To the Graduate Council:

     I am submitting a thesis written by Leonce B. Crump Jr entitled, How Teachers Perceive the "School Violence Issue." I have examined the final copy of this thesis and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science with a major in Criminal Justice.

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We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

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HOW TEACHERS PERCEIVE THE "SCHOOL VIOLENCE ISSUE"

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science Degree

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Leonce B. Crump Jr

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my wife Breanna and our daughter Eden who both sacrificed hours of time with me to allow me to focus on and finish this work. Breanna especially, for her constant encouragement throughout this entire process.

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ABSTRACT:

The propensity to overestimate statistics, underestimate safety, and dramatically report crime is clearly seen in the issue of school violence. Violent crime in schools is rare, however, over publicized (Baily, Carona, Mebane, & Snell, 2002). Nonetheless any evidence of it arouses fear in teachers, students, and parents (Toby, 1983; Dworkin, Haney & Telschow, 1988; May, 1999; Smith & Smith, 2006). Since the recent exposure and coverage of school shootings, Americans seem to be gripped by fear over this issue (Burns & Crawford, 1999). This fear, in conjunction with a lack of clear communication on the part of the school system and administrators, has led to knee jerk reactions in the realm of policy and student management.

This research sought to filter through the media montages and assumed information on a much debated subject. Specifically, it explored the thoughts and impressions of school violence from the perspective of teachers. Interestingly, though it would be assumed that teachers, on a macro level, would face severe fear and anxiety related to school violence, this research discovered that most have no real fear of violence, particularly in their own schools. It is often viewed as an issue "out there," but teachers do not feel responsible for addressing the problem directly.

The findings of this research indicate that teachers perceive that school violence is becoming "worse" and that their students are capable of violence even in the absence of actual violence in their schools. In addition, it has been

indicated that respondents who were more likely to perceive school violence as a problem in general were more likely to perceive school violence as a problem in their schools and were more apt to fear violence in their schools than were teachers who thought school violence throughout the U.S. was not an overly serious problem. The scale data does demonstrate though that most teachers, on average, were unafraid, but held an interesting contradiction in that there was a strong push for policy to address an issue that is not overly prevalent in their schools.

Media Consumption and the sensationalization of school violence seemingly played an interesting and unexpected role in the respondents' perceptions of school violence in that respondents who believed that the media sensationalizes school violence were significantly more apt to perceive school violence was a problem in general and were more likely to fear violence in their own schools. Thus, teachers who appear to have a more "realistic" view of school violence who are less affected by media sensationalism are, in fact, less fearful of school violence. Interestingly, however, the amount of time watching television was not associated with endorsing media sensationalism. Media consumption had an important effect but not in the expected direction. Interestingly teachers who watched less television daily were significantly more apt to fear school violence. As such, it appears that while acceptance of sensationalistic views of school violence is important when attempting to understand school violence, the overall amount of television consumed is even

more important.

The attention and focus of the American public, policy makers, and the American teacher, has too often turned to school violence. Although this is an important issue, it is not nearly as pressing as inadequate funding, deteriorating facilities, and an educational system that continues to produce fewer and fewer students prepared to move on to college with the average American ninth grader having less than a 40 percent likelihood of enrolling in any college, and in a country where our educational achievement is quickly becoming inferior to most other industrial and developed countries (Kingsbury, 2006).

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INTRODUCTION:

Headlines over the last several years have suggested that school violence is out of control, and on the rise (Baily, Carona, Mebane, & Snell, 2002; Fessel, May, & Means, 2004). The media has assisted in creating an atmosphere of fear among America's students, parents, and school officials (Baily, Carona, Mebane, & Snell, 2002). Measures that have been taken to ensure the safety of those in the school environment have contributed to this fear (Salgado, 2005). Also, installing of programs such as zero tolerance, putting metal detectors in urban schools, and hiring officers to monitor the schools have all been linked to impeding the learning process (Salgado, 2005). Zero tolerance has empowered the school districts to automatically enforce severe punishment in disciplining students, even in the event of minor offenses. Metal detectors, resource officers, and violence policies, however, contribute to an atmosphere of fear (Toby, 1983; May, 1999; Thompkins, 2000). When students arrive at schools that resemble prisons, it also may facilitate anti-social behavior.

