a high demand that the country could not meet the needs for the many abortions. Later on in the 1990’s, disastrous effects of Ceausescu’s extreme, pro-natalist, anti-family planning policies on women’s sexual and reproductive lives were documented, as well as their need for high quality abortion and contraceptive services. From this, there was a decline in maternal mortality. This decline was due almost completely to the decrease of abortion-related mortality. Despite the decrease of abortions during the 1990’s, the overall abortion rate remains high. In 1966, the new Ceausescu government reinstated the abortion restrictions due to their concern for the declining fertility and population growth. There were many illegal abortions, and still today, due to the high demand for abortions, women choose to have them illegally done. According to Fajans and his co-authors, this scenario was completely opposite from the circumstances in the United States during the 1970’s; therefore, it makes the opening comparison of Donohue and Levitt’s hypothesis an interesting contrast, which was done deliberately, to show an opposite effect. Though the authors do not mention anything about the United States, their data is used as an alternative possibility if abortion had not been legalized in the United States. Despite the differences between the countries, there are still valuable points made from what occurred in Romania that strengthens Donohue and Levitt’s hypothesis.

A strong argument that both strengthens Donohue and Levitt’s hypothesis as well as counters Fajan and co-author’s argument, was mentioned on the *Economist’s View* webpage. A study was conducted by Leo Kahane, David Paton, and Rob Simmons focusing on the United Kingdom and the effects legalizing abortion had on the crime rate. They found that overall the crime rates fell 23 years after the legalization process; which in conclusion did not match up with the age a child would most likely fall into the life of crime. The authors look at reasons to explain the different trends in crime in the two countries. They do come to the conclusion that despite the differences in rates one cannot rule out abortion as an impact on crime. The authors did state that there is still a possibility that abortion may have marginally impacted crime rates, but as an overall correlation, it is negative. The authors then chose to address the question of what would have happened if the aborted fetuses had been born. Children that would stay in an “unwanted” environment would most likely either stay with the birth mother or go into the care of the state. However the option of adoption arises. If the children would have been adopted they would have most likely been brought up in a loving and accepting home. Therefore if the number of infant adoptions matched the number of abortions conducted this item of discussion would have been closed, but the number of children under state care did not decrease in accordance with the increased number of abortions. Adoptions in the United States have shown no positive correlation with adoption rates. In fact, there is an opposite correlation during the first five years after abortion was legalized. There were more children living with single parents in 1975 than there was in 1970. The authors concluded by suggesting that Donohue and Levitt would be “more fruitful to try to tease out the size and direction of the impact of abortion on contemporaneous and direct indicators such as the rates of children taken into care”, opposed to “trying to identify a causal link from abortion to indirect outcomes such as crime which are only observed many years later.”

Ted Joyce’s article, “Did Legalized Abortion Lower Crime,” does not prove that Donohue and Levitt’s abortion hypothesis is false, but he does believe that their methodology has some holes that Joyce chooses to bring to attention and provide an alternative with his own theory. His arguments, he suggests, would fill the time gaps and then match the time decrease perfectly. Joyce discusses all arguments in his article, but to begin with, he looks at the “five states point” that Donohue and Levitt make. He states that Donohue and Levitt did not conduct the proper studies to collect data of the first five states because these states define crimes differently. Each state is different in many different ways and cannot be compared to another unless they show similarities in multiple fields; such as laws. Even then, it is still hard to prove a point when comparing multiple states. Ted Joyce’s article would have been made stronger if he had attacked the Romania connection due to the fact the two different countries would be the same or even more different than the “five states point.” Since Joyce did not use Romania in his review, his entire criticism of the “five states point” is weakened as a result.

