

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF VIOLENCE
AND SAFETY IN THEIR URBAN
HIGH SCHOOL

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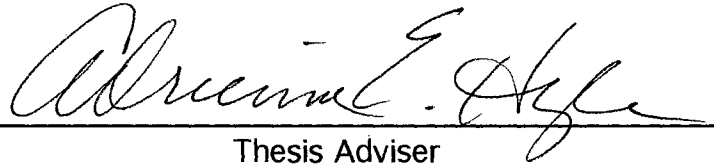
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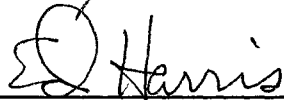
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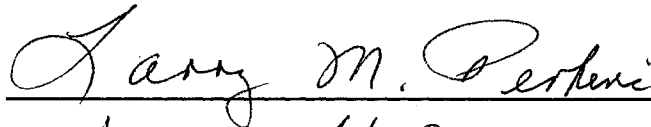
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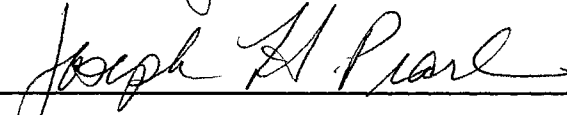


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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. DESIGN OF THE STUDY.	1
Statement of the Problem	3
Purpose of the Study	3
Conceptual Framework	4
Significance	5
Procedures	6
Site-District	6
Site-School	7
Sample	11
Data Collection	12
Data Analysis	14
Summary	16
Reporting	17
II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	18
The Epidemic of Violence in Schools	18
Statistics	19
Increase in Gun Violence	20
Media Influence	21
Gangs	21
Summary	22
No Cause for Panic	23
Statistics	23
Offenders, Victims and Fearful Youths	24
Violence Prevention	27
Curriculum	28
Gangs	29
Metal Detectors	30
Realities	30

Chapter	Page
Constructed Reality	31
Summary	34
III. PRESENTATION OF THE DATA	35
Establishment of Bias	35
Participant Selection	36
Categorization Process	37
Site and Population Observations	37
General Respondent Background and Descriptions	40
Frances	40
Larry	42
Curt	42
Allen	43
Dean	43
Rebecca	44
Lenny	45
James	45
Linda	46
Description of Documents	46
Student Handbook	46
Student Newspapers	48
Participant Perceptions of Their Urban High School	50
School Factors	50
Quality of Education	51
School Climate	51
School Activities	52
Administration	53
Teachers	54
Curriculum and Instruction	55
Summary	56
Diversity	56
"Real World" Reality	58
Segregation	58
"Veiled" Prejudice	59
Racism	61
Stereotypes	62

Chapter	Page
Private Schools	65
Summary	65
Violence	66
Definitions/Descriptions	67
Weapons	68
Gangs	69
Fear	70
Safety	71
Drugs	72
Summary	72
Summary	72
 IV. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA	 74
Definitions	74
Violence	75
Safety	76
Constructed Realities	77
Experiences and Beliefs	77
Metacognitive Interaction	78
Influential Consistency	80
A Different Constructed Reality	85
Summary	86
 V. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	 90
Summary of the Study	90
Data Needs and Sources	91
Data Collection	91
Data Categorization	92
Data Analysis	92
Summary of the Findings	93
Definitions	93
Constructed Realities	94
Victimization	95
Discussion	96

Chapter	Page
Implications	101
Research	103
Theory	104
Practice	105
Conclusions	106
REFERENCES	109
APPENDIXES	117
APPENDIX A - THE CONSENT FORM	118
APPENDIX B - OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL	120
APPENDIX C - THE STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	122

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
I. Year to Date Report of Suspensions (1992-1993)	10
II. Respondent Background	41

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Subsets of a Student Population: Offenders, Victims and Fearful Youths	25
2. Subsets of a Community's Youthful Population: Offenders, Victims and Fearful Youths	26
3. Subsets of a Student Population: Influential Congruence, Diversity-Valued School Environment, Diversity-Valued Home Environment, Safety, Influential Incongruence, Prejudiced Home Environment and Fear	87

CHAPTER 1

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

"Everyday quarrels that used to result in flailing fists and bloody noses - over a bump on the shoulder, a misinterpreted glance, romantic complications or flashy clothes--now end, with epidemic frequency, in gunshots" (Witkin, 1991, p. 26). Fights, bullying, and other "violent" acts have been historically commonplace among high school students. However, now more violence is infiltrating middle and elementary schools, and the violence in high schools is increasing (Harper, 1989).

Parents and community leaders all across the nation have shown concern and fear for the future of our youth and our nation's schools (Elam, Rose & Gallup, 1992; Harper, 1989). This fear has been one reason parents flee urban schools, often to enroll their children in private or suburban schools. However, according to the Center for Disease Control, if parents are looking for safety in suburbia or rural America, they will be disappointed because gun violence is on the rise all over America (Morganthau, 1992).

In the past, theorists have projected certain stereotypic

beliefs about children who engage in violent acts and about the schools they attended (Benson & Roehlkepartain, 1993; Morgenthau, 1992). The perception was that students in inner-city schools were the perpetrators of violence; and low socio-economic and/or minority students who attended other schools also engaged in violence. More current statistics show that children from all ethnic and socio-economic status categories, including females and children of all ages, are both victims and perpetrators of violence (Benson & Roehlkepartain, 1993).

Research exists that contradict the assertion that violence in schools is a new development or is as critical as some would have us believe (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1992; Furlong, 1994; National Institute of Education, 1990; National Center for Education Statistics, 1990). Contrary to popular opinion and the media, California students, teachers and other educators did not feel that violence in their schools was a major problem (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 1993).

Additionally, while the media may have accurately depicted increased public awareness and concern about school violence, it may not have accurately reflected what actually happened on school

campuses (Furlong, 1994). National news media coverage of school violence has increased over 300% in the past two years. Frequently, however, reports have been sensationalized and based on unscientific research (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 1993; Furlong, 1994).

Conflicting data, opinion and media coverage concerning violence in schools exists. Clarification of perceptions may provide insights on the topic.

Statement of the Problem

The published and most often disseminated information regarding violence in schools presented conflicting findings (Witkin, 1991; Furlong, 1994). Those findings reflected a perspective typically dominated by the media, teachers, parents and administrators. The perspectives of those most impacted by school violence--students--were, for the most part, missing. For a broader definition of violence and its relationship to school safety, these views must be examined.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine student perceptions of violence and safety in one urban high school and to discover why

these perceptions existed. Therefore, the research questions driving this study were:

1. How do students perceive school violence and safety?
2. What are the bases for these perceptions?

Conceptual Framework

Reality is in the eye of the beholder. For example, when an incident occurs, there are as many "realities" as there are people who witness the incident (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These "multiple realities" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) are based on the perceptions and experiences of those involved (McWhinney, 1992). People "construct" their own reality based on those experiences. Reality, then, is the "construct" of many individuals (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Additionally, Bogdan and Taylor (1975) state that truth is "the composite picture of how people think about the institution and each other" (p. 11). Truth is the totality of perspectives of all involved within and outside of the institution (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975).

Therefore, to know the "truth" about violence in schools, the constructed realities of selected students were considered. If multiple realities exist on the subject of violence in schools and the perceptions of students are different than those of adults, then the

perceptions of students must be examined to better grasp the "truth" about violence and safety in the public schools.

Significance

The research on violence is limited, conflicting and presented from an adult focus in terms of perception and interpretation. This perception was the reality of teachers, administrators, parents and the media. However, in the area of school violence and safety, there is a void in the research. The public has neglected to ask those who are most affected by school violence--students--about their "reality" of violence. This study provided perceptions from this underrepresented group.

This study also benefits researchers as they gather more data on the pervasive and age old problem of school violence (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1992; Allison & Berry, 1992; Van Meter, 1977). A dearth of information exists about violence in schools and is predominantly statistical in nature. It is hoped that interviews with urban high school students will provide breadth and depth to current research and the information gleaned about school violence in one urban school will prove transferable to other urban schools.

Violence prevention and intervention programs, anti-violence

curriculum, and various leadership techniques are common ways in which practitioners currently address the issues of school violence (Hiatt, 1987; Salholz, Kantrowitz, & McCormick, 1992; Schwartz, 1988; Sevetson, 1992; Terrel, 1991; Walker & Sylwester, 1991). It is equally important to determine what practices make students feel safe. With this information, then practitioners can design programs and develop practices to make schools a safer place for all.

Procedures

We do not understand the perceptions of those who are living with violence. We do not understand how these perceptions impact how students think about school safety and violence. This research provided that perspective and a more holistic picture of school violence and safety.

Site - District

The district chosen as the research site is the largest in its state, the 75th largest in the country, and the third largest employer in the city. Located in a "university" town of over 300,000 people, over 100 schools service its clientele, which is approximately 65% Caucasian, 20% African-American, 9% Hispanic, 2% Native American, and close to 4% Asian. Dropout rates for the district averages about

8% (Curriculum Audit Report, 1993).

Although enrollment had steadily increased since 1980, the district experienced a dramatic drop in enrollment in 1992 and 1993. Disaggregated enrollment data suggested the urban district was losing white children to suburban and private schools, and minority populations were increasing. In 1992-1993 the district had 48,836 students. The 1993-1994 school year data showed 724 students fewer, a 1.5 percent drop. This drop in enrollment reflected a decrease of 1,400 white students and an increase of 680 minority students (Wear, 1993).

Site - School

This site was 1 of 8 high schools in the school district. Although it was typical of other high schools in the district, this site was purposely chosen over the others. It was the oldest high school in the city, was close to downtown and its attendance area included a wide range of SES levels from poverty stricken families to millionaires. The willingness of the high school administrator to allow the school to be a part of this study was also a contributing factor in the decision.

Student Demographics. According to Quality Performance

Accreditation (Q.P.A.) Profile Information (1992), the urban high school selected had an enrollment of 1,963 students in grades 9 through 12. The average daily attendance for the 1991-92 school year was 89%. Forty percent of the student population was on free/reduced lunch. The student ethnic diversity was as follows:

1. White/Other	1195/61%
2. Black	399/20%
3. Asian	269/14%
4. Hispanic	77/4%
5. American Indian	23/1%

As with all schools in this district, most black students and some white students were bussed for integration purposes. The remainder of the ethnic makeup did not reflect district averages. This high school reflected a higher Asian population than the district average, due to the fact that one of the district's two high school English as a Second Language (ESL) programs was housed there. The lower number of Hispanic and American Indian students stemmed from the fact that these minority students were not bussed for integration purposes because it was not federally mandated and, typically, the housing patterns for these students

were in other high school attendance areas. Because of this, with the exception of white and black students, no high school in this district strictly reflected the districts' student racial diversity average.