There have been several attempts to explain the supposed rise in school deviance and violence. Some scholars have attributed it to the rise in criminality and deviance as a social phenomenon (Thompkins, 2000), while others attribute it to the popular culture, including music, movies, and the internet (Salgado, 2005). In order to more clearly understand the nature of today's focus on juvenile delinquency, and criminality in schools, it is necessary to understand the historical context.

CHAPTER ONE:

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historical Context

Contrary to popular belief, the concept of juvenile delinquency is a

relatively modern legal invention, tied to the passage of the first juvenile court in

1899 in Illinois (Bridges, Crutchfield, and Weis, 1996). It was through the child-

saving movement in the late 1800's that the modern juvenile justice system

emerged in the United States (Platt, 1969). The "child-savers," who were

responsible for creating a new legal institution for penalizing children and

creating correctional facilities to detain "delinquent" youth, were crucial to the

inception of this movement. This system, theoretically, was created to rehabilitate

delinquent youth (Platt, 1969). Today this same system is in place to control and

punish those youth deemed anti-social, violent, and delinquent.

In the early 1950's there was also a rise in the attention given to juvenile

delinquency. In the midst of "Leave it to Beaver," apple pie, and baseball, a new

youth movement began which included a new form of music: rock and roll.

Broken families and absent working mothers also were thought to contribute to a

growth in youth delinquency (Gilbert, 1987). In addition "racy" comics, films, and

other entertainment mediums geared at youth were thought to have "misshaped"

an entire generation of youth (Gilbert, 1987). Although media outlets were

considered partially responsible for the suspected rise in juvenile delinquency of

the time, they also were responsible for spreading the mania surrounding this

idea. Radio, television specials, magazines, and newspapers all dramatized juvenile crime. Unmanageable and unruly youths were often the focus of these films. Movies like the "Wild Ones" and "Rebel without a Cause," accentuated youth rebellion and juvenile angst (Osgerby, 2003).

Today, youth crime and delinquent behavior also often seem out of control and unmanageable. In this context, juvenile delinquency is increasingly associated with school violence.

An Atmosphere of Fear

Fear of crime, in general, has emerged as a serious social issue (Liska, Lawrence, & Sanchirico, 1982; Burns & Crawford, 1999). Over the last several years there have been many surveys (Harris, Gallop, National Opinion Research Center, and the National Crime Survey, 2004) that report many Americans fear criminal victimization (Liska, Lawrence, and Sanchirico, 1982). This fear of crime has been found to affect the daily routine of individuals, and creates stress and anxiety in everyday situations (Reynolds & Byth, 1976). Ironically, however, American's fear of crime is disproportionate to the rate at which crime occurs. A recent content analysis found that despite only a 1% increase in crime from 1979-1982, media coverage of crime increased by 55% and coverage of homicide rose 473% (Baily, Carona, Mebane, & Snell, 2002); Likewise, people disproportionately fear personal victimization over property crime, although they are more likely to suffer the latter (Sacco, 1995). The result of this fear varies, but in general, it has gone from an individual emotion to mass hysteria which has

eventually resulted in policy changes.

The fear of crime has been empirically evaluated along several important lines of distinction. Women and the elderly fear crime the most, but are the least likely to be victimized (Sacco, 1995). Data over the last 20 years has shown that the elderly are less likely to be victimized than a young person (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992). It has also been found that whites fear crime at a higher rate than do non-whites or minorities, but minorities have the greatest risk of being victims of violence (Madriz, 1997). Interestingly, it has also been found that the unmarried are more likely to be victims than their married counterparts (Joseph, 1997).