Furthermore, Joyce also states that his article is to “compare changes in homicide and arrest rates” among the criminals that were born before and after abortion was legalized to the changes in crime during those same years among similar criminals who were exposed to legalized abortion. Joyce’s main purpose of the response to Donohue and Levitt’s paper was to study the connection between legal abortion and crime and see if the theory Donohue and Levitt produced could actually be correct. The study period that Ted Joyce focuses on is the rise and decline of the cocaine epidemic. This epidemic began during the eighties, and settled in the early nineties. The epidemic was a series of turf wars between organized crime associations for land on which the gang members could sell their newly created merchandise. Once the ownership of turfs was settled, the crime rate fell dramatically. It is here that Joyce believes that the cause for the decrease in crime happens. He speculates that the abortion rate does indeed match the decline eighteen years plus one year down the road that correlates with crime. Joyce then proceeds to explain that it’s completely possible that before abortions became legal there were illegal abortions that were undocumented. The number of illegal abortions then simply moved in 1973 from illegal to legal causing the huge increase. Therefore, it did not match up with the significant drop that crime had at the beginning of the nineties. Joyce also makes a point to study abortion rates by comparing in-state groups. He argued that to compare unwanted children across the country produced too many variables. Each state has its own laws, its own customs, and its own people. It would have been smarter if Donohue and Levitt had chosen different sets of mothers from the same state and studied them and their children. This was a problem that multiple authors have brought up in their work, to Donohue and Levitt’s theory.

The last point Joyce mentions in his article is a note on the mothers view in Donohue and Levitt’s theory. Joyce argues that most mothers that would have had an abortion would have actually made better mothers than the women that actually proceeded to have their children. He believes that most women willing to deny their chance at motherhood during their young life were generally better educated, goal oriented, and had much brighter futures where they could provide for future children in a successful manner. The women that did have children during the early years of their lives most likely had lower educations and low-paying or no jobs. They would have been more likely, as mothers, to put their children through an environment that would make the children more susceptible to a life of crime. Donohue and Levitt however, focus more on the unwanted child aspect. Regardless of if the mother was good or bad, if the mother had been forced to have the child, the sense of un-wantedness would be imprinted on the child causing the child later in life to commit crime when they mature. The relativity of what type of person would qualify as a good mother and vice versa is a different matter that Donohue and Levitt do not need for their hypothesis to work, but should be taken into consideration to either strengthen o weaken the overall argument.

In response to Donohue and Levitt’s theory, sociologists Christopher Foote and Christopher Goetz question and investigate Donohue and Levitt’s theory’s validity in their article “The Impact of Legalized Abortion on Crime: Comment”. Their main argument agrees with Joyce’s argument of the five states. His argument was geared towards the criticism that Donohue and Levitt cannot compare the first five states to the rest of the country because the states vary in life structures and cultures. Foote and Goetz also go further by saying that comparing mothers from each of these first five states is highly unreasonable. Women that live in different states cannot be compared to one another because there are once again too many unknown variables. They begin their article by pointing out that the most promising argument that Donohue and Levitt had made was the section that discussed the first five states to legalize abortion and the five states’ earlier drops in crime compared to the rest of the nation. Foote and Goetz point out that this part of the research used a sample of data instead of the entire population to compare. The research would have been found to be much more reliable. For example, comparing two women from the same state would have produced much truer statistics in relation to comparing two women from two different states. The first problem arises here. Each state views and defines crime differently; therefore, the statistics on the data would not be entirely the same. Because Donohue and Levitt took their statistics from the total population’s crime statistics; their hypothesis lacks legitimate numbers. Foote and Goetz correct Donohue and Levitt’s data and find that with that change added, there was not any positive correlation between states to prove similarities between mothers and their children; making their un-wanted assumption wrong. Furthermore, it would seem that the result of Foote and Goetz’s experiment completely destroys the five-state segment of Donohue and Levitt’s argument entirely if this criticism were proven to be true.

Abortion in Colorado, as one of the first five states to legalize abortion, was not as open with legal abortion opportunities as Donohue and Levitt made it appear. Sociologist Susan Barnes and her colleagues provided data from personal interviews from people of different occupations in their article “Abortion.” While it was the first state to have reformed its laws on abortion, the law limited the abortions to five situations: 1) Pregnancy would result in death for the woman, 2) Serious permanent impairment of the physical health of the woman would be jeopardized, 3) Serious permanent impairment of the woman’s mental health as a strong possibility, 4) Child would be born with a deformity, or 5) if the pregnancy resulted in rape. This article also used different subjects to collect their data by way of interviews. The knowledge shared by these broad, based individuals only strengthens the results if they all accumulate the same data from their separate interviews. They also give different perspectives on the same area of study which strengthens the study’s results. Some views were from lawyers and their involvement of legalizing abortion, while others were from doctors and nurses and their experiences with abortions. One interesting point was made that the pregnant woman considers an abortion, “must not be afraid of using the law. In other words, she must be a fairly sophisticated person who knows of the existence of the law and to whom she can go for help… boils down to white middle class” (Barnes, 3). The article then goes on by adding that the state does not look at morals on the subject of abortion, merely the health and wellbeing of the many women considering the operation.