The Year to Date Report of Suspensions (1993) totaled the yearly suspensions and the reasons why students were suspended. Reasons for suspension included fighting, defiance of authority and multiple offenses. It also disaggregated the data by gender and race. A total of 215 suspensions for the 1992-1993 school year occurred in this school. (See Table I)

Curriculum. The high school offered a wide selection of programs including co-curricular and extra-curricular activities for students including special education, child learning centers, English as a Second Language, vocational education, an International Baccalaureate (IB) Program, sports, debate, music, and theater (Program of Studies, 1993; Q.P.A., 1992). A typical schedule for a 10th grade student with a 3.4 grade point average (GPA) and a 1.3 GPA might look like this:

TABLE I

YEAR TO DATE REPORT OF SUSPENSIONS (1992-1993)

REASONS FOR SUSPENSION	ASIAN		BLACK		HISPANIC		NATIVE AMERICAN		WHITE		TOTAL		
	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
INTOLERABLE CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR			2	2					2	0	4	2	6
INTOLERABLE CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR OUTSIDE OF CLASSROOM									2	0	2		2
GENERAL FIGHTING	2	3	25	10	4	0	1	1			44	19	63
ASSAULT AND/OR BATTERY ON PUPIL			3	3					1	0	4	3	7
ASSAULT AND/OR BATTERY ON STAFF				2					1	0	1	2	3
USE OF VULGAR AND/OR PROFANE LANGUAGE			1	0					2	1	3	1	4
DEFIANCE OF AUTHORITY		1	21	18	4	1			13	6	38	26	64
ACTED TO INCITE A DISTURBANCE			2	0							2		2
DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY			1	1					1	0	2	1	3
UNDER INFLUENCE OF NARCOTICS			3	1							3	1	4
UNDER INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL										2		2	2
POSSESSION OF WEAPON			3	1							3	1	4
STEALING			7	1			1	0	5	3	13	4	17
TARDY TO CLASS OR SCHOOL			3	1					2	0	5	1	6
EXCESSIVE ABSENCES FROM SCHOOL		1							4	2	4	3	7
TRUANCY			1	0							1		1
MULTIPLE OFFENSES			11						1	1	12	1	13
OTHER SCHOOL RULES			2	1					4	0	6	1	7
TOTALS	2	5	85	41	8	1	2	1	50	20	147	68	215
	7		126		9		3		70		215		

<u>Time</u>	<u>3.4 GPA</u> <u>Course</u>	<u>1.3 GPA</u> <u>Course</u>
8:00	School Begins	School Begins
8:00-8:48	Business Law	English 2
8:54-9:51	Honors English 2	Algebra 1
9:57-10:45	Geometry	Chemistry Applied
10:51-11:39	Honors US History 1	Office Assistant
11:45-12:33	Honors Biology 1	Weight Training
12:33-1:18	Lunch	Lunch
1:18-2:06	Pre IB Spanish 2	Drivers Education 1
2:12-3:00	Typewriting 1	Photography 1

Sample

A purposive (non-random) sample of students attending the site school was generated by school personnel. Students varying in gender, grade level, grade point average, socio-economic status and ethnicity were contacted in person by school personnel and asked if they would be willing to participate in a research study. If they agreed, their names were included in the interview pool.

The transcriptionist and I were the only people who knew the

identity of the subjects. The transcriptionist is a registered and qualified legal transcriptionist hired from an independent legal organization. I am an elementary school principal in this district with 17 years of experience in education.

Confidentiality was assured. A consent form was provided to procure parental/guardian permission for student participation in this study. This consent form also provided parents and students with information about the process, my credentials and where they might call for additional information (see Appendix A).

An application was made to and approval was given by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study (See Appendix B).

Data Collection

Semi-structured, open-ended questions were used to generate discussion surrounding the research questions. In addition to the interviews, observations and document analysis were conducted and employed.

Interviews. A purposive sample of urban high school students attending the site school were interviewed, using a naturalistic approach. Bailey (1992) describes the naturalistic approach to the

interview as:

focusing on the individual or case study in order to understand the full complexity of the individual's experience. From this perspective, there is no attempt to claim an ability to generalize to a specific population, but instead, the findings are relevant from the perspective of the user of the findings.

(p. 30)

Students were informally interviewed (Wolcott, 1988) in person in Spring 1994, and the interviews were audio-recorded. I chose a semi-structured interview technique using a fixed set of questions which was used to encourage dialogue. The interviews took place at the respondents' home in a room that afforded privacy. When privacy could not be guaranteed, one respondent and I went to a library to assure his privacy.

Protocol. The protocol questions were general and designed to stimulate conversation (Appendix C). Students had no knowledge as to the purpose of this study; only that I was interested in hearing about their high school. After asking the respondents to tell me about their high school, probing questions were used to glean specific information on issues that the respondents proffered. The

interviews ranged from casual conversation to direct questioning.

Observations. Babbie (1989) stressed the importance of documenting the observations and interpretations of the group being researched. Observations made during the interview with respondents were recorded and documented, including my reflections after the interview. Field notes gleaned during school site visitations were also recorded and documented.

Documents. Student transcripts and records such as QPA School Profile Information, brochures, parent/student handbooks and student newspapers were available and were collected. I was looking for anything that indicated student perceptions of violence and safety in their urban school.

Data Analysis

In a naturalistic study, data analysis is difficult to predict ahead of time; however, a basic process can be outlined (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After data was collected, the responses were categorized through the processes of data unitization, emergent category designation and negative case analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data was then inductively examined. Similar issues were located and conceptualized as themes, which resulted in

generalizations and formed the foundation of a model of student perceptions of school violence. Differences, as well as similarities, were documented and reconceptualized in the same fashion (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Interviews, observations and documents were analyzed using this process.

Data Unitization. The process of data unitization occurs when data is disaggregated into the smallest pieces of information that can stand alone as independent thoughts. A unit of data is a single idea or thought. The interview transcripts were analyzed to determine units of information. These units were then sorted into categories of ideas.

Emergent Category Designation. The process of sorting the units of data into categories of ideas is called emergent category designation. Designating the categories is one researcher's way of organizing the data. Another researcher might organize the data differently. This construction process should be considered just one way of looking at reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Twenty categories emerged from the unitization process.

Negative Case Analysis. When the researcher considers various interpretations of the data, especially data that is different

from the constructed reality of the researcher, it is called negative case analysis. Seldom would a researcher get data that is in 100% agreement and analyzing the negative data can be beneficial. The negative case I have analyzed in this study has been instrumental in providing the information for a "dissenting opinion".

The use of long interviews (McCracken, 1988), observations, and documentation throughout this study produced a rich or "thick" description of the sample chosen, thus maintaining a level of "trustworthiness" (Guba, 1981) that will affirm the credibility of this study. Trustworthiness means, in this context, that I will endeavor to produce a study that will be truthful, reflective of what they tell me, applicable in other contexts and with other respondents, and consistent if replicated (Guba, 1981).

Summary

There has always been violence in schools, however, school violence appears to be increasing. The perceptions, opinions and literature that existed on the topic of school violence was contradictory, conflicting and essentially devoid of students' perspectives. The purpose of this research was to determine student perceptions of violence and safety in one urban high school

using a naturalistic inquiry approach. The collected data will fill a void in the knowledge base: student perceptions of school safety and violence.

Reporting

Chapter One contains the design of the study. A review of related literature is presented in Chapter Two. Chapter Three presents data containing the observation, document, and the interview data obtained through naturalistic inquiry methods, categorized by themes. An analysis and interpretation of the data collected is presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five provides the summary, discussion, implications, recommendations and conclusions for researchers, theorists and practitioners.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review of literature on violence and safety in public schools consisted of over 50 books, articles, reports, papers, and surveys. The research was typically quantitative in nature and reported from the perspective of adults associated with schools and the education of youths. From this body of literature, two basic and conflicting generalizations can be made: 1) Public schools are in crisis because of the tremendous increase in school violence; and 2) school violence is not necessarily increasing, and schools are doing a better job than ever of assuring student safety.

These findings are presented in this chapter, along with supporting data. Research on offenders, victims and fearful youths, the concept of multiple and constructed realities, and the programs and curriculum available to help address the issue of school violence are examined in this chapter.

The Epidemic of Violence in Schools

There was a panic that encompassed communities across the nation (Elam, Rose & Gallup, 1992; Harper, 1989). Thinking that

school violence was causing their children to be unsafe, parents were fleeing urban schools (Morganthau, 1992). Many of these parents were enrolling their children in private or suburban schools- looking for a safe haven in which their children could learn (Morganthau, 1992).

Statistics

In 1990, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services gave a Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to 11,631 students in grades 9-12 in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Their statistics concerning weapons and violence were alarming. According to data from that survey, approximately 1 in every 5 high school students carried a firearm, knife, or club at least one time during the 30 days preceding the survey. Approximately 1 of 20 students carried a firearm, usually a handgun, within that same time frame (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1991). Additionally, the National School Safety Center proposed that 135,000 students carried guns to school daily in 1987 and the number is thought to be higher now (Witkin, 1991).

The Center to Prevent Handgun Violence (1990) condensed over 2,500 newspaper articles dealing with gun violence in both public

and private schools. From these articles, 227 incidents were examined. Their findings indicate that:

1. At least 71 people - 65 students and 6 school employees - have been killed with guns at school. Another 201 were severely wounded;
2. Shootings or hostage situations in schools have occurred in at least 35 states and the District of Columbia;
3. Males were most frequently the offenders (93%) as well as victims (76%);
4. School children aged 14 to 17 were most at risk of gun violence at school; and
5. Gun violence in schools occurred most often in hallways (24%) and in classrooms (19%).

Increase in Gun Violence

Many reasons were given for the increase in gun violence, but perhaps the simplest answer was that guns are easily available (Witkin, 1991). In a 20-state survey of 11,000 adolescents, 41% of the boys stated they could acquire a handgun if they wanted to; and 80% to 90% of the guns seized by school officials came from the

home (Morganthau, 1992). Included in this "epidemic of violence" (Gest & Witkin, 1992) was the fact that homicide was the second leading cause of death for persons aged 15 to 24 years (Center for Disease Control, 1992).

Media Influence

Today's youths are desensitized to violence (Witkin, 1991). They are surrounded by gunfire and other acts of violence in television, movies and other media (Greenfield, 1993; Hickey, 1992). Neil Hickey (1992) stated:

The overwhelming weight of scientific opinion now holds that televised violence is indeed responsible for a percentage of the real violence in our society. What is new is that psychologists, child experts, and the medical community are just now beginning to treat televised violence as a serious public health issue - like smoking and drunk driving - about which the public needs to be educated for its own safety and well-being. (p. 10)

Gangs

Gangs are prevalent in urban school settings and although they are not a new phenomenon, they are fundamentally different today

(Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny & Pardo, 1992) in the following ways:

1. There are more gangs;
2. They exist in more communities;
3. Gangs have increased adult involvement;
4. They are more organized;
5. They are more active in illegal enterprises; and
6. They use more lethal weapons.

Four basic reasons are given for youths joining gangs. They join to:

1. Achieve a sense of identity;
2. Gain protection;
3. Experience a sense of family; and
4. Because they were coerced (intimidated into joining).

(Hardy, 1991)

Summary

Gangs, weapons, fist fights, bullying, name calling, burglary, and vandalism...some or all of these things have always existed in schools, but is it a crisis situation? Not all agree that it is an "epidemic".

No Cause for Panic

There is also research to suggest that the media has sensationalized incidents of school violence (Furlong, 1994) and that "the outcry over the problem far outweighs the problem itself" (McDermott, 1983, p. 270).

The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing School Violence Advisory Panel (CTC) surveyed five major newspapers for articles published from 1982 through 1993 that focused on school violence. These newspapers included: *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Christian Science Monitor*. A total of 349 articles printed during this 10-year period dealt with school violence, and nearly half of those were published in 1992 and 1993. Many of these were categorized as anecdotal, sensationalized and without primary sources (CTC, 1993).

Statistics

Over 600 students, parents, teachers, administrators, support staff, law enforcement personnel and other community members participated in the CTC study. The results showed that although

students and educators felt that violence was increasing nationwide, they felt good about what was occurring at their own school and those who attend school (teachers, students and administrators) worried little about their personal safety (CTC, 1993).

Results from a National Educational Longitudinal Study supported these results. This study showed that between 1980 and 1990 there was a 12.2 % decrease in the number of students who reported feeling unsafe at school and 9.1 % decrease in the proportion of 10th-graders nationwide saying that they felt unsafe at school (National Center for Education Statistics, 1990).

These researchers realized that violence was a problem in public schools; however, they cautioned against panic. They advised each school to determine its own safety needs within the context of its individual community setting, before taking action (Furlong, 1994). There were schools in high crime communities that did have significant problems with crime and violence. However, violent schools were not the norm (McDermott, 1983).

Offenders, Victims and Fearful Youths

Typically, research and theory have viewed offenders, victims

and fearful youths as three separate and distinct groups. However, Joan McDermott (1983) presented a theory of victimization that provided a different way of perceiving crime and fear. She asserted that these groups were not mutually exclusive (i.e. some victims were fearful, but some of the fearful youths were probably offenders, and at least some offenders had also been victims). In other words, a person at school may at one time be an offender and at another time be a victim (Fig. 1).

