1-1-2015

Race Ethnicity & Youth Perception Of School Safety

Sterling Jose Jackson
Wayne State University,

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/oa_theses

Part of the Educational Sociology Commons, and the Social Psychology Commons

Recommended Citation

Jackson, Sterling Jose, "Race Ethnicity & Youth Perception Of School Safety" (2015). *Wayne State University Theses.* Paper 407.

www.manaraa.com

RACE/ETHNICITY & YOUTH PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL SAFETY

by

STERLING JACKSON

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of degree requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

2015

MAJOR: SOCIOLOGY

Approved By:

_____
Advisor   Date

DEDICATION

To my family

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to extend my deepest appreciation to the people at Wayne State University and most importantly the department of sociology who over the many years have assisted me throughout this endeavor.

I want to give very special thanks to my committee chair and advisor Dr. Khari Brown for his assistance, sincere interest and guidance throughout the many months of this process. Furthermore, I thank him for his mentoring, support, leadership and patience during times that were difficult for me.

I would like to extend a very sincere thank you to Dr. Dillaway for her leadership, moral support, and discernment abilities and heartfelt thanks to committee member Dr. David Merolla who spent many hours helping me to understand various statistical analyses. Your contributions to my life will never be forgotten!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates how race, sex, and age influence students' perceptions of school safety. In the United States, youth are exposed to various levels of violent acts especially through media outlets, family, peers, and parental modeling. Violence is "is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation" (World Health Organization, 2015). It has many causes that may include the following: "frustration, exposure to violent media, violence in the home or neighborhood and a tendency to see other people's actions as hostile even when they're not. Certain situations also increase the risk of aggressions, such as drinking, insults and other provocations and environmental factors like heat and overcrowding" (APA, 2000). Some provocations can be typical for an average low-poverty stricken family, or a community experiencing higher than average socioeconomic instability and environmental disorder; when such conditions are often ripe, violence, weapons, and crime are adjacent.

One extreme ingredient of violence occurring excessively in United States neighborhoods and schools compared to other industrialized countries is the use of weapons such as a guns, knives, clubs, or other devices of choice. Weapons (especially a gun) historically have contributed to severe violent, chaotic events resulting in death. The number of guns held by citizens in the United States tops 310,000,000 given a population size of 316,148,990 people (CDC, 2012). The United States does not have a gun database that registers owners, and, as a result, has no way to track the actual amount of guns, however, in another study Geneva-based Small Arms Survey estimates that the U.S. has the best-armed civilian population in the entire world. With an estimated 270 million total guns or an average of 89 firearms per 100 residents;

ahead of Yemen, coming in second with about 55 firearms for every per 100 people, or Switzerland coming in third with 46 guns for every per 100 people (Morgenstern, 2013). In 2008, about 1.2 million nonfatal violent crimes occurred against children aged 12 to 18. Importantly, more nonfatal violent crimes occurred against this age group at school, then away from school (Daigle, 2013). For students enrolled in grades 9 through 12, violent victimization was more common; in 2009, 11% reported being in a physical fight on school property, and 8% reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property (Center of Disease Control and Prevention, 2010). Furthermore, research analyzing death rates show that violence among American youth is a more difficult problem than in other countries combined (CDC, 1997). The high per-capita gun ownership rate in the U.S. undoubtedly contributes to the greater access American teens have to guns (Ludwig, 1996). Access to firearms, likely contributes to nearly one in ten American high-school students being threatened with a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club, on school property (Daigle, 2013). Many studies suggest that teens have easy access to guns (Ludwig, 1996). Compared to other countries the easy attainability of guns contributes to the homicide rate among males in the United States being over ten times higher than the homicide rates in other industrialized nations (World Health Organization, 1995). Furthermore, research analyzing death rates show that violence among American youth is a more difficult problem than in other countries combined (CDC, 1997). This information directly speaks to the problem of violence amongst American youth when compared to similar countries directly impacting the need and sense of security.

In a 2011 nationally representative sample of youth in grades 9-12: "5.4% reported carrying a weapon (gun, knife, or club) on school property on one or more days in the 30 days preceding the survey" (CDC - Centers for Disease Control, 2012). Data analyzed in 2008 by

Harvard University of over 1700 high school students in Boston revealed that "over 5% of students reported carrying a gun, 9% of boys, and 2% of girls. Students substantially overestimated the percentage of their peers who carried guns and the likelihood that a respondent carried a gun was strongly associated with his/her perception of the level of peer gun carrying" (Hemenway, Vriniotis, Johnson, Miller, & Azrael, 2011). Therefore, students perception that their peers where packing weapons where more frequent than student actually had them. Hence, the anticipation that someone may have a gun increases the fear and a sense and need for safety. Data analyzed from over 1800 youth in Chicago examined risk factors for an adolescent gun carrying – investigators found that characteristics of the neighborhood (social disorder, safety, collective efficacy) were significant predictors of illegal gun carrying by youth (Molnar, Miller, Azrael, & Steven, 2004). In an analysis of the relationship between firearm availability and unintentional gun death, homicide and suicide for children 5-14 year olds across the 50 states have elevated over a ten year period; hence, a disproportionate high number of youth died from unintentional firearm deaths in states and regions where guns were more prevalent (Miller, Azrael, & Hemenway, 2002).

The early 1990s represented a peak in violent crimes committed by juveniles (McCord, 2001). The increase in violence was mainly due to drug trafficking the new crack cocaine substance; between 1980 and 1999, the large majority (93%) of known juvenile murder offenders were male, more than half (56%) were Black, each year from 1980 to 1999, Black juvenile murder offenders were more likely than White offenders to use a firearm, and between 1986 and 1994, the number of White juvenile murder offenders increased 64%, compared with 185% for Blacks (OJJDP, 2001). Correspondingly, homicides committed by juveniles doubled between the years 1987-1994 (OJJDP, 2000) this was largely due to blacks committing increased violent

acts. Studies also document youth gang drug wars perpetuated the high increase in gun violence during this period. For example, between 1987 and 1994 Chicago Street gangs initiated wars over drug markets and territorial control of neighborhoods committing over 100 homicides (OJJDP, 1997) fueling an epidemic among inner city black youth. Systematically, similar episodes of violence played out in many black communities in U.S., fueling concerns of youth safety matters.