 The viewpoints from the doctors in the article, mention that when the women come to them for the medical procedure, they are found to be in a position of “emotionally, economically, environmentally, and/or psychologically untenable.” This states that, once again, the woman is thinking about her future, indicating some sophisticated background. This point that agrees with the mentioned statement about women who use abortions would support Joyce’s argument. However, Donohue and Levitt do not make the argument contingent on the quality of mothers, but on the general assumption that the child was unwanted.

The most important part of Donohue and Levitt’s abortion hypothesis is their “Un-wanted child” theory. Ted Joyce identifies a loophole in their argument by pointing out that mothers could be good or bad and cause influence in the child’s life. He argues that most mothers that would opt for an abortion would actually have made better mothers than the women that actually proceeded to have their children. He believes that most women willing to give up their chance at motherhood during a young life were generally better educated; goal oriented, and had much brighter futures where they could provide for future children in a successful manner. The women that did have children during early years of their lives most likely had lower educations and low-paying or no jobs. They would have been the mothers to put children through an environment that would make the children more susceptible to a life of crime.

In addition to Ted Joyce’s argument on bad mothers, Susan Barnes and colleagues give data as examples of “bad mothers”. The last point the authors in Barnes’ article mention was an interview with a nurse who mentioned how secretive the women who had opted for the procedure attempted to keep their abortion so that they would not live in shame. They would lie when they had to miss work, and even lie to their families. These women shared negative feelings about the pregnancy; proven by their desire to keep the whole ordeal secret. These women, if not allowed to have an abortion would have most likely had negative consequences with the birth of a child, hence the introduction of the “unwanted child”. The last statistic that was mentioned was that only twenty percent were actually relieved to have their abortion. The rest felt as if with extreme guilt and as if a part of them was missing. This, if using Joyce’s theory of “Bad Mothers”, could be assumed to mean that the eighty percent left were good mothers because they felt deep emotion and regret, but still chose to wait until a time when they could provide a better future for their child. The women that felt guilt demonstrate qualities that would show that the mothers wanted their children. The guilt of giving up motherhood affected them enough to stain them emotionally; hence the guilt.

In addition to Barnes’ argument, Ruth Dixon Mueller and Paul K. B. Dagg mention in their book Abortion and Common Sense, in chapter two, the types of women that have abortions. They give an interview of a Latina woman who was fifteen years old and pregnant. Her story was that she was unmarried. While she wanted to keep the child, she knew that she would not be able to present a good life to the child at that point in her life and so was pressured by her family and boyfriend to have the abortion. Afterward, the girl said she felt remorse, just like the girls that Barnes mentions in her article. The chapter continues to explore the examples of women who had received abortions and most were like the young Latina woman. They also mention that because many feel desperate to end their pregnancy due to the fact that they are not ready, as many as eighty thousand have illegal abortions, which include any procedures that terminated the fetus without the five previously mentioned exceptions from the Colorado article, were performed against the law and outside of a clinic. This issue of illegal abortions agrees with Joyce’s argument as well, when he stated that Donohue and Levitt did not factor in illegal abortions, which also forces the reader to discredit the Abortion hypothesis even more.

 Kristin Luker provides statistical data of which women would be more likely to support and use the abortion procedure. She points out that most women made below average incomes or were “house wives”. Pro-choice women generally made higher than average incomes and pursued education to lead to highly esteemed careers. Her data supports Joyce and Barnes’ theories by showing statistical evidence on how upper class women are more likely, because of their plans and goals in life, to hold off on marriage and families as opposed to lower class women who marry almost immediately upon reaching adulthood. The mothers that have been proven to most likely have participated in an abortion procedure are women from the privileged classes. They would have made good mothers based on the fact they have more forms of assistance available compared to an underprivileged mother. The authors, Susan Ostrov Weisser and Jennifer Fleischner, in their book Feminist Nightmares: Women at Odds, continues to back the idea of pro-choice women being of the privileged class and at least educated and left with broadened minds. However, as previously mentioned, Donohue and Levitt did not make the argument that bad mothering affected the child’s life. Their hypothesis argued solely on the sense of Un-wantedness projected on the child. If Donohue and Levitt were to expand on this subject as well it could strengthen their argument.