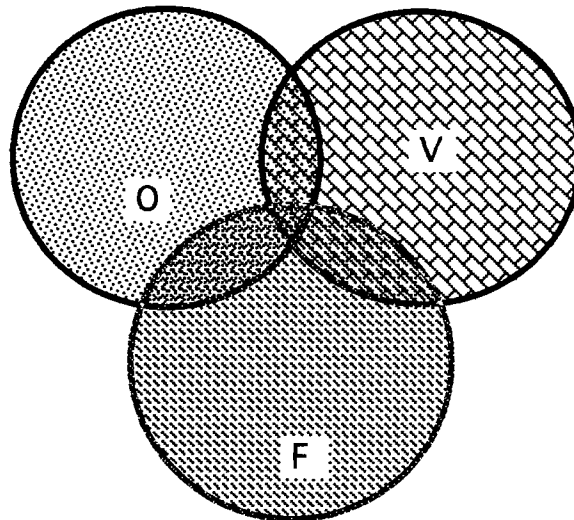


Figure 1. Subsets of a Student Population: Offenders (O), Victims (V), and Fearful Youths (F) (McDermott, 1983)

McDermott (1983) also proposed that crime and fear of crime

in schools be viewed within a wider community context because there were indicators that suggested school offenders and community offenders were the same individuals. This theory would also apply to those students who were considered victims and fearful youths. These indicated the need for a second Venn diagram (Fig. 2) which showed students in a given community and the overlap that may occur.

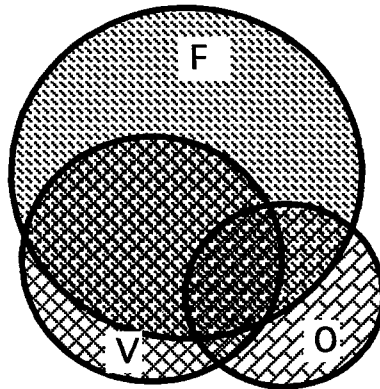


Figure 2. Subsets of a Community's Youthful Population: Offenders (O), Victims (V), and Fearful Youths (F) (McDermott, 1983)

This theory suggests a

cycle of victimization-fear-offending that presents a

strikingly different problem for both theoreticians and prevention strategists than the model which shows only minimal overlap in the three groups. The second Venn diagram suggests another reason why repressive preventive strategies that focus exclusively on offenders may not work--it may be difficult to separate the offenders from the victims, and, in any case, such strategies may work only to heighten the level of fear in the community. (McDermott, 1983, p. 282)

If high crime schools are located in high crime communities, and students who are apprehensive or fearful tend to come from neighborhoods with noticeably higher levels of fear, then practitioners need to look at the community as well as their school when assessing needs. Research cannot separate school from community; improving one might help the other, but not exclusively.

Violence Prevention

A number of programs and practices purported to assist in controlling violence in schools. Intervention curriculum, gang awareness and the use of metal detectors were notable strategies to address the problem. (Gest & Witkin, 1992; Center for Disease Control, 1992; Salholtz, Kantrowitz & McCormick, 1992; Walker &

Sylwester, 1991; Witkin, 1991)

Curriculum

Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith (1987), a leading researcher in the area of violence prevention and author of books and a curriculum designed to help curb teenage violence, suggested that a public health model approach be used to change behavior and attitudes toward violence. She cited the behavior and attitudinal changes that occurred when public health education and the media combined forces in a multidisciplinary approach to curb smoking and beef consumption as support for this suggestion.

Prothrow-Stith's (1987) public health plan curriculum on violence prevention included:

1. A high school curriculum in which students learn the facts and statistics about homicide, talk about anger and learn ways to resolve conflicts without fighting;
2. A media campaign, including public service announcements that decry violence and show its tragic consequences;
3. Social service and recreation programs that reinforce the school curriculum by training children to resolve

their differences peacefully;

4. Pamphlets that give statistics on homicides and show the impact of television violence; and

5. Direct contact with victims of violence who come into clinics and hospitals, and counseling support to help them avoid future violence.

Gangs

Kevin Riley (1991) stated that schools cannot use the same strategies to curtail gang activity that the police do. To use a "search and destroy" technique, identifying kids who are in gangs, watching their every move and expelling them from school on the slightest provocation, did not work, and in fact, could make the problem worse (Riley, 1991).

One suggested approach was to address the reasons youths are susceptible to joining gangs. Some of those are: poverty, broken and/or dysfunctional family, no positive role models, racism, low/no self-esteem, low/no job skills, lack of parental control or supervision, a lack of education, and no one to need, want and listen to them (Office of Substance Abuse and Violence Prevention and Intervention, 1993). Hardy (1991) contended that gang prevention

efforts were most effective when the link between school and community was strengthened through a curricula focusing on at-risk youngsters.

Metal Detectors

Metal detectors, in use in many urban schools, can act as a deterrent, but they will not stop someone who is determined to bring a gun onto school premises (Harrington-Lueker, 1992; Kongshem, 1992). Educators must weigh the expense, inconvenience and loss of school time used in implementing metal detectors, against the odds of actually apprehending someone with a weapon (Harrington-Lueker, 1992). Many contend that metal detectors alone will not solve problems; they must be used in conjunction with a school safety plan (Harrington-Lueker, 1992; Kongshem, 1992).

Realities

What is violence? Most agree that violence is the act of inflicting pain or harm on others. This definition encompasses everything from mental cruelty (including sexual harassment, teasing, bullying, name calling) to assault with fists or weapons (CTC, 1993). Theft, burglary and vandalism are also considered by some researchers to be violence (CTC, 1993). Suffice it to say that

there are as many definitions of violence as there are people who think about it. What is violence to one person may not be considered violence to another. What then is the "reality" of violence?

Constructed Reality

We each bring into our "world" our individual reality. Stewart Emery (1978) discussed self-created or constructed reality as follows:

Our individual personal reality--the way we think life is and the part we are to play in it--is self-created. We put together our own personal reality. It is made up of our interpretation of our perceptions of the way things are and what has happened to us. We make some basic decisions about life when we are being born, and we add to the script and embellish it during our childhood. We end up with a view of ourselves and the world that is usually highly inaccurate. Out of that we put together an environment that is a perfect reflection of our view of the world.

We write our script by the time we are about seven years old.

Then we treat the world as if it were the back lot at Universal

Studios. We pick out our sets and our props. We go to Wardrobe, which may be Sears or Macy's or Saks Fifth Avenue and choose our costumes. We select a location and begin filming the story of our life as we see it, starring US. We literally create a reality that reflects our view of the world and who we are in relation to it. (p. 39)

Lincoln and Guba proposed a concept of "constructed reality" and they questioned whether or not one can truly ever really know what "reality" is. Within this conceptual framework, reality is the constructs of many individuals. Therefore, there are "multiple realities" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba gave the following example of how multiple realities become constructed realities:

Another example of reality construction is apparent in the proceedings in a court of law. The adversarial system is designed on the one hand to construct at least two realities for the jury's consideration and, on the other hand, to create a single reality from the multiple memories of witnesses (a distillation of the essence of the crime). The essence of defense is that the jury can be brought to see an alternative

construction of the reality that the prosecution distills, so that the evidence absolves the defendant. The way to instill the legendary "reasonable doubt" is to spin (construct) an alternative reality. (p. 88)

How then are we to determine truth if reality for one person is not necessarily reality for another? If we are dealing with the perceptions of individuals and individual groups, how can truth be determined? Truth in organizations was explained by Bogdan and Taylor (1975):

Truth then emerges not as one objective view but rather as the composite picture of how people think about the institution and each other. Truth comprises the perspectives of administrators, line-level staff, professional workers, outsiders, volunteers, maintenance staff, residents and family. (p. 11)

If multiple realities exist on the subject of violence in schools, to determine the "truth" about violence and safety in the public schools one would have to determine the perceptions of all players: administrators, teachers and students.

Summary

The review of literature on the subject of violence in schools was at best conflicting, contradictory and/or sensationalized.

Without a doubt there is violence in schools, there has always been violence in schools and there is no indication that violence in schools will somehow miraculously disappear without intervention.

But, before we know what intervention strategies to use, and how to use them and upon whom, we must determine to the best of our ability what is the "reality" of violence in schools.

We know what administrators, teachers, parents and other adults think about violence in schools. What is missing is what students think about violence in their schools. To determine the "reality" of violence in schools, this missing component was examined.

CHAPTER III

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

The purpose of this study was to examine student perceptions of violence and safety and the bases for these perceptions, in one urban high school. The concept of multiple and constructed realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) constituted the conceptual framework for this study. The perceptions and experiences of individuals make up the "composite picture" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975) of how society views truth. This research provided the perception of students, another piece to consider when looking for the "composite" or holistic picture of school violence and safety.

This chapter includes the Establishment of Bias, Participant Selection, Categorization Processes, Site and Subject Descriptions, Description of Documents, and Participant Perceptions of Their Urban High School.

Establishment of Bias

I have been an educator for 17 years, the last 7 of which I have spent as an elementary school principal. Most of my experience has been in an urban school district, working in schools where children

considered "at-risk" make up most of the enrollment. I have a great deal of interest in urban school districts and feel that my experience and expertise gives me added motivation and awareness of the plight in which urban school districts find themselves.

Because of my biases, I have continually reminded myself that I must be willing to view the topic from perspectives other than my own. Presuming that all efforts to maintain appropriate methods are successful, my biases should not unduly affect the data or the findings of the study.

Participant Selection

Participants selected for this study included students in an urban high school located in a midwestern state. Nine students were selected to participate, chosen from a larger list of students that had been recommended by school personnel in their high school. Participants varied in gender, grade point average, ethnicity and grade level. Asian and Hispanic students contacted for participation chose to decline.

Parental consent was obtained and each participant was assured confidentiality and anonymity. Because of this, pseudonyms were substituted for their real names in the data reporting section.

This study was conducted in Spring 1994.

Categorization Process

The process for data categorization suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) was used in this study. The site and subjects were purposely selected and categories were formed through the process of unitizing data, emergent category designation and negative case analysis. The process of unitizing data and emergent categorization is presented in this chapter.

The term "unitizing data" depicts the process used when data is disaggregated into the smallest pieces or units that can stand alone as independent thoughts. These units are then sorted into categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Interview transcripts were carefully read, unitized, then sorted into categories and subcategories as dictated by emergent themes. This process takes data from the specific to the general.

Site and Population Observations

Four site observations occurred; before school, mid-morning, during the lunch period and mid-afternoon. This included times when students were in class and passing periods. Handwritten notes and taped recordings, later transcribed, complete the field notes made

for site visitations. The following is a compilation of observations made at the high school.

7:40 AM. This urban high school was a very large, red brick structure. There was a large grassy area in front of the school that boasted a water fountain and a sculpture of a student walking to school. Upon entering the school, it was immediately noticeable that the school was old. However, it was clean and well maintained. The floors had a high gloss and maintenance crews were in the process of repainting scuff marks on the wall.

An administrator in the cafeteria told me that the cafeteria mostly served students who were on free or reduced lunch. A variety of students were served a "carry out" breakfast. Many Asian students sat in the cafeteria visiting before school.

The library had approximately 20 students quietly visiting or studying. These students reflected the diversity of the school.

There was a group of black males congregated on first floor. I had been informed that these were gang members who sometimes intimidated students who passed by. I intentionally walked through the group instead of going around them, and while doing so, one of them made the comment, "Dog!" However, at no time did I feel

physically threatened. In all fairness, though, I feel at ease around black males and unless my space was violated, or I was touched, I would not feel intimidated.

There were groups of students congregated in the hallways, but I also saw many students of different ethnic backgrounds mingling with each other. Two security guards were on first floor near the group of black males, but all were at ease and the guards were chatting causally with one another.

Lunch Hour. During lunch, the lunchroom was filled with students eating, talking and laughing. Occasionally there would be a loud outburst of laughter or raised voices from one group to another, but they seemed "in-control" and the adults on duty appeared nonplused. I was sitting near several groups of special education students.

There were groups of students clustered throughout the hallways and on the front lawn. Many were eating brown bag lunches and visiting. Others were not eating but were having social time during the noon hour.

