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# Journal of Knowledge and Best Practices in Juvenile Justice and Psychology

# Bullying: An Adult Perspective from Educators Who Work Predominately with African American Students

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## Abstract

A survey of 31 teachers and counselors who work predominantly with African American students about bullying revealed these findings: Analyses by individual questions indicated that participants (a) disagreed that bullies and victims were of any particular ethnic group, (b) were unsure about whether gender impacted bullying and whether bullying had decreased (c) agreed that pairing loners with other students was a good intervention and that victims tended to be students with special needs, and (d) strongly agreed that bullies have feelings of power and control. Analyses by categories and demographic characteristics indicated no statistically significant differences for gender and job position. There were statistically significant differences found for frequency and intensity of bullying for (a) age, with younger respondents perceiving fewer rates, (b) ethnicity, with Hispanic participants perceiving higher rates, and (c) years of experience, with those with fewer years of working experience perceiving fewer rates.

In order to prevent bullying and victimization in schools will require adult intervention. Unfortunately, adults in schools are not well informed about how to identify bullies and what interventions to use (Boulton, 1997; Leff, Kupersmidt, Patterson, & Power, 1999; Stockdale, Hangadumanbo, Duys, Larson, & Sarvela, 2002). It becomes important that educators are not only aware of the many dimensions of bullying but knowledgeable about how to intervene. Recognizing bullying behavior is a serious societal problem because it has been estimated that 49 to 50% of all students will experience some form of bullying during their educational experience (Charach, Pepler, & Ziegler, 1995).

The problem of bullying is likely to become more complex as the minority student populations become the majority in many of our schools (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000) and thus, the racial composition of schools also needs to be considered (Peskin, Tortolero, & Markham, 2006). Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to survey the knowledge of educators who work with predominately African American students (> 50%). Specifically, the following bullying and victimization behaviors were assessed as they related to African American students: (a) location, (b) frequency and intensity, (c) interventions used, (d) perceived severity of physical vs. verbal, (d) victim characteristics, (e) ethnic differences, and (f) physical, gender, and Socioeconomic Status (SES) characteristics. For the purpose of this study, bullying was defined as "…a student is being bullied or victimized when he is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other students" (Olweus, 1993, p.9).

Left unaddressed, bullying can have short as well as long-term negative outcomes (Boivin, Hymel, & Hodges, 2001; Coie & Dodge, 1998; Moffitt, 1993). For example, aggressive youth often experience higher levels of externalizing behavior such as peer rejection, delinquency behavior, psychosocial maladjustment, and lower levels of academic performance than youth who are not engaged in bullying. Engaged youth can also have increased levels of internalizing behaviors such as depression (Angold, Erkanli, Loeber, & Costello, 1996). Similarly, victims of aggressive behavior can have negative feelings towards school fairness which can ultimately lead to a disconnection between students and everything related to schools (Ma, 2004).

*Psychosocial and Educational Characteristics of Bullying - Teachers, Counselors, and Principals as Raters*

Bullying is a major problem, yet only limited research has addressed teachers' roles in bullying dynamics. Extant studies have reported that teachers are likely to: (a) report lower prevalence rates of bullying

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than do students (Stockdale et al., 2002), (b) not always correctly identify bullies (Leff et al., 1999), and (c) not feel confident in their abilities to deal with bullying (Boulton, 1997). In the identification of bullying behavior, Leff et al., found that teachers could more accurately identify bullies and victims in elementary schools than they could middle school students. Key aspects of the bullying phenomenon may go unrecognized because of the sophisticated cognitions of the bully. Further, teachers and counselors may not easily recognize the employment of exclusionary methods of bullying in which peers are engaged in excluding certain students and the strategies used to mobilize anxious bully cohorts as comrades (Sutton, 2001).

Teachers and counselors may not recognize the surprising similarities between bullies and victims due to their proximity to the bullying incident (Robles-Piña, Nichter, & Campbell-Bishop, 2004). This study found that teachers are more likely to view the immediate bullying situation, whereas counselors are likely to discuss the situation with the students after the actual bullying takes place. Thus, these two groups have different perspectives about how to identify and intervene in bullying situations.

The blurred lines between roles and attitudes of bullies and victims make it difficult for teachers and counselors to identify them with accuracy. For example, bullies and victims are more likely to have more pro-bully and more negative pro-victim attitudes and are more likely to actively or passively reinforce bullies when confronted with a bully situation (Marsh, Parada, Yeung, & Healey, 2001). Therefore, the simplistic classification historically of either a bully or a victim belies the growing research revealing that the two are positively correlated (Marsh et al.). They are both likely to use avoidance coping strategies, tend to be more depressed, have difficulty controlling their anger (with bullies exhibiting more externalizing behaviors and victims, more internalizing behaviors), have lower levels of self-concept, and report high levels of life stress (Marsh et al., 2001).

In terms of physical versus verbal acts of violence, Eslea's (1998) study revealed that teachers perceived physical acts of bullying as more distressing to the victim. When considering teachers' perceptions on those who bully whom, they were more likely to perceive girl on boy acts of bullying, as more serious than boy on girl acts. Moreover, they were more likely to take some sort of action, such as punishment, when bullying included a physical act. If teachers recognize the severity of bullying and encourage children to report them, then subsequently reduces these acts (Eslea). Bullock (2002) suggests that they can intercept the bully by declaring that this behavior is unacceptable, discuss acceptable behavior, and consequences for actions. Therefore, it becomes very important for the bully and victim to know that rules about bullying are observed by everyone at the school and that a safe environment is a common goal (Bullock).

Several studies have been conducted regarding administrator/principals' perceptions about bullying. In 2002, Sprague, Smith, and Stieber examined principals' perceptions in Oregon and found that while they believed that schools were relatively safe from acts that are considered violent, acts such as bullying, harassment, and cruel teasing remained grave concerns. A study of Texas principals' knowledge of bullying found that while principals' level of knowledge was high, they were not aware of the level of bullying on their campus and were not aware of locations where bullying occurred (Hathorn, 2004). Like teachers, principals underestimated the amount of bullying that occurred and were reluctant to get involved (Viadero, 1997). A most recent national randomized study (Dake, 2004) surveying principals' perceptions indicated that no school-based bullying prevention activities were being conducted in one out of five schools.

*Academic Performance and Individual Characteristics*

Bullying and victimization can occur in a variety of locations and the research in this area is mixed. Stockdale et al., (2002) found in their study that bullying is prevalent in rural and urban elementary schools alike. A study comparing three rural schools (Dulmus, Theriot, Sowers, & Blackburn, 2004), however, has indicated that the prevalence of bullying is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. In relation to specific locations within schools, bullying is most likely to occur in unstructured school settings, such as the playground or lunchroom (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000; Leff, Power, Costigan, & Manz, 2003). Interestingly, the second most common location is not the hallways and bathrooms as one would think, but the classroom (Frost, 1991; Smith & Shu, 2000; Whitney & Smith, 1993; Wolke, Woods, Stanford, Sehultz, 2001).

The research on school performance characteristics such as academic achievement of students who are victims of bullying has provided inconsistent findings. In some studies correlations were found between low academic achievement and students who are victims and/or students who are bully/victim. A study in Britain found a significant inverse relationship of -0.41 between a student's report of victimization and academic achievement, as well as a significant weak negative relationship (-0.27) between bullying and academic achievement (Mynard & Joseph, 1997). A similar study involving a sample of children in the U. S. also found that both victims and bullies experienced lower academic performance (Mynard & Joseph). Schwartz, Dodge, Pettit, and Bates' study (2000) also found that both bullies and victims reported lower academic achievement while Juvonen, Nishina and Graham (2000) found similar findings when investigating academic achievement in a sample of middle school students who had been victimized. Conversely, Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan,

Simons-Morton and Scbeidt (2001) found no significant relationship between academic achievement and status as a victim or bully/victim, but did find a significant relationship for bullies who were found to be more likely to have academic problems.

*Physical Characteristics*

The literature regarding physical characteristics of victims, bullies, and victim/bully, has been examined and found to be conflicting. Most of the studies were conducted in the late '70s and current studies are needed. Physical characteristics found to be related to being victimized in these studies included the size of the students, who were typically smaller and weaker in comparison to their peers (Olweus, 1978). Other researchers have found no significant differences between students who had been victimized and those who had not been victimized when size was considered. However, Lowenstein did find that victims were less attractive, had odd mannerisms, and/or physical disabilities (Lowenstein, 1978). Most recent research indicates that victims are disabled, overweight, or physically unattractive (Sweeting and West, 2001).

*Characteristics of Gender and Race*

When gender has been studied in relation to bullying in children and adolescents, the literature has been categorized as direct versus indirect bullying behaviors. Boys have been found to be involved in more direct bullying, such as physical aggression, than girls (Baldry & Farrington, 1999; Berthold & Hoover, 2000; Natvig, Atbrektsen, Qvarnstrom, 2001; Olweus, 1994; Siann, Callahan, Glissov, Loekhart, & Rawson, 1994; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Some studies indicate that both boys and girls are likely to engage in direct verbal bullying (Baldry & Farrington, 1999; Charach, Pepler, & Ziegler, 1995). The literature describes indirect bullying as social exclusion and subject of rumors, and few gender differences exist (Baldry & Farrington, 1999; Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1994; Peterson & Rigby, 1999; Siann et al., 1994). The research indicates that several gender differences did exist in regard to who bullies whom. Typically, boys are bullied by boys, but not by girls, and girls are bullied by both sexes (Whitney & Smith, 1993).

Research studies investigating racial or ethnic groups in regards to bullying and victimization are varied and conflicting. Earlier studies in the United Kingdom (Siann et al., 1994; Whitney & Smith, 1993) found no significant differences for racial or ethnic groups. A caveat with the Siann et al., study is that while there was no empirical evidence for differences between ethnic groups, there were statistically significant differences between the beliefs of ethnic and non-ethnic children. The ethnic children believed themselves to be more vulnerable to bullying than non-ethnic children.

A most recent study from England and Germany (Wolke et al., 2001), however, did find a significant relationship between ethnicity and bullying, with minorities more likely to be the victims of bullying. In the U.S., three studies have produced differing results. A national study (Nansel et. al., 2001) and a state study (Hanish & Guerra, 2000) investigating bullying and victimization behaviors between American, Hispanic, and White children found no significant differences. However, in a study in California, where White students were in the minority, there was a greater likelihood that White students were victimized and African American students more likely to be the bullies (Graham & Juvonen, 2002).

Most recent studies that examined ethnic differences in bullying continue to produce mixed results. For example, a study of 454 students, ages 12-17, found no ethnic differences in bullying and victimization (Seals & Young, 2003). Conversely, Peskin et al., (2006) examined bullying and victimization in 1,492 low socioeconomic, Black and Hispanic students in Texas schools. They found that Blacks were more likely to participate in bullying and victimization and these behaviors peaked in 9th grade. A recent qualitative study including 25 African-American, 9th and 10th graders, was conducted in Chicago (Axelman, 2006). Findings from interviews suggest that discipline policies in schools are in direct conflict with (a) students' age-appropriate strivings for autonomy and (b) culturally rooted forms of self-expression, which in turn can lead to disenfranchisement. In other studies when students were asked why they bullied, they indicated that the victims were "different" in various ways, such as behavior, appearance, or nationality (Terasahjo & Salmivalli, 2003).

*Social and Psychological Characteristics*

The role of socioeconomic status in relation to victimization and bullying has been studied and has also yielded different results. Sourander, Helstela, Helenius, and Piha, (2000) found in their study that socioeconomic status, parental level of education, and whether a child came from an intact, divorced, or remarried family were not significantly related to bullying or victimization. Conversely, in another study, a significant relationship between socioeconomic status and bullying and victimization behavior was found (Wolke et al., 2001). In this study, children from lower SES were more likely to bully others and to be the victims of bullying.

The research investigating whether or not "loners" were more likely to be bullied is related to whether the study was one of causation or relationship. Some research indicates that there is a positive relationship between loneliness and victimization (Forero, McLellan, Rissel, & Bauman, 1999; Juvonen et al., 2000; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Nansel et al., 2001) and negatively related to self-esteem (Juvonen et al.). Those studies that have reported causation have described peer victimization as a cause of children's loneliness

(Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996) and lower self-esteem (Forero et al., 1999). The interaction of victimization, loneliness and self-esteem was reported as due to a "poor self-concept that may play a central role in a vicious cycle that perpetuates and solidifies a child's status as a victim of peer abuse" (Egan & Perry, 1998, p. 299).

*Effectiveness of Interventions*

In response to problems with bullying in schools, most schools are lacking in measuring the effectiveness of interventions (Orpinas, Horne, & Staniszewski, 2003). Of the existing programs, very little is known about their effectiveness (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). The existing interventions can be categorized as: (a) prepackaged programs, (b) zero tolerance policy, (c) conflict resolution to all students and classroom management to teachers, and (d) modification of the school climate (Orpinas et al.). Examples of prepackaged programs include: First Steps to Success (Walker, Kavanagh, Stiller, Golly, Severson, & Feil (1998); Bully Busters: A Teacher's Manual for Helping Bullies, Victims, and Bystanders (Newman, Horne, & Bartolomucci, 2002); Bully-Proofing Your School: A Comprehensive Approach for Elementary Schools (Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, & Short-Camilli, 1997). Interestingly, Mytton, DiGuiseppi, Gough, Taylor, and Logan (2002) found that, overall these programs have had only modest outcomes.

Strategies to reduce aggression by teaching conflict resolution have had some moderate success. For example, an evaluation of the Resolving Conflicts Creatively Program (Aber, Jones, Brown, Chaudry, & Samples, 1998) indicated that this program did manage to decrease the amount of aggression in classes where implemented, especially in classes where the lessons were taught on a frequent basis. Currently, the zero tolerance policy, a strategy designed to reduce and eliminate school violence by severely punishing offenses, indicated that there was no evidence that the program improves school safety (Skiba, 2000).

Orpinas et al., (2003) indicated that the best interventions are based not on specific interventions or a consultative model, but on a collaborative model. This type of model should include school personnel, university consultants, modification of the school environment, education of students, and training of teachers. Additionally, there is a need to survey the school climate, address character education, and introduce bullying prevention in programs, as well.

*Theoretical Framework*

To understand the findings from adults who are reporting on bullying and victim behaviors of African American students, these researchers will use the framework of descriptive psychology (Ossorio, 1979, 1995). This theory posits that explanations for human behavior can be answered by asking questions such as (a) why do people do what they do, (b) what are differences among people? and (c) how do people develop? In the case of understanding bullies and victims, it is necessary to understand what their intentions and their actions are intended to achieve.

By using this theoretical framework, the approach to understanding bullying behavior is to approach it from an actor, observer, and critic role (Holmes & Holmes-Lonergan, 2004). As actors we are spontaneous, creative, and value giving. As observers we are aware of what we are doing, what is happening, understanding the case, and not how things are. As critics, we need to give feedback to the actor in the best interest of the actor. If things are going well, we make that known to the actor. However, if things are not going well, then it is our job as critics to figure out what has gone wrong and prescribe ways to make things better for the actor. Thus, it is important not only to observe the behavior, but the intention of the bullying behavior.

The following research question emerged from the literature reviewed on this topic: (1) What are the perceptions of counselors and teachers who work with African American students regarding the following aspects of bullying: (a) location, frequency, and intensity; (b) physical versus verbal; (c) victim characteristics; and (d) relationship between physical characteristics, gender, socioeconomic, ethnicity variables and bullying?

Method

*Participants*

The teachers and counselors (N = 31) surveyed were from a large metropolitan area who work over 50% of the time with African American students ages 12-18. The majority of the participants (N = 25) worked predominately in a suburban school district and the remainder of participants (N = 6) worked predominately in a residential home. However, all stated that they had or were currently working in both type of settings. Table 1 provides the demographics of the participants. In summary, the following observations were made: In regards to professional position, there were more teachers than counselors surveyed and only two administrators. Regarding gender and age, there were more females than males, and the majority was in the 40-49 age range. The ethnic composition was close with Whites (48%) and African Americans (39%). The majority had 21-25 years of experience and worked predominantly in secondary schools.

Table 1.
*Professional/Bullying Experience/Demographic*
*Characteristics Of Counselors and Teachers (N = 31)*

| Characteristics | N | % |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Current Position** | | |
| Teacher | 23 | (74%) |
| Counselor | 6 | (19%) |
| Administrator | 2 | (07%) |
| **Gender** | | |
| Male | 11 | (36%) |
| Female | 19 | (61%) |
| **Age** | | |
| 20-30 years | 3 | (10%) |
| 31-39 years | 6 | (19%) |
| 40-49 years | 11 | (36%) |
| 50-59 years | 9 | (29%) |
| 60+ years | 2 | (07%) |
| **Ethnicity** | | |
| Hispanic | 3 | (10%) |
| African American | 12 | (39%) |
| White | 15 | (48%) |
| Other | 1 | (03%) |
| **Experience** | | |
| 1-5 years | 2 | (07%) |
| 6-10 years | 3 | (10%) |
| 11-15 years | 4 | (13%) |
| 16-20 years | 7 | (23%) |
| 21-25 years | 10 | (32%) |
| 25+ years | 5 | (16%) |
| **Population** | | |
| Elementary | 2 | (07%) |
| Secondary | 19 | (61%) |
| Both | 7 | (23%) |
| Other | 3 | (10%) |

*Procedures*

Participants were recruited by the second author who teaches at a predominately African American university and were enrolled in a master's degree course while employed in schools and a residential area. They were informed of their rights to participate or decline participation without retribution. Moreover, they were advised that the data collected would be handled confidentially and that only aggregate data would be used in order to minimize identification of particular individuals or schools. Since all of the participants were adults, return of the survey indicated consent. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board.

### Instrument

The Bullying Survey (Robles-Piña et al., 2004) was used to collect the data. The following demographic information was requested: current position, gender, age, ethnicity, years of school experience, and populations served. Forty questions were developed and responses were requested on a Likert-scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Unsure, 4 = Disagree, to 5 = Strongly Disagree.

Evidence of reliability and validity were provided. Content validity was established in the following three ways: (a) linking questions to empirical studies in the literature review, (b) submitting the instrument to three experts in the field of bullying and, (c) conducting a pilot study. A pilot test of the instrument was conducted by submitting the survey to six master's level students in a graduate program who were employed as school counselors and teachers. Their suggestions were incorporated into the final survey used. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .78 was used for support of internal consistency reliability.

### Results

The analysis consisted of several steps. In the first step, frequencies for all demographic variables were conducted (see Table 1) and described in the participants section. The second step consisted of rank ordering the means for each of the 40 questions from a 5 (strongly disagree) to a 1 (strongly agree) (see Table 2). The third step consisted of conducting t-test of independent means and ANOVAs to determine mean group differences for categories by demographic variables. There were no responses which corresponded to a 5 (strongly disagree) on the survey. There were 4 responses which corresponded to a 4 (disagree) on the survey. Educators disagreed that (a) bullies are African American or Asian, (b) victims are White students, and (c) bullying had become more passive.

There were 6 responses which corresponded to a 3 (unsure) on the survey. Educators were unsure about whether (a) boys were targets of verbal bullying behaviors, (b) girls were targets of physical bullying behaviors, (c) most bullies are White or Hispanic students, (d) victims were smart, and (e) bullying had decreased over the years.

There were 11 responses which corresponded to a 2 (agree) on the survey. The four highest statements of agreement in this category were related to (a) having a plan for dealing with bullying, (b) pairing "loners" with other students, (c) an increase in bullying behaviors, and (d) victims beings students with special needs.