As stated earlier, the current study investigates racial differences in student perceptions' of school safety. During the 1990s, Black students were significantly more likely to carry weapons than were their white counterparts (33 percent versus 25 percent), particularly, in 1991 when the gap was the greatest (Child Trends 2012). In 2007, fewer percentages of white students (4 percent) and Asian students (2 percent) reported being afraid of attack or harm at school than blacks (9 percent) and Hispanic (7 percent) peers, (NCES, 2010).

Among students nationwide, the prevalence of having carried a weapon decreased during 1991-1999 (26.1%-17.3%) and did not change significantly during 1999-2011 (17.3%-16.6%), (CDC, 2011). As a result, there has been less than a moderate decrease in students carrying weapons to school over the past decade. "Youth violence diminished as the "crack" markets shrank, law enforcement increased efforts to control youth access to guns, youth gun carrying declined, and the robust economy provided legitimate jobs for young people" (Blumstein, 1995).

Students' perception of being safe and their concerns about violence while attending school are paramount to academic and social development. A survey conducted by Children's Institute International 2012, revealed that almost 50 percent of teenagers believe that their schools are becoming more violent. Therefore, in general half of all teenagers' perception of violence in schools is on the rise. At the most basic level, a school that is safe for students and

faculty must be free of violence and crime, because criminal activity and violence do not only affect those individuals directly involved, but also undermine teachers' ability to teach (Henry, 2000). Along these lines, research suggests that students from more violent neighborhoods and, to a lesser extent, schools tend to perform worse academically and have more behavioral problems in schools than do other students (Bowen & Bowen, 2008)[1]. The perception that violence will occur can hinder and reduce developmental growth in that the fear associated with violence can have a negative effect on students' educational objectives.

Black youth tend to live in racially segregated neighborhoods and, subsequently, attend racially segregated schools; it stands to reason that they are more concerned than are their white counterparts about school violence. Residential segregation is particularly problematic for quality of life outcomes among blacks because Blacks are disproportionately poor, less highly educated, outside of social networks with political and corporate elites, and consequently have less political power (Massey, Denton 1998). That said, racial segregation, inherently situates many blacks in or near neighborhoods that lack economically and political power, which more easily allows for their systematic victimization and lack of political will to address their concerns (Massey, Denton 1998). For example, because of racial segregation, over time, the average residential environment of whites improves economically while the average home value for blacks deteriorates (Massy, 1990). Financial, economic, and culturally rich neighborhoods have been the pinnacle of healthy and strong communities in America. Within the black community destructive conditions are woven within the fabric of society. These conditions exist because segregation concentrates poverty building a set of mutually reinforcing and self-feeding systems of decline into black neighborhoods. Economic dislocations deprive a segregated group of

---

[1] Bowen, Natasha K., and Gary L. Bowen. "Effects of crime and violence in neighborhoods and schools on the school behavior and performance of adolescents." *Journal of Adolescent Research* 14.3 (1999): 319-342.

employment, increases poverty, socioeconomic deprivation inevitably becomes more intense in neighborhoods where that group resides. The damaging social consequences that follow from increased poverty are spatially concentrated as well, creating uniquely disadvantage environments that become progressively isolated geographically, socially, and economically- from the rest of society (Denton, 1998). Several studies find that "aspects of the neighborhood were important predictors of illegal gun carrying by youth" (Molnar, Miller, Azrael, & Steven, 2004). Again, fueling the need for safety concerns within these communities.

To the point, the black experience of living in racially segregated and disproportionately poor and unsafe communities with relatively poorer city services, such as police protection, likely impact youths' perceptions of safety. For example, students may: (a) feel safe in their neighborhood because of less crime, adequate police, and less outward signs of poverty. On the other hand, visual deteriorating infrastructures in urban cities like Detroit and Flint where there are thousands of vacant buildings make students feel less safe from violence and protected. These youth (b) experience more signs of outward poverty such as a lack of community service like trash collection, and limited police protection. Issues such as these can create distrust and a sense of fear within struggling neighborhoods amongst its citizens. This study theorizes that black students' perception of safety and violence in school are in part the result of violent experiences within their neighborhoods and communities. In addition, race has had a major impact on the subsequent opportunities afforded to blacks (e.g. access to jobs, quality of schools, political efficacy, individual racism, etc.) due to the impact caused by racial segregation. This extreme racial isolation did not just happen; it was manufactured by whites through a series of self-conscious actions and purposeful institutional arrangements that continue today (Massey, Denton 1998). This article focuses attention on youth perceptions of violence while attending

school in the United States and as a result has found that providing an augmented understanding of youth perceptions of violence by race can help reduce the overall occurrences of youth violence. This investigation is unique in that it argues exposure to violence and perception of it varies significantly by race. Furthermore, by selecting to analyze residential segregation as an independent variable amongst the dependent variables that were chosen for the study this examination is distinct. Residential segregation creates and supports places where poverty and inequality are high and white poverty and inequality are lower compared to places that are less segregated.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Environmental & Social Impact of Perception to Violence

One of the major reasons that youth have violent tendencies is a fear associated with unsafe environments on and off school property. Messages regarding the physical condition of the environment by news outlets in disadvantaged poor urban areas may contribute to perceptions regarding safety. Ecological theory posits that living in such disadvantaged communities will have a direct influence on one's individual characteristics and associated behaviors by people that live in that community (Rosenthal & Wilson, 2003). A number of theories suggest environment influences behavior. "The ecological perspective uses ecological concepts from biology as a metaphor with which to describe the reciprocity between persons and their environment. Attention is on the goodness of fit between an individual or group and the places in which they live out their lives." (Sands, 2001) This perspective suggests that people receive from their environment messages about the meaning making process. The social work discipline has expanded this perspective to explain that an individual is "constantly creating, restructuring, and adapting to the environment as the environment is affecting them" (Ungar, 2002). Complicating matters in these poor neighborhoods and communities and formally describe in sociology, the term "broken-window" that contends that if a neighborhood or city doesn't fix its broken windows, vacant homes and so on, the neighborhood will continue to descend into crime, chaos and violence (Thompson, 2012). Therefore, chaotic environmental conditions help shape perceptions of violence especially within neighborhoods where there are multiple and visual signs of poverty, resulting in many members within these communities to devalue their neighborhoods.