Mid-morning and Mid-afternoon. There were few students in the hallway and those that were in the hallway seemed to have a

specific designation. I saw no loitering nor did I see any sign of students off task. Most teachers smiled and nodded. Some students smiled shyly, but most just glanced uninterestedly as they passed. During the passing periods, there were teachers in every hall and administrators and security guards were evident.

General Respondent Background and Descriptions

All respondents were receptive and cooperative during the interview; they seemed eager to provide information about their school. All but one were interviewed privately in their home.

For presentation purposes, and to aid in understanding the data, I have presented the nine respondents in grade level groups. I have also placed a short descriptor following each name. This descriptor will provide the grade level, gender and race of each respondent. For example, 9, M, W following a name indicates the respondent is in the ninth grade, is male and white. (See Table II)

Frances (9, F, W)

Frances lived in an inexpensive apartment with her mom and stepfather. The homes in the area were small but well-maintained. She was not on free lunch.

TABLE II
RESPONDENT BACKGROUND

<u>NAME</u>	<u>GRADE</u>	<u>GENDER</u>	<u>ETHNICITY</u>	<u>HOUSING ARRANGEMENTS</u>	<u>GPA</u>	<u>FREE LUNCH</u>
FRANCES	9	F	W	MOTHER AND STEPFATHER	3.8	NO
LARRY	9	M	B	MOTHER ONLY	1.3	YES
CURT	9	M	W	BOTH PARENTS	3.4	NO
DEAN	10	M	B	MOTHER AND STEPFATHER	3.4	NO
ALLEN	10	M	W	BOTH PARENTS	3.2	NO
REBECCA	11	F	W	BOTH PARENTS	2.7	NO
LENNY	11	M	B	MOTHER ONLY	1.3	YES
JAMES	11	M	W	BOTH PARENTS	3.3	NO
LINDA	12	F	B	MOTHER ONLY	3.1	YES

Frances was a petite young lady who liked to write poetry and listen to music. She described herself as "funny, smart and nice." She had a GPA of 3.8. Frances was very at ease and cooperative in the interview.

Larry (9, M, B)

Larry and his brother Lenny were both interviewed in their home. It was clean, nicely maintained and located in what is known as the "black area" of town. Larry and Lenny lived with their mother. Both were on free lunch.

Larry described himself as "funny, clown, crazy, great to be around, a peacemaker and (someone who) stops conflicts." He enjoyed "adventure, videogames and skating." He had a 1.3 GPA. Larry was a tall, large young man who could be physically intimidating if he were not so affable, good-natured and friendly.

Curt (9, M, W)

Curt lived in an older, lower middle class neighborhood and his home appeared neat and clean. Curt lived with both parents. He was not on free lunch.

Curt played soccer and enjoyed sports. He described himself as someone who liked to "joke around but can be serious" when

necessary, was a good friend and understanding. He also considered himself a leader and capable of taking charge of situations (particularly in sports). He had a 3.4 GPA. Curt was a tall, blonde, good natured young man and was polite and cooperative during the interview.

Allen (10, M, W)

Allen's home was small, neat and clean. His neighborhood consisted of small frame homes. Allen lived with both parents and was not on a free lunch program.

I recognized Allen as a former student; I was his music teacher when he was in third grade. He was of medium height and was fairly thin. He enjoyed playing basketball and stated that his friends described him as a "goody-goody". He had a 3.2 GPA.

Allen appeared to be a little nervous but it did not seem to inhibit his responses. Allen told me during the interview that Dean, one of his friends, was a gang member. I asked for a last name and realized that Dean was on my list to interview.

Dean (10, M, B)

Dean's home was in a "mixed" ethnic neighborhood and was small and well-kept. He lived with his mother and stepfather. He

does not receive free lunch.

I interviewed Dean at the University library because he and his mother were in doubt as to whether or not we would be able to have privacy at his home. I suggested we go to the library.

Dean was relatively tall and was dressed in a gray sweatsuit, high top tennis shoes and Michigan ball cap. He was of medium stature. He informed me that he missed our first scheduled interview because the track meet that he was participating in ran late. He placed 1st in the 400 that day. He had lettered in three sports--track, football and basketball and made the varsity football team as a freshman. Sports were important to him, but so were academics. He had a 3.4 GPA.

Dean was intelligent and articulate when he chose to be, lapsing into black dialect the more at ease he became. During probing questioning, Dean confided to me that he was a member of a gang and had participated in gang activities. In fact, the Michigan ball cap was one of the gang's "colors".

Dean was cooperative and candid during the interview.

Rebecca (11, F, W)

Rebecca lived in a large old home in an older section of town.

The neighborhood was fairly neat and her home had a unkept, "lived-in" feeling. She lived with both parents and she did not receive free lunch.

Rebecca described herself as being funny, talkative, considerate and enjoyed socializing with her friends. She had a 2.7 GPA. She was very cooperative and positive in her interview.

Lenny (11, M, B)

Lenny was much smaller than his younger brother Larry (9, M, B), yet he could hardly be described as a small person. He had an average, muscular build and was about 5' 9" tall. He had a GPA of 1.3. Again, he and his brother, Larry, lived with their mother and both brothers were on the free lunch program.

Upon our first meeting, Lenny seemed a little hostile and exhibited a negative attitude. However, during the interview, I did not see the obstinate behaviors that were shown earlier--in fact, Lenny was quite cooperative and polite.

James (11, M, W)

James lived in a very "well-to-do" neighborhood, in a home filled with antiques with a swimming pool in the back yard. He lived with both parents and was not on free lunch.

James appeared to be an intelligent, secure person, who described himself as being a "nice guy", smart and easy to get along with. James was very attractive and wore the latest teenage fashions. He described his parents as being supportive and people who valued diversity and education. James had a 3.3 GPA.

James was cooperative in the interview but exuded an air of "nonchalant" about it.

Linda (12, F, B)

Linda lived with her mother, in low income apartment housing. She received free lunch.

Linda liked to draw, read and design clothes and maintained a 3.1 GPA. She described herself as being "perky, polite, mischievous and active". Linda was a thin girl of medium height. She was extremely polite and cooperative.

Description of Documents

The student handbook and school newspapers were examined to find evidence of student's perception of violence and safety.

Student Handbook

The student handbook (Student Agenda, 1993) was a combination of rules, policies, activities calendar and student helps

(writing, time management and study guides). Administrative expectations of student behavior were stated:

Students are expected to behave in a manner that is appropriate for high school age individuals and complies with all BOE policies. These behaviors would include attending classes, working on all tasks assigned by teachers, and complying with all reasonable requests made by school staff members. The staff's intention is to serve all the students. It is the staff's preference to focus on the business of education and avoid being disciplinarians. We ask that all students assist us in this endeavor.

The staff does take a very aggressive posture in maintaining the safety of all students. We continue to have this as one of our main goals for the coming school year. We will not tolerate any person or persons threatening or intimidating students or staff. All students are required to present their student picture ID when asked by school personnel. Violation of this rule could result in a student's suspension.

Hats: Students are not allowed to bring hats to school.

Radios: Students are not allowed to bring electronic equipment to school. This includes CD players, radios, headsets, cassettes, and boom boxes. (p. 7)

Student Newspapers

Thirteen student newspapers, dated between September, 1993 through May, 1994 were reviewed to detect student perceptions of violence and safety. Four articles were related to issues of violence and safety in their high school. In one article, students voiced their concern about disruptive students in class, suggesting an alternative classroom assignment for those students ("Now, where was I?", 1993).

Two articles addressed the issue of gun control and the district weapons policy that requires parental signatures to show that they have been informed that the consequences for a student bringing a weapon to school is expulsion ("Guns don't belong...", 1994; Sayeed & Cayton, 1993). "Although signing a piece of paper is not going to guarantee gun free schools, (the principal) hopes that family, peer pressure and students wanting a safe learning environment will improve the chances for success through the dangerous weapons policy (Sayeed & Cayton, 1993, p. 6).

One letter to the editor, in reply to an earlier editorial, discussed the close adult supervision that occurs at school activities (Givens & Seaton, 1993):

Your editorial states, "Hangar dances need to be controlled better....Some teachers and adults think it would be better if there were more chaperones." The Hangar dance on the 22 of September was chaperoned by 4 sets of parents, who had been contacted a month ahead of time, by 2 sponsors and their spouses, several members of the (high school) faculty and staff, and a multitude of parents who visited during the evening, 4 (high school) administrators, 2 (high school) security personnel, 2 off-duty (city) police officers, and 4 employees of (the district) who operated scanning equipment. This totals 24.

(Your article) further implies that there was a reason to get after people who were rowdy at the Hangar dance. (A woman), who works inside security at all Hangar dances, remarked after the last Hangar dance, "It was by far the best attended and best behaved group of students I have supervised in many

years, there were '0' problems."

Our only function is to provide the opportunity for all (high school) students a place to attend a dance, in a safe and secure environment, where they can meet their friends and enjoy themselves, five times a year....Last year it was necessary for us to raise the price of admission, because of the need to pay for extra security. (p. 2)

Participant Perceptions of Their Urban High School

After unitizing and classifying the interview data, 20 categories emerged that defined the participants perception of their urban high school. These 20 categories were clustered in three main categories: 1) School Factors, 2) Diversity and 3) Violence.

School Factors

Several categories were clustered under the title "school factors." All had to do with things that occurred at school. They included: 1) Quality of Education, 2) School Climate, 3) School Activities, 4) Administration, 5) Teachers, and 6) Curriculum and Instruction.

Quality of Education

All students felt that they were receiving a quality education and that their urban high school was preparing them for life after high school. Larry (9, M, B) felt his education was "challenging" him. Rebecca (11, F, W) talked about the number of national merit scholars that come from their high school. She also touched upon the academic competition among students.

It's hard to be in the top 25% of the class because there are a lot of students who do make good grades, who make really good grades. It's hard... really, really hard to do that. It's not just like if I made two A's, it would do it, you have to be pretty close to a 4.0 student to be up there.

Students felt that the honors classes were of better quality than the regular classes. James (11, M, W) went so far as to suggest that regular classes were "pointless." They also felt that most students could be successful in honors classes if they were encouraged to take them.

School Climate

Several students commented on they felt a sense of family at their high school. Lenny (11, M, B) related this by stating:

The kids are pretty cool. Everybody seems like a family at (our high school). Like in our fifth hour, we call that our family, you know. Because she's the mom, the teacher. We started there earlier this year and carried it on second and third hours. Everybody gets along in there.

Curt (9, M, W) said, "Most of the people, for the most part, are friendly and help to stand up for each other no matter who they are."

School Activities

A sense of school pride, tradition and spirit were conveyed throughout all interviews. When asked where this pride and spirit came from, students would talk about the activities at their high school. Dean (10, M, B) explained it, "A lot of spirit though...has a lot of spirit. Once you've been there for a year, then you don't want to leave." Frances (9, F, W) stated that "spirit cabinets and all the different kinds of groups you can get involved with in sports" made her high school good.

Linda (12, F, B) made the point that school activities helped her get to know other people:

There's a lot of clubs and activities to do that I'm involved in...like I met a girl from Russia. I mean, and really I'm

beginning to notice there's no difference in us at all as I mix and mingle and don't just stay to who I really, who I feel comfortable with. You really have to get out there and either, well, I wouldn't say force, but, it's kind of at (our high school) the activities that we have make it easier for people to get to know other people, you know, who aren't from the same background as you. You know, different clubs and everything. And, you can meet different people from other countries, just anything!

Administration

Generally, students were supportive of the administration, particularly of the principal. Administration was viewed as being strict, yet fair. Administrative expectations were known and were enforced. Communication between students and administration was encouraged. Curt (9, M, W) stated, "....they give the kids a say in what happens and the kids can talk freely and suggest anything."

Rebecca (11, F, W) went even further by saying, "If she (principal) says something and she realizes that it's not fair, she's not going to stick to it just because she said it and doesn't want to look bad. She's going to make the fair choice." Lenny (11, M, B)

thinks that he "and all the principals get along great."