Table 2.
*Ranking of Bullying - (N=31) Analysis of Questions*

| Question | M | SD |
|---|---|---|
| 27. Most bullies are Asian students. | 4.55 | 0.51 |
| 38. Most bullies are African American students. | 4.45 | 0.51 |
| 37. Bullying behaviors have become more passive. | 4.19 | 0.40 |
| 40. Victims of bullying are usually White students. | 4.03 | 0.80 |
| 28. Girls are more likely to be the target of physical bullying behavior. | 3.90 | 0.54 |
| 16. Most bullies are Hispanic students. | 3.74 | 1.21 |
| 33. Boys are more likely to be the target of verbal bullying behavior. | 3.55 | 0.89 |
| 7. Bullying behaviors have decreased over the years. | 3.23 | 1.50 |
| 22. Victims are usually very smart. | 3.23 | 0.99 |
| 8. Most bullies are White students. | 3.03 | 1.11 |
| 24. Boys are more likely to be the target of physical bullying behavior. | 2.77 | 0.99 |
| 26. Bullies usually come from a low socioeconomic background. | 2.65 | 1.05 |
| 21. I use anti-bullying materials (i.e., web sites, books, videos). | 2.48 | 1.03 |
| 12. Our school would benefit from a plan for dealing with bullying behavior. | 2.48 | 0.96 |
| 23. Reading stories about bullying is a prevention strategy that I use. | 2.45 | 0.85 |
| 25. I use mediation as a prevention strategy for bullying. | 2.19 | 0.60 |
| 36. I encourage students to talk with each other as a means of preventing bullying. | 2.16 | 0.78 |
| 32. Victims are usually students with special needs. | 2.20 | 0.70 |
| 9. Bullying behaviors have increased over the years. | 2.03 | 0.18 |
| 19. I try to pair "loners" with other students. | 2.00 | 0.00 |
| 13. I have my own plan for dealing with bullying behavior. | 2.00 | 0.63 |
| 29. Victims are physically weak and are loners. | 1.97 | 0.18 |
| 20. Bullies target physically weak students. | 1.94 | 0.25 |
| 14. I teach skills to students as a means of preventing bullying. | 1.94 | 0.51 |
| 35. Observers of bullying are negatively affected. | 1.90 | 0.30 |
| 34. Bullying behavior continues throughout the lifespan. | 1.90 | 0.30 |
| 17. I have observed that "loners" are more likely to be bullied. | 1.90 | 0.30 |
| 5. I witness bullying behaviors during sports activities. | 1.87 | 0.72 |
| 31. Bullies have been victims of past bullying behavior. | 1.84 | 1.21 |
| 10. Bullying behaviors have become more aggressive. | 1.84 | 0.37 |
| 3. I witness bullying behaviors on the playground. | 1.81 | 0.48 |
| 4. I witness bullying behaviors in the lunchroom. | 1.74 | 0.44 |
| 2. I witness bullying behaviors in halls. | 1.74 | 0.44 |
| 1. I witness bullying behaviors in classrooms. | 1.74 | 0.44 |
| 11. Our school has a plan for dealing with bullying behavior. | 1.68 | 0.65 |
| 6. I witness bullying behaviors during bus duty. | 1.68 | 0.91 |
| 18. Administrators pay more attention to physical abuse than to verbal abuse. | 1.29 | 0.46 |
| 15. Physical abuse (i.e., slapping) is taken more seriously than verbal abuse | 1.26 | 0.63 |
| 30. Bullies want a feeling of power and control. | 1.16 | 0.58 |

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Unsure, 4= Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree

There were 18 responses which corresponded to a 1 (strongly agree) on the survey. The four highest statements of agreement in this category were related to (a) bullies wanting feelings of power and control, (b) physical abuse taken more seriously than verbal abuse, (d) administrators paying more attention to physical abuse than verbal abuse, and (e) witnessing bullying behaviors on bus duty.

Inferential statistics were conducted to determine group mean differences for demographic variables (gender, position, age, ethnicity, years of experience, and work place) by placing the 40 questions into categories arrived at during a content analysis of the literature. Following are the questions comprising the categories: (a) location of bullying behaviors (questions, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6); (b) frequency and intensity of bullying behaviors (questions 7, 9, 10, 34, 37); (c) interventions used by school/individual (questions 11, 12, 13, 14, 21, 23, 25, 36); (d) physical versus verbal bullying behaviors (questions 15, 18, 30, 37); (e) victim characteristics (questions 22, 31, 35); (f) ethnicity x victims x bullying (questions 8, 16, 19, 20, 27, 38, 29); and (g) physical aspects, gender, socioeconomic status, and bullying (questions 17, 24, 26, 28, 32, 33, 39).

There were no differences found for gender for any of the bullying questions by category: (a) location ($t(28) = -.368$, $p > .05$); (b) frequency & intensity ($t(28) = -1.77$, $p > .05$); (c) interventions ($t(28) = -.940$, $p > .05$); (d) physical vs. verbal ($t(28) = -.318$, $p > .05$); (e) victim characteristics ($t(28) = 1.807$, $p > .05$); (f) ethnicity ($t(28) = 1.80$, $p > .05$); and (g) gender and SES ($t(28) = .927$, $p > .05$).

Differences about bullying categories were analyzed by position (counselor, teacher, and administrator). Due to low number of respondents for persons in the administrator ($N = 2$) category, administrators were analyzed with counselors). Further, due to low number of respondents from the residential homes, no analyses were conducted to note differences between those who worked in school and the residential setting. No statistically significant differences were found for position and bullying questions by the following categories: (a) location ($t(29) = 1.39$, $p > .05$); (b) frequency & intensity ($t(29) = 1.39$, $p > .05$); (c) interventions ($t(29) = -1.37$, $p > .05$); (d) physical vs. verbal ($t(29) = -1.35$, $p > .05$); (e) victim characteristics ($t(29) = -.72$, $p > .05$); (f) ethnicity ($t(28) = 1.80$, $p > .05$); and (g) gender and SES ($t(29) = -.72$, $p > .05$).

Differences about bullying categories were analyzed by age of respondents. Due to low number of respondents in some age groups, categories were collapsed to form two groups, respondents ages 20-30 and respondents 31-60. Statistically significant differences were found for age by the frequency and intensity category ($t(29) = -2.84$, $p = .00$) with younger (20-30) perceiving less frequency and intensity of bullying ($M = 2.40$, $SD = .37$) than those older respondents (31-60) ($M = 2.73$, $SD = .26$). There were no significant differences found for the following categories: (a) location ($t(29) = -.20$, $p > .05$); (b) interventions ($t(29) = .07$ $p > .05$); (d) physical vs. verbal ($t(28) = .49$, $p > .05$); (e) victim characteristics ($t(29) = .49$, $p > .05$); (f) ethnicity ($t(28) = .42$, $p > .05$); and (g) gender and SES ($t(29) = .41$, $p > .05$).

ANOVA analyses were conducted for ethnicity by bullying categories and only one statistically significant difference was found and that was for frequency and intensity of bullying behaviors ($F(2, 28) = 5.33$, $p = .01$). Post hoc analyses determined that Hispanics viewed the frequency and intensity of bullying higher ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .16$) than African Americans ($M = 2.43$, $SD = .28$), and Whites ($M = 2.73$, $SD = .33$). There were no statistically significant differences found in other categories by ethnicity: (a) location ($F(2, 28) = .76$, $p > .05$); (b) interventions ($F(2, 28) = .46$, $p > .05$); (c) physical vs. verbal; ($F(2, 28) = 2.53$, $p > .05$); (d) victim characteristics ($F(2, 28) = .17$, $p > .05$); (e) ethnicity ($F(2, 28) = .18$, $p > .05$); and (f) gender and SES ($F(2, 28) = .11$, $p > .05$).

Regarding years of experience while considering statistical significance at less than .01 with a Bonferroni adjustment for conducting multiple tests (.05/4 = .01), statistical significance was found only for the category of frequency and intensity ($F(3, 27) = 7.74$, $p > .00$). A post hoc analysis revealed that respondents with 6-10 years of experience perceived lower rates of frequency and intensity of bullying ($M = 2.36$, $SD = .32$) than respondents with 1-5 years ($M = 2.68$, $SD = .17$), 11-15 ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .17$) and 16-20 ($M = 2.68$, $SD = .31$) years of experience. Inferential statistics were not calculated for the demographic work place due to the fact that the majority of the respondents (84%) worked with secondary populations or both (secondary and elementary).

A summary of the survey of 31 teachers and counselors who work predominantly with African American students about bullying revealed these findings. Analyses by individual questions indicated that participants (a) disagreed that bullies and victims were of any particular ethnic group, (b) were unsure about whether gender impacted bullying and whether bullying had decreased (c) agreed that pairing loners with other students was a good intervention and that victims tended to be students with special needs, and (d) bullies have feelings of power and control.

Analyses by categories and demographic characteristics indicated no statistically significant differences for gender and job position. There were statistically significant differences found for frequency and intensity of bullying for (a) age with younger respondents perceiving fewer rates than other age groups, (b) ethnicity, with Hispanic participants perceiving higher rates than other ethnic groups, and (c) years of experience with those with fewer years of experience perceiving fewer rates than those with more years of experience.

Discussion

The present study extends prior research on bully and victim behavior as it relates to teachers' and counselors' observations while working with African American adolescents predominately in secondary school settings. Several limitations were noted in this study. First, was the small sample size? However, we feel we have begun an investigation of examining the bullying question from the perspective of educators who work with African American students which heretofore had been non-existent. Second, the information provided on the survey was self-report and there could have been a certain degree of social desirability in the responses.

We feel that these types of responses, however, provided information on the great deal of ambiguity about issues concerning bullying and victimization when ethnicity is considered. Noteworthy, is that this study provides evidence that more studies like this one need to be conducted. Third, we realize that data collected on bullying from multiple perspectives (staff, observations, discipline records, and interviews) would have increased the validity of this study. However, this study is one of an exploratory nature that begins to address an issue from a perspective that has been largely ignored by the literature. Clearly, further research needs to be conducted.

The statements to which the educators more strongly agreed were regarding bullies wanting more power and control, that physical abuse is taken more seriously than verbal abuse, and that administrators pay more attention to bullying concerning physical abuse. Not surprisingly, the statement with which educators felt about more strongly was the one of bullies wanting power and control. Our finding is substantiated by the following empirical studies that have examined how bullies gain power and control in specific areas: location and frequency (Leff, et al., 2003; Stockdale, et al., 2002); academic achievement (Nansel, et al., 2001), physical characteristics (Lowenstein, 1978; Olweus, 1978), gender (Natvig et al., 2001; Baldry & Farrington, 1999), and ethnicity (Axelman, 2006; Graham & Juvonen, 2002; Peskin et al., 2006; Siann et al.,1994).

Power imbalance occurs between the bully and victim and the victim's inability to defend themselves (Olweus, 1997). The imbalance can be caused by physical superiority, group membership, such as a group of a diverse racial or ethnic composition different to the victim, and intellectual superiority. Use of the theoretical framework to guide us in working with African American students can use the actor, observer, and critic (Holmes & Holmes-Lonergan, 2004) paradigm to analyze role in addressing bullying behavior. It is important to analyze the power difference not only between students but to analyze the distance to the problem that the educator has. Admittedly, distance to the problem can have an impact on not only the perception of the problem but on how to intervene (Robles-Piña et al., 2004).

The following are observations regarding power and control made from the third author who has worked directly with African American adolescents for more than 25 years.

African American males are often stereotyped as predatory, menacing, and physically aggressive. The source of some those stereotypes stem from historical events such as slavery and media portrayals of black men as brutes and black women as emasculating. As with most stereotypes, those have been easy to apply but difficult to eliminate. In my work with African American students, I learned several salient points that are relevant to the understanding of bullying. The term bullying is not a part of the popular vernacular of students in this population. The term "punking" is used instead. "Punking" is similar but different than bullying, in that "punking" does not necessarily result in violence. Rather, a challenge is issued by one student to another to "square-off", i.e., stand face-to-face, until someone intervenes and brings a halt to the incident. This is akin to "playing the dozens", in which individuals engage in verbally abusive remarks about one another's parents. To the outside observer, such an event might seem odd and as a precursor to a physically violent confrontation. To the culturally savvy observer, such an event is very unlikely to result in violence.

From a theoretical perspective, understanding why students are bullying is paramount to solving the problem and the reasons will probably vary by the type of students. Thus, as observers, educators need to document and address all bullying incidents and as critics they must follow up with talking with those involved about their motivations for bullying. Interventions can then be individualized for the bully or victim depending on the circumstances. Existing research has provided evidence that policies such as zero tolerance are not successful (Skiba, 2000) and we believe it is because most consequences do not go beyond the surface of meting out canned discipline responses for the actions. Programs that are school-wide and have clear and consistent policies are needed (Orpinas, et al., 2003).

Physical bullying receiving more attention than verbal bullying were the next two statements that elicited educators to strongly agree. These findings suggest that educators are not aware of how to detect the subtleties of bullying before they escalate to physical bullying. This is consistent with the literature that indicates that administrator/principals under-estimate bullying incidents (Viadero, 1997) and teachers are not very confident with their ability to intervene (Stockdale et al., 2002; Leff et al., 1999; Boulton, 1997). Due to a lack of skills, educators respond to physical acts of violence (Eslea, 1998) because they believe these actions to be more hurtful to the victim.

A practitioner's perspective of physical versus verbal bullying from is the following:

Often, the behavior and manner of speaking by African Americans, males in particular, are misinterpreted as aggressive. What to some might seem like a verbal altercation are merely two individuals displaying a dimension of their culture that recognizes this type of behavior as normal and relatively harmless. African

American girls tend to engage in bullying or "punking" behavior more than boys. In addition, girls' behavior is typically manifested in a hierarchical format in which a dominant individual who dislikes and wants to target a particular girl will entice her friends to verbally or physically assault that individual. It mimics a gang hierarchy in which the gang leader instructs others to carry out the leader's wishes. However, "punking" is less pervasive and dangerous than typical gang activities.

Theoretically, a  lack of knowledge and action would indicate that educators need to develop their "observer" skills to be able to detect aggressive behavior in their non-verbal and verbal states before the behavior escalates to the physical stage which is the one traditionally noticed. Further, it is the one for which there are discipline measures in place, but which are not effective because the rates of bullying are only increasing (Charach et al., 1995; Farrington, 1993).

There were only four questions to which educators disagreed and those were primarily related to whether African Americans and Asians were considered as bullies and whether bullying behavior had become more passive. The degree to which the educators would identify any particular ethnic group as bullies or victims may be indicative of several things. Educators may want to be politically correct and not want to address topics that are of such a sensitive nature such as the role of ethnicity in bullying and victimization. In truth, the role of ethnicity in bullying has had mixed results and so the degree of uncertainty that these educators expressed is consistent with other research (Whitney & Smith, 1993; Wolke et al., 2001; Graham & Juvonen, 2002, Peskin et al., 2006). It may also be that bullies are employing bullying tactics for which educators have a hard time deciding on whether they border on regular student behavior or the precursors to bullying. Further, the methodologies used in bully studies may not be sensitive enough to pick up on precursors to bullying behaviors. The actor, observer, critic model (Holmes & Holmes-Lonergan, 2004) would suggest that educators need to assess their role in contributing to bullying behaviors by taking a stance on those who bully, regardless of ethnic identity.

When questions were analyzed by categories by demographic variables, no differences were found for gender and job position indicating that males, females, teachers, counselors, and administrators in this study did not differ on location, victim characteristics, or interventions. There are no studies that have analyzed the effects of gender. There is one study that has noted the differences in job position with counselors viewing bullying situations and interventions differently than teachers (Robles-Piña et al., 2004).

The category of frequency and intensity of bullying by categories was the only category for which differences were noted. Findings indicate that younger participants and those with less experience are less likely to observe an increase in intensity and frequency of bullying. There is no literature to support this finding. Another finding indicated that Hispanic educators felt that there was more of an increase in frequency and intensity in bullying than other educators. Again, there is no literature to support this finding. An implication on this finding is that differences in perceptions might elicit different interventions.

The following is an account from a practitioner about how bullying interventions can be used with African American students.

> Intervention strategies to address issues that place African American males at risk of becoming perpetrators or victims of violence should come early rather than later. For most African American boys, particularly those from single parent households in which the custodial parent is the mother, the fourth grade is the pivotal period for intervention. If positive intervention does not take place by that time, the child is likely to engage in acting out behaviors that might suggest to the unenlightened observer that the child has emotional problems. The acting out behavior is a normal reaction to the absence of positive African American male role models in his life. Thus, the intervention has to be in the form of African American men engaging the young man in positive activities that result in a shift in his value and belief system. Since values drive behavior, it is critically important that intervention strategies address the underlying beliefs and values associated with the behavior. This strategy has successfully been used by me with African American males in three school districts.

The implications of these findings on research and public policy are a couple. For research in particular, this study needs to be replicated because no studies have been conducted to investigate how educators view bullying in African American populations. There are two studies that have specifically addressed bullying by surveying children and those have produced mixed results (Peskin et al., 2006; Seals and Young, 2003). Evident from these studies is the lack of educational policies regarding implementation of bullying programs and how the programs need to be culturally adapted.  Further, these findings suggest that policies for staff development in schools to train educators on how to use culturally appropriate bullying programs are very necessary.

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# Assessment Practices in Residential Treatment Facilities for Juvenile Offenders

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## Abstract

Given the high prevalence of mental disorders among juvenile offenders, as well as the link between untreated disorders and delinquent behavior, there is a critical need for standardized, cost-effective, and clinically effective procedures to identify youth with mental health problems. Surveys were sent to staff in juvenile residential facilities throughout Pennsylvania to examine statewide assessment practices, including the background and training of staff, the standard intake procedures used in these facilities, and the role of assessment in treatment planning. Although results provide evidence of some common statewide assessment practices, there was significant variability in the use of specific procedures. Suggestions are offered for enhancing mental health screening and assessment in juvenile justice facilities.

In contrast to past neglect, there is increasing recognition that the mental health needs of youth in the juvenile justice system are an important focus of intervention. Several well-designed studies have documented the high prevalence of mental disorders in this population (Skowyra and Cocozza, 2007 and Teplin et al., 2002). As many as 65% of these juveniles have a diagnosable mental disorder (Desai et al., 2006), a rate that is estimated to be two or three times higher that that among adolescents in the general population (Grisso, 2005). Moreover, a majority of those who are diagnosed with a mental disorder also meet the criteria for one or more co-occurring mental or substance use disorders (Abram, Teplin, McClelland, and Dulcan, 2003), a high rate of comorbidity that complicates both diagnosis and treatment. The death rate from suicide also appears to be significantly higher among juvenile offenders than among nonoffenders (Ryan and Redding, 2004; Sheras, 2000).

In spite of the evidence of significant mental health problems among these adolescents, there is general agreement that the juvenile justice system has not been effective in meeting their needs in the past (Desai et al., 2006). There is a compelling rationale for providing juvenile offenders with mental health services (Wasserman, Ko, and McReynolds, 2004). Their untreated mental disorders may contribute to their delinquent behavior, interfere with their rehabilitation, increase the likelihood of an adverse reaction to confinement, and undermine their ability to participate in programs designed to address their mental health, physical, and academic needs. All of these factors may increase the risk of recidivism. In contrast, as Ryan and Redding (2004) have affirmed, appropriate mental health services may lead to improvements in psychosocial functioning, interpersonal relationships, academic performance, and decreases in delinquent, disruptive, and suicidal behaviors.

In fact, researchers have found that providing mental health services may reduce recidivism (Lipsey, Wilson, and Cothern, 2000; Skowyra and Cocozza, 2007). The challenge is to provide accessible, innovative, and effective treatments to incarcerated youth, a population that is often beyond the reach of traditional mental health services (Teplin, Abram, McClelland, Washburn, and Pikus, 2005). Grisso and Underwood (2004) have pointed out that identifying troubled youth is the first step in providing them with appropriate intervention. Thus, there is a critical need for standardized, cost-effective, and clinically effective procedures to identify these adolescents so that they can receive the appropriate services. Such procedures must also meet the requirements of juvenile justice settings (Bailey, Doreleijers, and Tarbuck, 2006).

Wasserman and her colleagues (Wasserman, et al., 2003; Wasserman, Ko and McReynolds, 2004) have discussed, assessment practices for obtaining mental health information vary enormously across settings, such as detention, court, placement, and diversion, and also across jurisdictions, even within the same state. Furthermore, current practices frequently do not employ evidence-based, scientifically sound instruments, and they often do not reflect the highest standard of care. Although a common practice has been to rely on prior use of mental health services as an indicator of current needs, many juveniles with mental disorders have not previously received services. Too often, their needs have

gone unrecognized and untreated because of inadequate screening and assessment.

The present study was designed to provide additional information regarding assessment practices in juvenile residential facilities. Specific objectives were to obtain information about the background and training of staff, to explore the standard intake procedures used in these facilities, and to examine the role of assessment in treatment planning.

### Method

The data came from surveys completed by staffs who were in charge of assessment at juvenile residential programs in the state of Pennsylvania. A comprehensive list of statewide juvenile residential placements was obtained from a resource directory published by the Center for Juvenile Justice Training and Research of the Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges' Commission. The sample included only those placements in the following categories: (a) general residential, (b) secure placement, (c) mental health residential, (d) drug and alcohol, and (e) sex offender. The sample excluded nonresidential drug and alcohol placements, nonresidential sex offender placements, and short-term detention facilities in which juveniles are placed temporarily and/or prior to juvenile court dispositions.