Most American poverty stricken dense urban areas have a plethora of environmental conditions that plague the community and contribute to neighborhoods and communities often increasing eyesores and infrastructure decline. To add, racial discrimination, compounded by poverty, unemployment, and infrastructure dilapidation contributes to the sentiment and lack of being safe and causes students to feel unprotected and provoke feelings of hopelessness, despair, and powerlessness in urban youth to effect change in their surroundings (Cedeno, 2010). In many ways neighborhood and community conditions both bad and good become symbols that relay message to its citizens especially regarding acts of violence. However, sometimes the actual message being transmitted to citizens by the media regarding violence can become convoluted and part of the growing problem. From an ecological perspective messages are transmitted to citizens about their environment that allows them to make decisions about the communities' state and condition, also the media also sends messages.

Media Influence on Community Violence

Magnification of social problems that are associated with poverty and disadvantaged neighborhoods through media may lead one to perceive their environment incorrectly by relying upon unsupported information and reports. When the media falsely or mistakenly report nonfactual information to citizens it can shape the perception and belief system within communities causing false interpretations and reactions. For example, a study by two nonprofit journalism organizations found that President Bush and top administration officials issued hundreds of false statements about the national security threat from Iraq in the two years following the 2001 terrorist attacks (Press, 2008). The study concluded that the statements "were part of an orchestrated campaign that effectively galvanized public opinion and, in the process, led the nation to war under decidedly false pretenses" (Jackson, 2008). These profound actions

have changed the world we live in today and may certain have led to a greater and in some cases less sense of fear within the United States and the world. Because perception of environment matters the media's portrayals of violence can have direct effect on the sense of how safe environments are therefore can actually influence violence. In America some research as well as media outlets support a perception that crime in majority white rural areas are less frequent and or vice versa, and it is often speculated that greater informal controls in rural areas protect against high crime rates (Smith, 1994). The media often portrays and supports messages of rural America (small towns, farming communities, and open country) as "crime free", and abnormal and shocking when certain crimes do occur. But in fact rural crime rates are in many cases just as high or higher depending on the crime. For example, "the 2011 rate of rapes and sexual assaults reported by victims to the NCVS was 110 per 100,000 persons age 12 or older in urban areas, 70 per 100,000 persons age 12 or older in suburban areas, and 130 per 100,000 persons age 12 or older in rural areas" (FBI, 2011). Clearly sexual assaults are more common in rural areas however, if citizen are not aware of this fact they could believe a non-fact about the condition of sexual assault within their community. Hence, the media reporting messages of violence to the community can influence the public's perception of safety by publishing inaccurate information.

Perception of Violence in Schools

Perception of violence in schools can cause major distress on an entire neighborhoods and communities and as a result, correct messages being relayed to citizens is paramount to safety and the perception thereof. Serious challenges can occur when incorrect information or data is consistently being reported to the community at large. The media under-reports these events, "Just in the first half of the 1999-2000 school year alone, some dozen and a half school-aged

children were killed – away from schools – in the District of Columbia, with hardly a mention in the news media outside Washington" (MintPress, 2012). Again, in the United States more incidents of violence happen in majority African American schools, but little if any attention is being paid to this social problem, making it a dormant or non-issue. For example, if the Influenza Flu kills twenty thousand people a year and Ebola only twenty but the magnification of the lesser disease appears in the media as more of a problem, than the perception of the more serious issue may not receive the appropriate examination, attention, etc. Normally, the media portrayal of violence in schools generally depicts a male student going mad galvanizing public concern of school safety in white suburban schools. The media's depiction of violence can have a significant impact on the perception we have to danger and our responses to it. Moreover, incorrect portrayals of violence in particular, with regard to school violence negate appropriate restructuring, policies, and procedures effecting violent outcomes.

Reaction to the perception of an unsafe environment and one's perception of it varies and can include avoidance, and fear and may solicit precautionary behavior by students. For example, many times students and teachers react to danger by avoiding certain places in school, these areas include; restrooms, stairways, classrooms or corridors. Some students may avoid school altogether and will "skip" classes. Four percent of all secondary school students reported that they stayed home out of fear at least one time a month. However, seven percent of the senior high school students in the largest cities said the same, as did eight percent of junior high school students (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1978). This suggests that fear and violence is a significant problem in U. S. schools that compromises the environmental stability and integrity especially in poor communities. What's more, violence by way of weapon further augments the need for safety and creates elevated fear and avoidance of school.

Race, Weapons, Media, and School Violence

Weapons' carrying by youth is a national health crisis that has had countless negative effects on families in the United States. However, the use of guns has instrumental value that is transferred through displays of dominance and urban "myths", but also through the incorporation of gun violence into the social discourse of everyday life among pre-adolescents. Because guns in American are widely available and frequently displayed they are significant symbols of power, and status, also they provide strategic means of gaining status, domination, and material goods (Fagan, 2002). It may be a complete failure to investigate media, youth perception of violence and safety while attending school without referring to what may be arguably the most profound concerns regarding youth violence at school and that is weapons carrying such as a gun. Hence, we need to understand the role that guns play within certain environment. The reality of weapons carrying and the perception of safety may be in some ways culturally linked.