Teachers

Overall, students held a high regard for their teachers. They felt that most of their teachers were "good" and cared about their education. Dean (10, M, B) felt that most of his teachers were "pretty cool." James (11, M, W) defined a good teacher as one who "cares about all students; wants them to learn so they can go to college or whatever they want to do...spending the extra time with anyone who wants it."

Regarding teachers, Allen (10, M, W) stated:

I think they feel like they want to teach them (students), you know. They want you to be in class and stuff, and they want to help you out. So, they try and make you stay in class and work and stuff. It's pretty good. I like all my teachers. They are really nice to me...besides that, the teachers really help me out...

When describing the teachers who don't care, Rebecca (11, F, W) said that they

just teach the lesson, not asking if there are any questions, and assigning an assignment to do and not really getting any

questions. Or they see some problems going on with some students, just kick them out of class, and expect them/things to get better.

Curriculum and Instruction

Instruction delivered in an interesting and motivating format was viewed by students to be "better" instruction. The subject areas taught in this way were viewed as being more meaningful than subjects taught in a less participatory manner. Lenny (11, M, B) shared his experience in his English class.

I thought the class was fun in the beginning. It always is. I don't think the class could ever be boring. That's like one of the only classes I can enjoy. Just really sit there and really want to learn something because everybody's so, well, together, and the assignments...not like my other classes. They are just dead. It seems like there's not life at all in them...it seems like you are there but you're sitting in the room by yourself. There's no one communicating with you.

Curt (9, M, W) stated that improvement in instruction could occur if students had

more hands-on work in class, not just all book work, and have

a lot of class discussions and debates in class. People would be more willing to learn, I think. They would look more forward to coming to class, and we wouldn't have the gypping problems that we do.

Summary

Students stated that they are supportive of the administration, their teachers, and most think that they are getting a "good" education. Some suggested that a more "hands on" curriculum would improve instruction. In other words, they want to be actively involved in their learning process. However, the school climate and the activities available for students created a collegial and familial atmosphere at their school.

Diversity

All students talked about the diversity at their high school and that that was one of the things that made their school "good." Rebecca (11, F, W) said, "There's just so many different people there that you don't feel like you stick out or anything. There's always someone to, where you can kind of fit in with, because there is such a mix of people." Frances (9, F, W) stated that diversity is good because you get to learn that there's many different people

that lead very different lives than you. And that you see how differently they can be raised and the different things they feel and the different values they have and everything...different races...people from different backgrounds as far as family and kind of social group they hang around in.

Dean (10, M, B) described the schools' approach used to promote diversity:

They teach us to be open minded...If you take foreign language, then they will teach you, you know, everything. That there is other people out there. I mean, they don't want you to be against anybody. I mean, they'll, that's why they have like Spanish classes, and black history classes, and Asian classes. I mean, they have all types of different language classes. I mean, you, you know, get into and have some type of knowledge on other people's culture, I mean so, you know, then we can all work together.

The categories that were clustered under diversity are: 1) "Real World" Reality, 2) Segregation, 3) "Veiled" Prejudice, 4) Racism, 5) Parent Perspectives and Expectations, and 6) Private Schools.

"Real World" Reality

Many stated that being around a diverse population was preparing them for life after high school in the "real world." James (11, M, W) explained this reality:

That's how it is going to be when you get out into the real world. The real world is going to be exactly the same. It's not going to be just like you. You are not going to be able to work well with people if you can't handle that.

Perhaps Linda (12, F, B) summed it up best of all when she stated:

I think it is really good to prepare people for how it really is. I mean, because I feel like if you're sitting at another school, and it's not as mixed as the whole world is, you're not going to get the right perception, you know? And, then you're going to go to college, and you're going to think, "Damn, where did all these people come from?"

Segregation

These students talked about how other students in their high school segregated themselves into social and racial "cliques." It seems that this self-segregation was caused more by social and language barriers than racial reasons. Dean (10, M, B) explained this

as "...the different groups at our school don't speak English, and so they need to get together so they can talk in their own language and get around kids that they know."

Rebecca (11, F, W) was a little more philosophical about self-segregation:

I should say there are a lot of students who mix with other groups. Usually the groups who you see are of the same ethnic or social class or usually they kind of stick together looking for people who are like themselves. You know, who they can get along with. But, there are a few students who, I should say there are several students who mix with the other classes, you know, races or anything. It's not like they wouldn't ever allow someone else to be in their group of friends or something. Just if you want to be with that group of friends, if you're like them, and that's what you want to be like or who you want to be with.

"Veiled" Prejudice

Initially, when students brought up the subject of prejudice, most denied that it existed in their school. However, upon probing, most admitted that there was some "veiled" prejudice. Comments

were made "behind the backs" of and about other races. Rebecca (11, F, W) said this was done rarely and it is done because "when they are behind each other's backs, it's different because they can say anything without getting in a fight and not getting hurt."

Only one student openly noted prejudice, the prejudice of his father and peers:

My dad is pretty prejudiced against blacks, and it hasn't helped at all...He was born in (a southern state) and I guess that was the way he was raised by his parents and all the prejudice they have down there. And, he just makes comments and me and my sisters don't believe in it at all. We always go get in verbal fights with them about it, and have a lot of arguments about it. I just don't understand how he can sit there and in just one minute and say that none of them are any good and they don't have any reasons for being here or anything, and then the next minute, if he likes one and gets to know them, he'll end up liking them, and he's just, he's singleminded, he doesn't think about it.

There are a lot of my friends that are prejudiced against blacks, and that, there's a hall at (our school) that most of the

blacks' lockers are. Whenever we say something about going down to first floor or something and they would make a comment about that....'I'm not going down that hall' or 'that's where all the blacks hang out', stuff like that. I guess I would like to tell them that we are all created equal and that they shouldn't do that, but they are my friends, and a lot of them think that and I feel, kind of, I wouldn't be able to tell them that, I wouldn't be able to say that, normally. (Curt, 9, M, W)

Racism

Students indicated that there was evidence of racism at school, but that there were no racial conflicts. Frances (9, F, W) told about students making fun of other students (especially non-English speaking) "trying to intimidate them and teasing them". Lenny (11, M, B) said there were no "problems with racism" and that "if people are racists, they keep it to themselves."

Dean (10, M, B) felt that the lack of racial problems was due to the multicultural classes that are taught stressing learning about and valuing other cultures. He described his high school as "a melting pot...we have all kind of cultures at (our high school) and they just blend together."

Stereotypes

The students I interviewed were united on this subject. All brought up the media and they all were irritated at how their school was depicted. They feel that the media only told the negative things that happened at their school and that those episodes are exaggerated and blown out of proportion. Dean (10, M, B) stated,

The media, they give (our high school) a bad rep. I mean, they don't see the good things that come out of (our high school)...they just bring out the bad stuff about it, they don't say anything good about it. I mean, they just take the bad stuff out of a situation and blow it up about schools. I think they really need to visit the school for about a week, and then make an analysis on the school before they give them a bad rep.

Rebecca (11, F, W) summed up most of the students statements when she said, "They don't really know. They haven't interviewed the students or anything. They just look at it and judge it from a distance. They don't really know what's going on or what it's like."

Students felt that some students were stereotyped, also. Curt (9, M, W) felt that African-American and white students were stereotyped. The following reflected his perception:

They (blacks) are in gangs and that they all get into trouble a lot and that they all use drugs. They just can't stand white people. There are a lot of stereotypes on white people that they are all prejudiced against blacks.

Curt also mentioned:

My mom stereotypes them (blacks) but she thinks that, like if we were going somewhere, or I was going somewhere by myself, and she will see a group of them (blacks), then she'll like 'we got to be careful', or something like that. We'd have a lot more respect for adults if they wouldn't stereotype because then we wouldn't have anybody to learn that from.

Then we could all, it would be a lot better place to live.

However, Curt goes on to say,

I never got in a fight with (black kids) or anything. I have nothing against them so I talk to them like anyone. They don't bother me that much. It's just we all have it in our heads that they are going to start something, and they don't...I guess I find the stereotypes too, in some way.

Parent Perspectives and Expectations

Students indicated that their parents liked their high school

and were supportive. James (11, M, W) said that his parents wanted him to "be at a bigger school, with lots of people and stuff. Be ready for that when I get out on my own. Being able to handle it (diversity)." Frances (9, F, W) also said that her mom feels that "eventually I am going to have to deal with it (diversity). You know, all different kinds of people and situations in my life so it's not really much of a big deal for me to be going to (this high school)." Dean (10, M, B) stated that his stepfather expected him to get good grades and to continue to play sports.

Allen (10, M, W) said his parents liked the school and that they attended there when they were in high school. However, he said that they worried about violence a little bit, but not unduly. He mentioned that they know that he is "friends with gang members and that that's OK" with them. When asked what his parents thought about the diversity in the school, he said they "think it's normal...every school has (diversity)."

Rebecca (11, F, W) said that when her parents hear about a problem

they'll ask me about it. They don't just assume, you know. So, they hear from me and they know, I like, I wouldn't want to go

anywhere else. And, they know that I like this school. And, I think that makes them realize that it's a good school.

Private Schools

Dean (10, M, B) and Rebecca (11, F, W) talked quite a bit about a private parochial high school (Taylor High School) that is located in town. It is typically attended by the affluent Catholic. They both talked about the lack of diversity at Taylor and they felt that the students that attended this private school lacked cultural sensitivity and were more prejudiced than the students at their high school. Rebecca felt that adults had the perception that students at Taylor could be trusted more because it was a "religious school."

Dean (10, M, B), when comparing his high school with Taylor High School, explained it this way,

I mean, Taylor is like a white school and there's not too many black kids at Taylor. I feel, they might give me the education that I need, but I wouldn't feel comfortable with the surroundings so I might not learn anything because I'm worrying about my surroundings.

Summary

All students talked about the diversity at their school. All

thought that this was a strength of their high school and that classes were taught on various cultures and ethnic groups. There was an attitude that diversity was valued.

Students also mentioned "veiled" prejudice but noted that there were no racial conflicts at their school. The segregation that occurred at the school was as much social as it was racial. In other words, common languages, socio-economics, and common interests seemed to group kids together: not necessarily race.

Violence

Students were unanimous in their opinion that their high school was not a violent school. Even Curt (9, M, W) would not classify his high school as violent.

If they say (my high school) was a violent school, I wouldn't agree with them at all. I would try to change their mind, because it's not a violent school...There's always going to be some kind of trouble somewhere. If you are in a little town somewhere, there's always going to be that possibility, so you should always...going to worry no matter where you are, I think.

(Curt, 9, M, W)

The following categories were clustered under violence: 1)

Weapons, 2) Gangs, 3) Fear, and 4) Safety.

Definitions/Descriptions

I asked them to define violence.

Curt (9, M, W): "A fight...stealing...theft...vandalism."

Larry (9, M, B): "When you start bringing out weapons to help you win, then that's considered violence."

James (11, M, W): When someone gets hurt physically or mentally.

Frances (9, F, W): "Harming others...putting them in a dangerous position."

Dean (10, M, B): "Violence would be any outburst of emotion where you invaded somebody's space...rights or opinions...hurts the person emotionally."

Linda (12, F, B): "When you are probably just infringing upon somebody else's right to be safe."

The number of fights that were known about or witnessed during their tenure at the school varied from 2 to 6, depending on the tenure of the student. Interestingly, several students stated that most of those were "girl fights." Linda (12, F, B) noticed that most girl fights were over boys. Student perception was there were few

fights at their high school and the fights that did occur involved no weapons. Larry (9, M, B) said there were few fights because, "Everybody knows what to say and what not to say" to keep the peace.

Rebecca (11, F, W) had seen only one fight between two freshmen boys, and the teachers flew out the doors and pulled them apart and called the administrators and the administrators came down and took them upstairs, and you didn't see anything about it again and everybody just went on their way.

Weapons

None of the subjects had ever seen a gun at school, but most were certain that some students who attend their high school owned or had access to guns. It is believed by the subjects that some students (particularly gang members) kept guns in their cars and at home. However all were emphatic that no guns were brought into the school. When asked why, the reasons were the same: Students would not bring guns to school because they would not want to get into trouble or be expelled from school.