There is little doubt that, generally speaking, crime has a greater impact on elderly people, and it can have significant effects on their quality of life (Pain, 1995). This issue has been described as a serious problem, wrought with psychological, physical, and financial consequences (Joseph, 1997).The paradox of this issue is that the risk of crime for the elderly and the fear of crime are disproportionate. In the Islington Crime Survey, only 15% of those who reported being victims of violence were over the age of 45 (Pain, 1995). One reason explored for this heightened concern of victimization is the low social status and insecurity of the elderly in western society (Maxfield, 1987). It is also common to find among most research that elderly women report considerably more fear than elderly men, gender seemingly the strongest predictor of fear of crime in old age (Jones et al. 1986; Pain, 1995). It is this level of perceived vulnerability that

leads to this intense fear experienced by late middle to elderly aged individuals (Joseph, 1997).

Perception is also a significant factor in how women view their risk of being victims of violence and stranger violence. Perception of the typical victim, the typical criminal, and the "violent America's" leads to an unnecessary, and unexplainable level of fear among women, particularly white women (Madriz, 1997).

A recent study sought to empirically evaluate this issue, using interviews and focus groups, with a sample of 140 women (Madriz, 1997). The argument presented was that women's fear of crime is exacerbated by stereotypical images of criminals and victims. The dominant perception of criminals was found to be unknown minority males, while the prevalent idea of a victim is an innocent, defenseless, middle-class white woman (Madriz, 1997). These representations reflect attitudes so embedded in tradition that they seem natural (Reiman, 1995), and they affect women's and men's lives in various ways: teaching what crimes to fear, where and when to be afraid, who is dangerous, and who is safe. This modality is prevalent in the fear of school violence when, who is to be feared, what demographic of student to fear and why you should fear them, have already been pre-established and accepted by those who it could possibly affect. Although the idea of a public place and the lurking stranger is accepted as the ideal situation to facilitate a violent act, research shows that most violence against women is intimate, and most often occurs in private.

(Madriz, 1997). If there is anything to fear it is not being violently attacked in the classroom of an urban school, but more likely a suburban home.

Feminist ideology finds that fear of crime is one of the most oppressive and deceitful sources of informal social control of women (Madriz, 1997). Some have even argued that women have been socialized into fear of public space, a fear of strangers, and a fear of men (Sacco, 1990). These popular representations associated with safe and dangerous situations, harmless and menacing individuals, and "good" and "bad" victims reinforce overlapping hierarchies of power, amplifying distances among different groups and severely limiting women's daily activities (Madriz, 1997).

Although the sample in this study was fairly evenly distributed to represent Black, Latina, and White, it was found that even the non-white women most prevalently pictured a criminal as minority, and to be most feared (Madriz, 1997). This was found regardless of socioeconomic background.

The news media is a vital part of the process by which individual, private, experiences with crime are transformed into public issues (Sacco, 1995). The ways in which the news media collect, sort, and contextualize crime reports help to shape public consciousness about the conditions of crime, what kinds of problems they represent and, by implication, how they should be resolved (Burns & Crawford, 1999; Sacco, 1995). The absence in news media of non-white victims influences the fear of crime in several ways (Madriz, 1997). In this particular study, as well as others, white women are found to clearly be more

fearful of crime than non-white. This idea of white women being the ideal victim perpetuates the idea of "white womanhood" and the need to protect it (Madriz, 1997). The reaction that crime reporting receives creates a cyclical interaction between the media and the public. The greater the reporting, the more intense the reaction, which in turn leads to more coverage. It is estimated that the percentage of total news that is dedicated to crime reporting is 25 percent (Burns & Crawford, 1999; Sacco, 1995).

Public issues often are distorted when individual experiences are reported and understood as exemplifying a larger social problem. Stories that are reported are often done in dramatic fashion, using examples that typify the problem. Reporters emphasize support for their assertions by relying on "experts" who supposedly represent a consensus on the issue and the scope of its seriousness (Burns & Crawford, 1999; Sacco, 1995). School violence is a perfect example of this process. Retell the story of Columbine (high school shooting) for weeks, add to it a similar incident (Pennsylvania), and then overload the broadcast with interviews from concerned faculty, scared parents, and expert panels advising how to address the issue. Before we know it an epidemic has been "created," regardless of whether or not the particular problem is wide spread from a statistical point of view.