Participants were asked questions about their background and education. They were also asked to circle all standard intake procedures used for assessing incoming youth from a list of 51 procedures and to list any additional procedures used at their facility. In addition, facility staff was asked how soon after placement the assessment occurred and whether the type of assessment varied from one youth to another. Finally, they were asked how the results of assessment were used in treatment planning and which staff determined the treatment plan.

If surveys were not received within 3 weeks, trained research assistants made follow-up calls to the facilities, encouraged assessment staff to return the survey, and offered to send an additional survey if needed. Of the 188 surveys sent to residential placements, 58 were returned, reflecting a 31% response rate. There were some missing data due to unanswered survey questions.

### Results

As indicated in Table 1, survey participants included a similar number of males (n = 31) and females (n = 27). Their highest level of education ranged from associate's degree to doctoral degree; a majority (65.5%) had a master's degree or higher. Most (81.0%) reported they had received special training in assessment.

Table 1.
*Characteristics of Survey Participants from Residential Treatment Facilities (N = 58)*

| Variable | n | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 31 | 53.4 |
| Femalet | 27 | 46.6 |
| Highest level of education | | |
| Associate's degree | 1 | 1.7 |
| Bachelor's degree | 19 | 32.8 |
| Master's degree | 35 | 60.3 |
| Doctoral degree | 3 | 5.2 |
| Special training in assessment | | |
| Yes | 47 | 81.0 |
| No | 9 | 15.5 |
| Missing | 2 | 3.4 |

*Assessment Procedures*

Table 2 lists the percentage of facilities using specific assessment procedures in the following categories: (a) interviews and clinical evaluations (100% used these procedures); (b) records (100%); (c) measures of cognitive and academic functioning (86.2%); and (d) measures of child, adolescent, and family functioning (84.5%). Of the 43 measures of child, adolescent, and family functioning listed in the survey, 33 were used by at least one facility.

As indicated in Table 2, there was substantial variability across facilities in their use of specific measures. Only the Global Assessment of Functioning was used by at least half of the facilities (n = 30). At least one fourth of facilities reported the use of three other measures: the Chemical Dependency Screen (n = 26), the Child Behavior Checklist (n =19), and the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Test (n = 16). The remaining measures were used by fewer than 20% of facilities, and numerous instruments (n = 18) were used in three or fewer facilities.

Although listed on the survey, the following procedures were not used by any of the residential facilities: Center for Epidemiology-Depression Scale, Client Engagement in Child Protective Services, Conflict Tactic Scale, Exposure to Abuse and Supportive Environments- Parenting Inventory, Neighborhood Risk Assessment, Ohio Youth Scales, Parenting Sense of Competence, Practical Adolescent Dual Diagnostic Intervention, Texas Christian University (TCU) Motivation Scales, and Trauma Symptom Checklist (used with the Child Behavior Checklist).

Table 2

*Percentage of Juvenile Residential Facilities Using Various Assessment Procedures (N = 58)*

| Assessment procedure | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Interviews and clinical evaluations | |
| Interviews | 93.1 |
| Psychiatric evaluations | 93.1 |
| Psychological evaluations | 91.4 |
| Records | |
| Juvenile court records | 98.3 |
| Official school records | 86.2 |
| Mental health records | 96.6 |
| Measures of cognitive and academic functioning | |
| Intelligence tests | 72.4 |
| Tests of academic achievement | 72.4 |
| Measures of child, adolescent, and family functioning | |
| Global Assessment of Functioning | 51.7 |
| Chemical Dependency Screen | 44.8 |
| Child Behavior Checklist | 32.8 |
| Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Test | 27.6 |
| Child Trauma Questionnaire | 19.0 |
| Substance Abuse Screening Test | 17.2 |
| Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument | 15.5 |
| Caregiver Substance Abuse Use | 13.8 |
| Family Experiences Questionnaire | 13.8 |
| Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale | 12.1 |
| Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol | 12.1 |
| Children Living with a Domestic Violence Perpetrator | 8.6 |
| Child Development Inventory | 8.6 |
| Social Skills Rating System | 8.6 |
| Children's Global Assessment Scale | 6.9 |
| Adolescent and Adult Parent Inventory | 5.2 |
| Brief Symptom Inventory | 5.2 |
| Emotional and Physical Abuse Questionnaire | 5.2 |
| Million Adolescent Clinical Inventory | 5.2 |
| Parent Evaluation of Development | 5.2 |
| Parenting Scale | 5.2 |
| Things I've Seen and Heard | 5.2 |
| CAGE | 3.4 |
| Functional Social Support Questionnaire | 3.4 |
| Stress Index for Parents and Adults | 3.4 |
| Domestic Violence Screening Tool | 1.7 |
| Family Resources Scale | 1.7 |
| North Carolina Family Assessment Scales | 1.7 |
| Parenting Stress Index | 1.7 |
| State Trait Anger Expression Inventory | 1.7 |
| The Danger Assessment | 1.7 |
| Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children | 1.7 |
| Trauma Symptom Inventory | 1.7 |

Many participants reported they used instruments other than the 51 procedures listed in the survey, such as the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (n = 4), the Columbia University TeenScreen (n = 4), the Beck Depression Inventory (n = 3), and the Estimated Risk of Adolescent Sexual Offender Recidivism (n = 3). Some agencies also reported they used generic procedures, such as a biopsychosocial history or neuropsychological test, mentioned an instrument developed by the agency (e.g., a gang/culture survey), or cited a clinical resource, such as the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-IV-TR* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

*Treatment Planning*

A majority of participants indicated that the assessment occurred within 30 days of placement (87.9%) and that the type of assessment varied from one youth to another, depending on the presenting symptoms and history (67.2%). When asked how the results of assessment were used in treatment planning, all facilities reported that they used the results in developing a treatment or service plan. Some facilities also used the results for other purposes, such as school placement, medication determination, referrals to ancillary services, discharge planning, and collaboration with aftercare providers. In addition, many facilities reported they used other information in treatment planning, such as reports from referring agencies and the court, input from the client and family, and psychiatric and/or psychological evaluations.

All facilities reported that numerous staff were involved in developing treatment or service plans, including the clinical supervisor (81.0%), caseworker (77.6%), counselor (75.9%), probation officer (72.4%), psychiatrist (60.3%), and psychologist (50.0%). A majority (86.2%) also listed others who participated in formulating the treatment plan. These included family, parents, or caregivers (n = 17), the juvenile (n = 9), and various other individuals, including facility staff (n = 21), mental health and substance abuse counselors (n = 18), educational staff (n = 7), medical staff (n = 4), and others (n = 4), such as a referral source, child advocate, or child welfare worker.

Discussion

Results of the survey provide evidence of some common assessment practices in juvenile residential facilities. A majority of staff had a master's degree or higher, and most had received special training in assessment. All facilities reported they use interviews and/or clinical evaluations, as well as case records, and they make use of results of assessment in treatment planning. In addition, all facilities used a multidisciplinary team approach to treatment planning, sometimes including the youth and/or family as members of the treatment team.

On the other hand, there is strong evidence that uniformity is lacking in the use of specific procedures. For example, although most facilities reported they administer some measures of cognitive and academic functioning and of child, adolescent, and family functioning, their use of specific instruments varied widely. Only the Global Assessment of Functioning was used by half of the facilities, and many instruments were used in only one or a few settings. The absence of standardized procedures undermines communication across agencies and prevents meaningful statewide data collection and analysis. Clearly, there is a need for a more standardized approach to assessment, which is recommended in the *Report of the Consensus Conference* (Wasserman et al., 2003), along with other recommendations that reflect best practices.

Firstly, it is essential to employ sound instruments for screening and assessment (Grisso and Underwood, 2004). Namely, the instruments should be reliable (yield consistently similar results) and valid (measure what they claim to measure); be appropriate for use with the juvenile justice population; be suitable for use with youth of diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds; and offer relevant age-and gender-based norms. In addition, mental health assessments should be based on multiple methods of evaluation and on the input of multiple informants, including parents. Instruments should also meet practical criteria for specific settings, such as financial cost, reading ability, response format, administration time, and level of education and expertise required of staff.

Secondly, evidence-based mental health screening should be provided within the first 24 hours of a youth's arrival at a facility. Screening is a relatively brief process designed to identify those who are at increased risk of having disorders or conditions that warrant immediate attention, who are at risk for suicide or harm to others, who are currently on any type of psychotropic medication, or who require further evaluation or assessment. Essentially, screening is a triage process that is designed to identify any urgent mental health concerns and that is generally administered by nonclinical staff.

Thirdly, juveniles who have been identified during the initial screen should be referred for assessment, which involves a more comprehensive and individualized examination of the psychosocial needs and problems identified during the initial screening, including the nature of mental health and substance use disorders. In contrast to screening, assessment is more time-consuming and expensive, requires the expertise of a mental health professional, and may include contacts with parents or teachers, psychological testing, clinical interviewing, and review of past records from other agencies. The resulting report generally provides recommendations for intervention.

Fourthly, reassessment should be undertaken as needed. Appropriate candidates for reassessment might include youth whose mental health problems require close monitoring, those whose disorders may worsen

under the stress of confinement, or those who are preparing to leave a postadjudicatory secure facility and return to their communities.

Finally, it is important to provide training for staff appropriate to their role for in screening and assessment. All mental health staff should be professionally credentialed or directly supervised by credentialed staff. In light of the limited number of mental health professionals, however, appropriate training should also be provided for other gatekeepers, including judges, probation officers, and detention workers. Such training can enhance communication and collaboration between these gatekeepers and mental health professionals.

As Cocozza and Skowyra (2000) have observed, many challenges must be addressed before these recommendations can be fully implemented. Problems include the confusion across multiservice delivery and juvenile justice systems, at both the policy and practice levels, as to who is responsible for providing services to these juveniles; the lack of funding and clear funding streams to support services; and the absence of training, staffing, and programs necessary to deliver mental health services for this population. They also note the tendency to label externalizing disorders as "behavior problems," which ignores the underlying causes of the behavior, as well as the absence of sufficient research that adequately addresses the effectiveness of treatment models and services in the juvenile justice system. Other challenges include the lack of information on mental health history, limited parental involvement, short lengths of stay, unpredictable release dates, and fear of compromising the legal case (Desai et al., 2006).

In spite of these challenges, there is much reason for optimism. Researchers have repeatedly documented the high prevalence of mental disorders among juvenile offenders (e.g., Skowyra and Cocozza, 2007) and established the link between these disorders and offender behavior (e.g., Wasserman et al., 2004). There is also general agreement regarding the services that should be provided, as well as evidence for their effectiveness. In their recent report, Skowyra and Cocozza noted that numerous reviews of evidence-based treatment interventions, such as Multisystemic Therapy, Functional Family Therapy, and Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care, have consistently found positive outcomes associated with their use with juvenile offenders, including decreased psychiatric symptomatology and reduced long-term rates of recidivism.

Based on his review of the literature, Redding (2000) concluded that the best programs are based on empirically demonstrated effective treatments; simultaneously address the multiple risk factors contributing to the delinquency (e.g., child, family, school, and neighborhood variables); are tailored to each adolescent by considering the personal and environmental risk and protective factors; are of sufficient duration; and maintain high program quality in terms of staff recruitment and training, supervision, accountability for outcomes,

and ongoing program monitoring and evaluation. In addition, many excellent screening and assessment instruments are now available. For example, a comprehensive resource guide for practitioners (Grisso and Underwood, 2004) describes more than 50 screening and assessment instruments

In summary, there is general agreement regarding best practices for screening and assessment in the juvenile justice system (Wasserman et al., 2003), as well as an expanding array of procedures that meet psychometric and practical criteria. As Grisso and Underwood (2004) have asserted, screening should be performed for all youth as they enter the juvenile justice system, assessment should be performed for those who require further evaluation, care should be taken to identify the most appropriate instruments, and need and risk levels should be carefully balanced. Only when we address the underlying problems of juvenile offenders, including their mental health problems, will the juvenile justice system be able to fulfill its mission of enhancing their prospects for a satisfying and productive future, of reducing recidivism rates, and of promoting community safety.

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# An Examination of Female Youth Gangs

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*Abstract*

Cohen's subculture of delinquency theory (1955) posits that male youth gangs exist largely as the result of the status frustration experienced by rejected adolescents in their search for middle class acceptance. Cohen concluded that social and structural factors, particularly neighborhood and school environments, impacted youth gang prevalence. While many studies related to the existence of youth gangs have been conducted, few have focused specifically on female youth gangs. In the current study, an examination of female youth gangs was conducted using self-report data gathered for the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1997-2001). Contrary to arguments that gendered-specific criminological theories are needed to explain female gangs, the findings presented here show that the factors suggested by Cohen's theory are applicable to membership in female gangs.

Female youth gangs have become a major societal concern, due in part to their recent proliferation (Egley, Howell, and Major, 2004; Snyder and Sickmund, 2006), but also because of their increasing gang membership in serious and violent crimes (Archer, 2004; Miller and Decker, 2001; Peterson, Miller, and Esbensen, 2001). Unlike male violence, which has either decreased or remained constant since the early 1990s, female violence generally is on the rise. When compared to their non-gang counterparts, female youth gang members have been found to be responsible for more serious crimes and to have a higher propensity toward violence (Bjerregard and Smith, 1993; Jankowski, 1991; Thornberry, 1998). Specifically, female gang members' self-reported behavior revealed that 90% had been involved in violent acts, with 78% taking part in fighting, 69% carrying weapons, and 39% committing aggravated assaults (Deschenes and Esbensen, 1999).

While youth gangs in America have received widespread attention from researchers, limited research has been conducted on female gangs (Chesney-Lind, 1997). Criminological theories have traditionally focused on explaining male delinquency while lacking sufficient explanations of female crime (Heimer and De Coster,

1999; Hughes, 2005; Smith and Paternoster, 1987). Similarly, while there are theories that have traditionally addressed male gang existence and membership, theories explaining female gang existence and membership are limited (Campbell, 1984; Chesney-Lind, 1997; Deschenes and Esbensen, 1999).

Despite the continued growth in number and size of female gangs, little is known about whether or not factors predicated on traditional gang theories account for variations in female gang presence and membership. In order to address this gap in the literature, this study examines how well variables suggested by a traditional male-centered criminological theory-Cohen's *subculture of delinquency theory* (1955), explain female gang membership. Because of its very nature as a grounded theory (a systematic research method where theory is derived from pre-existing data) and based largely on the precepts of Glaser's 1930 grounded theory approach (Akers and Sellers, 2004), Albert Cohen's *subculture of delinquency theory* was the ideal theory to test in the current study. In addition, Cohen's theory is an extension of Robert Merton's 1938 structural strain theory and Edwin Sutherland's 1939 differential association theory. As such it was relevant for the scope and purpose of this study (Cohen, 1955; Williams and McShane, 1998).

*Theoretical Background*

In 1955, during a time when America was experiencing an increase in youth gang presence and delinquency, Albert K. Cohen introduced his subculture of delinquency theory. Cohen's theory drew on previous

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ecological research that studied the relationship between social factors and the existence of youth gangs (Kvaraceus, 1945; Shaw and McKay, 1931; Thrasher, 1927). Based on findings from these earlier studies, Cohen (1955) presented a logical explanation of subculture theory to account for the formation, prevalence, and membership in youth gangs.

*Cohen's Seminal Work: Delinquent Boys*

In his 1955 theoretical explanation of delinquent subcultures, Delinquent Boys, Albert Cohen studied structural conditions that facilitated gang existence in poor urban areas. According to Cohen, structural factors, particularly, neighborhood, social class, and school variables were significantly related to youth gang existence and membership. Cohen asserted that the delinquent subculture existed as a way of life among certain groups of youth living in urban neighborhoods as a means of counteracting status frustration (feeling experienced by youth when they realize the disadvantages and inequalities in opportunities to achieve goals because of their lower-class status).

Cohen's major theoretical contribution was the development of three subcultural traits by which society could readily identify youth gang subcultures that have become a standard in the literature. Specifically, Cohen (1955) proposed that gang subcultures were non-*utilitarian*, *malicious*, and *negativistic*. Gang subcultures were non-utilitarian because frustrated males maintained group interactions with peers who approved of deviant values thereby rejecting the middle class value system. Cohen further suggested that gang subcultures were negativistic and malicious because members did not commit crimes to gain economic wealth but rather for fun and to destroy those who were a part of a system to which the gang members do not belong.

A second contribution to the criminological literature was Cohen's statement that status frustration leads to three reactions: *college boy*, *corner boy*, and *delinquent boy* reactions. The *college boy* reaction as described by Cohen was the acceptance of middle class values and adjustment through conformity. Unlike the *college boy* reaction, the *corner boy* reaction rejected middle class values including: ambition, individual responsibility, setting long- term goals, control of aggression and violence, recreation, and respect for property (Cohen, 1955). Cohen argued that the *college boy* personality showed sacrifice and effort to uphold middle class values that most *corner boy* personality types directly opposed. The *delinquent boy* according to Cohen was therefore negative, did not conform to middle class standards, legitimized aggressive behavior, and exhibited hostility toward the middle class and thus comprised the delinquent gang subculture. In addition to subculture traits and reactions to status frustration, Cohen asserted that poor academic performance was

specific to lower class youth. He argued that as the result of academic frustration youth would join delinquent subcultures. Cohen further believed that youth sought peer group status at school and when rejected from the middle class social, lower class youth reacted in frustration and formed subcultures.

*Cohen's Theoretical Components*

Cohen's theoretical components were based on two fundamental perspectives: strain, and differential association. The strain perspective, according to Cohen (1955), was presented in his assertion that lower class youth experience problems in society based on their social position. Accordingly, the differential association and the reaction formation perspectives, then, were predicated on the assumption that lower class youth, who when faced with the same problems, came together to form gang subcultures in reaction to problems shared based on class and status differentials in middle class society.

Cohen's theory, like others generated at that time, focused exclusively on urban, lower class males. Coextensive with the women's rights movement, female gender-specific explanations for involvement in crime sprang up (Adler, 1975; Simon, 1975). More recently, proponents continue to argue that gender-specific theories are needed to explain female delinquency and criminality (Chesney-Lind, 1997). However, in several recent tests, traditional male-oriented theories have enjoyed a degree of success in explaining variations in female crime. Gottfredson and Hirshi (1990), for instance, in applying their general theory of crime to female populations, found that those who exhibited low self-control were likely to commit delinquent acts, although the particular acts were likely to be of the less serious variety (i.e. status offenses).

Similarly, Agnew (2001), in applying his general strain theory, found that females were affected by strain similar to males, however, citing that females when compared to males experienced different types of strain such as those related to physical and sexual abuse. Relying on Cohen's theory as a guiding framework for the current analysis of female gang membership, specific factors were identified for study related to neighborhood characteristics, family/peer influences, social class, and academic performance.

Within the context of this review on female gangs it was hard to distinguish the literature on female gang existence, membership, participation and gang delinquency. This void suggests the need for specified research on female gang membership and social factors attempting to explain the continuous increases. While not intended to test Cohen's theory directly many studies have linked aspects of Cohen's theory to gang membership and delinquency. This section provides accounts of several recent studies on female gangs and delinquency.

*Neighborhood Characteristics*

Studies have been conducted on neighborhood characteristics and structures to offer explanations of violence and delinquency and have provided an increased understanding of neighborhood dynamics in youth involvement in gangs and delinquency. In their study of gang locations, Tita, Cohen, and Engberg (2005) found a significant relationship between the existence of gangs, lower class status, and social disorganization variables. In their study of neighborhood characteristics and female delinquency, Hunt, Joe-Laidler, and Evans (2002) found that women who lived in congested and violence prone neighborhoods were more likely to have lower levels of education and limited legitimate economic opportunities.

Similarly, Curry, Decker, and Egley (2002) conducted a study of gang involvement and delinquency among middle school students based on the location/neighborhood of their middle schools. Findings indicated that two of the three schools-those located in poor neighborhoods where gangs were known to exist, experienced higher rates of delinquency than the middle school in the non-gang neighborhood (De Coster and Heimer, 2001; Jang and Johnson, 2001).