Between 1981 and 2010, 112,375 infants, children, and teens were killed by firearms 25,000 more deaths than the number of soldiers killed in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, combined (Brock, 2013). "Youth gun violence is central to the ecological background of many neighborhoods, and also to the developmental landscape that shapes behavioral expectancies and social identities of area adolescents" (Fagan, 2002). The development of an ecology of danger reflects the confluence and interaction of several sources of contagion, mainly of fear. Weapons serve as an environmental cue that in turn may increase aggressiveness (Slaby, 1995). Adolescents presume that their counterparts are armed, and if not, could easily become armed. (Fagan, 2002).

The early 1990s became a historically significant period in modern history where youth were considered a high-usage group of firearms. Hemenway et al (1995) conducted a survey of seventh and tenth grade students in twelve inner-city schools. Overall, they found that 17% of the students have carried a concealed weapon. The majority of respondents reported self-preservation as a primary reason for carrying guns. Also, having a family member that has been shot is a predictor of carrying a weapon; suggesting that neighborhoods that are considered dangerous by way of culture promote violent behaviors in teens. As part of an on-going regional study of students in a rural area of central Texas, Kingery and Heuberger (1996) students in eighth and tenth grade English classrooms were surveyed regarding carrying weapons to school. Approximately 9% of the students carried a weapon to school in the previous twelve months. The two most salient reasons for this were fear or anger. Although the proportion of violence that occurs at school is much smaller than the violence that happens in other environments, when it does occur in the context of the school it is very significant; this study indicated a 138% increase in students carrying weapons. School-aged children are dealing with significant levels of fear on school campus due to weapon issues and increase levels of violence.

Further, results from the National Youth Survey indicate that between the years 1993 to 2005, seven percent to nine percent of high school students reported being threatened or victimized with a weapon (i.e., guns, knives, or clubs) on school property. Hence, for over a decade there has not been any significant decrease or increase in high school students being threatened or victimized by way of weapon. Further, research indicates that there has been an increase in violence committed by American youth since the 1980s (Bilchik, 1996). Therefore, it is understandable why carrying weapons continues to be a national health concern, in the United States.

Not only is the rate of youth being threatened or victimized with weapons for more than ten years been unwavering, but also youth committing certain kinds of violence is swelling. This is enough to suspect that violence by way of weapon may multiply if something is not done expeditiously to combat the escalating violence by United States youth. Large numbers of teens in the U. S. that are in possession of guns and/or other weapons, youth perceiving that their friends are carrying weapons, the fact that youth violence is escalating, challenges and augments perception and increases the need for safety. Another concern is that an increase in violence may create a surge in weapons carrying mainly gun possession by students and a rise of homicide arrest rates of adolescents 10 – 17 years of age (Zimring 1998).

Race, Violence, and Victimization

Violence at schools occurs in the United States at rates much higher than similar industrialized countries and in some cases depending upon the act more than all of countries combined. This further establishes substantial and credible reason to investigate youth's perception of violence while attending school. School safety garners the attention of many community stakeholders such as educational and non- profit organizations, law enforcement, health care professionals, community activists, policymakers, federal, state, and local municipalities concerned with improving the health and safety of the U.S. educational system. With the latter in mind studies show that schools in neighborhoods highly populated by blacks and other minorities are more prone to experiencing and reporting episodes of violence. Both exposure to violence and perception of it vary substantially by race. Furthermore, black children and adolescents living at or below the poverty level are particularly vulnerable to witnessing or being directly victimized by violence (Bloom, 2002). In addition, 82% of schools that are more than 50% black have recorded at least one violent crime compared to 77% of majority Hispanic

schools and 71% of majority white schools (BlackDemographics.com). Current research support the position that blacks are more likely than whites to be victimized by violence and being overall concerned with safety while at school especially if they live in conditions of poverty. Moreover, previous research purports that majority of blacks reside in poor dense urban areas where most violence occurs, increasing the probability that they will experience more crime than their white counterparts will. Therefore, referring to the data school safety and violence appears to be more of a concern for poor black youth attending school because they are more likely to be victimized and exposed to violent conditions.

Residential Segregation & Concentrated Poverty

In 1890, many blacks lived among whites who numerically dominated urban cities. By 1940, the typical African American lived in a census tract in where 60% of the residents were black. Residential isolation has continued to climb throughout the last half century, so that by 1990, the typical census tracts where blacks lived averaged 85% African American. By the mid-1920s the real estate industry successfully popularized the idea that brokers were violating a norm and breaking their code of ethics if they introduced blacks, Jews, Hispanics or other racial minorities to formerly white neighborhoods (Helper, 1969 & McEntire, 1960). As the concentration of African American neighbors increased, whites' willingness to consider moving into the neighborhoods declined. Thus, even though whites support the principle of racial equality, they believe that there is little to gain from residential integration while some studies argue that segregation improves outcomes for whites. Segregation creates places where black poverty and inequality are higher and white poverty and inequality are lower, compared to places that are less segregated and it holds a longstanding position as one of the prime suspects in explaining the persistent economic inequality between blacks and whites (Ananat, 2011).

It has been 60 years since the ruling of Brown V. Topeka Board of Education case where the U.S. Supreme Court declared state laws establishing separate public schools for Blacks and Whites unconstitutional. Schools became desegregated as a direct result of the Brown V. Topeka ruling. However, residential segregation was increasing and its effects within minority neighborhoods reflect third world countries in that often basic resources are scarce. Hence, in many urban cities police and fireman have been laid off, pensions cut, lack proper equipment to conduct their work or lost their jobs. Visual signs of poverty and economic strife or the competition and stress related to obtaining minimum financial income in poverty stricken areas, are evident in cities where high levels of unemployment and city services are stressed. Lower wages, revenue, and the lack of spending capital by citizens and local governmental municipalities have significantly contributed to the creation of urban ghettos. Groups that experience both high poverty rate and a high degree of residential segregation (e.g., blacks and Puerto Ricans) showed the highest levels of poverty concentration, of which rose most dramatically in urban areas where a sharp downward shift in the income distribution occurred in a highly segregated communities, e.g., Chicago and New York, (Douglas S, 1990).