There seems to be a pattern emerging of media coverage dramatically reporting school violence. Though data says otherwise, recent exposure and coverage of school shootings seem to be gripping Americans with fear over this

issue (Burns & Crawford, 1999); however, this fear does not exist in isolation. Consider, for example, the media attention given to some of the most visible incidents of school violence such as Columbine High School. Two students calling themselves The Trench Coat Mafia, opened fire killing a teacher and 12 classmates before killing themselves (Burns & Crawford, 1999). This incident ignited a barrage of public fear, outrage, and concern for the "state" of the modern school system. President Clinton was quoted as saying that "the changing culture" has "desensitized our children to violence," (Burns & Crawford, 1999). Following this incident, movies were made (Bowling for Columbine), media coverage of "school violence" increased, and an atmosphere of panic was created.

Springfield, Oregon, 1998, 15 year old Kip Kinkel had just been arrested the previous day for having a gun at school (Timeline of School Shootings). The police would later find both of his parents at home dead. The New York Times coverage of this incident, which ran on the front page of the paper for three consecutive days (Burns & Crawford, 1999), is a clear example of this media frenzy. Daytime television programming provided continuous coverage of the shooting while funerals for the victims were broadcast live on the Internet, radio, and closed circuit television (McFadden, 1998; Cart, 1998). With this type of coverage, it should come as no surprise that a 1998 nationwide study of adults found that 75% of them were very seriously concerned about school violence and school shootings, and another 15 % were somewhat concerned (Shell Oil

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Company, 1998).

Despite the fear of school violence, is criminal behavior in schools a serious social problem? Is there truly a sudden threat to the safety of students in the school setting or has this all been media invention? Ninety percent of children under the age of twelve and 70% of children age twelve to seventeen are killed by adults, not children at school (Males, 1998). When one considers that more children are killed in two days of domestic violence than were killed in all recent, high-profile school shootings, the panic seems ridiculous (Males, 1998). On the day of a highly publicized school shooting in Arkansas, a California mother was arrested for suffocating her three children with duct tape. A few days after a Kentucky school shooting, three West Virginian parents were arrested for burning down their house, deliberately killing five children. The day after the Oregon school shooting, an Arleta, Canada mother was arrested for murdering her two children and burying them in a national forest (Males, 1998). A recent study suggests that 872,000 children were victims of abuse in the U.S. in 2004; 18% were cases of physical abuse, with 1,500 resulting in the fatality of the child (Hopper, 2004). Likewise, what was found is that 79% of the perpetrators were parents, 7% other relatives, and 4% unmarried partners of the child's parent (Hopper, 2004).

This focus on school violence, and juvenile violence, in general, could be perceived as cultural avoidance of interfamilial abuse of children. If the majority of children are losing their lives at the hands of adults, who are often their

parents or parental figures, then it seems more coverage should be given that issue. During the 1998-99 school year there was a one-in-two-million chance of being killed at school (Baily, Carona, Mebane, & Snell, 2002), yet 71% of respondents in an NBC/Wall Street Journal poll felt that a school shooting in their community was likely. In addition, despite a 40% decline in violent deaths in schools, respondents to a USA today poll in 1999 felt less safe than in 1998 (Baily, Carona, Mebane, & Snell, 2002). In general, then, the data clearly demonstrate that fatalities associated with school violence are rare. As a society then, we are witnessing a tragic misdirection of attention and resources, as we overreact to school violence, while ignoring other serious threats to children such as abuse by parents and parental figures (Donahue, 1998).

With each shooting, however, concern and fear intensify. Highly publicized shootings in Colorado, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Mississippi, Alaska, and Tennessee, continue to draw attention to school violence (Baily, Carona, Mebane, & Snell, 2002). Recently there has been another media onslaught of images, interviews, and glaring questions about the safety of our schools witnessed in the aftermath of incidents in Bailey, Colorado; Cazeniovia, Wisconsin; and Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. These incidences, and subsequent media attention, continue to cause great fear among parents, students, and educators.

The Gender Question

One issue that has received little attention in research or media coverage of school violence is the gendered nature of these sensationalized, violent acts. Recent research conducted from a feminist perspective has found that media coverage severely discounts, or in most cases completely eliminates, the role of masculinity, bullying, and male violence against girls and women (Danner & Carmody, 2001).