*Family/Peer Association*

The relationship between family and peer association and youthful delinquency has also been implicated in the literature. While a major caveat of the Gifford-Smith, Dodge, Dishion, and McCord (2005) study is the all male sample, the study provides support for both family and peer pressure as well as the need for more studies focusing on female populations. Specifically, in their study of attachment to parents, Gifford-Smith et al., (2005) analyzed the videotaped dialogue of 186 adolescent boys and their friends, and found that the influence of family members and peers, along with age, gender, prior record of delinquency, attachment to parents, and attitudes towards delinquency were all significantly related to delinquent behavior.

Similar results reported by Zatz and Portillos, (2000) showed that peer socialization was significantly related to female gang membership, involvement and existence (Deschenes and Esbensen, 1999). In his 2000 study of 500 middle school and high school females, Wang (2000) set out to study the perceptions of 334 females in regards to the link between peer influence, status, family problems, and gang participation. While not a direct test of gang membership, findings indicated that female respondents agreed that peer pressure

(71%), protection of status (70%), acceptance (68%), and home problems (66%) were leading factors related to gang participation.

*Social Class*

Empirical support for Cohen's subculture theory and the relationships between social status, poverty, and delinquency were predicated on the previous findings of Kvaraceus' (1945) which revealed that poverty and delinquency were significant among delinquent youth when compared to non-delinquent youth. Cohen (1955), supported by others, further posited that social structural conditions including social class and status among youth in school were purported to cause gang formation, membership and delinquent behavior. In their longitudinal study of violence and female gangs Fleischer and Kreinert (2004) examined 74 young women over the course of several years. Their findings indicated that female gang members reported living in poverty and were from single parent homes where their parents received government aid as an economic supplement.

*Academic Performance*

Cohen's reaction formation concept explained that poor academic performance resulted in frustration that produced higher rates of failure among lower class youth leading to membership in delinquent gang subcultures (Howell and Lynch, 2000). Accordingly, one of the most tested correlations was the link between school experiences, gangs, and delinquency (Curry et al., 2002). In their 2005 study of middle and high school students, Nihart, Lersch, Sellers, and Mieczkowski surveyed 1,029 middle school students and 625 high school students regarding their feelings towards parents, teachers, and police. The findings of this study indirectly supported Cohen's proposition that grades, particularly poor grades, were related to low social class status and gang membership (Jang and Johnson, 2001).

While traditional gang theories focused on explaining male gang existence and delinquency, the literature has been left void of criminological theories explaining female gang existence and gang membership. Much of the research conducted on females has been conducted on the relationship between the Women's Rights Movement and increased delinquency (Adler, 1975; Simon, 1975). The concepts of Cohen's Subculture of Delinquency theory tested in this study have found some empirical support. The hypothesis that status frustration evolved as the result of neighborhood structures and associated social factors, status frustration (guided by the use of secondary data) was not directly analyzed.

*The Current Study*

The purpose of this study was to conduct a partial test of Albert K. Cohen's (1955) *subculture of delinquency theory* to see whether social structural variables predicted female gang membership. Specifically, it was predicted that juvenile female gang members were more likely to live in neighborhoods where gangs flourish, live in urban areas, have more family and peers who were gang members, receive more government aid and exhibit lower school performance than non-gang members.

Method

A secondary data analysis was conducted using data from the 1997-2001 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). The NLSY data were gathered in phone interviews with 8,984 youths age 12-17. Of those, 51 % (4,599) were male and 48 % (4,385) were female. As such, this was an ex-post-facto causal comparative study using data from a nationally representative sample. While the original purpose of the NLSY data was to collect data documenting the transition from school to work experienced by youth, this study utilized variables within this data set to test theoretical assumptions on female gang membership. In this two-group design, data were examined to study the relationship between social factors and female gang membership.

*Sample*

NLSY female respondents classified as gang members (n1 = 150) represented the targeted population for this study, and females who were not members of gangs (n2 = 150) comprised the comparison group. A random sampling of non-gang females was conducted to obtain a weighted sample size equal to 150, which yielded a representative sample of the NLSY population of females. Female gang members comprised the entire population of female gang members in the sample (n1 = 150). For the purpose of this study, gang membership was defined as female youth who responded "yes" to the question of ever being a gang member. Comparative analyses were conducted herein to identify differences between the two groups. A total of 300 female youth respondents constitute the sample upon which the analyses and results of the study are based.

*Variables of the Study*

The following predictor variables were selected from the larger dataset for the current analyses: neighborhood gang presence, living in urban/rural neighborhoods, receiving government aid (social class), family/peer gang membership, and ever repeat a grade

(academic performance). The neighborhood variables were asked in two questions: (a) Do you live in a rural or urban neighborhood? and (b) Are there any gangs in your neighborhood? Social class was defined using the survey question that identified whether or not the respondent's parent(s) ever received government aid. The family/peer gang membership variable comprised an amalgamation of two variables including family/peer gang membership. Academic performance was defined by grade retention. All of these variables were recoded into dichotomies, with "1" indicating a positive response and "0" a negative response. Two additional control variables, age and race, were included in the analyses. While age was retained as a continuous variable, race was recoded so that White (majority) females were coded "1" and all other racial/ethnic (minority) groups were coded as "0." Each of these groups is compared on the key Cohen variables to more fully assess the adequacy of the theory.

Gang membership was the outcome variable associated with several social measures including: gangs in the neighborhood, living in urban/rural neighborhoods, family/peer gang membership, receiving government aid, and ever repeat a grade. Following the statistically significant chi-square ($\chi^2$) and phi ($\Phi$) estimations, logistic regression was conducted to determine which of the predictor variables best-predicted female gang membership. Logistic regression was chosen because of the dichotomous nature of the outcome variable of gang membership. Seven variables were used as predictor variables in the final logistic regression model including the two control variables: age and White/minority status. All seven predictors were entered into the model and met the inclusion criterion for the exploration. Control variables were included in the model to account for their possible influence on the relationship between the predictors and outcomes.

Results

*Age*

Table 1 presents a breakdown of control variables by gang membership. Female respondents in this study ranged from 12 to 17 years of age. The average age of the female respondents was 14.4 years old, varying somewhat according to their gang status. For gang members (n = 150), the most common age was 15 years old (29.3%). For females who reported not being in a gang, the most common age was 13 years old. While the analysis showed that gang females were slightly older on average, a t-test revealed no statistically significant differences in age between the gang and non-gang groups.

Table 1.
*Control Variable by Ever Belonged to a Gang*

|  | No | | Yes | | $\chi^2$ | $\Phi$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | f | % | f | % |  |  |
| Age |  |  |  |  | 8.407 | .167 |
| 12 | 17 | 11.3 | 9 | 6.0 |  |  |
| 13 | 36 | 24.0 | 25 | 16.6 |  |  |
| 14 | 31 | 20.0 | 35 | 23.3 |  |  |
| 15 | 29 | 19.3 | 44 | 29.3 |  |  |
| 16 | 26 | 17.3 | 29 | 19.3 |  |  |
| 17 | 11 | 7.30 | 8 | 5.3 |  |  |
| Race/Ethnicity |  |  |  |  | 60.375 | .452** |
| Minority | 23 | 15.3 | 86 | 57.3 |  |  |
| White | 127 | 84.7 | 60 | 43.7 |  |  |

*Note:* **Denotes significance at the p < .01 level.

### Race/Ethnicity

Within the total sample of 300 females, majority group (White) respondents (62.3%) comprised the largest proportion of the sample while minority group respondents (37.6%) comprised the smaller portion. Differences in race/ethnicity were noted when the sample was divided by gang membership. Less than half of the gang members were majority group members (43.7%), while non-gang members were comprised mainly of majority group members (84.7%). Chi-square analysis showed that there were significant differences in the observed and expected values for the "race" and "gang" responses ($\chi^2$ = 60.375, $\Phi$ = .452). To measure the strength of association between these two categori-

cal variables, the phi statistic revealed a moderate association. Thus, the race/ethnicity of the respondents explained approximately 20% of the variance in gang membership ($\Phi^2$ = .2043).

### Neighborhood Characteristics

Table 2 provides a bivariate comparison of the predictor variables by gang membership. When respondents were asked the question, "Are there any gangs in your neighborhood?," approximately 85% of gang members versus only about 31% of non-gang females reported that that gangs were present in their neighborhoods.

Table 2.
*Predictor Variables by Ever Belonged to a Gang*

|  | No | | Yes | | $\chi^2$ | $\Phi$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | f | % | f | % |  |  |
| Gangs in Neighborhood |  |  |  |  | 88.716* | .545 |
| No | 103 | 69.1 | 23 | 15.3 |  |  |
| Yes | 46 | 30.9 | 126 | 84.7 |  |  |
| Neighborhood |  |  |  |  | 47.192** | .401 |
| Rural | 93 | 62.4 | 33 | 22.8 |  |  |
| Urban | 56 | 37.6 | 112 | 77.2 |  |  |
| Family/Peer Gang |  |  |  |  | 128.259** | .654 |
| No | 121 | 80.7 | 23 | 15.3 |  |  |
| Yes | 29 | 19.3 | 127 | 84.7 |  |  |
| Government Aid |  |  |  |  | 9.321** | .188 |
| No | 65 | 47.4 | 37 | 29.1 |  |  |
| Yes | 72 | 52.6 | 90 | 70.9 |  |  |
| Ever Repeat a Grade |  |  |  |  | 14.807** | .235 |
| No | 92 | 67.6 | 59 | 44.4 |  |  |
| Yes | 44 | 32.4 | 74 | 55.6 |  |  |

*Note:* **Denotes significance at the p < .01 level.

Statistics revealed that these two variables were not independent, with gangs in the neighborhood accounting for approximately 30% of the variance in gang membership among respondents. Further examination showed that observed and expected values for living in urban/rural neighborhoods also varied significantly across gang membership. The assertion that living in urban versus rural neighborhoods increases the chance of gang membership, while not new, was substantiated by the current study's findings. More than three-fourths of gang-affiliated respondents reported living in urban areas compared to just over one-third of non-gang females who reported living in urban areas. These results revealed that living in urban/rural neighborhoods was significantly related to gang membership status among the female respondents.

*Family/Peer Influence*

The association of family/peer and gang membership also supported Cohen's assertion about gang members. Approximately, 85% of the gang-affiliated respondents reported having family/peer gang members, while only 15% reported they did not. The pattern was reversed for non-gang females. Specifically, the association between gang membership and having family/peers who were gang members was significant and explained approximately 43% of the variance between the two. Accordingly, the relationship between this variable and gang membership was, on average, an inverse one. Similar to the results of having gangs in the neighborhood, respondents who reported having family/peer as gang members were approximately 7 times more likely to be gang members than those who did not.

*Government Aid*

In examining the association between receiving government aid and gang membership, preliminary observation of the data revealed differences in gang and non-gang females, with gang females reporting that their parents had received significantly more government aid than females who did not belong to a gang. Examination of predictor and outcome variables showed that observed and expected values for the question: "Has your parent ever received government aid?" varied significantly across gang membership. The variance component was $\chi^2 = 9.321$; $\Phi = .188$. While these two variables were not independent of one another, the phi statistic revealed a small association that accounted for only 3.5% of the variance between the two variables.

*Academic Performance*

On the academic performance measure more than half of the gang members reported repeating a grade, while less than one-third of the non-gang females reported ever repeating a grade. The chi-square analysis comparing the differences between the observed and expected values among the outcome variable "ever belonged to a gang" and the predictor variable "ever repeat a grade" revealed a significant difference ($\chi^2 = 14.807$, $\Phi = .235$). While these two variables were not independent of each other, the phi statistic revealed only a mild association between the two, explaining only 5.5% of the associated variance between these variables.

*Logistic Regression Model*

Table 3 presents the results of the logistic regression model predicting gang membership. For this regression model, each predictor variables and the two controls variables were regressed on the outcome-gang membership. Multicollinearity within the correlation matrix was not strong (that is, $\Phi < .80$) and did not prevent inclusion of the chosen variables from contributing significantly to the logistic regression model. Overall, the logistic regression model was quite successful in predicting gang membership, accounting for 63.8% of the variance (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .638$) and correctly classifying 84.8% of the female respondents.

Table 3.
*Multivariate Logistic Regression Model Predicting Gang Membership*

| Variable | b | SE | Wald | Exp(B) | 95% C.I. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Neighborhood Gangs | 1.916 | .433 | 17.863 | 6.796** | 2.795 | 16.528 |
| Urban/Rural | 1.151 | .412 | 7.818 | 3.162** | 1.411 | 7.086 |
| Family Gang | 1.946 | .409 | 22.693 | 7.002*** | 3.144 | 15.596 |
| Government Aid | .776 | .404 | 3.692 | 2.174 | .985 | 4.799 |
| Ever Repeat a Grade | .984 | .399 | 6.080 | 2.676* | 1.224 | 5.851 |
| Age | .113 | .136 | .688 | 1.120 | .857 | 1.463 |
| Race | -.123 | .141 | .766 | 0.884 | .671 | 1.165 |

*Denotes significance at the p < .05 level. ***Denotes significance at the p < .001 level.

Discussion

All of the predictor variables suggested by Cohen's theory included in the regression model were related in the predicted direction, and all but one was statistically significant. The Exp (B) shows that females who lived in neighborhoods with gangs, were nearly 7 times more likely to have ever been a gang member, compared to females living in neighborhoods without gangs controlling for all other variables in the equation. Likewise, respondents who had family/peer gang members were 7 times as likely to have been gang members themselves. Thus, like Cohen (1955) and Sutherland (1939), these findings suggest that female respondents who had close associations with gang members were more likely to be gang members themselves, compared to respondents who had no close association to gang members.

Females who repeated a grade in school were nearly 3 times more likely to have ever been gang members compared to females who had never repeated a grade in school. These results revealed a weak association between ever repeating a grade and ever belonging to a gang. This weak association may be explained largely as a result of the ever repeating a grade variable representing an indirect measure of academic performance. Although weak, these findings, like Cohen's (1955), showed that female gang members were more likely to have lower academic performance than non-gang females. Similarly, living in urban/rural neighborhoods was significantly related to gang membership status among the female respondents. Females who lived in urban neighborhoods were over 3 times more likely to have ever been a gang member compared to those who lived in rural neighborhoods. The assertion that living in urban versus rural neighborhoods increases the chance of gang membership, while not new, was substantiated by the current study's findings.

According to Thornberry, Lizotte, Krohn, Farnworth, and Jang (1994), social class as a predictor of gang membership was strongest when measured with three variables: parent income, parent education, and parent receipt of government aid. Due to limitations of the NLSY data, this study's measure of social class was limited. As such, receiving government aid was a marginally significant predictor of female gang membership, particularly when the significance level for government aid was relaxed to .10. While the government aid variable was the most robust measure of social class entered into the regression model, receiving government aid marginally yielded significance at the $p = .055$ level. Even though no statistical significance for this variable emerged at the $p < .05$ level, females from families which had received government aid were still more than 2 times as likely to report ever belonging to a gang compared to females from families which had not received government aid.

*Limitations*

Several limitations of the current study warrant comment. First, the study did not directly address all aspects of Cohen's (1955) *subculture of delinquency theory*. Specifically, Cohen's theory addressed several gang types and gang member characteristics that are not addressed in this study. Instead, this study examined those social structure concepts including gang presence in neighborhoods, living in urban versus rural neighborhoods, academic and social class measures, and differential association concept via family/peer gang membership, and delinquency.

Second, although similar analyses have been conducted, this study focused on data from a single NLSY year (1997). Consequently, the generalizability of these findings is limited and future research would benefit from the comparison of data from multiple years. A third potential limitation to the generalizability of these findings was the homogenous study of female respondents (N = 300). It is likely that additional comparison groups comprising male respondents would provide results better suited to generalization, as this study's sample is representative of the youth population in America. While the data are now more than 10 years old, this study was an exploratory data analysis of a traditional criminological theory against the idea of new gendered theories to address female gang membership.

*Future Implications*

The argument for the need of gendered theory was not supported by the findings of this study. It is true, however, that female gang presence continues to increase. With this in mind, perhaps policy implications surrounding female gangs and delinquency should be addressed with traditional criminological theory albeit contrary arguments by feminist theorists. In light of the findings, suggestions for addressing female gang presence and delinquency would include creating policies that address social conditions. Both quantitative and qualitative examinations will add to the depth of the research on female gangs and lead to effective policy implementations in all levels of government planning.

Other recommendations include providing additional resources to communities to effectively address social issues that facilitate continued gang presence and influence over the weak (society's adolescents). The present study demonstrated that the application of Albert K. Cohen's subculture of delinquency theory to female youth gangs offered an empirically significant explanation. Based on the results of this study, future research endeavors should include a replication with a larger sample size using male and female comparison groups.

Summary

The fact that females are under-represented in criminological research and that there are insufficient explanations of female gang existence and delinquency is undisputed here (Belknap, 2001; Campbell, 1984; Chesney-Lind, 1989, 1997; Simpson, 1989). Many feminist theorists have argued against the application of male dominated theory to female populations. The results of this study, however, revealed that Cohen's (1955) theory does offer an explanation of female gangs. Like Cohen's male gang members, the current study found that female gang members were more likely to (a) live in neighborhoods with gang presence, (b) live in urban neighborhoods, (c) have family/peer gang members, (d) receive government aid, and (e) have lower levels of academic performance when compared to their non-gang counterparts. The findings from this study support a broad literature that has found empirical support for Cohen's subculture of delinquency theory (Ardelt and Day, 2002; Lauritsen, 1993; Nihart et al., 2005; Reiss and Rhodes, 1963; Rowe and Farrington, 1997; Warr, 2002). Contrary to arguments that gender-specific criminological theories are needed to explain female gangs and delinquency, the findings presented here support the application of Cohen's traditional theory to female youth gangs.

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# Television Violence Prevention Versus Juvenile Violence Prevention: Any Connections In Parental Control?

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*Abstract*

Animated features, like children's cartoons, are considered by some to be the most violent shows on television, with approximately 25 to 50 acts of violence per hour (Dietz and Strasburger, 1991). Cartoons, unlike other shows that portray violence, present instances of violence to children in an "acceptable" way, which teaches children from zero to 17 years of age that hurting people is tolerable. Television violence has been linked to juvenile aggression, which has been linked to juvenile violence. In researching several studies, the author found that many of the preventions mentioned in the television violence studies were also mentioned in the research studies on juvenile violence. Parents were the primary source of control and prevention in both fields of juvenile justice and television media. The prevention connection found in both areas should help mental health professionals, law enforcement personnel, juvenile justice personnel, parents, and other interested persons curb violent behavior in children and adolescents.

British television personality, Sir David Frost once said, "Television is an invention that permits you to be entertained in your living room by people you wouldn't have in your home." In her book, *The Magic Years*, Selma H. Fraiberg gives a resounding recollection of her research on the influence of television violence:

> We need to consider what it means to be a child who receives moral education from his parents and is entertained in his own living room, with the consent of his parents, by a constant flow of visitors…whose views on society and human values would have been barely tolerated in a Neanderthal cave (Fraiberg, 1959, p. 270-271).

Television violence may be a very serious threat to the early developmental processes of children across America. According to Cheng et al., "Violent media exposure has been associated with aggressive behavior, and it has been suggested that child health professionals counsel families on limiting exposure" (2004, p. 94). Numerous violent juveniles continue their deviant behavior and often become violent adults. In a study published by *Prevention* in 2003, Megan Orthersen Gorman found that men who were heavy viewers of very violent television shows when they were six to eight years old were twice as likely as other men to push, grab, or shove their spouses. Additionally, the men were

three times as likely to be convicted of criminal behavior by the time they reached their early 20s.

Gorman (2003) also found that women were twice as likely to have thrown something at their spouse and more than four times as likely to have punched, beaten, or choked another adult. In this paper, "violence" includes the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Index Crimes (i.e., murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault). According to a 2002 article published in the journal *Psychiatry*, a 1996 report released by the American Medical Association (AMA) revealed that violent entertainment causes violent behavior and other problems in children, and that television use, "must be limited to no more than one or two quality hours per day" (Eth, 2002, p. 301). Few in the television broadcast and entertainment industry are implementing provisions to curtail violence on television. The federal government has implemented sparse provisions for television violence. Regardless of whose responsibility it may be to patrol the violence youth intake from the medium of television or the industry itself, it is clear that not many provisions are being made. This meta-analysis will review several studies that detail many interventions and preventions of violent influences on youth and interventions and preventions of violent behavior of youth. Is there a connection in the juvenile violence preventions in comparison to the television violence preventions? The connections found in the interventions and preventions of the two fields (media and criminal justice/criminology) should help mental health professionals, law enforcement personnel, juvenile justice personnel, parents, and other interested parties determine

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the best way to help bridle violent and delinquent behavior in children and adolescents.