Part of the reason for continued segregation is institutional practices, prejudice, and racial discrimination. As a result, many white families' transition in the 1970s from neighborhood that were populated by blacks to neighborhoods and school districts with better reputations, status, and resources while leaving behind communities reduced of resources that eventually turn into ghettos. Wilson (1996) argues that another result of residential segregation is that racial division increases the ability of local government to transfer schooling resources from black to white communities. *Wilson (1978)* argues that during the 1970s economic and demographic changes in inner cities explains the rise of the minority underclass. At such time there was a decrease in

manufacturing, the suburbanization of blue-collar employment, and the rise of the service sector. These changes eliminated many well-paying jobs for unskilled minorities and reduced the pool of marriageable men, thereby undermining the strength of the family, increasing the rate of poverty, and isolating many inner-city residents from accessible, upper, and middle-class occupations. At the same time, the expansion of civil rights generated new opportunities for middle-class blacks, who moved out of the ghetto in large numbers, leaving behind an isolated and very poor minority community without the institutions, resources, and values necessary for success in modern society (Wilson W. J., 1978).

Conclusion

In conclusion, residential segregation is a key factor in the establishment of pockets of low-income ghettos and communities. Many of the citizens in highly segregated areas are low-income earning African Americans vying for the similar socioeconomic conditions as the majority population. Resources that include but are not limited to; employment, education, and better living conditions all of which provides a sense of fundamental safety.

As a significant result of residential segregation many African American neighborhoods and communities are considered destitute and dangerous, especially where there are noticeable signs of unstable or unsafe conditions (i.e., teenagers that assemble gather outside of stores during school hours, numerous vacant properties in a neighborhood (Wilson J. Q., 1982). High rates of residential segregation have significantly contributed to the economic strife, high poverty, unemployment, and infrastructure dilapidation, within African American ghettos' contributing to the need for protection and safety by its citizens.

High levels of poverty, limited resources, and deplorable environmental conditions significantly contribute to youth violence and if not addressed appropriately many United States

communities will continue to descend socioeconomically. Complicating things is the media reporting of information regarding critical issues and if reported improperly can lead to inaccurate perceptions. Understanding youth perception of violence and weapons carrying while attending school is important to this investigation and the United States because not only it occurs much higher than in similar industrialized countries but also it creates and supports an atmosphere of fear and violence that is more likely to be experienced by African American citizens. As a result, it is important to understand how it is symbolized and perceived by youth within their perspective communities to support any initiative at reducing youth violence. Arguably the most important factor to perception of violence is residential segregation because it supports places where poverty and inequality are high and white poverty and inequality are lower compared to places that are less segregated.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

<div align="center">

Hypothesis

</div>

Black teens are more likely than whites, to be concerned about violence and security while in school.

<div align="center">

Sample

</div>

This study relies on data from CBS News/The New York Times. CBS News/New York Times Teen Poll, October 1999. In a national survey teens were queried regarding various subjects. A total of 1,038 participants were surveyed providing a 96.9% response rate. The type of school attended was important within the survey private, public, and parochial. This study does not afford information regarding certain data such as whether participant's where chosen at random or if interviews were conducted over the phone, face-to-face or by way of mail.

<div align="center">

Measures

</div>

Dependent Variables: Perceptions of School Safety

The dependent variables used to asses' teen student's perceptions of school safety examine the extent to which students say that they believe that violence is their school's number one problem and at least some students at their school carry weapons. This study also examines the extent to which students are scared of a Columbine-styled shooting happening at their school; don't feel safe at school, and desire increase school security. All these variables are measured dichotomously.

Independent Variable: Race

Race was measured using the following responses: White, Black, Hispanic, and other.

Control Variables

This study also takes age, gender, father employment status, household structure, and residential region in to account.

Statistical Methods

Because the dependent variables are dichotomous; logistic regression was utilized for the multivariate analyses.

Results

These findings indicate that; blacks are more likely than whites to be concerned about school violence and safety.

Bivariate Analysis

The cross tabulation analysis reported in Table 1 indicates that black students are consistently more likely than whites to express concern about their safety. The only measure where this trend does not hold is with the concern about Columbine. In addition, Hispanics and members of other races are more likely than Whites to say that they don't feel safe at school. Finally, Hispanics are more likely than Whites express a desire to increase school security.

Multivariate Analysis

Unlike the bivariate analyses, the multivariate analyses of Table 2 reveal only two significant differences along racial/ethnic lines on perceptions of school safety. Blacks and Hispanics are more likely than Whites to say that they don't feel safe at school and to desire increased security at their school. These analyses also indicate that, on all of the school safety measures, Southern students are more likely than non-Southerners to be concerned about safety. Suburban students are less likely than rural students to believe that at least some students at their school carry a weapon. Respondents with employed fathers were less likely to fear a Columbine-style event happening at their school. In three of five school safety measures older students are more concerned about school safety than are younger students.