When asked if they would tell authorities about a gun, Linda

(12, F, B) said that she would if there were no way that she could be "implicated." However, Dean (10, M, B) felt that

If you tell, eventually it will get out that you told and then they will come looking for you, too. If a white person saw the dude bring a gun to school, he would have told. (This boy with a gun) was mostly in a black community so, the black community has the thing where you don't tell on me and I won't tell on you. So that's how it operates at (our high school).

Gangs

All participants acknowledged that there were gang members in their school, however their responses otherwise varied. Rebecca (11, F, W) said, "It's not like you feel any tension or anything about it (gangs). Like I said, I don't know who is in and who is not (in a gang)." Frances (9, F, W) stated,

Well, they haven't harmed me at all. I'm not really scared about it or intimidated. Because no one around me or myself has been hurt by (them), (and) I know gang members personally and stuff and never has anyone hurt me.

James (11, M, W), Lenny (11, M, B) and Dean (10, M, B) felt that there were very few gang members in their school because most had

either dropped out or been expelled. When asked why gang members did not cause more trouble at school, Dean (who is a member of the Black Mafia Gangsters) responded that "If you are in a gang everything takes place outside of school. It's all out in society. They don't want to get in trouble, so they keep it outside of school and won't bring it to school."

Dean was coerced into joining a gang when he was a freshman. He also shared with me that gang members allowed him to participate or not participate in illegal activities. He told me that he had not participated in any illegal activities nor did he abuse any substances.

Fear

Curt (9, M, W) mentioned that he had a little fear when he walked on first floor (where some black gang members stand), but only when he was alone. Dean (10, M, B) said that some students feared walking on first floor but it was because of social intimidation. According to Dean, students should not fear physical attacks. However the students on first floor verbally intimidate anyone who doesn't "measure up" in their eyes. Allen (10, M, W) corroborated this statement when he said

But they don't really start any trouble. They want to just 'mess with people'. They just go up to them and start talking to them. Get them scared, and that's it. They never really try to beat them up or anything.

This verbal intimidation caused fear in some students (i.e., Curt) because they were not sure when verbal intimidation might change to something physical. Curt was the only subject that expressed this fear. All other subjects stated that they had no fear, nor do they feel threatened (even on first floor).

Safety

All students reported feeling safe at their high school. When asked what kind of things made them feel safe, subjects responded that the supervision of people made them feel safe: security guards, administration, teachers, and friends. Most however, stated that they felt safe because, "I haven't encountered anything to make me feel scared or in danger" (Frances, 9, F, W).

Again, Curt (9, M, W) was the exception and said that he felt safe only when he was not alone. "I worry about fights. I wouldn't start anything. But, I don't really worry about my life. I don't think anything will happen...I'm pretty comfortable there."

Drugs

Curt (9, M, W) was the only student that brought up the subject of drugs. He mentioned that he had a senior in one of his classes that carried a marijuana pipe and other drug paraphernalia but that he "hasn't seen any evidence" that drugs were done at school.

Summary

Students generally defined violence as hurting someone physically, although some felt that hurting someone mentally could also be described as violence. They all agreed that their school was not a violent school. All but one, stated that they felt safe at their school and experienced no fear. One student, Curt (9, M, W) stated, "(I'm afraid) when I am by myself...a lot when I am on first floor".

No student felt that guns were in the high school, however they did feel that there were students who had guns at home or in their cars. They also explained that these students, including gang members, would not bring weapons inside the school because they would not risk expulsion.

Summary

The emergent themes were subcategorized and then compiled into 4 main categories: 1) School Factors, 2) Diversity,

3) Violence and 4) Stereotypes.

Data perspectives were consistent and supported the idea that the high school was not a violent high school and students who attended there, felt safe. Only one respondent spoke of feeling fear, and that was when he was alone among gang members. Others spoke of having no fear and feeling safe.

The diversity of the school was seen as a very positive attribute by both parents and students and the multiculturalism that permeated the school appeared to be a source of pride. Although prejudice existed in the school, it was not seen as a source of contention nor was racism seen as an issue.

All students spoke of their school with a great sense of pride and loyalty and took to task anyone who stereotyped their school or the students who attended it as less than satisfactory.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

In this chapter, the categorized data is inductively analyzed to determine the student generated perceptions of violence and safety in their urban high school and the bases for those perceptions.

Violence and safety are defined and the constructed reality, based on student experiences, is presented.

Definitions

Violence

Definitions of violence given by students ranged from verbal harassment and intimidation to using weapons to win a fight.

Frances (9, F, W) stated that violence would be "harming others...putting them in a dangerous position." James (11, M, W) said that violence occurs "when someone gets hurt physically or mentally."

The student's definition of violence appeared to have depended on their opinion of what was acceptable behavior and what was not, based upon their own definition of acceptable behavior. For example, Larry (9, M, B) commented that fist fighting should not be considered

violence, only weapon use. Yet, Dean's (10, M, B) definition included "hurting the person emotionally."

Without exception, students defined violence as anytime anyone harmed another. This included fist fighting, some verbal harassment, harming others (physically and mentally), vandalism, theft and putting others in a dangerous situation. One student defined violence as anytime you are "infringing upon somebody else's right to be safe."

No student had personally been involved with any violence during their tenure at this urban high school, but all had either witnessed or heard about fights that had occurred.

No student felt their high school was violent. This may have been because they had had little direct experience with fights or disruptions. Reports of fights seen or heard of at the high school ranged from 2 to 6.

Safety

Students defined safety as the absence of fear. In other words, when students experienced little or no fear at their school, they felt safe; those who experienced fear felt less safe.

There was no evidence any student in this study had been an

offender or victim of violence. This lack of experience with violence seemed to impact their feeling of safety. Frances (9, F, W) summed it up best: "I haven't encountered anything to make me feel scared or in danger."

High behavioral expectations were delineated in the Student Agenda (1993). The close supervision of security guards, administration, teachers and being with their friends were also mentioned during the interviews. High expectations that were enforced and close supervision helped students feel safe. An article in the school newspaper addressed the practice of close supervision at school dances. It appeared that students were saying that there was a direct correlation between close supervision and student safety at these dances. This supported the data received through subject interviews.

The security derived from being closely supervised and being with friends remained even when a student might be in a potentially threatening situation. For example, Curt (9, M, W) feared first floor where some black gang members congregated, but only when he was alone.

Nothing seemed to have happened to Curt to cause this fear. He

had not been a victim at the hands of these black students.

Nonetheless, he definitely had a fear of being harmed. What, then, was the bases of this fear?

Constructed Realities

The structured school environment which helped students feel safe in their school, had been constructed primarily by adults. The rules, policies, close supervision, curriculum, and the acceptance and valuing of diversity had been primarily determined by adults. However, this structured environment alone did not explain the lack of fear and the perceived safety that most of these students possessed. For these students, experiences weighed heavier in their definition of reality than did other factors such as knowledge, adult, and media realities. In this school, students constructed their own reality on safety and violence based on their experiences and beliefs, metacognitive interactions (consciously thinking about your actions), and influential consistency (beliefs consistent with influential others).

Experiences and Beliefs

None of the students interviewed reported that they had been victims of violence at school. Many said that the reason they were

not fearful was because nothing had happened to them to make them feel afraid. They stated that perhaps if they had experienced violence, then maybe they would have been afraid. Ultimately, then, lack of violent experiences kept students from being afraid and seeing themselves as victims, potential victims or offenders.

The constructed reality for these students was that they did not attend a violent school and 8 of the 9 students felt safe and had no fear when attending their school.

Metacognitive Interactions

Students shared that they valued diversity and, through multicultural classes, were learning about other cultures. Just as importantly, as Larry (9, M, B) said, "Everybody knows what to say and what not to say to keep the peace." Students felt that this was a big step in learning to get along in society.

Students learned what to say and what not to say in order to get along with others, thereby exhibiting metacognition.

Metacognition "is being aware of our thinking as we perform specific tasks and then using this awareness to control what we are doing" (Marzano, Brandt, Hughes, Jones, Presseisen, Rankin & Suhor, 1988 p. 9). Knowing that certain acts or words could cause trouble, these

students avoided them. They wanted to get along and knowing what to say to keep the peace helped students feel safe.

Differentiated Metacognition. For most of the students, knowing what to say to keep the peace was not a difficult cognitive process; interacting with others that were different from them seemed to be a natural process and involved little thought. However, for Curt (9, M, W) it appeared to be almost a painful metacognitive process that seemed to occupy a disproportionate amount of his thoughts. Interacting did not come naturally for him. It required him to consciously think about his actions and how they would affect his safety. For Curt, this painful metacognitive process stemmed from how he viewed black students.

Influential Modelers and the "Real World". The metacognitive modeling, done by significant adults (teachers or parents) and their peers, helped students see the importance of "getting along" in this "real world" situation. James (11, M, W) suggested,

That's how it is going to be when you get out into the real world. The real world is going to be exactly the same. It's not going to be just like you. You are not going to be able to work well with people if you can't handle that.

Most students talked about how their parents felt that experiencing diversity and having a "real world experience" was an important part of their educational process. The belief emerged that diversity was valued, metacognitively modeled, and espoused by adults and students in this urban high school. Adult and peer modeling influenced their constructed realities of violence and safety.

Influential Consistency

All students talked about the value of attending a culturally diverse school. Most students talked about how their parents also thought that experiencing cultural diversity in an urban school would help prepare them for the "real world." Only one student expressed concern about his fathers' overt prejudices against blacks (Curt, 9, M, W).

Curt (9, M, W) talked about his fathers' southern roots and about his prejudice. Curt appeared frustrated with his fathers' views and stated that his mother was less prejudiced but still stereotyped people of other races. Interestingly, Curt was the only student who stated that he felt fear for his safety in school. Perhaps more interesting is the fact that he only felt this fear on

first floor (an area where some black gang members congregate) when he was not accompanied with his friends. Generally, he avoided first floor.

Curt (9, M, W) has never been verbally or physically bothered by any black students, yet he was easily intimidated by them and feared that they "might" start something.

(I feel afraid) when I am by myself. A lot when I am on first floor. It shouldn't be like that but when I am around a lot of them (blacks), like a big group of them, its just something that may get started, they might say something, so I will try and stay away from them. I walk a little bit away from them so that won't happen. If I'm with my friends I don't pay that much attention to it. I never got in a fight with them or anything. I have nothing against them so I talk to them like anyone. They don't bother me that much. It's just we all have it in our heads that they are going to start something, and they don't.

Other students talked about how they did not fear black students on first floor because they knew some of them. However, Curt (9, M, W) did not know these black students nor did he see them as individuals. He saw them as a group. Curt brought up ethnicity a

number of times. His replies had racial overtones when he spoke of prejudice, stereotyping and fear. By his comments, it was clear that Curt felt prejudice and stereotyping was wrong, but his comments also showed that he was guilty of the same biases that he condemned his father for. It would seem that Curt's family background or experiences directly impacted his suspicions and fear of people of African-American descent.

In contrast, other students spoke of how their parents valued diversity. When these students brought up stereotyping they spoke of socioeconomic stereotyping as well as academic and cultural stereotyping. Race was not singled out as a major issue. In fact, according to them, race was not an issue. When asked probing questions regarding diversity, both black and white students that were interviewed denied the existence of racial conflicts, except for Curt (9, M, W).

Influential Congruence. When a student's beliefs were consistent with the influential adults and peers in his/her life, a condition occurred which can be described as influential congruence. This congruence helped the student maintain a cognitive balance or "peace of mind." Conversely, those who had influential incongruence

experienced a cognitive dilemma.

Most students were in a state of influential congruence with their influential adults and peers. None of these students experienced fear in their high school and all felt safe, with the exception of Curt (9, M, W); all students valued diversity and so did their influential others, except for Curt.

Influential Incongruence. Curt (9, M, W) stated that he valued diversity, but his parents and peers did not: "There are a lot of my friends that are prejudiced against blacks.... My dad is pretty prejudiced against blacks, and it hasn't helped at all." When there was incongruence between the influential others in a student's life, in this case peers and parents, a cognitive imbalance occurred which proposed a dilemma for that student. Theorists call this imbalance "cognitive dissonance or incongruence" (Festinger, 1975; McGuire, 1966).