*Anecdotal Examples*

In the summer of 2004, I took my young cousins to the movie theater. Five-year-old Jessie was asked to catch the hand of her two-year-old sister, June, for a minute while I unloaded the diaper bag out of the car. In just a few seconds, June managed to release the hand of her older sister and run across the movie theater parking lot. Suddenly, a car appeared right in front of June. Everyone thought the worse was going to happen as we all paused in amazement. Thankfully, the car stopped "on a dime" and did not hit June.

However, we noticed that Jessie could have caught up with June before the car reached her. Instead of trying to catch her baby sister, Jessie laughed and said it would have been "funny" if the car had hit June. We could not believe our ears. She actually thought it would have been "funny" to see her little sister run over by a huge Cadillac. I later discussed this incident with her mother and she said, Jessie thought it was "funny" because, "On the cartoons, when the characters get run over by a car, the children laugh." I was amazed by what I had just learned. I had witnessed the devastating effects of the violence in animated shows on television. My little cousin could not detect fantasy from reality. She would have let her baby sister be hit by a car, just to get a laugh.

In the fall of 2004, my freshman college students were asked to role-play a stressful situation for a police officer. One of the groups in the class decided to mimic a police officer beating his wife after not being promoted that day by his Captain. When the group reached the stage (in front of the class), the police officer started talking rudely to his wife. The class chuckled lightly. However, when the woman said something the officer (her husband) did not like, he began to beat her. The class laughed in an uproar. They could not control themselves. They fell out of their chairs laughing while the officer beat, kicked, slapped and verbally abused his wife. I could not believe my eyes. I kept appealing to them that the scene was not meant to be funny. Clearly, some of the students were not amused, as it was a very frightening, serious scene in the skit. I was appalled that a group of 18-20 year olds thought it was funny to see a police officer brutally beat his wife. I asked them why they thought it was funny. They really did not have an answer.

Lavers (2002) explains that while young men are the target audience, young women are most often the victims, whether in a television series or in a serial-killer glorification movie. The "slasher" genre, an extreme form of film violence, was launched in 1963. This form of entertainment features people, primarily teenage girls and young women, being tortured, dismembered, disemboweled and beheaded with various construction tools:

chain saws, tool guns, drills, and jigsaws. It is anyone's guess how much television my two young cousins view per day, or how much television my students viewed when they were younger. However, it is apparent that the television they were allowed to view had a major detrimental effect on their assessment of the way the world operates.

*Influence of Television Violence on Juveniles: Exposure*

Television is omnipresent. There is a television set in at least one room of most educational settings. More than ½ of all children in America between the ages of five and 17 have televisions in their bedrooms and ¼ of children ages two to five have a television in their bedroom (Nielsen Media Research, 2000). The effects of television violence on a child who suffers from aggression and/or other antisocial disorders may be adding fuel to the fire. A study by the Los Angeles-based Parents Television Council (PTC) revealed a huge increase in coarse language on television from 2000 to 2001; up 78% compared to a previous study they conducted from 1998 to 1999. Television violence had increased by 70%. They found that violence, coarse language, and sexual content (homosexuality, oral sex, pornography, masturbation, "kinky" sex, group sex, and bondage) were marketed to 10 million children every night (Lavers, 2002). According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP, 1995) children between the ages of two and 18 spend up to eight hours a day with some type of media, including television, movies, and video games. They report that children spend more time with entertainment media than any other activity except sleeping. By the time children reach age 18, they will have viewed 16,000 simulated murders and 200,000 acts of violence on television.

David Sarnoff of RCA introduced television to the United States in an experimental mode in New York City in 1939 at the World's Fair (Federal Communications Commission [FCC], 2005). In the first of several volumes of the *National Television Violence Study*, Seawell (1997) reported the highest proportion of violence is in children's programming. In their review of 74 G-rated animated feature films, Yokota and Thompson (2000) found that 100% of the animated films produced in the United States between 1937 and 1999 portrayed violence. In a Federal Trade Commission (FTC) report in 2000, "Marketing Violent Entertainment" it was revealed that entertainment industries aggressively and wrongfully target violent entertainment directly to adolescents and children even though the industries' ratings system found the material to be inappropriate.

Research has linked exposure to television violence to a wide variety of ailments for children and adolescents. Some of the physical and mental problems include aggressive behavior, desensitization, violence, fear, depression, nightmares, and sleep disturbances (Bar-on, et al., 2001).

*Influence of Television Violence on Juveniles: Influence*

Media influences children by teaching through observation and imitation. Children in grades four through eight prefer video games that award points for violence against others (Funk and Buchman, 1996). Dave Grossman (1996), a psychologist and media researcher says the alcohol and tobacco industries figured out early on that if they could continue to sell their products to children, they could start the addictive process early and keep the children hooked well into adulthood. Grossman is a retired United States Army lieutenant colonel who has studied how to make persons who are not naturally inclined to kill, become natural born killers. He used several psychological tools to get the recruits to want to kill and like it and also used practices that involved repetition, desensitization, escalation and an instinct for survival.

According to Lavers (2002), repetition is a psychological technique used to decrease phobias. By increasing exposure to the phobia, you increase the person's tolerance level of the phobia. This paradigm leads to addiction. She says this same practice is found in the advertising industry, where more exposure to violence desensitizes the child to violence. It makes the child familiar with violence and comfortable with violent occurrences. Like an addiction, once the child has reached a plateau of what constitutes violence, the industry must develop more extraordinary acts of violence to peek the interest of the child.

Can you be conditioned to kill, and like the feeling of killing someone? According to Grossman (1996), you can. He believed that the conditioning of violence was twofold. First, the operant conditioning teaches the person how to kill (in repetitive, automatic responses-like a video game simulator). Classical conditioning is a subtle, but powerful technique that teaches the person to like killing (by rewarding the repetitive, automatic responses). Over three thousand research studies have examined the association between media violence and violent behavior, and all but 18 have shown a positive, significant relationship (Grossman and DeGaetano, 1999).

Brandon S. Centerwall (1993), a Seattle psychiatrist, published a report in *Public Interest* claiming that television violence is a cause of violence. To see whether television influences the murder rate, Centerwall took advantage of the fact that television broadcasting was banned in South Africa until 1975. He graphed the changing murder rates for Whites in Canada and the United States from 1945 to 1974 against television ownership and compared them to the White murder rates in South Africa during the same period. The White homicide rate in the United States increased 93%. In Canada, the homicide rate increased 92%. In South Africa, where television was banned, the White homicide rate declined by seven percent.

Centerwall (1993) explains that the introduction of television also helps explain the different rates of homicide growth for Whites and minorities. He says White households in the United States began acquiring television sets in large numbers approximately five years before minority households. Thus, the White homicide rate began increasing in 1958, and that was exactly four years before a parallel increase in the minority homicide rate. He finishes his point with a very powerful, but bold conclusion:

> Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that if, hypothetically, television technology had never been developed, [there] would today be 10,000 fewer homicides each year in the United States, 70,000 fewer rapes, and 700,000 fewer injurious assaults. Violent crime would be half what it is (Centerwall, 1993, pp. 63-64).

*Prevalence of Juvenile Violence: History*

In a revolutionary move from pilgrim expeditions to industrialization, the United States saw an increase in unsupervised children in impoverished, inner-city neighborhoods. The increase in unsupervised, neglected children matriculated into an increase of crimes throughout urbanized areas. This increase in crime led to the formulation of foster homes and refuge houses (Sanborn, Jr. and Salerno, 2005). These temporary solaces were soon phased out and legislative actions led to the formulation of probation officers and eventually a formal juvenile justice system in 1899. The juvenile justice system was created with the "best interest of the child" (e.g., rehabilitation) in mind. With a swift move from rehabilitation to punishment in the 1980s, and a quiet push to return to juvenile rehabilitation in the 21st century, legitimate opportunities to rehabilitate children and adolescents are a necessity.

According to the *Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Statistical Briefing Book* (2006) in all age groups (e.g., five to 17 years old), the number of juvenile homicide offenders increased between 1984 and 1994. However, the number of youth committing homicides decreased between 1994 and 2002 (Snyder and Sickmund, 2006). Children who kill are nothing new. Youth have consistently been accused of committing murder, from the notorious 19th century gang, Pug Uglies of New York's infamous Five Point neighborhood to the immigrant street-smart juveniles of the mid-1930s (Mones, 1999).

"Interpersonal violence, as victim or as perpetrator, is now a more prevalent health risk than infectious disease, cancer, or congenital disorders for children, adolescents, and young adults" (Bar-on et al., 2001, p. 1224). Among urban youth, interpersonal violence is the most prevalent cause of injury (33%), and the incidence of gunshot wounds has increased dramatically in the past decade (Nance, Stafford, and Schwab, 1997).

According to a 1996 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, each year 3,500 adolescents are murdered. A fact sheet published by the National Adolescent Health Information Center in 1995 reveals that more than 150,000 adolescents are arrested

for violent crimes each year. Non-White children and adolescents, particularly Black males, disproportionately suffer the effects of violence in their communities as aggressors and as victims. The number of murderers 15 to 17 years of age increased by 195% between 1984 and 1994, when 94% of juveniles arrested for murder were male and 59% were Black (Snyder, Sickmund, and Poe-Yamagata, 1996).

In an article published in The Journal of the American Medical Association, Fingerhut and Kleinman (1990) explained that the murder rate of young Black males rose 300% during the three decades after television's introduction in the United States. Although exposure to television violence is not the sole factor contributing to aggression, antisocial attitudes, and violence among children and adolescents, it is an important health risk factor that needs much assessment and attention. Kashani, Jones, Bumby, and Thomas (1999) argue that the high rate of youth violence will continue for decades to come due to the growing youth population, the "criminal careers" that some youth will carry into adulthood, and the "get tough" stance many have taken against juveniles.

*Variables*

According to a 1999 article by Paul Mones, psychological illness, clinical depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder are very critical explanations of why some youth kill. He explains that children who suffer from these disorders often are impulsive and easily humiliated. The other psychological factors he lists as common among youth that kill are family mental illness, borderline personality disorder, and a history of being struck on the head.

Kashani et al. (1999) implicated several variables that have been linked to youth violence. They include the (1) individual and/or personal characteristics (e.g., difficult temperament, minor physical abnormalities, and low verbal IQ scores), (2) demographic characteristics (e.g., gender and race), (3) familial factors (e.g., family history of criminal behavior, and substance abuse), (4) school factors (e.g., lack of commitment to school), (5) peer variables (e.g., association with other rejected peers), and (6) community and cultural variables (e.g., youth who carry guns or other weapons and disorganized neighborhoods). The authors conclude that there is no "single" formula or compound combination of variables that are linked to each violent youth.

*Television Violence Preventions*

Disgust over the content of television programming has prompted the creation of two technological fixes, the V-chip and CC+. The V-chip is widely available in new television sets and some cable boxes. It combines hardware and software to block programming according to rating codes and content categories. CC+ is a hard-

ware and software technology that blocks curse words (Lavers, 2002). However, according to the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation (1998), many parents find the entertainment industry's rating system difficult to use. Sixty-eight percent of the parents of 10 to 17 years olds refuse to use the television ratings system. Bar-on et al., (2001) explained the difficulty in having a different rating system for each medium (e.g., television, movies, music, and video games). The authors argue that it makes the rating system confusing, because the different forms of media have little similarity and conclude by explaining that simple, user-friendly, content-descriptive ratings that are consistent across various entertainment media should be implemented. "Just as it is important that parents know the ingredients in food they may feed to their children, they should be fully informed about the content of the media their children may use" (Bar-on et al., 2001). Moreover, the results suggest that if parents do not purchase or use harmful entertainment media, it will no longer be produced.

Practitioners should suggest healthy alternatives to television, such as sports, creative pursuits, interactive play, and reading. Parents should consider co-viewing television shows with their children, limiting screen time to one to two hours per day, and/or keeping the television out of the children's bedrooms. Research has demonstrated that television education and well-planned television use can reduce violent behavior in children (Robinson, Wilde, Navracruz, Haydel, and Varady, 2001).

*Juvenile Violence Preventions*

Mones (1999) suggests targeting young people at an early age. He relays that after-school and evening drop-in programs draw youth into the community and possibly teach them nonviolent negotiating skills. He concludes by suggesting massive mental health screenings along with follow-up components that become part of the children's regular pediatric checkups. Kashani et al. (1999) asserts that cognitive behavioral skill interventions with seriously aggressive or violent youth (e.g., social skills and problem solving training, cognitive restructuring techniques, role-plays, therapist modeling, and behavioral assignments) may reduce delinquent or aggressive behaviors at home or in school. The authors also report that Multisystemic Therapy (MST) is the only treatment approach to date that has successfully reduced rates of violent behavior in youth. Occurring in the juvenile's home, school, and neighborhood, MST interventions are flexibly tailored to the individualized developmental and psychosocial needs of each youth and his or her family. Finally, Kashani et al., (1990) list several recommendations for policy makers, community leaders, law enforcement personnel, mental health professionals, parents and other adults to help youth develop a sense of personal accountability for their actions. They include, "reduce media violence; limit

youth access to firearms, drugs, and alcohol; involve the schools; promote healthy family functioning; and ensure community persistence" (Kashani et al., pp. 205-208, 1999).

## Method

With the proliferation of information in criminological research, there is a need to combine studies from different disciplines in order to reach a general conclusion about the effect of television violence on juvenile violence. Meta-analysis falls under a broader classification of reviews known as systematic reviews (Neill, 2006). This type of systematic review is quantitative. Using a quantitative systematic review (meta-analysis) the researcher was able to generate a narrower, specific study question, make the data collection more comprehensive, allow the study selection to be based on uniformly applied criteria, and make the data synthesis quantitative.

The current meta-analysis is based on summary data that was abstracted from actual research articles and books. The steps in this meta-analysis include, but are not limited to: a search of the literature, the establishment of criteria for the studies that were included in the meta-analysis, the recording of data from the included studies, and the statistical analysis of the data. Multiple databases (e.g., ProQuest, EBSCOhost, Google, and Houston Public Library) were searched in order to minimize the chances of omitting studies that met the inclusion criteria. The researcher cross-referenced bibliographies of retrieved studies and reviewed articles in order to identify other studies that met the inclusion criteria. Additionally, a hand search was conducted of journals, books, magazines, and newspaper articles for studies. Upon a manual search of the literature to locate the most relevant articles (approximately 25 articles), it became apparent that only eight articles were needed to complete the meta-analysis. Some of the retrieved articles were not included in the study, because the study looked only at specific instances of youth killings, and/or the studies covered only content reviews of specific television shows.

Some of the variables listed in a few of the articles were excluded because they appeared to be repetitious. There was no limit in the space of years used in the analysis. Some of the studies on television violence prevention and juvenile violence prevention went as far back as 1993 and were as current as the year 2003. The inclusion criteria for studies to be covered in the meta-analysis were based on the research question: Are there any connections in television violence preventions and juvenile violence preventions? Some of the things that were considered in selecting articles and studies for the meta-analysis include, but are not limited to: types of study designs (e.g., randomized trials versus nonrandomized trials), types of subjects included in the study (e.g., age and gender), types of publications from which the studies were extracted (e.g., published journal articles versus unpublished journal articles, newspaper articles and online retrievals), types of preventions listed in the studies and articles (e.g., television violence preventions versus juvenile violence preventions). Finally, the time frame was considered (e.g., studies conducted since televisions were sold commercially in the U. S. (1939) versus the creation of the juvenile justice system in 1899).

Television violence studies were coded in Table 1 with the label (TV Study), and juvenile violence studies were coded in Table 1 with the label (JV Study). In Table 1, the question of juvenile violence being linked to television violence was indicated next to each study by placing a Yes or No in the second column on the table. Several of the studies in the meta-analysis did list television violence as a causal factor or link to juvenile violence and aggression. Two studies which did not report a relationship within the two areas are Rhodes (2000), and Mones (1999). Table 2 (see Appendix) reveals which studies listed similar or same preventions for television violence and juvenile violence. The plus sign (+) indicates a prevention (variable) was listed in the study or research article. A minus sign (-) indicates a prevention (variable) was not listed in the study or research article. The studies and their relationship to the variables (preventions) of television violence and juvenile violence are presented in Table 2.

Table 1.
*Studies of Television Violence and Juvenile Violence*

| Author(s) | TV Linked to Juvenile Violence | Study Type |
|---|---|---|
| Anderson et al. (2003) | Yes | TV Study |
| Lavers (2002) | Yes | TV Study |
| Bar-on et al. (2001) | Yes | TV Study |
| Rhodes (2000) | No | TV Study |
| Mones (1999) | No | TV Study |
| Kashani et al. (1999) | Yes | TV Study |
| Domingue (1996) | Yes | TV Study |
| Centerwall (1993) | Yes | TV Study |

## Results

The tables reveal what has been extensively suggested by many in the criminal justice and criminology fields of learning: parents must do their part in preventing their children from being influenced by violence and/or becoming violent. The following prevention variables were found in both the television violence studies as well as the juvenile violence studies: Parental Supervision, Parental Control of Children's Exposure to Media Violence, V-Chip Control, Better Media Literacy, Better Use of Television by Parents and Children, Clearer Media Ratings, More Responsible Portrayal of Violence By Media Producers, Limiting Screen Time,

Involve the Family in Interventions, and finally, Parents Set Firm Limits on Behavior. The effort that is mentioned the most in both studies involves *parental control*.

In most of the studies, parents were mentioned as primary sources of prevention, whether it was television violence or juvenile violence. If television violence is viewed as a link to juvenile violence, and the primary prevention factors for both involve parental control, this finding has elevated several theories. For example, according to Travis Hirschi's control theory (1969), the breakdown of the family is listed as a causal factor of crime. Later, with Michael Gottfredson, Hirschi developed *A General Theory of Crime* (1990) in which low self-control and low resistance to the temptation of crime was blamed on a lapse in parenting.

In this theory, great emphasis is placed on parental upbringing, as they argue that this is the source of socialization that instills self-control in a child. Thus, yes, there is a connection between television violence prevention and juvenile violence prevention. The connection is effective parenting. Centerwall (1993) reports children as young as 14 months can recognize, mimic, and objectively illustrate what they observe on television. Considering that fact, it is imperative that parents take advantage of the opportunity to control what their children take in during their early childhood years.

### Discussion

Policy makers, community leaders, law enforcement personnel, mental health professionals, parents, and others must develop effective strategies to assist youth in developing a sense of personal accountability for their actions. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, many families have replaced teachers and parents as educators and role models, and have made the primary source of information for their children-the media (Bar-on et al., 2001). It is not the violence on television itself that causes children to become violent. However, the context in which violence is portrayed can make a difference between learning about violence and learning to be violent. Most violent portrayals on television show immediate thrills with no consequences for human loss.

On the contrary, in 2000, Richard Rhodes published an article in *Rolling Stone* magazine countering the argument that television violence causes violent behavior in children. He states that many reports dedicated to television violence studies being linked to aggression in children all share the same flaw. They fail to account for the powerful effect called "researcher expectation," whereby the subject(s) in the study easily guess what the researcher wants him or her to do and behaves that way. Rhodes also points out that a 1986 study by Huesmann and Eron that claimed a "strong relation between early television violence viewing and adult criminality," also showed that early aggressiveness predicts later violence,

and violence runs in families. Rhodes contends that violence is not hereditary; it is a "learned behavior" (p. 57).

Point well taken! Even the antagonists believe that violence is a "learned behavior." Most of the research studies that find a relationship between television violence and childhood aggression and later adult criminality do point out the techniques media utilize to get children to learn to like their products and ultimately learn to like and observe the violent images they view on the television screen. In conclusion, Rhodes (2000) gives his bottom line to the television violence argument. "To become violent, people must have experience with real violence. No amount of imitation violence can provide that experience" (Rhodes, p. 58). However, some simulated violence can be just as "real" as real violent occurrences. Being conditioned to enjoy violence desensitizes children so much so, that they believe they can accomplish the feats they witness on the television screen, with no concern for human loss.