Table 1: Impact of Race/Ethnicity on Perceptions of School Violence: Cross-Tabulations

	Violence is #1 school problem	At least some students carry weapons	Scared of Columbine-styled shooting happening at school	Don't feel safe at school	Increase school security
White[2]	13.3%	19.4%	48.5%	44.0%	18.4%
Black	20.8%*	30.2%*	57.3%	68.8%**	30.2%**
Hispanic	12.1%	23.2%	57.6%	58.6%**	27.3%*
Other Race	17.31	15.38	46.15	53.85**	15.38
N=1006	14.1%	20.6%	50.1%	48.3	20.3%

*<.05, **<.01

---

[2] Whites are the statistical comparison group

Table 2: Impact of Race/Ethnicity on Perceptions of School Violence: Logistic Regression

	Violence is #1 school problem	At least some students carry weapons	Scared of Columbine styled shooting happening at school	Don't feel safe at school	Increase school security
Race/Ethnicity[3]					
Black	.317	.310	.203	.820*	.548*
Hispanic	-.187	.170	.386	.557*	.506*
Other Race	.313	-.294	-.043	.434	.400
Control Variables					
Married	-.221	-.309	.266	-.423*	.015
South	.418*	.373*	.403*	.339*	.377*
Urban[4]	-.164	-.068	.166	-.105	-.038
Suburban	-.134	-.437*	.065	.004	-.281
Father Employed	-.173	-.012	-.364*	-.031	.119
Age	-.175*	.212	.135*	.119*	-.077
Female	.039	.208	.120	.131	.173
N=	1006	1006	1006	1006	1006

*<.05, **<.01

---

[3] Whites are the comparison category for race/ethnicity

[4] Rural is the comparison category for urbanity

Discussion

The findings indicate that both exposure to violence and the perception of it vary substantially by race. Black high school students are more likely than whites; to be concerned about violence and security while in school. Similar to blacks, Hispanics are also more likely than whites to report that they did not feel safe at school and increase security was important. The results of this investigation may reflect the fact that racially segregated and subsequently impoverished neighborhoods reflect third world countries with limited social-economic resources and heightened safety issues. Hence, in many urban cities police and fireman have been laid off, pensions cut; lack proper equipment, all of which makes it difficult for these institutions to maintain public safety amidst social-economically distress. Residential segregation denied blacks access to schools, parks, and opportunities that were available to whites, and it allowed local and state officials to provide African Americans with second-rate services (Myrdal, 1944). Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton (1993) described the process whereby residential segregation concentrates poverty, and in turn creates the urban underclass neighborhoods found in many urban cities. And the point that "ecological theory" and "broken windows" concept exposure in disadvantaged neighborhoods and communities' influence a person's behaviors that live in that community. Therefore, it is my argument that residential segregation and influences through media have significantly contributed to the current neighborhood and school characteristics regarding youth perception of safety and violence by transmitting messages that shape their perception of and to violence in general.

Impact of Segregation

High residential segregation is one catalyst for shaping blacks' attitudes and perceptions toward safety and violence within their neighborhoods. It reduces the quality of life for black

citizens and contributes to youth's perception of what is safe within their schools. As Gunnar Myrdal observed in his landmark study, residential segregation denied blacks access to schools, parks, and opportunities that were available to whites, and it allowed local and state officials to provide African Americans with second-rate services (Myrdal, 1944). Housing discrimination and segregation play key roles in maintaining racial differences in employment, income, poverty and wealth holdings (Yinger, 1999). Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton 1993, describe the process whereby residential segregation concentrates poverty, and in turn creates the urban underclass neighborhoods found in many cities.

David Cutler and Edward Glaeser analyzed the consequences of residential segregation for young African Americans making the school to work transition. They found that young blacks living in highly segregated places were significantly more likely to drop out of high school and young women residing in highly segregated places were more likely to be single mothers. They concluded that if residential segregation was eliminated, "black-white differences, earnings, high school graduate rates, and idleness would disappear as would two-thirds of the black-white differences in single motherhood" (Cutler, 1997). In addition, there would be less of a need and concern for safety because resources would be more stabilized within neighborhoods and communities. Clearly, the impact of residential segregation is important to youth perception of safety while in school and deserves further investigations.

The Columbine variable is the only variable that does not reveal a significant difference because it is skewed. In other words events like the Columbine episode are do not happen often and as result is an extreme scenario and may not serve as a viable question for the study.

Disadvantaged Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods are social spaces that have an influence on the behavioral conditions and interaction patterns of individuals in that environment. When we do not respond to low levels of violence termed "broken windows", it creates problems within institutional settings and augments the issue of social disorder, which has consequences for behavior. An unintended or latent consequence of disadvantaged and unstable inner-city neighborhoods is that the people who live in them begin to feel unsafe. When communities are perceived to be unsafe people, and well as public safety official's don't seem to participate in formal social controls, then "violence should be considered one of the primary mechanisms through which disadvantaged neighborhoods affects adolescent outcomes" (Harding, 2009). In other words, the perception violence and living in disadvantaged neighborhoods can directly affect youth development and positive outcomes in a school setting.

Respondents in the study who live in the south were more likely than non- southern students to report that violence is the number one school problem, at least some students carry weapons, they're scared of Columbine styled shooting happening at school, don't feel safe at school and increase school security are important; differences in economic interest may be related to this phenomenon. For example, historically agriculture was the economic engine in the south, meanwhile in the north the industrial revolution began of which created different needs and experiences regarding violence and security for citizens. Blacks living in southern states may have experienced higher rates of overt discrimination and racism opposed to African Americans residing in northern arears.

Lack of Gatekeepers

Moreover, these communities and school are thought of as having a lack of gate-keepers and or unresponsive members that can regulate behavior, (i.e., weak politicians, relative political structures) and limited social ties. Fragile social connections, as opposed to strong ones, lead to fewer resources available to community members, resulting in limited access to institutionalized means to achieve basic and standard societal goals (i.e., achievement and success). As a result, some neighborhoods and communities and school are completely disorganized so that they cannot prevent crime and violence from occurring (Henslin, 2010). Codes emerge under certain conditions that shape the decision making process. Some cultural patterns in the inner-city communities reflect informal rules that shape how people interact to make decisions. The meaning-making and decision-making processes evolve over time in situations imposed by racial segregation and poverty, and are situations that severely hamper social mobility (Wilson W. J., 2009). Furthermore, high residential segregation has created a whole "ghetto experience" by forging unstable schools, (police, education, job loss, and higher unemployment rate) and neighborhoods.