An example that provides support for Donohue and Levitt’s hypothesis is in John Evans’ article “Polarization In Abortion Attitudes in U.S. Religious Traditions, 1972, 1988.” This article focused on the strong polarizations due to religion on the issue of abortion. John Evans conducts a study on multiple church groups based on age, education, size of town that the resident lives in, if their residence is in the South, and gender. These are simple characteristics used often in observational studies. A point mentioned was that polarization increased during the same time span as the time length for the crime decrease to occur, in accordance with the abortion theory. Evans states that subgroups in the mainline Protestantism result in changes of attitudes towards abortion for demographic subgroups. The religious groups made a small social war on tradition vs. changes. This thought may have caused an increase in abortion, and so because they were not ready or able to be a good mother they had the abortion. It is interesting though, that even if the abortions were not the reason for the decline in crime during the 1990’s, it could very well be because of the anti-abortion movement during the time of legalization and since then; pressing the issue of being a good parent that ensured better upbringings and keeping children from a life of crime.

Looking at frameworks of attitudes towards abortion, Danigelis and Strickler make a highly valuable point which happens to agree with Joyce. This article examines how the determinants of abortion attitudes have changed between 1977 and 1996, using data from General Social Surveys. In earlier periods whites were more approving of abortion than blacks and now, in present day, it has reversed. The reason given for this is because white women were generally more privileged and knew what was within their rights. Religion became a less powerful predictor of abortion attitudes, while respondents’ attitudes toward sexual freedom and belief in the sanctity of human life increase in their predictive power. The study discussed how the overall level of support for legal abortion has remained stable for several decades, but forty-five percent of the people thought the level of allowance for abortion was usually limited to abortion for only mothers who want no more children.

The population has become more educated and more secular, allowing an increasing desire for fertility control. The authors quote Luker and how he offers a compelling argument for why highly educated women support legal abortion. They are more likely to engage in meaningful activities other than motherhood. Highly educated women are more likely to see unwanted pregnancies as potentially threatening to a woman’s well-being, proving that the “Good Mother” argument is not an essential argument needed for Donohue and Levitt’s hypothesis to work.

Joseph Sabia’s article on blacks and family caps also brings an interesting point to the table. The earliest Family Cap laws were put in place in 1922, which put restrictions on a family from receiving too much welfare. Before these laws were passed, for each child born to a family, a large sum of money was added to the family’s monetary aid. This article was chosen specifically because it focuses on the African American family. Donohue and Levitt mention in their evidence that the black crime decrease matches with statistics from the beginning stages of abortion. This author claims that the family cap is associated with a reduction in nonmarital birth rates, particularly among black women. This reduction is driven, according to Sabia, by a reduction in nonmarital pregnancy rates rather than through an increase in abortion or marriage rates. Sabia suggests that the implementation of the family cap law stigmatizes nonmarital births and pregnancies, particularly among black women. This would mean that black women chose abstinence over abortion as a form of birth control.

Another new argument that was added in response to Donohue and Levitt’s article was “Declining Violent Crime Rates in the 1990s: Predicting Crime Booms and Busts” by Gary LaFree. This article explored possible reasons for the increase and later decrease in crime. Gary LaFree began his work by stating that it is to our understanding that crime trends are hampered by a lack of longitudinal analysis and by a-historical approaches. He gathers his information through studying crime waves, starting at the end of World War Two. LaFree’s first concern was to identify the major trends in violent crime rates during the post- World War Two period. Rape and aggravated assault rates are generally less reliable, but despite these problems with reliability of the number they show a dramatic increase. Robbery and murder rates increase the most, by either doubling or tripling.

However, LaFree states that the decline in crime does not drop as much as the increase climbed. Gary bounces from one idea of his to another idea about the increases in crime. The most interesting is when he states that the civil rights era, when crime increased dramatically, has strong ties to crime rates from 1955-1970’s. There was an increasingly negative relationship between the crime rates and the people involved with the Civil Rights generation thereafter. It was at this point that perhaps the crime increase was related to the civil rights generation. Starting in the seventies, the younger generations began to emerge, replacing the negative and hateful violence. This would also include the idea of the aging generation.