In a similar argument, Mones (1999) explains that it is "not" watching television violence that predisposes a child to commit violence; rather it is exposure to real-life violence in the child's home and/or neighborhood. He believes many parents and practitioners look for someone beside themselves to blame for the problems with juvenile violence.

### Conclusion

It all started with the findings of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, published in 1969. That report established what is now a broad scientific consensus: "Exposure to television increases rates of physical aggression" (Centerwall, 1993, p. 64). In 1996, Maryland's Attorney General, J. Joseph Curran, Jr. urged parents, broadcasters, and advertisers to fight youth violence by curbing violence in the media and restricting children's access to it. He exclaimed that the responsibility was not totally on the media to decrease the amount of violence to which children are exposed but ultimately, the burden lies with the parents to shield their children from such programming. Curran urged parents not to forego an opportunity to exert control over a most basic form of entertainment. He says, "Parents are the key here" (Dominguez, 1996, p. 1).

This leads to a very important element of the meta-analysis. Most of the articles that were analyzed for this study suggested that parents should be the major source of prevention; whether it was to lessen the influence of television violence or prevent juvenile violence. In *A General Theory of Crime*, Gottfredson and Hirschi suggested, "The major 'cause' of low self-control thus appears to be ineffective child-rearing" (1990, p. 97). They explained that low self-control was the major cause of some people not being able to resist temptation to commit crime and/or participate in deviant acts. Ten years earlier, Patterson determined a set of parenting

skills conducive to effective child rearing. They include: "(a) notice what the child is doing; (b) monitor it over long periods; (c) model social skill behavior and (d) clearly state house rules" (1980, p. 81). Many of the suggestions made by researchers in an effort to decrease the influence of television violence on children involved many different forms of parental control. Similar to what Patterson suggested in 1980, parents have been asked to monitor what their child views, and clearly state how many hours of television the child is permitted to watch. The juvenile violence preventions have also been quite similar. Previous researchers have asked parents to model good social skills in front of their children. Parents must begin to realize the major influence they have over their children, be cognizant of their television consumption, and monitor the attitudes they allow to form from television's influence on them and their children.

*Recommendations*

Large-scale longitudinal studies would help identify the magnitude of media-violence affects on the most severe types of violence (Anderson et al., 2003). Just as drug companies and insurance agencies study for many years the affects of products on humans, so should researchers hoping to protect children form the affects of television violence. There should more effective ways to disseminate information learned in research studies (e.g., delivering information to directors of child protective services, juvenile justice personnel, and professionals in the school system). The discrepancy between empirically supported interventions and prevention programs and the services that are actually delivered to violent youth should be analyzed. Professionals outside of academia should be convinced to implement empirically supported programs in their communities (Kashani et al., 1999).

Interactive media (e.g., video games, cell phones, iPods, MP3 Players, Web Cams, and the Internet) should be assessed more intensely to determine their influence on the physical and mental health of children and adolescents (Kashani et al., 1999). Finally, provisions should be set in place to encourage medical officials to discuss with parents, the detrimental affects violent television consumption elicits on children and young adults.

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Appendix

Table 2.
*Studies and Their Relationship to the Variables of Television Violence Prevention and Juvenile Violence Prevention*

| Variable | Studies | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Parental supervision | + | - | + | - | - | + | + | + |
| Parental control of children's exposure to media violence | + | - | + | - | - | + | + | + |
| Parental mediation | + | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| V-chip | - | - | + | - | - | + | + | + |
| CC+ |  | - | - | - | - | - | - |  |
| Better media literacy | + | - | + | - | - | + | + | + |
| Better use of television by parents and children | - | - | + | - | - | + | + | + |
| Clearer media ratings | - | + | - | - | - | + | + | + |
| More responsible portrayal of violence by media producers | - | - | - | - | - | + | + | + |
| Mentors to help with parenting | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - |
| Mandatory counseling for parents and children | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - |
| Removing the child from the home | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - |
| Sports | - | - | + | - | - | + | - | - |
| Creative pursuits | - | - | + | - | - | + | - | - |
| Interactive play | - | - | + | - | - | + | - | - |
| Reading | - | - | + | - | - | + | - | - |
| Co-viewing television with children | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - |
| Limiting screen time | - | - | + | - | - | + | + | + |
| Keeping televisions out of children's bedrooms | - | - | + | - | - | - | - | - |
| Mock violence | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - |
| Early juvenile violence intervention | - | - | - | - | + | + | - | - |
| After-school and evening drop-in programs | - | - | - | - | + | - | - | - |
| Massive mental health screenings | - | - | - | - | + | + | - | - |
| Treatment and prevention programs | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Social skills training | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Problem-solving training | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Cognitive restructuring techniques | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Role play | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Therapist modeling | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Behavioral assignments | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Functional family therapy (FFT) | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Multisystemic therapy (MST) | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Conflict resolution | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Parent training | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| School-based programs | - | - | - | - | - | + | + | - |

Table 2.

*Studies and Their Relationship to the Variables of Television Violence Prevention and Juvenile Violence Prevention*

| Variable | Studies | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Vocational training programs | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Neighborhood rehabilitation projects | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Gang and gun prevention and intervention strategies | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Reduce access to firearms, drugs, and alcohol | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Modify laws to limit access to firearms, drugs, and alcohol | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Educating children | - | - | - | - | - | + | + | - |
| Integrated programs into school intervention | - | - | - | - | - | + | + | - |
| Involve the family in interventions | - | - | - | - | - | + | + | - |
| Positive affective climate in the home | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Parents set firm limits on behavior | - | - | - | - | - | + | + | + |
| Model pro-social behaviors | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Parenting classes | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Mental health services for parents | | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Elicit social support from extended family and friends | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |
| Time-channel locks | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + |
| Reward and punish  children's behavior | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | - |

# General Strain Theory: Latino Youth and Familism

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*Abstract*

The applicability of general strain theory to the Latino population was examined. Secondary data analysis was performed. Data were culled from the National Survey of Adolescents. The data were collected over a six-month period, from January, 1995 to June, 1995. The sample for the current study utilized a national cross-section of 3,136 adolescents, ages 12 to 17 years old. The analytical tool used to test the hypotheses was logistic regression. Results revealed that there is a relationship between general strain theory and Latino juvenile delinquency. However, the relationship was found to be weak. This was due to the impact family has on Latino youth, a socio-cultural factor that is prevalent among Latinos.

One of the concerns in theoretical criminology is that lack of analysis as it applies to ethnic-minorities. Researchers have failed to adequately address marginalized groups such as Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans. According to Martinez (1997), this failure is unfortunate because addressing minority issues, generally ignored by Criminologists and criminal justice practitioners, is imperative in order to advance theory and research in its application to practice.

### Criminology, Race and Ethnicity

Race and ethnicity have often been used synonymously (Wynkoop & Kiselica, 1994). Criminologists and Criminal Justicians have tried to distinguish the difference between race and ethnicity but often fail because of conceptual complexities. Race refers to genetic or biological differences between groups (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1983). On the other hand, ethnicity refers to within race distinctions between groups in terms of customs, language, religion, and behavior (Pedersen, 1988). According to Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1979), three broad racial groups are identified: Caucasoid, Black, and Mongoloid. However, using race as a single indicator to distinguish groups is non-progressive in research. According to Myers, Cintron, and Scarborough (1994), this single-distinction tendency has meant that subgroups of race and ethnicity have been ignored or misrepresented in all fields. The end result has been an invalid depiction of the race-crime relationship because the diversity within all races has not been taken into account (Myers et al.). The authors argued that the solution is a reconceptualization of the race and ethnic-

ity variable in crime-related research. Furthermore, they suggested that the significance of race and ethnicity in criminology demands that the researcher make a concentrated effort in the reconceptualization of race. If not, what is known about crime causation will continue to be scant (Myers et al.).

Aggregating Latinos as a racial group is useful because the multidimensional group can be broken down by ethnicity (i.e., Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban). Wynkoop & Kiselica (1994) also noted that distinctions can be made among various Caucasoid groups in the United States (e.g., Irish, Italian, Germans). Such differences lead individuals to respond differently to various institutions such as the criminal justice system. In turn, crime rates among the different race and ethnic groups will vary (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990).

Because Latinos are a rapid-growing segment of the American population, the etiology of Latino delinquency is becoming increasingly important (Perez-McCluskey, 2002). Criminological theory has not kept up with the ever-changing demographics, especially with the increasing numbers of Latinos in this country. While the strain perspective has always played an important role in explaining juvenile offending, the current strain theory, Agnew's (1992) general strain theory, might be limited to certain segments of society. General strain theory particularly appears to lack empirical support for minority ethnic groups such as Latinos. Therefore, this study investigates how ethnicity impacts theory. In particular, it explores the applicability of general strain theory to the Latino youth population, a group often ignored by theory and research.

The concept of familism is the focal point in determining whether there is a relationship between general strain theory and Latino youth. Familism was selected because the usual portrayal of the Latino family suggests cohesiveness that nears enmeshment and because the belief that such strong cohesiveness gives Latinos a sense of support (Miranda & Matheny, 2000). Sabogal,

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Marín, and Otero-Sabogal (1987) extend this idea by suggesting that a high level of perceived family support is the most fundamental and constant dimension of the Latino family. Patterson and Marsiglia (2000) go further in stating that Mexican-Americans and other Latino groups stress cooperation, collectiveness, and strong inter-generational family ties. The family is seen as a problem-solving unit that extends beyond blood relations including primary kin, extended kin, close friends, and neighbors (Patterson & Marsiglia, 2000). This network encompasses a deep sense of duty and obligation by its members to each other. According to Perez-McCluskey (2002), familism is a strong attachment to both immediate and extended family. As noted by Marín and Marín (1991):

> The significance ascribed to values such as familism (the importance of relatives as referents and as providers of emotional support) and to social scripts such as 'simpatia' (the preference for positive interpersonal interactions) are characteristics shared by most Hispanics independent of their national background, birthplace, dominant language, or any other socio-demographic characteristic (p. 2).

Marín and Marín (1991) assert that common cultural values such as familism are more likely to distinguish Latinos as members of a clearly identifiable group than other demographic characteristics. The cultural value of familism within the Latino population might be the most important mediating factor that impacts strain the relationship in empirical testing. This cultural value could quite possibly result in lower delinquency rates for Latinos than their White counterparts. Specific variables of familism include, but are not limited to, the number of children and adults living in the household, the number of biological parents living in the household, the marital status of the parents, the amount of family strain, and the number of extended family living in the household.

The research examined the applicability of general strain theory to the Latino youth population. It tested the hypotheses that: There is a relationship between general strain theory and Latino youth delinquency.

## General Strain Theory

General strain theory is an adaptation of Robert Merton's (1938) anomie or traditional strain theory. Due to the lack of empirical support, general strain theory was considered less often as an explanation of juvenile delinquency (Agnew & White, 1992). Merton's (1938) definitions of anomie were often inconsistent and confusing. According to Featherstone and Deflem (2003), this confusion led to the abandonment of traditional strain theory. Furthermore, according to Agnew (1992), causal models of crime and delinquency (such as social control and differential association/social learning theory) were beginning to dominate the discipline. According to Agnew and Passas (1997), the lack of supporting data can be attributed to the neglect of previous revi-

sions, resulting in a body of work that misrepresented the original purpose or meaning of anomie theory. In 1997, Merton admits the unfinished nature of his contributions on anomie and deviance, which may have resulted in misrepresenting his original work (Merton, 1997). Levine (1985) notes that although the concept of anomie appears in the title of Merton's (1938) original article, the term is used only casually in two passages with multiple meanings, and in a way that is not entirely consistent with Durkheim's (1893/1984). Furthermore, the macro-sociological concept of anomie has often been confused with the social-psychological concept of anomie (Levine, 1985). According to Featherstone and Deflem, the conceptual ambiguity over Merton's anomie concept is at least partly to blame for its misrepresentation. Moreover, Levine argues that Merton's various formulations of anomie demonstrate a pattern of semantic confusion, and that he employed at least ten definitions of anomie from 1938 to 1964. Due to much confusion over Merton's (1938) original version, scholars were quick to discard anomie in favor of causal models of crime. Based on Featherstone and Deflem's analysis, scholars who are critical should not necessarily discard anomie/strain theory, because the theory is compatible with several other theories of deviant behavior. If anomie/strain theory is employed properly, it might help fine-tune explanations of other crime and deviance theories (Featherstone & Deflem, 2003). Contemporary theorists argue that empirical data actually supports the theory (Barron, 2004; Broidy, 2001; Capowich, Mazerolle, & Piquero, 2000; Mazerolle & Maahs, 2000; Piquero & Sealock, 2000a, 2000b; Simons, Chen, Stewart, & Broidy, 2003).

When Robert Agnew proposed his version of strain theory, it was rather simple: strain makes you upset and you respond with delinquency (Agnew, 2001). However, because of its simplicity scholars have studied, debated, disagreed, and even agreed on what Robert Agnew (1992) intended in his version general strain theory (Barron, 2004; Broidy, 2001; Capowich et al., 2000; Featherstone & Deflem, 2003; Mazerolle & Maahs, 2000; Piquero & Sealock, 2000a, 2000b; Simons et al., 2003). Agnew contends that traditional strain theory examines positively valued goals and asserts that another ingredient should be added: the avoidance of painful (or negative) situations. Just as individuals' goals can be blocked, so can the ability to avoid undesirable situations or stressful life events. According to Agnew's example, a child might attempt to avoid a bad family situation, might drop out of school as a solution to poor grades, or might even hide from peer rejection. In the Latino community, losing a family member through death, migration, or deportation can be one of the most stressful events in a young person's life because family members are the most influential people in the Latino community (Baer and Schmitz, 2007). Deportation, death of a family member, and dropping out of school also yield levels of frustration as high as those of blocked aspirations or immediate goals. When both pos-

itive blockage and negative avoidance are combined, the potential stress levels can pose the highest rates of delinquency and deviance (Agnew, 2001). Although general strain theory is relatively new, it has already received support from a number of empirical studies which include, but are not limited to, the African American population, the homeless, college students, and urban adolescents (Barron, 2004; Broidy, 2001; Capowich et al., 2000; Mazerolle & Maahs, 2000; Piquero & Sealock, 2000a, 2000b; Simons et al., 2003).

Method

A secondary data analysis was conducted using data from the National Survey of Adolescents (Kilpatrick & Saunders, 1995). The data was collected over a six-month period from January, 1995 to June, 1995. The "original" sample included a national cross-section of N = 3,161 adolescents, ages 12 to17. However, since the original sample did not include enough ethnic minorities, an extra 862 youths were added. The 862 youths were from an over-sampled strata of households in areas designated as central cities by the 1990 U.S. Census Bureau (Crouch, Hanson, Saunders, & Kilpatrick, 2000). The central city over-sample was designed to increase the number of racial/ethnic minority subjects (Crouch et al., 2000). The total sample size of the "original" data set was N = 4,023. Parents in 90.1 % of eligible households completed an interview and 78.9 % of that percentage gave permission for their children to be interviewed (Kilpatrick & Saunders, 1995). Adolescent interviews were completed for 75% of the eligible households (Kilpatrick & Saunders, 1995).

Because our main focus was Latino youth, the sample size was restricted to include only Latino. Assessing the Latino ethnic group was warranted because many studies of general strain theory mostly focus on ethnic groups other than Latino youth (e.g., Barron, 2004; Broidy, 2001; Capowich et al., 2000; Mazerolle & Maahs, 2000; Piquero & Sealock, 2000a, 2000b; Simons et al., 2003). All other ethnic groups comprised of Blacks, Asians, Native Americans, and a general category of "others" were excluded from the sample. The final sample size was N = 390 (12.4%) Latino youth of the original N = 3,136.

*Measures*

The original dataset contains 1,120 variables. Respondents were asked about the prevalence of violence and drug abuse in their schools and communities and about the different types of violence they had witnessed (Kilpatrick & Saunders, 1995). Adolescents were also asked about stressful events, history of sexual assault, physical assault, and harsh physical discipline. Information was gathered on their delinquent behavior as well as delinquent behavior of their friends (Kilpatrick & Saunders, 1995). Other questions included

information on personal and family substance abuse. Parents were asked similar questions including victimization, and whether they discussed personal safety with their child. Finally, demographic information was gathered on both the juvenile and the parent such as age, gender, grade, and marital status (Kilpatrick & Saunders, 1995).

The original dataset contained an abundance of variables that were needed for testing general strain theory and its relationship to Latino delinquency. A "clean-up" was conducted to choose only those variables needed for the study. After the "clean-up" was completed, only remaining variables were those necessary for the testing of strain theory on Latino youths. The predictor variables and the outcome variable were broken down into several distinct categories. The outcome variable was serious delinquency; essentially, the respondents were asked if they have ever committed a motor vehicle theft, general theft, strong armed robbery; have they ever broken and entered; committed a rape; ever attacked someone with intent to maim or kill; and had they ever been involved in a gang fight. The predictor variables were: witnessing violence, being a victim of sexual assault, physical assault, or physically abusive punishment, family and school strain, peer delinquency, negative emotionality (Spohn, 2003; see appendix A), and control variables.

*Control variables*

The study included a total of 10 control variables. The control variables were included in the logistic regression models to ensure that the effects of the theoretical variables were not spurious. For example, age and sex have been strongly related to delinquency and as such had to be included in the models. Employment status, educational attainment, location of residence, and family income has also been found to be strongly related to delinquency. Family variables that might produce confounding effects, but were controlled due to their consistent relation with delinquency, included number of children living in the household, total number of people in the household, marital status, and one or both biological parents living in the household.

*Outcome variable: Serious delinquency*

Serious delinquency was selected as the outcome variable to determine its strength and relation when regressed against the predictor variables. Most studies of general strain theory focus on minor delinquency (Barron, 2004; Broidy, 2001; Capowich et al., 2000; Hay, 2003; Mazerolle & Maahs, 2000; Piquero & Sealock, 2000a, 2000b; Simons et al., 2003). Serious delinquency in this study refers to six of the eight crimes included in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Part I Index Crimes found in the Uniform Crime Reports. Include were arson, murder, aggravated assault, rape,

robbery; burglary, theft, and motor vehicle theft. Questions regarding all categories of the Part I Index Crimes were asked of the participants with the exception of arson and murder. The original data set did not give a reason for the excluding of arson and murder.

*Hypothesis*

With the variables delineated, the research hypothesis may be clarified. The research tested the relationship between general strain theory and delinquency among Latino youths and the strength of this relationship. Factors influencing Latino youth delinquency may include are socio-cultural variables such as familism. Do family variables impact Latino delinquency? Is the impact positive or negative? Do family variables mediate between strain and delinquency for Latino youth? Essentially the hypothesis was as follows:

H1 = There is a relationship between general strain theory and delinquency for Latino youths

*Design and Analytical Tool*

The design of this study is correlational in nature. Correlational studies are also referred to as non-experimental or observational studies (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). This correlational study will simply observe the size and direction of the relationship between the predictor and the outcome variables while holding control variables constant (Shadish et al., 2002). The application of general strain theory to the Latino population was be tested by using logistic regression models. Results allowed for the examination of correlates of Latino delinquency.

Results

*Correlations*

The bivariate correlation matrix for Latino youth is displayed in Table 1. Spearman's correlation was used to determine the size and direction of association between the predictor variables and the outcome variable. Six of the eight predictor variables have a statistically significant bivariate relationship with serious delinquency. They were having witnessed violence, having been physically assaulted, physically abusive punishment, family strain, school strain, and peer delinquency. Each one of them was positively related to serious delin-

quency. They were also related by general strain, i.e., this was a type of strain experienced by Latino youth. Having been "physically assaulted" had the strongest association with serious delinquency (r = .484). "Physically assaulted" has a positive correlation with serious delinquency for Latino youths. The scale of peer delinquency had the next strongest correlation coefficient (r = .466), which was also positively correlated. Having been sexually assaulted did not have a significant association with serious delinquency; however, this lack of association could be due to the skewed distribution of this variable. The variable, "negative emotionality" also did not have a significant correlation with delinquency; but again, its skewed distribution could be contributing to the lack of effect. The control variables that were found to have a significant bivariate relationship with delinquency were location of residence (*r* =.162), age (*r* = .192), and gender (*r* = -.162).

Among predictor variables, the relationship to family strain was closely observed because of the family influence on Latino youth versus White youth. Interestingly, the strongest statistically significant association with family strain was school strain (*r* = .330), followed by peer delinquency (*r* = .290); both were positively related for Latino youth. The strain variables such as sexually assaulted, physically abusive punishment, school strain, and peer delinquency were also found to be statistically significant.