Conclusion

Students' perception of being safe and their concerns about violence while attending school is paramount to their academic and social growth. Schools with an inability to provide a safe learning environment for students may experience adverse outcomes regarding students' academic success. Students that are experiencing violence, whether as an aggressor or victim, negatively contributes to a climate of malice, moreover, the thought of not being safe while attending school is enough to decrease learning ability.

REFERENCES

Ananat, E. O. (2011). The Wrong Side(s) Of The Tracks: The Causal Effects Of Racial Segregation On Urban Poverty And Inequality. *American Economics Journal: Applied Economics 3*, pp. 34-66.

APA, A. P. (2000, July). *American Psychological Association*. Retrieved From American Psychological Association: http://www.apa.org/topics/violence/index.aspx

Bilchik, S. (1996). *1996 National Youth Gang Survey.* Rockville: Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse.

BJS, S. U. (2010, September). *Criminal Victimization.* Retrieved February 2015, From http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv10.pdf

BlackDemographics.com: http://blackdemographics.com/education-2/school-violence-crime/

Bloom, S. L. (2002). *The PVS Disaster: Poverty, Violence And Substance Abuse In The Lives Of Women And Children.* Philadelphia: West Willow Grove.

BLS, B. (2014, October 3). *Charting The Labor Market: Data From The Current Population Survey (CPS).* Retrieved October 10, 2014, From Bureau Of Labor Statistics: www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cps_charts.pdf

Blumstein, A. (1995). Youth Violence, Guns And The Illicit-Drug Industry. *The Future Of Children*, 10-36.

Brock, S. A. (2013). *Youth Gun Violence Fact Sheet.* Retrieved September 2014, From National Association Of School Psychologists: http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/Youth_Gun_Violence_Fact_Sheet.pdf

CDC – Centers For Disease Control. (2012). Retrieved From Facts At A Glance 2012: http://www.cdc.gov

CDC. (1997). Rates Of Homicide, Suicide And Firearm-Related Deaths Among Children-26 Industrialized Countries. *Morbidity And Mortality Weekly Report*, 46:101-105.

Census, B. U. (2012, April 1st). *Education: Educational Attainment*. Retrieved October 15, 2014, From United States Census Bureau: http//www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/table/12s0229.pdf

Child Trends, C. (2012). *High School Students Carrying Weapons*. Retrieved From Child Trends Databank: http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=high-school-students-carrying-weapons

Cutler, D. M. (1997). Are Ghettos Good Or Bad? *Quarterly Journal Of Economics*, 827-872.

Daigle, L. E. (2013). *Victimology.* Thousand Oaks: Sage publications.

Denton, D. S. (1998). The Dimensions Of Residential Segregation. *Social Forces*, 281-315.

Douglas S, M. (1990). American Apartheid: Segregation And The Making Of The Underclass. *American Journal Of Sociology*, 329-357.

Fagan, D. W. (2002). What Do We Know About Gun Use Among Adolescents? *Center For The Study And Prevention Of Violence*, 32-33.

FBI, B. O. (2011). *Criminal Victimization.* Washington, DC: Federal Bureau Of Investigation.

Harding, D. J. (2009). Collateral Consequences Of Violence In Disadvantaged Neighborhoods. *National Institues Of Health*, 757-784.

Helper, R. (1969). *Racial Policies And Practices Of Real Estate Brokers.* Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press.

Hemenway, D., Vriniotis, M., Johnson, R. M., Miller, M., & Azrael, D. l. (2011). Gun Carrying By High School Students In Boston, MA: Does Overestimation Of Peer Gun Carrying Matter? *Journal Of Adolescence*, 34:997-1003.

Henry, S. (2000). "What Is School Violence?: An Integrated Definition.". *The ANNALS Of The American Academy Of Political And Social Science*, 16-29.

Henslin, J. (2010). *Essentials Of Sociolgy, A Down To Earth Approach.* Prentice Hall.

Jackson, T. (1983). Violence In School. *Crime And Justice*, 1-47.

Joan McCord, C. S. (2001). *Juvenile Crime, Juvenile Justice.* Washington: National Academy Press.

Linda A. Cedeno, M. J. (2010). School Violence, Adjument, And The Influence Of Hope On Low-Income, African American Youth. *American Journal Of Orthopsychiatry*, 213-226.

Ludwig, P. J. (1996). *Guns In America.* Washington: The Police Foundation.

M.D., S. L. (2002). *The PVS Disaster: Poverty, Violence And Substance Abuse In The Lives Of Women And Children.* Philadelphia: West Willow Grove .

McEntire, D. (1960). *Residence And Race: Final And Comprehensive Report To The Commission On Race And Housing.* Berkeley: University Of California Press.

Miller, M., Azrael, D., & Hemenway, D. (2002). Firearm Availability And Unintentional Firearm Deaths, Suicide, And Homicide Among 5–14 Year Olds. *Journal Of Trauma*, 52:267-275.

MintPress, P. (2012, March 5). *School Violence Garners Less Media Coverage In Communites Of Color*. Retrieved From Mint Press News: file:///C:/Users/Blockcade/Downloads/School_Violence_Garners_Less_Media_Coverage_in_Communities_of_Color%20(1).pdf

Molnar, B., Miller, M., Azrael, D., & Steven, B. (2004). Neighborhood Predictors Of Concealed Firearm Carrying Among Children And Adolescents. *Archives Of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*, 158:657-64.

Morgenstern, M. (2013, March 19). *How Many People Own Guns In America? And Is Gun Ownership Actually Declining*. Retrieved From The Blaze: http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2013/03/19/how-many-people-own-guns-in-america-and-is-gun-ownership-actually-declining/

Myrdal, G. (1944). *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem And Modern Democracy.* New York: Harper & Brothers.

NCES, (2010). *National Center For Education Statistics*. Retrieved From National Center For Education Statistics: nces.ed.gov

OJJDP. (2001). *Murders By Juveniles Fell In 1999 To Their Lowest Level Since The Mid-1980s.* Washington, DC: OJJDP National Report Series Bulletin.