LaFree’s offers another suggestion for why crime may have decreased: Family disorganization. Families are the first step in a child’s life where they learn social rules as well as the family’s way of life. These families also help decrease crime because of their instinct to protect their family from harm. If the Baby Boomer idea was applied, if some families chose to force lives of crime on their children, there would not be enough children to replace the number of criminals from the past generation due to the large population boom the generation before.

LaFree chooses not to accept just the Baby Boomer theory by itself. The Baby Boomer theory being during the generation of baby boomers, crime jumped simply because there were more criminals compared to previous generations. In the following few generations, the new population grows smaller because the idea of smaller families is generated and promoted. With age the old generation of criminals begins to retire from their lives of crime, but they do not have enough people from the new generation to replace them. He briefly touches on age as an alternative reason for the decrease in crime and states that age, as an element, is vastly overrated and overused. He mentioned Drug markets, jails, policemen, and education as other possible alternative hypothesis for the decrease in crime that are more likely contributors. All had an effect on the decrease in crime. The Drug Market was most likely to cause the greatest effect, due to the Drug War during the 1980’s. As previously mentioned, many crime lords fought over turf to sell their narcotics. The crime rate increase drastically during this time, and once the turfs were established, the crime began to decrease. LaFree’s article did not really rule out any theory. LaFree listed many theories and explained their strengths and why they made sense. By doing his article this way, LaFree made, in his opinion, a more important statement than if he had chosen one specific theory and worked with it. He demonstrated that there are many contributing factors to the decrease in crime, instead of just one overall theory. By finding what hypotheses work together to create an overall picture of crime decrease, a stronger hypothesis could be made. Donohue and Levitt agree with this choice of pairing hypotheses together to closely affirm the cause of the decrease in crime. There example is that the abortion argument could not possibly take all credit for the decrease in crime. They fully leave room for the Baby Boom generation argument or the Crack war. Their main point is to argue that the legalization of abortion does impact some part of the crime decrease.

*“Does Gentrification Affect Crime Rates?”* By Scott C. McDonald offers yet another explanation for decline in the crime rate in early 1990’s. Gentrification can be defined as the process of improving one’s neighborhood by having wealthier families take up residence and invest money into improving the community. This theory proves to be equally as interesting as the Abortion hypothesis because it was a fresh idea. It contradicted the general trend of urban decline by stating that the middle class was moving to high-crime neighborhoods. The working class and lower income families were relocated to even more impoverished locations. The study was conducted by taking time-series data from fourteen “gentrified” neighborhoods in Boston, New York, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, D.C. They then were analyzed to determine if gentrification had an effect on crime rates in central city neighborhoods. The time that this study observes for crime rates falls between the years 1970 and 1984. This study is important because it displays that gentrification works. With the repression taking effect and the stock market crash, many families could no longer afford the cost of living of their current homes, resulting in them moving to less expensive areas to live. The study also draws more significant data from personal crime vs. property crime. According to the article, gentrification is said to take place whenever high-income people replace low-income people in central city neighborhoods, and when the turnover is accompanied by capital reinvestment in the neighborhood’s housing stock. The article does concede that there are as many reasons why gentrification might depress crime rates as reasons why it might stimulate them. Another he mentioned was that there are a few scenarios to explain why the crime rates went down. 1) Affluent neighborhoods enjoy lower crime rates in general. 2) Renovations bring new technology and make more people protect their investments. 3) Citizen patrols come with gentrification. 4) Affluent newcomers have more political clout than their predecessors. 5) Displacement of poor may remove elderly, prime targets for crime.

The articles that have been discussed were meant to display the wide variety of options for the crime decrease that happened in the 1990’s and it also shows each of these hypotheses could possibly be responsible for at least a proportion of the decrease. The book Sense and Non-Sense: about Crime, Drugs, and Communities by Samuel Walker, gives support for The Abortion hypothesis. Walker suggested that contextual factors such as demographic changes, the rise and fall of the crack cocaine epidemic, and changes in labor markets could relate to the crime drop. Walker also brought to light gun control policies, increases in incarceration and consequent incapacitation of offenders, and innovations in policing. He even looked towards the possible impact of abortion. The “argument further adds that abortions were disproportionately high among women whose children would be most at risk for criminal behavior” (Walker, 8). In agreement with LaFree, Walker does mention repeatedly in the chapter that all of these ideas, while possible, have to work together to reach the decrease in crime. One hypothesis alone cannot furnish the entire explanation for a complicated issue such as a decrease in crimes. His argument is solely meant to attempt to answer one basic question: What works? What criminal justice policies are effective in reducing serious crime?