Cognitive Dissonance. Cognitive dissonance occurs when people believe one thing but their actions represent something other than what they believed. For example, when speaking about how his friends treated blacks, Curt said, "We are all created equal and they shouldn't do that (speak ill of blacks), but they are my friends, and a

lot of them think that. I wouldn't be able to tell them that." Curt also stated, "I have nothing against them (blacks) so I talk to them like anyone." Curt espoused the beliefs that he valued diversity, that black students were just like everybody else, and that they were equal to whites. However, his actions did not portray these beliefs and he knew it. He stated, "I guess I find the stereotypes too, in some way."

He only expressed fear about black students even though he had never been a victim. At no time did he express any fear of any students other than black students. Clearly, what he believed and how he acted were in conflict with each other, posing a dilemma for him. He experienced influential incongruence with those that he cared about. This dilemma was unsettling for him and appeared to result in stress and anxiety. It is possible that this anxiety expressed itself in the form of fear or at least contributed to his fear.

According to Festinger (1975) and others, individuals desire cognitive balance and work to achieve balance. When a person has cognitive incongruence, that person searches for ways to change the situation. How, then, will Curt resolve his cognitive incongruence?

A Different Constructed Reality

McDermott (1983) stated that there is a weak to moderate relationship between previous victimization experiences and fear. This purposeful, yet semi-random, sample of students did not include students who viewed themselves as being victims of violence in school and the constructed reality of these students was based on their experiences. Therefore, the constructed reality that eight of these students had of their high school was that they were neither victims, offenders, nor fearful youths. And, contrary to adults, the media and general public perception, they felt safe in their high school.

An analysis of the negative information Curt (9, M, W) provided the possibility that in this school, a student who experiences higher levels of prejudice, experiences higher levels of fear. Therefore, the prejudicial experiences that he had received in his home environment or through peer interactions may have influenced Curt to fear blacks even though he had had no negative experiences with black students.

It is also quite possible that the influential incongruence Curt experienced was also a factor contributing to his fear. When

parental beliefs conflicted with the dominant beliefs that were espoused and modeled in school, (e.g., all students have worth) a dilemma occurred for that student. In this case, Curt described this reality as fear.

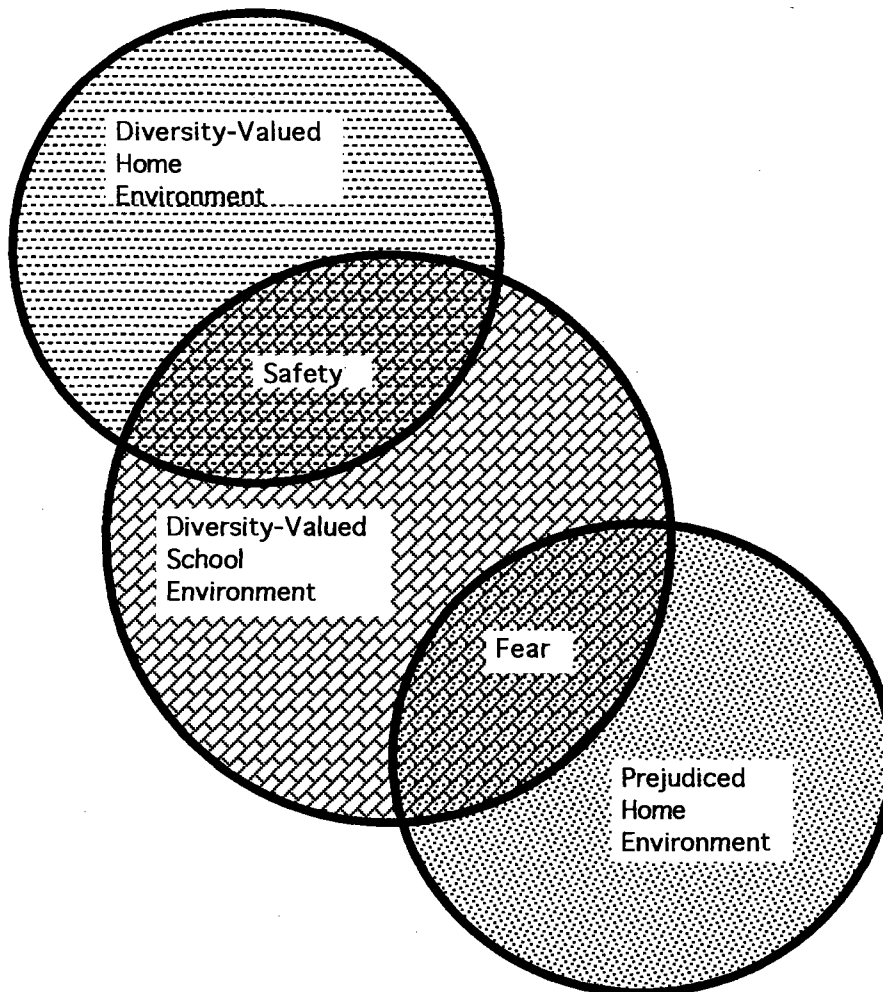
Because of the way these students constructed reality on violence and safety, a new Venn diagram depicting violence and safety was created. This new diagram demonstrates the constructed reality of these students concerning violence and safety in their urban high school (Fig. 3).

Students saw themselves as neither victims nor offenders and most felt safe within the school environment. However, the student who felt prejudice against another group of students, felt fear for his safety. For this one student, within the shelter of a safe school environment was cognitive dissonance; with this dissonance, came fear. The Venn diagram (Fig. 3) depicts this phenomena.

Summary

The student generated definition of violence in this study was anything that caused another person physical and sometimes mental pain. No student felt that his/her school was a violent school. Safety was defined as the absence of fear. And with the exception

Influential Congruence



Influential Incongruence

Figure 3. Subsets of a Student Population: Influential Congruence, Diversity-Valued School Environment, Diversity-Valued Home Environment, Safety, Influential Incongruence, Prejudiced Home Environment and Fear

of one student (Curt), all students considered themselves safe and they had experienced no fear at their school.

Most students did not see themselves as victims, offenders or fearful youths, and they considered their school to be non-violent and safe. Their lack of fear could be attributed to their lack of experiences with school violence. It could also be attributed to the fact that these students were raised in a home environment that valued diversity and was consistent with the beliefs that were espoused and metacognitively modeled by the adults and peers in their high school.

The term influential congruence was used to depict the positive correlation between a student's beliefs and his/her influential other's beliefs. The students in this study have a consistency between their beliefs and their actions. When there was influential congruence, there was usually cognitive consistency, a cognitive "balance" that was desirable to achieve and maintain.

The term influential incongruence was used to depict the negative correlation between a student's beliefs and his/her influential other's beliefs. These students may experience an inconsistency in their beliefs and their behaviors. Influential

incongruence may cause a cognitive imbalance which in turn could cause a dilemma for the person who is experiencing it. The ambiguity between belief and action is a plight that is not desirable. Most people strive to correct the imbalance (Festinger, 1975).

Students had not been victims of school violence, nor had they witnessed school violence. This seemed to contribute to their strong feeling of safety. This phenomenon was expressed in a Venn diagram in which school safety was perceived as a much stronger factor than either victims, offenders or fear. In fact, the role of victims and offenders did not relate to these students personally.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The published and most often disseminated information regarding violence in schools gives conflicting findings. Those findings reflected a perspective typically dominated by the media, teachers, parents and administrators. The perspectives of those most impacted by school violence--students--were, for the most part, missing.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine student perceptions of violence and safety in one urban high school and to discover why they had these perceptions. The research questions that drove this study were:

1. How do students perceive school violence and safety?
2. What are the bases for these perceptions?

If truth is the totality of perspectives of all involved within and outside of the institution, then for a broader definition of violence and its relationship to school safety, the constructed

reality of students must be examined.

Data Needs and Sources

To conduct this study, data that provided insight into school violence was needed, as well as data that described student perceptions of violence and safety in their high school. Three data sources were used: high school students, relevant documents and ethnographic field notes. Nine students provided information about their perspectives of their high school. The documents led to further information that verified the perspectives of the students. The ethnographic field notes made during observations at the site provided the researcher with a more intimate feeling about the research and environment. It also provided verification of the topics discussed during the student interviews.

Data Collection

The semi-structured open-ended interview served as the primary method of data collection in this study. Students had no knowledge as to the topic of this study, only that I wanted to talk to them about their high school. A protocol of general questions was developed and used only if a respondent needed direction or encouragement. The interviews ranged from casual conversation to

direct questioning. Observations and the collection of pertinent documents and publications were also used.

Data Categorization

The processes suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used in data categorization. The site and subjects were purposely selected and categories were formed through unitizing data, emergent category designation and negative case analysis.

The term unitizing data depicts the process used when data is disaggregated into the smallest pieces or units that can stand alone as independent thoughts. These units were then sorted into categories. Emergent categorization is a process where the interview transcripts are carefully read, unitized, then sorted into categories and subcategories as dictated by emergent themes. This process took data from the specific to the general. Negative case analysis was used when I received data that was different from my constructed reality and/or the constructed reality of the other respondents.

Data Analysis

After the data was collected and sorted, similar issues were located and conceptualized as themes, which resulted in

generalizations and formed the foundation of a model of these students' perceptions of school violence. Differences, as well as similarities, were documented and reconceptualized in the same fashion (Strauss & Corbin, 1988).

Summary of the Findings

Definitions

These students defined violence in a variety of ways, depending on their beliefs about what was socially acceptable behavior. However, with the exception of one respondent (who defined violence as using weapons to help win a fight), all felt that anytime anyone inflicted physical (and sometimes mental) harm to others, it was considered violence. No student felt that their high school was violent and none of these students had been directly involved with any violence.

These students defined safety as the absence of fear. Those that had fear, felt less safe. When asked what made students feel safe, the main responses were adult supervision and being with peers. Students suggested that because they had not been involved in or had any direct experience with violence, they felt safe at their school. The one exception was Curt (9, M, W), who had fears when he

was alone, particularly on first floor where some black gang members reportedly congregated. Although Curt had never experienced any conflicts at school, with anyone, he had a lot of fear. He especially feared black students.

Constructed Realities

All students expressed the importance of experiencing the diversity in their school and that they had "learned what to say and what not to say" in order to get along. Many of them stated that their parents also valued the experiences they were having and that they were being prepared for the "real world." The belief that diversity was valued was modeled and espoused by adults and students in this urban high school. When the beliefs and actions of the student were consistent with the beliefs and actions of his/her significant others (parents and/or peers), they experienced influential congruence, which may have contributed to feelings of safety.

Not all students had parents or peers that valued diversity. Curt spoke about his father's prejudice and said his peers were also prejudiced. This posed a dilemma for him. He espoused that diversity was good but, throughout his interview, he spoke of his

fear toward black students. This dilemma, this cognitive incongruence (McGuire, 1966), was caused by the incongruence he experienced with his "influential others" (i.e., influential incongruence).

If a student experienced this cognitive inconsistency, he/she sought to correct the imbalance. In Curt's case, his beliefs and actions were incongruent. He denounced prejudice and stereotyping, yet he was guilty of it himself, and he knew it. The conflict that occurred within him, coupled with the environment in which he was reared, may have been the source of the stress and anxiety that contributed to his fear.

Victimization

Because these students do not see themselves as offenders or victims, and because, with the exception of Curt, none were fearful, a new Venn diagram of violence was created. This diagram showed that, within this school environment, eight of these students experienced no fear and felt safe. The negative information provided by Curt would suggest that students who experienced higher levels of prejudice, may have had higher levels of fear. For Curt, within the shelter of a safe school environment was a valued diversity, a

lack of prejudice; Curt's home experiences resulted in cognitive dissonance and fear. The Venn diagram depicted this phenomenon.

Discussion

Cognitive theorists posit that people desire cognitive consistency (McGuire, 1966; Fishbein, 1966). When they experience cognitive inconsistency, they strive to correct the imbalance by correcting either their beliefs or their actions. Eight of nine students were cognitively consistent about their high school.