OJJDP, P. O. (1997). *Youth Gang Drug Trafficking And Homicide.* Washington: U.S. Department Of Justice.

Paul M. Kingery, B. E. (1996). A Profile Of Rural Texas Adolescents Who Carry Handguns To School. *Journal Of School Health*, 18-22.

Peterson, L. J. (2009). Segregation, Racial Structure, And Neighborhood Violent Crime. *American Journal Of Sociology*, 1765-1802.

Press, A. (2008, January 23rd). Study: Bush Led U.S.To War On 'False Pretenses'. Washington, Washington, United States.

Reynolds Farley, S. D. (2000). *Detroit Divided.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Rosenthal BS, W. W. (2003). The Association Of Ecological Variables And Psychological Distress With Exposure To Community Violence Among Adolescents. *Research Support, U.S. Gov't, P.H.S.*, 459-479.

Sands, R. (2001). *Clinical Social Work Practice In Behavioral Mental Health: A Postmoodern Approach To Practice With Adults.* Needham Heights: Allyn & Bacon.

Slaby, R. G. (1995). *Early Violence Prevention: Tools For Teachers Of Young Children.* Michigan: National Association For The Education Of Young Children.

Smith, B. (1994). *Rural Crime And Rural Policing* . Washington D.C.: U.S. Department Of Justice Office Of Justice Programs.

Thomas, A. J. (2012). African-American Youth And Exposure To Community Violence: Supporting Change From The Inside. *Journal For Social Action In Counseling And Psychology*, 54-68.

Thompson, M. (2012, July 5th). *Broken-Windows Theory*. Retrieved From Time: http://nation.time.com/2012/07/05/broken-windows-theory/

U.S. Department Of Health And Human Services. (1999). *Mental Health: A Report Of The Surgeon Genreal.* Rockville, MD: U.S. Department Of Health And Human Services.

Ungar, M. (2002). A Deeper, More Social Ecological Social Work Practice. *Social Review*, pp. p. 480-497.

W.H.O. (1995). *The World Health Report 1995.* Geneva: Office Of World Health Reporting.

Webster, M. (1999). *Collegiate Dictionary.* Springfield, Massachusetts: Library.

Wilson, J. Q. (1982). Key Idea: The Police Can Control Crime. *Atlantic Monthly*, 29-38.

Wilson, W. J. (1978). *The Declining Significance Of Race: Blacks And Changing American Instiutions.* Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

Wilson, W. J. (2009). *More Than Just Race.* New York, N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

World Health Organization. (2014, May 24). Retrieved October 3rd, 2002, From World Report On Violence And Health: http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/en/

World Health Organization. (2015). *Violence*. Retrieved February 8th, 2015, From World Health

Organization: http://www.who.int/topics/violence/en/

Yinger, J. (1999). Sustaning The Fair Housing Act. *Journal Of Policy Development And Research*, 93-106.

Zimring, F. E. (1998). *American Youth Violence.* New York: Oxford University Press.

ABSTRACT

RACE/ETHNICITY & YOUTH PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL SAFTEY

by

Sterling J. Jackson

May 2015

Advisor: Dr. Khari R. Brown

Major: Sociology

Degree: Master of Arts

This study investigates how race/ethnicity, sex, and age influence students' perceptions of school safety. Students' perception of being safe and their concerns about violence while attending school are paramount to academic and social development. In a national survey teens were queried regarding various subject matters. The type of school attended was important within the survey being private, public, and parochial. The findings of this investigation purport that blacks are more likely than whites to be concerned about school violence and safety. Schools with an inability to provide a safe learning environment for students may experience adverse outcomes regarding students' academic success. The results of this research could be used to implement plans that reduce violence in school by public policies aimed at increasing racial and economic diversity within neighborhoods and schools.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

As a product of the foster care system, Sterling J. Jackson Sr. often lived a confused and transient life with limited support from those in his internal and external social systems. As a scholar, however, the field of sociology allowed Jackson Sr. the opportunity to discern and extract an understanding of his entire environment, leading not only to significant changes within how he lived his life, but in how he understood it as well. According to Jackson Sr., the field of sociology, including its theories, bodies of research, and key critical thinkers, has been the single most important contribution to his life's work.

Sterling J. Jackson Sr. was born in Detroit, Michigan and was placed into relative foster care as a toddler. Subsequently, Jackson Sr. was forced to relocate to Cleveland, Ohio, where he lived until the age of 12. During his youth and teenage years, Jackson Sr. was often categorized as a delinquent. Nevertheless, in later years he enrolled at University of Detroit Mercy where he determined education would be the swiftest route to his success, both professionally and personally. He went on to receive degrees in both psychology and sociology from UDM and is currently in the process of pursuing his Ph.D. in sociology from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan.

Jackson Sr.'s life experiences as well as his course of study have been built upon his commitment to compassion, especially in regards to those populations in southeastern Michigan that need help most: namely, children and families who require assistance. In order to successfully serve those, Jackson Sr. commands a high level of competence and respect from his colleagues as well as himself.

In the early stage of his career, Jackson Sr. distinguished himself as an exceptional case manager and supervisor while employed with Spectrum Human Services, a child welfare, family preservation, and mental health human services organization with locations throughout southeastern Michigan; he likewise served the community at Vista Maria, an agency centered in Dearborn Heights, Michigan, which offers an array of community-based programs including education, general and treatment foster care, youth assistance programming and transition assistance. Jackson Sr.'s other professional experience includes over 19 years working in various capacities within the field of real estate and land acquisition.

The professional accomplishment that Jackson is most passionate about, however, is his role as founder and Executive Director of Young Men / Women In Transition (YMWIT), one of the most respected and growing mentoring and supportive services organizations in Wayne County, Michigan. Under his leadership during the last eight years, YMWIT has been extremely successful at providing the most vulnerable members of our diverse urban communities with appropriate services and resources for at-risk youth.