Family strain appeared to be inversely related to marital status (*r* = -.119). Other control variables that were statistically significant and positively related to family strain are location of residence (*r* =.124) and gender (*r* =.123). With the exception of having been sexually assaulted, the relationship between all other predictor variables and serious delinquency were found to be statistically significant, which has been confirmed in previous studies of general strain theory (Agnew, 1992; Barron, 2004; Simons et al., 2003).

Agnew (1992) posited that delinquency was a result of negative emotions brought on by strain; however, negative emotions were not significant for serious delinquency. Bivariate correlations for family strain were also found to be statistically significant for all predictor variables except "negative emotionality." Statistical significance for family strain and predictor variables was expected in the bivariate models because, according to Agnew (1985), family strains were among the most important and had the most impact on juvenile delinquency, and that these types of strains tended to be inter-related to one another.

Table 1.
*Bivariate Correlations: Latinos*

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (1) WV | 1.00 | .184* | .315* | .184* | .274* | .162* | .430* | .045 | .061 |
| (2) SA | | 1.00 | .233* | .212* | .235* | .115* | .183* | .034 | -.013 |
| (3) PA | | | 1.00 | .201* | .284* | .2418 | .300* | .087 | .007 |
| (4) PAP | | | | 1.00 | .198* | .164* | .257* | -.028 | -.126 |
| (5) Family strain | | | | | 1.00 | .330* | .298* | .048 | -.033 |
| (6) School strain | | | | | | 1.00 | .232* | .074 | .098 |
| (7) Peer delinquency | | | | | | | 1.00 | -.033 | .021 |
| (8) Negative emotionality | | | | | | | | 1.00 | .022 |

| Variable | (10) | (11) | (12) | (13) | (14) | (15) | (16) | (17) | (18) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (1) WV | -.006 | -.084 | -.029 | -.032 | -.030 | .109* | .168* | .012 | .316* |
| (2) SA | -.001 | -.084 | -.059 | -.067 | -.079 | .022 | .067 | .188* | .095 |
| (3) PA | .023 | -.016 | -.015 | .053 | .006 | .085 | .200* | -.070 | .484 |
| (4) PAP | -.098 | -.053 | -.040 | .015 | .022 | .072 | .041 | .041 | .195* |
| (5) Family strain | -.013 | -.119* | -.080 | -.061 | -.033 | .124* | -.043 | .123* | .244* |
| (6) School strain | .063 | -.136* | -.143* | -.066 | -.139* | .075 | -.020 | -.085 | .313* |
| (7) Peer delinquency | .029 | -.013 | .049 | .066 | .052 | .000 | .379* | .052 | .466* |
| (8) NE | .112* | .040 | .002 | -.005 | .048 | .030 | .004 | -.021 | .048 |
| (9) More child | .418* | .146* | .136* | .091 | -.012 | -.044 | .056 | -.134* | -.005 |
| (10) People in house | 1.00 | .365* | .323* | .015 | -.103* | -.034 | -.024 | -.074 | .040 |
| (11) Parent's marital status | | 1.00 | .796* | .108* | .087 | -.044 | .044 | .018 | -.061 |
| (12) Other bio in household | | | 1.00 | .120* | .068 | -.037 | .023 | .034 | -.05 |
| (13) Empolyment status | | | | 1.00 | .209* | .019 | .042 | -.012 | .070 |
| (14) Educational attainment | | | | | 1.00 | .017 | -.001 | -.065 | -.028 |
| (15) Location of residence | | | | | | 1.00 | -.014 | -.070 | .162* |
| (16) Age | | | | | | | 1.00 | -.056 | .192* |
| (17) Gender | | | | | | | | 1.00 | -.162* |
| (18) Serious delinquency | | | | | | | | | 1.00 |

WV=witnessed violence, SA=sexually assaulted, PA=physically assaulted, PAP= physically assaulted punishment, NE=negative emotionality, more child=more than one child ages 12-17 living in the household, people in house=number of people living in the household
*p < .05

*Multivariate Regression Models*

Logistic regression models were employed to test general strain theory and its applicability to Latino youth. The simplest way to interpret logistic regression is to observe the exponentiated numeral given in the final column of the tables. The exp (B) column provides the odds ratio, which may be interpreted as one category being so many times as likely as the other category of the predictor variable to result in a positive outcome.

The logistic regression model for Latino youth is displayed in Table 2. Of the eight predictor variables only three were found to be statistically significant with the serious delinquency outcome variable. The largest coefficient among strain variables and serious delinquency for Latino youth was having been physically assaulted (b = 2.28). The exp (B) indicates that Latino youth experiencing a physical assault were almost 10 times as likely to commit serious delinquent offense as

those Latino youths who had not been physically assaulted.

The next strongest predictor for Latino delinquency was school strain (b = .468). Latino youth experiencing school strain were 1.6 times as likely to commit a serious delinquent act, than those Latino youth who had not experienced school strain. Of most interest, negative emotionality was not significant. Individuals that felt a negative emotion were no more likely to commit serious delinquency than those who did not experience a negative emotion. Family strain also did not have an impact on serious delinquency, which is one of the most crucial variables in the model. Other family variables that did not significantly impact Latino youth delinquency were having more than one child in the household, the number of people in the household, marital status of parents, and the presence of one or both biological parents. The

proportion of variance explained by all the variables in the model was 62%.

Essentially, results from the model on Table 2 suggest that the hypothesis can be accepted; there is a relationship between general strain theory and Latino delinquency. However, the extent of this relationship was found to be weak since only two strain variables, physically assaulted and school strain, were found to have a significant impact on serious delinquency. According to the literature on general strain theory, a relationship was to be expected (Agnew, 1992; Barron, 2004; Broidy, 2001; Capowich et al., 2000; Hay, 2003). However, in testing traditional strain theory to Latinos, Perez-McCluskey (2002) indicated that family variables confounded empirical results in support for the theory; in this case, the family variables had no direct impact on serious delinquency for Latino youth.

Table 2.
*Logistic Regression: Predictor variables of serious delinquency (Latinos)*

| Variable | b | SE | exp(B) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Witnessed violence | .136 | .487 | 1.140 |
| Sexually assaulted | -.263 | .686 | 0.768 |
| Physically assaulted | 2.28* | .497 | 9.863 |
| Physically abusive punishment | -.245 | .667 | 0.783 |
| Family strain | .044 | .743 | 1.045 |
| School strain | .459* | .222 | 1.583 |
| Peer deliquency | .468* | .079 | 1.590 |
| Negative emotionality | .035 | .069 | 1.030 |
| More than one child | -.222 | .483 | 0.801 |
| People in household | -.052 | .215 | 0.949 |
| Marital status | .719 | .810 | 2.050 |
| Other bio in household | -1.04 | .741 | 0.352 |
| Employment status | -.438 | .277 | 1.500 |
| Education attainment | -.438 | .277 | 0.645 |
| Location of residence | .425* | .178 | 1.520 |
| Age | -.041 | .155 | 0.960 |
| Gender | -.618* | .495 | 0.198 |
| Constant | -3.251 | | |
| X² | 161.4 | | |
| -2 log likelihood | 154.9 | | |
| Nagelkerke R² | .622 | | |

*p< .05

## Discussion

The results have allowed for the examination of the hypotheses being tested. The hypotheses tested were as follows: there is a relationship between general strain theory and Latino youth. The hypothesis was accepted with caution. Although physical assault and school

strain were found to be significant, all other strain variables were inconclusive. Family strain and family factors also were found to have no significant direct impact on Latino youth. Even though Latino youth suffered from strain and might respond to strains in other negative ways, these Latino youth were less likely to commit delinquent acts due to strain.

The lack of statistical significance between family strain and Latino youth delinquency could indicate that Latino youth may utilize alternative coping mechanisms. Coping mechanisms, other than serious delinquency, were not examined in this study but have been discussed in the limitations. Family control variables were also found to have no statistically significant impact on Latino youth delinquency. For example, no statistical significance was found between Latino youth delinquency and parent's marital status. In addition, for Latino youth, location of residence yielded statically significant results; this may be attributed to the fact that Latino youths in this study lived in urban areas. The statistical significance of Latino's location of residence has been supported by the literature (Cintron, 2006; Cintron, Owens, & Cintron, 2007; Del Pinal & Singer, 1997; Marín & Marín, 1991; Martinez, 2007; Myers et al., 1994; Perez-McCluskey, 2002; Sabogal et al., 1987). Moreover, the United States Census Bureau (2005) has indicated that Latinos tend to live in large metropolitan cities and in urban areas where the crime rate have been found to be much higher than in other areas. The environment in which Latino youth live can contribute to strain, and in turn, explain delinquency.

Parental educational attainment was not statistically significant in the logistic regression model for Latino youth. Bivariate models revealed also yielded no statistical significance for Latino youth. Lower educational attainment for Latino youth has also been supported by the literature and has remained a constant problem among Latino communities (Cintron, 2006; Cintron et al., 2007; Del Pinal & Singer, 1997; Marín & Marín, 1991; Martinez, 2007; Myers et al., 1994; Perez-McCluskey, 2002; Sabogal et al., 1987).

Generally, this study found that even though Latino youth suffer from strain and might handle strain differently, Latino youth are less likely to commit delinquent acts due to the strain. The hypothesis has been supported, but caution must be taken when interpreting the results due to the limited preliminary nature of the findings.

*Implications*

In general, this research contributes to the epistemology of social science, particularly to the knowledge of general strain theory as it relates to Latino youth. As the current research highlights, predictors and outcomes of general strain theory vary by ethnicity. However, much work still needs to be done in the realm of criminology and criminal justice as it relates to Latino youth. Researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and academicians need to refocus their agendas on Latino issues (Cintron, 2006; Cintron et al., 2007; Marín & Marín, 1991; Martinez, 2007; Myers et al., 1994; Perez-McCluskey, 2002). This research shows that the discipline currently lacks the fundamental theoretical knowledge to meet the growing needs of the largest minority group in the country (Cintron, 2006; Cintron et al., 2007; Marín & Marín, 1991; Martinez, 2007; Myers et al., 1994; Perez-McCluskey, 2002).

*Limitations*

Since race was aggregated, it presented a limitation to the study. Villarruel and Walker (2002) noted that it is necessary and valuable to distinguish the development of Latino subgroups such as the Mexican, Guatemalan, Salvadorian, Nicaraguan, Honduran, Colombian, Puerto Rican, and Dominican ancestry, all of whom have their own ethnic identity and cultural traditions. Nevertheless, in this research different Latino groups were not distinguished due to the size of the sample and the use of secondary data. It examined Latino youth as a collective group for the purposes of studying general strain theory, particularly the occurrences of strain within the youth population. Since Latino youth have received insufficient attention in academic literature, the story of Latino youth in criminology is still incomplete (Urbina, 2007). According to Urbina, researchers need to develop datasets that will enable empirical examination of Criminological Theory across Latino youth subgroups to better separate the effects of color (race) and ethnicity (culture) because, after all, the Mexican experience differs vastly from the Puerto Rican experience.

Another limitation that has not been discussed is the testing of strain variables as it relates to impact or magnitude of strain. In addition, it did not test strain variables as they relate to time such as recency, duration, and clustering. These factors have the potential of predisposing a juvenile to delinquency (Agnew, 1992). Magnitude has different meanings depending on the strain being examined. Agnew notes, with respect to goal blockage, magnitude refers to the size of the gap between one's goals and the reality. With respect to the loss of positive stimuli, magnitude refers to the amount that was lost. As for the presentation of noxious stimuli, magnitude refers to the amount of pain and discomfort. Recency suggests that recent events are more consequential than older events and those events more than three months have little effect. Agnew further explains that events of long duration (chronic stressors) have a greater impact on a variety of negative psychological outcomes. Finally, Agnew points out that clustering suggests that events closely clustered in time have a greater effect on negative outcomes. The current study did not take into account strain variables as it is related to time. The lack of incorporating strain variables related to impact and time could pose a limitation because Latino youth might have suffered from the same type of strain of White youths, but the recency, duration, magnitude, and clustering of that event could have been vastly different.

Coping mechanism, other than delinquency, were also not incorporated. Agnew (1992) states there are many other ways to cope with strain that do not include

delinquent or criminal acts, and coping mechanism may also differ by ethnic group. Agnew points out that cognitive, behavioral, and emotional are coping strategies, put forth by general strain theory enable the individuals to deal with strain in a legitimate fashion.

Cognitive coping strategies, according to Agnew (1992), enable individuals to rationalize the stressors in different ways. Firstly, is to minimize the importance of a strain-causing event or circumstance. Secondly, is to maximize the positive aspects of reaching that goal. Essentially, an individual can place less emphasis on a particular strain effect and more emphasis on the positive-valued goal. Thirdly, coping with strain through cognitive, non-delinquent methods is accepting the negative responsibility for the negative outcomes.

Behavioral coping can be observed in an individual who is actively seeking out positive stimuli or trying to escape negative stimuli. Seeking out revenge in a non-criminal manner has also been observed. The third type of coping strategy is emotional coping. In this coping strategy, the individual focuses on removing the negative feelings rather than trying to alter the event itself (Agnew, 1992).

*Recommendations*

There are several recommendations to aid in reducing the amount and different types of strain experienced by Latino youth. A systematic uniform data collection procedure to determine the proportion of Latino youth encounters with the juvenile justice system needs to be developed. The data collection should track the different subgroups within the Latino youth group (e.g., Mexicans, Puerto Ricans). Without consistently-applied, sound data collection, research on policy formulation will remain in a "one size fits all" practice. This practice enables over-representation of Latino youth in the juvenile justice system. Moreover, it contributes to the lack of services in the system for Latino youth delinquents. Further research should focus on longitudinal studies that incorporate both quantitative and qualitative methods for Latino youth. These studies, in some respects, give more insight than relying on quantitative cross-sectional studies. They should experiment with a applying a variety of Criminological Theories to Latino youth.

Agnew (1995) has also suggested the application of general strain theory to various programs despite ethnicity. These programs include, but are not limited to family, school, and peer-based programs. According to Agnew, these programs have been successful. Family-based programs for Latino youth are necessary even though the existing unity or cohesion of family heavily impacts Latino youths' restraint from committing delinquency. These programs are simply designed to teach family members conflict resolution which includes parents and children (Agnew, 1995). There must also be a reciprocal effect if a family-based program is to be effective.

School-based programs are also imperative for Latino youth. They stress concern for relationships between a child and the school and focus on performance, especially academically, because performing to the expectations of the school's policy can be a source of strenuous episodes for a child (Agnew, 1995). Moreover, a consistent finding in criminological research is the influence of peer delinquency (Agnew, 1992; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi, 1969). Due to such findings, peer-base programs are imperative. These programs focus on peer relations and can have the greatest impact on the greatest number of youths (Agnew, 1995) and also need to instruct the adolescents on how to cope with strain, a limitation that was not addressed (Agnew, 1995). Agnew (1995) points out that increased social systems provide behavioral, emotional, and cognitive support.

Agnew (1995) summarized four recommendations from general strain theory that should lead to a decrease in delinquency. These recommendations are universal and therefore are applicable to all ethnic groups. Firstly, reduce the negative relations of youth's social environment, such as delinquent peers. The variable delinquent peer in this was found to be statistically significant for both White and Latino youth. For this reason the social environments of both groups should be closely examined. Secondly, change the way youths respond to their environment and decrease their negative reactions to others. This is especially important because the findings of this study indicated that Latino youths that were physically assaulted were much more likely to commit a serious delinquent act than those Latinos who had not been physically assaulted. Thirdly, increase social support, although the results for study's sample indicated that Latino youth's social support (familism) decreased the likelihood of them committing a serious delinquent act. Yet, the same cannot be generalized about all Latinos. Finally, teach adolescents how to cope with the strain on their own, coping mechanism other then serious delinquency were not considered in this study. However, future studies on general strain theory and Latinos should explore non-delinquent coping mechanisms that may be prevalent in Latino communities (Agnew, 1995).

Summary

General strain theory was examined and its applicability to a sample of Latino youth. While the strain perspective has played an important role in explaining juvenile offending, this research argued that the theory could be limited to certain segments of society. That is, Criminological Theory has not kept pace with national demographic trends, especially the increasing number of Latinos in this country. General strain theory, in particular, appears to lack empirical support for this ethnic group. As a growing segment of the American population, it is becoming increasingly important to consider

the etiology of Latino youth delinquency (Perez-McCluskey, 2002). According to Perez-McClus-key, socio-cultural differences among ethnic groups such as Latinos might influence strain relationships, and as a result, have confounding effects on empirical tests of strain theory. Several scholars have noted that socio-cultural factors among Latinos include, but are not limited to honor, respect, family, brotherhood, and gender roles (Cintron, 2006; Cintron et al., 2007; Marín & Marín, 1991; Martinez, 2007; Myers et al., 1994; Perez-McCluskey). For purposes of this study, the concept of family and family variables were of central concern.

Researchers need to study Latino youth and their subgroups. If strides are not made today in all aspects of the criminal and juvenile justice systems and in criminology, then the current theories of crime and delinquency will continue to lack explanatory knowledge of this complex group. Traditional theories of crime and delinquency need to be tailored, integrated, and modified to address the needs of all marginalized groups. In order to adequately account for minority-related crime, research must incorporate various types of methodological approaches using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Only then can we begin to address the issues surrounding crime and delinquency as they relate to ethnic-minorities. After all, the "one size fits all" policies are no longer applicable to the existing marginal groups.

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Appendix

Description of Negative Emotionality

- Had trouble concentrating or keeping your mind on what you were doing, even when you tried to concentrate?
- Lost interest in activities which usually meant a lot to you?
- Felt you had to stay on guard much of the time?
- Deliberately tried very hard not to think about something that had happen to you?
- Had difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep?
- Stop caring about activities in your life that were important to you?
- Unexpected noises startled you more than usual?
- Kept having unpleasant memories, or seeing them in your mind?
- Had repeated bad dreams or nightmares?
- Went out of the way to avoid certain places or activities which might remind you of something that happened to you in the past?
- Deliberately tried to avoid having any feelings about something that happen to you in the past?
- Felt cut off from other people or found it difficult to feel close to people?
- Could not feel things anymore, or that you had much less emotion than you use to?

- Found your-self suddenly feeling anxious, fearful, or panicky?
- Little things bothered you or a lot could make you angry?
- Had disturbing memories that kept coming into your mind whether you wanted to think of them or not?
- Felt a lot worse than you were in a situation that reminded you of something that happened in the past?
- Found yourself reacting physically to things that reminded you of something that had happen in the past?
- The way you think about or plan for the future has changed by something that happened to you in the past?
- Had a "flashback" - that is, have you had an experience in which you imaged that something that happened in the past was happening all over again?
- Spohn, R. E. (2003). Strain and deviant adaptations: The conditioning role of social and economic factors (Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Iowa, 2003). *Dissertations Abstracts International, 64*, 159.

# Psychological Disorder in Juvenile Offenders and the Impact of Placement

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*Abstract*

This study sought to examine trends in the assessment of juvenile offenders' diagnoses and to identify types of placements and recommendations of mental health services as a result of assessment outcomes in a sample of 400 participants, ages 13-17, from a Southwestern juvenile detention center. Results revealed that race and poverty emerged as predictor variables for experiences of mental health problems and placement. However, no predictive effect for gender was demonstrated for mental health problems and placement. Future research is needed to further investigate impact of gender on placement and mental health problem. Overall, these variables need further clarification on the impact of juvenile mental health status and effective treatment.

Due to failures in meeting the mental health needs of children in primary care, school, child welfare and the larger mental health systems, many mentally ill youth are ending up in the juvenile justice system (Teplin, 2000). Children from minority populations, of low socioeconomic status, and with comorbid (more than one diagnosis) disorders are disproportionately represented among this population of mentally ill juveniles. Although psychologists have participated in the legal system providing expertise in psychological understanding of personality and behavioral assessments, there has been a marked increase in the number of incarcerated youth diagnosed with mental health disorders. This trend has increased the concerns of many state-agency juvenile justice systems, yet there are few empirical studies on the extent of these problems. The inability to meet the needs of underserved juvenile populations has created a disparity of treatment and the need to examine the prevalence of diagnosis and recommendation of youth with mental health issues in the Texas Youth Commission (TYC) appears to be warranted.