Curt, the one exception, struggled with the prejudice he felt and his contrasting beliefs that "all are created equal." The dilemma that this caused, along with his home environment, may have impacted the fear that he had toward black students. The influential adults at school were modeling one thing, and Curt's father and his own peers were modeling something quite different. When the influential others in a student's life disagreed (as was the case with Curt), then that student must determine with which influential others he will identify. This too, caused cognitive conflict.

To correct this imbalance, Curt would have to either change his behaviors, or change his beliefs. I predict that this will happen within the next few years following this study. The anger he felt

toward his prejudicial father, and his own beliefs supporting diversity made me think that his fear of black students would diminish.

If this is true, then the adult influence on students could determine their perceptions of safety and violence. Although the findings in this study did not support or refute research about victims and offenders, they supported the research that suggested that there was little correlation between fear and prior victimization (McDermott, 1983). Most research presented adult perspectives on violence and safety in schools. The findings had been conflicting. The student perceptions in this study were also varied and conflicting. However, one thing was clear: these students did not think of their high school as violent and all but one felt safe.

Most of the student's beliefs were congruent with the influential adults in their life. The students appeared content. They had no fear for their safety. Curt, on the other hand was not content. He felt fear and he did not feel safe. Curt espoused that he valued diversity and that "we are all created equal." On the other hand, his parents and peers did not value diversity and were prejudiced

against black people.

If the influence that adults and peers have on students determine their perceptions of violence and safety, then students arrive at school with preconceived ideas of violence and safety. But can schools deal differently with students who arrive "fearful," particularly if they arrive fearful of a particular segment of the student population?

Leonard Doob (1947) states that attitude is learned and that it precipitates response. Fishbein (1966) explains this in the following way:

But once one has learned the attitude, he also must learn what responses to make to it--i.e., there is no innate relationship between the attitude and behavior, thus one still has to learn a behavioral response. Thus two people may learn to hold the same attitude toward a given stimulus; clearly, however, they may also learn to make different responses given this same learned attitude.

For example, the sight of a Negro child may elicit the same negative predispositions or feelings of unfavorableness or unpleasantness in two Southern children. Let us further

assume that this feeling initially elicits the same overt response in both these children, for example, "Look at that dirty black boy. I won't play with him." Now it is possible that the mother of one of the children may say, "That's right; you're a good boy." In this child, then, the negative overt avoidance behavior would be reinforced; it would continue and persist. However, the mother of the other child may react quite differently. Indeed, she may say, "I never want to hear that kind of talk again, you bad boy." Thus, for this child, the behavior has been negatively reinforced and may extinguish. Here then is an example in which two children or two people may have the same negative feelings toward a given stimulus; because of differential reinforcement of the initial behavior elicited by this attitude, however, one may continue to display negative overt behavior, while this particular behavior may be extinguished on the other. (p. 201-202).

Fishbein (1966) did not think a change in a behavioral intention necessarily led to a change in attitude unless the change in behavioral intention was accompanied by a change in behavior. That is, a change in behavior implies a new set of relationships between

the individual and the stimulus. This may then lead to the learning of new beliefs about the stimulus, and thus to attitude change.

These beliefs will not be learned overnight, however, and the change in attitude may lag well behind the change in behavior. In other words, when we change behaviors through laws and policies, the belief about a stimulus (e.g., black students) may change through education and experience. But, the attitude (how we feel) may take longer to change.

Curt was reared in an environment that supported prejudice. His influential others at school promoted the value of diversity. So his behaviors at school primarily promoted diversity. He came to believe in the value of diversity. However, his attitude and actions toward blacks had not totally changed.

Schools address behaviors. Policies and behavioral expectations can be enforced (i.e., how students treat one another). Beliefs can be influenced through curriculum and examples set by staff and peers that show diversity is valued. When beliefs and actions (behaviors) change toward a given stimulus (black students), then students' attitudes (feelings) may follow (Fishbein, 1966).

Implications

The review of literature on violence and safety in public schools presented two basic and conflicting generalizations. Public schools were in crisis because of the tremendous increase in school violence; school violence was not necessarily increasing, schools were doing a better job than ever of assuring student safety.

No Cause for Panic. According to the students in this urban high school, their school was doing a good job of assuring student safety. Students interviewed refuted the theory of increasing school violence and supported the researchers who felt that the media had sensationalized incidents of school violence (Furlong, 1994).

Victimization. This study did not support nor did it refute the research on victimization. These students did not see themselves as victims, offenders, or (with one exception) fearful youths. This study did, however, support the notion that there was a weak to moderate relationship between previous victimization experiences and fear (McDermott, 1983) since the only student that experienced fear had no prior victimization.

Violence Prevention. This study supported the research that promoted violence prevention. Several students brought up the importance of learning about other cultures and accepting the diversity that is in their school. They mentioned multiculturalism was not only promoted, but it was taught and modeled by school personnel.

Cognitive Dissonance. Doob (1947) and Fishbein (1966) proposed that attitude and behavior were related, one affects the other. This study did support their tenet. Students who came from a home that valued diversity were comfortable around those who were different from them and they felt no fear at school. Curt (9, M, W) came from a prejudice home environment, was uncomfortable around those who were different from him and did have fear at school.

Realities. If multiple realities exist on the subject of violence in schools, to determine the "truth" of violence and safety in the public schools, the perceptions of all players (administrators, teachers and students) would have to be examined. This study attempted to examine what students thought about violence in schools.

In order for educators to determine what intervention strategies to use, how to use them and upon whom, we must determine to the best of our ability what is the "reality" of violence in schools. This study was successful in disclosing the perceptions, or the "reality", of nine students in an urban high school. That reality was based upon student experiences, influential congruence/incongruence and the school environment. For these students, the congruency between their home environment and their school environment impacted their feelings of safety and/or fear.

Recommendations

The problem of violence and safety is a complex one and can be viewed many ways. It is important to examine the perceptions of urban high school students on violence and safety in order to get their perspective of this issue and fill a void in the research.

Research

This research will be helpful to further research efforts which explore theories of violence and safety. Students of different ethnic mixes should be studied as well as students from different settings and groups.

The perceptions of students who consider themselves victims and/or offenders should be studied to determine if their perceptions correlate to the findings in this study. For example, do students who have been victimized have more fear following the victimization?

Much of the findings in this study are based on the negative data that came from Curt (9, M, W). Is he an anomaly? It would seem that he is not. The lack of progress made since the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would lead us to believe that Curt's dilemma is quite common.

Theory

Cognitive theorists may be interested in probing and further developing the influential consistency concept that has been generated in this study. Further research is needed to determine the correlation between cognitive dissonance and influential consistencies.

The data can help theorists in creating new ways of looking at schools, teachers, parents and students. Theorists wanting to examine the constructed reality of school violence and safety will be able to use the data to provide a more holistic and composite view of school violence. By using student perceptions, as well as

the adult perspectives, on this topic, the "truth" of violence and safety may be further revealed.

Practice

Practitioners can use this research when determining what strategies to use in helping students feel safe in their urban high school. The data supported that most students feel safe in their school and that the influence of significant others dominates student's beliefs and behaviors.

Influential Role Models. It is important to convey to adults that what they are modeling and espousing influences the student. Their influence can be negative or positive and may impact how students view their school, other students and issues of violence and safety.

Close Supervision. Close supervision of teachers and administrators helped students feel safe in their school environment. It appeared that these adults met the safety needs of the students in this study.

Curriculum. It is very important that students are taught the importance of valuing diversity and understanding the cultures of others. Students need to see each other as individuals, instead of

stereotyping each other in groups. With knowledge comes understanding, which in turn can hopefully eradicate a portion of fear. Knowledge and familiarity with one another will promote understanding. This, along with appropriate modeling, can be very effective in providing students with the impetus to a successful school experience.

Conclusions

I chose to study student perceptions of violence and safety in their urban high school because I wanted to know the student perspective. We often neglect to ask what students think, yet they are one of the major players in the organization called school. They are the experts on how they feel. Educators often try to second guess what students need and what they think. Perhaps we should just ask them and involve them.

The urban high school students interviewed for this study held a fierce loyalty for their school and vehemently denied that their school was violent. Most students had little or no fear for their safety, due in part to the efforts of school personnel and the support of the influential others in their lives. Because school personnel did what was necessary to provide a safe environment (e.g., close

supervision, high expectations and enforced policies), conditions were at an optimum for students to feel safe.

Diversity was valued and multiculturalism was modeled as a part of the schools' curriculum. Schools must consistently provide and maintain the position that diversity is cherished so students like Curt will experience cognitive dissonance. The dilemma caused by cognitive dissonance will enable students to reevaluate their behaviors and attitudes about diversity.

The expectation at school was that everyone would get along and work cooperatively with one another, yet students came to school with predetermined attitudes about school violence and safety. For some, working and interacting with people that were different from them was difficult. They saw certain students as a group, rather than as individuals, which contributed to their fear of that group. For other students, cooperation with peers was not an issue; working and interacting with people that were different from them came naturally. When students valued the dignity and worth of individuals it allowed them to know and get along with others, thus helping them feel safer. Ultimately, they had to "learn to say and do what was necessary to get along."

This was a study of hope, hope for the way people will continue to grow in their acceptance of one another in the future, and hope for the way we teach our children about respecting the diversity and differences of others. Based on what we have learned about Curt's experiences at school and home, it may be that he will choose to raise his own children differently than he was raised. Public schools can make a difference in how students interact with others, and ultimately may determine how successful they are as adults. Without a doubt, public schools continue to impact the future of our society.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A
THE CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

A list of 20 or more students have been recommended by school personnel. These students have been contacted by school personnel, asking them if they are willing to participate in a research project. The researcher will then choose 9-10 subjects from the suggested list of students. Those chosen subjects are interviewed in person and the interview is recorded on cassette tape. In rare instances, a second, follow-up interview may be needed in order to probe relevant themes or clarify information. Student transcripts and school records may also be reviewed. The interviewer and transcriptionist are the only people who know the identity of the participants in the study since pseudonyms are substituted for their real names in the data reporting section. Confidentiality is assured. Data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home and the researcher will be the only one to have access to it. This data will be stored for a period of 3 years, at which time all subjects will have graduated and will no longer be in the district.

I understand that participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without penalty.

I may contact Peg Dokken at (316) 686-4590 should I wish further information about this research. I may also contact Jennifer Moore, University Research Services, 001 Life Sciences East, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078; Telephone: (405) 744-5700.

"I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me."

Date:_____

Time:_____ (AM/PM)

Signed:_____

Student

Signed:_____

Parent/Guardian

"I certify that I have personally explained all elements of this form to the subject before requesting the subject to sign it."

Signed:_____

Peggy L. Dokken (Researcher)

APPENDIX B
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

Date:04-07-94

IRB#:ED-94-087

Proposal Title:STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF VIOLENCE AND SAFETY IN
THEIR URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

Principal Investigator(s):Adrienne Hyle, Peg Dokken

Reviewed and Processed as:Expedited

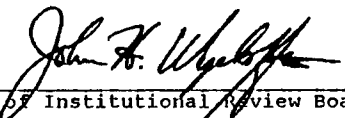
Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

APPROVAL STATUS SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY FULL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AT NEXT
MEETING.
APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR ONE CALENDAR YEAR AFTER WHICH A CONTINUATION OR
RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED FOR BOARD APPROVAL.
ANY MODIFICATIONS TO APPROVED PROJECT MUST ALSO BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL.

Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Reasons for
Deferral or Disapproval are as follows:

COMMENTS: Please change the University Research Services contact
person in the consent form from Terry Macula to Jennifer Moore.

Signature:


Chair of Institutional Review Board

Date: May 12, 1994

APPENDIX C

THE STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Student Interview Protocol

1. How do you feel about East High School?
2. What would make things better here?
3. How do your parents view the school?
4. How do students impact East High?
5. How does East High help in the development of successful people (adults)?
6. How would you describe your feelings about East High?

VITA

Peggy L. Richardson Dokken

Candidate for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Thesis: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF VIOLENCE AND SAFETY IN
THEIR URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

Major Field: Educational Administration

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