The authors Danigelis and Strickler, while they did provide agreement with Joyce in some aspects, also provide a fact that agrees with Donohue and Levitt’s argument. A bivariate analysis, Danigelis and Strickler studied; found that white women were less likely than black women to have an abortion (Henshaw and Kost, 1996). Whites, however, appeared to be more approving of abortion rights. This piece agrees with the theory by suggesting that underprivileged blacks are more likely to have abortion, but privileged white women, who under the assumption are better educated, choose to be permitted the option for the sake of choice.

Ted Joyce could quite possibly have mistaken the white women that approve of abortion with the few white women that actually had abortions. What is interesting is that Ted Joyce and co-authors Donohue and Levitt had response articles to one another over the Abortion hypothesis. They covered all topics, but when Donohue and Levitt published their response to Joyce, they did not cover the bad mother portion that Joyce attacked. With this area of argument being so important to their theory, it would seem vital to reestablish why they know bad mothers are responsible for raising delinquent children who will become criminals and also why they would be more likely to get abortions. It is possible; however, that Donohue and Levitt chose not to acknowledge the argument because they found the “bad mothers” argument unimportant to their hypothesis. Donohue and Levitt instead focus solely on the unwanted child scenario.

During the 1970s, statistics show that underprivileged black women were more likely to become pregnant before marriage over underprivileged white women. With this in mind, there would be higher numbers for black women who had abortions compared to White women. The only way either author’s statistics could be taken more seriously is if they had compared percentages of white and black women to see what portion of white women chose to have abortions compared to proportions of black women. Neither of the two studies mentions the proportions of their statistics. This would have weakened the argument for the opposing side if they had.

Ted Donohue and Steve Levitt’s theory has too many holes in it to be given credit for a large part of the decrease in crime. The idea of bad mothers being responsible for the decrease in crime because they chose not to have their children does not fit together with Donohue and Levitt’s hypothesis unless they can recalculate their data and add that study into their hypothesis. Donohue and Levitt would also improve their argument if they would make stratified comparisons of mothers from each state. Only one study, by Foote and Goetz, actually compared mothers from the five states together and then from within the states. Though the results did not rule in Donohue and Levitt’s favor, one study is not enough to completely rule out the entire section of the theory.

It would be important to insert here that Donohue and Levitt conducted this study, which resulted in the Abortion hypotheses, for the mere purpose of investigating a stimulating and controversial subject in the Sociological world. They chose not to delve deeper into conflicting segments of their argument. They chose to rely solely on two assumptions: the assumption that most unwanted children fall into a life of crime or the assumption that children that were aborted would have lived an unwanted life with their mothers. There are many conflicts with this hypothesis. However, there is too much evidence, such as a strong correlation between the two events of legalizing abortion and the crime decrease, to rule out the possibility when only one study has been conducted on this exciting subject.

Sociology theories are near impossible to be completely ruled out or completely accepted by the academic world. There are many holes in the Abortion hypothesis and so it is definite that the argument cannot take full responsibility for the crime decrease, but it is quite possible that is does take credit for a portion of marginal size. Romania’s crime statistics help aid Donohue and Levitt’s argument. That particular argument had not been mentioned by Joyce where it would have made substantial progress in weakening Donohue and Levitt’s theory. The misinterpretation of the argument on “unwanted” children is ignored by Joyce and several other authors. They instead respond with the “bad mother” argument, which would discredit Donohue and Levitt’s argument had it actually been mentioned in the hypothesis. Several authors have stated that many theories must work together to provide the answer to the decrease in crime. Donohue and Levitt agree with this statement and simply provide one piece to the puzzle. The hypothesis, while not accurate for all women, could be the scenario for some mothers and their unborn children. The theory remains intriguing as ever, but not as explanatory as it had first appeared.

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Chart B



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Chart A



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