Recent research has demonstrated that the majority of youth incarcerated carry with them a mental health diagnosis (Shelton, 2002). National estimates of youth in the juvenile justice system with diagnosable mental health disorders range from 50 to 75 percent with approximately 20 percent having a serious mental health disorder. Incarcerated youth are three times more likely to be evaluated with severe behavioral and psychological disorders than non-incarcerated youth. In addition, various publications have identified that race may pose a potential factor in the diagnosis (Breland-Noble, 2004).

Furthermore, there have been widespread reports documenting African American youth with mental health issues who go untreated. These individuals are being referred to the juvenile justice system at alarming rates while Caucasian youth with similar issues are referred to the mental health system (Breland-Noble, 2004). Consequently, the question of fair practices is raised in reference to the pervasive racial disparity in accurately diagnosing and treating youth of color; moreover, the disparity in type of placement when a juvenile is identified as having a mental disorder. Several studies indicate an exorbitant amount of African Americans with mental health conditions similar to Caucasians as being habitually placed in correctional facilities over residential treatment (Drakeford and Garfinkel, 2000). According to U.S. Surgeon General Satcher, disparate use of services exists not only in the number of treatments provided but also in the quality of mental health care offered to minorities (Daw, 2001).

Another area of interest is the differential diagnoses or appropriate diagnoses among factors of socioeco-

nomic status (i.e. rural, urban, and suburban identified juvenile offenders). In addition to race, juvenile offenders from lower socioeconomic communities (i.e. rural and urban) tend to be diagnosed with substance or behavioral related disorders, relegating them to non-psychiatric, incarceration oriented placements and essentially depriving them of the appropriate services needed (Abram, Telpin, McClelland, and Dulcan, 2003; Breland-Noble, 2004). There is a lack of understanding surrounding the implications of race and socio-cultural issues associated with living in lower socioeconomic environments. For example, the continual need for a youth to remain in fight or flight mode as a means of self preservation (Breland-Noble, 2004). The inability to appreciate such experiences perpetuates an already prevalent trend of misdiagnosis, inappropriate comorbid diagnostic considerations and the overall potential for treatment.

To adequately understand the issue of accurate diagnoses and use of mental health services for juvenile offenders, some concepts must be discussed. Firstly, cultural mistrust should be raised and identified as a possible factor impacting the use of mental health services. A number of African American scholars (Gillman, Porter, Rousseau, Showalter, and King, 1993; Herz, 2001) have argued that the phenomenon of racism hinders African Americans ability to trust oppressive systems and individuals working within such systems. Secondly, stereotyped attribution factors can also contribute to diagnosis outcomes. African American youth are associated with negative internal characteristics (no remorse) while Caucasian youth are associated with negative external characteristics (negative peers) (Herz, 2001). This dynamic suggests that one group is deserving of incarceration while the other is worthy of rehabilitation and/or treatment. Similarly, other minority groups such as female juvenile offenders are also associated with negative internal characteristics. This negative view has historical connotations dating as far back as the diagnosis of hysteria and its relationship to a woman's nature, thus depicting the perception of women as untreatable (Gillman et al., 1993). In fact, recent study (Moracco et al., 2004) indicated females have higher rates of mental health problems and receive fewer mental health services than males. Essentially, the needs of minority groups are not being met within the juvenile justice system.

Disparity in treatment has persuaded the Texas Legislators to make considerable efforts to understand the impact of mental health issues on juvenile offenders entering the system. The recent formation of the Texas Juvenile Crime Prevention Center (Texas JCPC) and the new Clinical Adolescent Psychology program at Prairie View A & M University demonstrates the critical need for research addressing the mental health concerns for Texas youths. There is a need to develop a full understanding of the extent and nature of mental health problems of juveniles in the Texas system. To this end, the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC) decided to utilize a uniform mental health screening assessment, the Common Application for Placement of Children in Residential Care (CAPCRC) as the initial screening tool to determine if further mental health assessment is needed.

It becomes imperative that the evaluation of the assessment process and diagnosis outcomes be examined with respect to juvenile mental health evaluation (Breland-Noble, 2004; Herz, 2001). Such a review is consistent with past research on competency and examiner biases. Research has identified major concerns including the failure to recognize socio-cultural factors that contribute to mental health diagnoses.

The profound racial disparity in the psychological treatment of juvenile offenders necessitated this study. The examination of trends in the assessment of juvenile offenders' diagnoses, identification of types of placements and recommendations of mental health services is a timely one. This study explored the prevalence of diagnoses based on socio-cultural economic factors and identified relevant issues within placement and clinical services rendered. Numerous hypotheses for this study are as follows.

## Hypothesis

Hypothesis I: It is predicted that African American and Hispanic youth will receive more severe behavioral related diagnoses than Caucasian youth.

Hypothesis II: It is predicted that females will have higher rates of mental health problems compared to males.

Hypothesis III: It is predicted that females will receive fewer mental health services and more punitive related placement than males.

Hypothesis IV: It is predicted that youth from inner-city and rural communities will have higher rates of mental health problems compared to youth from higher Socioeconomic Status (SES) communities.

Hypothesis V: It is predicted that youth from lower SES communities will receive fewer mental health services and more punitive related placement than youth from higher socioeconomic status communities.

## Method

*Target Population*

Analyses for this study were conducted with a sample population from the Texas Youth Commission, Marlin facility. Participants were randomly selected from a data file of 3,000 youth. The sample for this study consisted of 400 juveniles, between the ages of 13 and 17 years-old, varying in ethnic background (African American, Hispanic, Caucasian, and other) who have been committed to a Texas Youth Commission facility with a minimum length of stay of nine months. The population consisted of 258 males and 142 females. Demographics

of the sample for the present study consisted of 108 White youth (27.0%), 130 African American youth (32.5%), 155 Hispanic youth (38.8%), and seven Other (1.8% including Indian). Participants' birth city consisted of: 61 from Houston (15.3%), 16 from Austin (4.0%), 36 from Dallas (9.0%), 35 from San Antonio (8.8%), and 245 from other cities outside of major metropolitan areas (61.3%). Breakdown of other cities by race consisted of 76 White youth (31.3%), 75 African American youth (30.9%), 86 Hispanic youth (35.4%), and six Other (1.6% including Indian).

*Procedures*

Quantitative analysis was proposed in evaluating psychological statuses among our target population. Common Application intake assessments were obtained

from TYC admission at the Marlin facility in Marlin, Texas. The data obtained did not reveal any significant identifying markers of the participants and thus, confidentiality was maintained. General TYC offender data included basic mental health information on age, sex, birth city, mental health status, case disposition, and mental illness characterization.

Results

The data analysis consisted of descriptive, Chi-square, ANOVA, and regression obtained with use of Common Application to assess the hypotheses. Descriptive information on socioeconomic level is presented first. Next, results of analyses testing the hypotheses are presented.

Table 1.
*Mental Health Problems Experienced by Race (N=331)*
Mental Health * Race Crosstabulation

| Mental Health Problems Experienced | | | White | Black | Spanish | Other | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | Count | 72 | 81 | 94 | 2 | 249 |
| | | % with mental health | 28.9% | 32.5% | 37.8% | .8% | 100% |
| | No | Count | 17 | 26 | 35 | 5 | 81 |
| | | % with mental health | 21.0% | 32.1% | 43.2% | 3.7% | 100% |
| Total | | Count | 89 | 107 | 130 | 5 | 331 |
| | | % of Total | 26.9% | 32.3% | 39.3% | 1.5% | 100% |

Table 2.
*Placement of youth with Mental Health Problems by Sex (N=330)*
Sex by Disposition of a Referral by Mental Health Crosstabulation

| Mental Health Problems Experienced | | | | AP | AT | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | Sex | Male | Count | 24 | 86 | 160 |
| | | | % Sex | 15.0% | 53.8% | |
| | | Female | Count | 17 | 41 | 89 |
| | | | % Sex | 19.1% | 46.1% | |
| | Total | | Count | 41 | 127 | 249 |
| No | Sex | Male | Count | 11 | 22 | 53 |
| | | | % Sex | 20.8% | 41.5% | 100.0% |
| | | Female | Count | 8 | 12 | 28 |
| | | | % Sex | 28.6% | 42.9% | |
| | Total | | Count | 19 | 34 | 81 |

Note: AP = Adjudicated to Probation and AT = Adjudicated to TYC.

*Poverty description*

To determine socioeconomic status, economic characteristics for participants' birth city were identified and compared to the national average poverty level as reported by 2000 U.S. Census Bureau. Overall, participants' city of birth characteristic for poverty was used in the study to determine their SES compared to the aver-

age poverty level. The national average poverty level for families in the U.S. is 13.6%. Three of the four major cities, including rural areas, identified within the study had higher poverty levels than the national average of 13.6%. Thus, participants in this sample were likely to come from impoverished environments. This measure of SES was determined from indentified measure of economic markers as determined by state eco-

nomic statistics. We examine theoretical components of poverty by city.

Socioeconomic status demographic characteristics of this sample are presented in Figure 1. Participant's birth city poverty rates in this sample consisted of 36 youth from Dallas which has the lowest poverty rates, 17 youth from Austin which has moderate level of poverty, 34 youth from San Antonio which has high level of poverty, and 306 youth from Houston and rural areas which has extremely high levels of poverty.
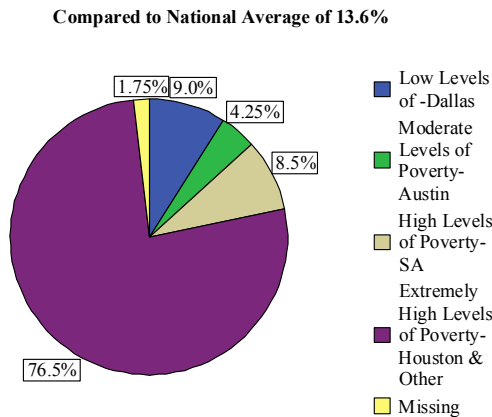
**Compared to National Average of 13.6%**



*Figure 1.* Socioeconomic characteristics

*Hypothesis I.*

Crosstabulations were computed to examine mental health problems experienced among race. These analyses revealed that out of the 249 who experienced mental health problems, 72 are White (28.9%), 81 are African American (32.5%), and 94 are Hispanic (37.8%). African Americans and Hispanic youth experience more mental health problems than White youth. Mental health characteristics of this sample are presented in Figure 2.
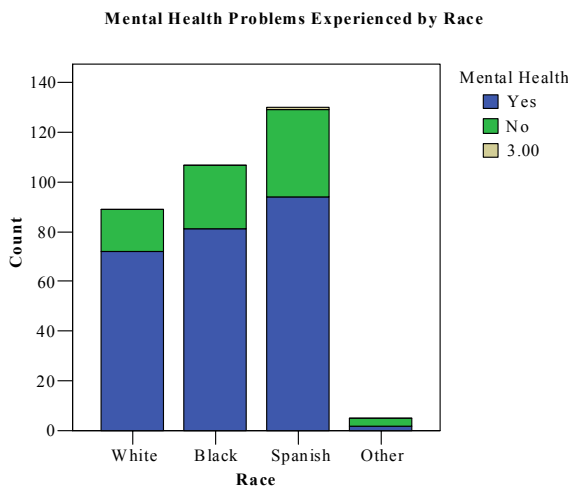
**Mental Health Problems Experienced by Race**



*Figure 2.* Mental health problems by race

Regression analyses were also conducted to determine how demographic variables impact mental health. Only variables identified in the model that produce an F statistic significant at the retention level are discussed. In this way, the best regression equation is produced for mental health variables without substantially increasing the mean square error in order to increase $R^2$ (Howell, 1987). Variables of interest entered into the regression equation for predicting mental health scores were sex, race, and poverty. A linear regression analysis revealed that race was a highly significant predictor of mental health scores ($\beta = .06$, $p = .028$), accounting for 20% of the variance in youth experiencing mental health problems. Tukey's post hoc test reveals significant differences between Hispanic and White youth. Therefore, the hypothesis that minority youth will receive more behavioral related diagnoses than White youth was supported.

*Hypothesis II*

Crosstabulations were computed to examine mental health problems experienced between males and females. The analyses revealed that out of the 214 male youth 74.8% and 76.1% female youth ($n = 89$) experienced mental health problems. The result indicated that Female youth experience more mental health problems than male youth. Mental health characteristics of this sample are presented in Figure 3. Therefore, the hypothesis that female youth will receive more behavioral related diagnoses than male youth was also supported.

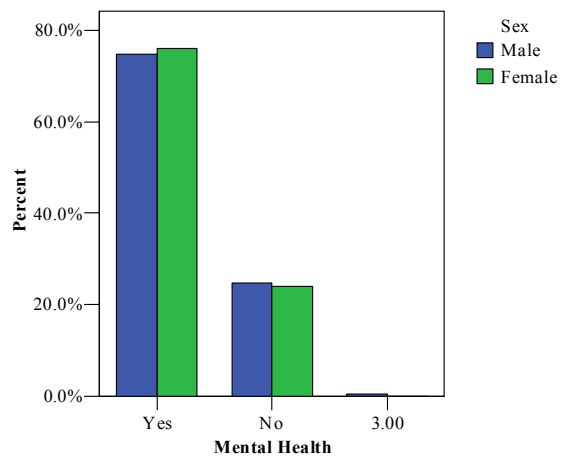**Characteristics of Mental Health Problems Experienced by Sex**



*Figure 3.* Mental health problems by sex

*Hypothesis III*

Crosstabulations were computed to examine if females with mental health problems receive more punitive related placement than males. For this study dispo-

sition (AP=Adjudicated to Probation and AT=Adjudicated to TYC) was used to measure punitive placement. These analyses revealed that out of the 249 youth who experienced mental health problems 19.1% of females compared to 15% of males were adjudicated to probation. Youth adjudicated to TYC revealed that 46.1% were females while 53.8% were males. Female youth who experience mental health problems were not likely to receive more punitive related placement than male youth. Therefore, the hypothesis that female youth will receive more punitive related placement than male youth was not supported.

*Hypothesis IV*

Crosstabulations were computed to examine youth living in poverty experience more mental health problems than youth from higher socioeconomic status. These analyses revealed that out of the 30 youth who live in low levels of poverty 20 (66.7%) experience mental health problems and out of the 13 youth who live in moderate levels of poverty 10 (76.9%) experience mental health problems. It also revealed that out of the 29 youth who live in high levels of poverty 21 (72.4%) experience mental health problems and out of the 254 youth who live in extremely high levels of poverty 76.4% (n = 194) experience mental health problems. Youth living in higher levels of poverty experience more mental health problems than youth from higher socioeconomic status. Therefore, the hypothesis that youth from inner-city and rural communities will have higher rates of mental health problems compared to youth from higher socioeconomic status communities was supported. However, a major limitation may be the lack of identified income levels within families as variables to measure SES within this research. In addition, limitation of this research is the possibility of correlated mediating variables.

*Hypothesis V*

Crosstabulations were computed to examine whether youth living in poverty received more punitive related placement than youth from higher socioeconomic status communities. Again, for this study disposition (AP=Adjudicated to Probation and AT=Adjudicated to TYC) was used to measure punitive placement. These analyses revealed that out of the 393 youth 36 youth lived in low levels of poverty and 25 (13.7%) were adjudicated to probation or TYC, of 17 youth who lived in moderate levels of poverty 10 (76.9%) were adjudicated to probation or TYC. Also, of the 34 youth who lived in high levels of poverty 19 (11.5%) were adjudicated to probation or TYC, and finally, of the 306 youth who lived in extreme poverty 67.4% (265) were adjudicated to probation or TYC. Youth living in higher levels of poverty are likely to receive more punitive related placement than youth from higher socioeconomic status. Therefore, the

hypothesis that youth from lower socioeconomic status communities will receive more punitive related placement than youth from higher socioeconomic status communities was supported. The cross-sectional design and single source data are limitations of this research.

Furthermore, regression analyses were conducted to determine how demographic variables impact placement. Only variables identified in the model that produce an F statistic significant at the retention level are discussed. Referrals were regressed on race, disposition of referral, gender, poverty and community. These five predictors accounted for over three fourths of the variance in referrals ($R^2$ = .79), which was highly significant, $F$ (5,385) = 9.8, p=.000. Race ($\beta$ =.79, $p$=.011), gender ($\beta$ =.57, $p$=.045), and community ($\beta$ =.75, $p$=.000) demonstrated significant effects on the referrals of youth.

Finally, ANOVA was conducted. The 155 participants in the Hispanic group had an average number of referrals of 9.8 (SD = 6.6); the 129 participants in the African American group had an average referral of 9.0 times (SD = 4.9); and the 107 participants in the White group had a mean of 7.7 (SD = 3.9). The effect of race was highly significant, $F$ (4,393) = 2.94, $p$=.021. Therefore, the hypothesis that youth from lower socioeconomic status communities will receive more punitive related placement than youth from higher socioeconomic status communities was supported. This suggests that individuals from lower class status continue to receive harsher penalties and fewer interventions than their higher economic counterparts.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent that race, gender and socioeconomic status effected mental health issues and placement of youth in juvenile justice system. The present results suggest that race and poverty play a greater role than gender on youth's experience with mental health problems and placement. These results support previous findings (Herz, 2001; Breland-Noble, 2004) that race and poverty account for rates of mental health and placement problems. There was a significant difference in levels of mental health problems experienced and placement when the sample was examined according to race and poverty. Race predicted mental health problems for Hispanic youth. Race, gender, and socioeconomic status predicted placement for youth from higher levels of poverty than youth from lower levels of poverty. Overall, Hispanic youth were associated with increased mental health problems and punitive related placement.

Issues warrant future research on race and poverty related factors with regards to mental health treatment of youth within TYC. Consistent with our understanding of challenges within the juvenile justice system and mental health issues, race and poverty had stronger impact on treatment and placement. This suggests that

we should not focus solely on factors related to incarceration but should focus on the quality of mental health services and recidivism rates. As noted earlier, issues associated with race and SES was due to the lack of available quality care because of the barriers minorities face as a result of cultural cost and stigmatization (Daw, 2001). The association among referral, race, gender and community factors further strengthens this hypothesis. These interactions may be influential in the development of initiatives that impact prevention within particular communities where mental health issues remain challenging. The fact that different models of the relationship between placement and mental health emerged in this study suggest the need to explore the various aspects of how culturally specific prevention programming and intervention may impact mental health and placement separately. This finding is consistent with that of Daw; in that, the lack of culturally centered mental health services is the leading cause of higher rates of incarceration and mortality in minority populations.

Regression analyses suggests that it is not only the impact of race but the extent that culture and socialization effect youth's participation in juvenile justice system. It is clear that socioeconomic factors have a direct relationship to cultural socialization and affordable opportunities that could prevent youth from participating in juvenile justice system. For instance, a major limitation may be the lack of identified income levels within families as variables to measure SES within this research. Another limitation of this research is the possibility of correlated mediating variables. The cross-sectional design and single source data are additional limitations of this research. These factors could influence the willingness of youth participation in crime preventive activities tied to social, political, and economic factors of their place of origin. The race differences noted in the level of participation provide support for this interpretation. The impact of culturally specific prevention and mental health care services should be examined when we address the issue of race in juvenile justice system.

These data should be interpreted with caution. First, data received was not self-reported and that translation of data set could affect true meaning of the results. In addition, data received from TYC did not allow for specific indicators of treatment placement. For purposes of this study, types of mental health treatment were not identified but it has been reported that all youth participate in social-milieu treatment modality. This suggests that "one size fits all" approach is the preferred method of treatment instead of individualized treatment plans. This may be a reflection of limited resources made available to the juvenile justice system when dealing with issues of mental health and prevention.

There are some limitations associated with this current study such as its poverty characteristics and measure of SES. For instance, a major limitation may be the lack of identified income levels within families as vari-

ables to measure SES within this research. Another limitation of this research is the possibility of correlated mediating variables. The cross-sectional design and single source data are additional limitations of this research.

One of the major barriers to treatment is the lack of funding. Funding issues are related to inadequate funding initiatives, stringent eligibility criteria, and competition among different types of agencies (i.e., mental health, child welfare and juvenile justice) who all have similar interests in crime prevention (Kamradt, 2000). Future research should focus on increasing specific types of prevention tailored to particular communities that are designed to meet that community's mental health needs of the youth. An examination of this issue may allow us to understand how confronting community and culturally specific intervention and mental health services may serve to reduce youth participation in juvenile justice system. In addition, gender-related and poverty-related mental health care services within TYC should be explored further.

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