Upon examining the details of seven highly publicized school shootings (Pearl, Mississippi; West Paducah, Kentucky; Stamps, Arkansas; Jonesboro, Arkansas; Fayetteville, Tennessee; Littleton, Colorado; and Conyers, Georgia) Danner & Carmody, (2001) found that the shootings resulted in the deaths of 13 female and 9 male students as well as one female and one male teacher. They also found that there were 32 injuries to female students and 24 to male students, with two female teachers being injured as well. Statistically, 100 percent of the offenders were male and 59 percent of the victims were female (Danner & Carmody, 2001).

The gendered nature of school violence has several implications. First, sex is represented disproportionately among assailants and victims. The distinct majority of victims among teachers and students are female. Second, when violence is perpetrated by low-status males against high-status males or random victims, it suggests a response to masculinity challenges such a bullying. An example of this can be found in the Columbine case, in which the assailants

focused on athletes who they felt had demeaned or excluded them. Third, when violence is perpetrated by either high or low-status males against current, former or desired girlfriends or random females, it is an assertion of masculine superiority in the subordination of female autonomy; this display being one driven by power and a desire to dominate, having whatever it is that you feel you can take (Danner & Carmody, 2001). How then could this issue have been overlooked by the media as well as other researchers? The relative absence of attention to the gendered nature of school violence encourages incomplete explanations and ineffective policies (Danner & Carmody, 2001). This aspect of the school violence issue is just one of many parts that construct the school violence phenomenon.

School Violence

Violence in schools is not a new phenomenon. The federal government has collected data on the safety of American schools for several decades. The first study on school violence was conducted in 1976 (Edwards, Kondrasuk, Greene, Nayak-Rhodes, & Waggoner, 2005), and was prepared by the National Institute of Education (1978). In this study questionnaires were given to 31,373 students and 23,895 teachers in more than 600 junior and senior high schools. The schools were selected from a probability sample of 5,578 schools nationwide (National Institute of Education, 1978). The study found that about 13 percent of both students and teachers were victimized each month (National Institute of Education, 1978).

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Minor theft (with most items valued at fewer than ten dollars), was the most common crime experienced (National Institute of Education, 1978). Only 1.3 percent of students and .5 percent of teachers experienced an assault (National Institute of Education, 1978). The risk of violent crime in schools was said to be rare and highly unlikely (Gottfredson and Daiger, 1979; Toby, 1983).

Another government study was conducted in 1989 as a Supplement to the National Crime Survey. Interviewers questioned more than 10,000 young people between the ages of twelve and nineteen who had attended school during the previous six months. The questions focused on personal crimes of violence and theft committed in school buildings or on school property. Overall, about nine percent of students surveyed reported being victimized at school over the last six months; seven percent of them were victims of property crimes and two percent victims of violence (National Crime Survey, 1989). The violent crimes mostly consisted of simple assaults and attacks without a weapon.

In 1993, the NCES conducted the survey involving telephone interviews with a national sample of 6,504 students in grades 6-12 and their parents (n=10,117). Students were asked about three kinds of victimization occurring at school or on the way to or from school: 1) bullying, 2) physical attacks, and 3) robberies (NCES, 1993). Twelve percent of the students said that they had been victims of one or more of these acts; 25 percent said they worried about it; 56 percent said they witnessed it. While 71% of the students said they had heard about these problems, only 4% had experienced an actual physical attack.

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Most recently, the U.S. Department of Education (2003) found that violent crime victimization in public schools had declined by 50% (from 48 to 26 per 1000 students) between 1992 & 2002 (Kerbs, Kyubeom, Gutierrez, & Rollin, 2005). The study addressed each area of school related violence; violent deaths, nonfatal student victimization, and nonfatal teacher victimization. From July 1, 1992 through June 30, 1999, there were 358 school associated, violent deaths in the U.S. (p.2). Of these deaths, 218 were homicides by students (p.2); however, school-aged children (5-19), were 70 times more likely to be murdered away from school than they were to be murdered at school (p.2). During this time period there 22,323 homicides of children aged 5-19 committed away from school (p.2). Similarly, students age 12-18 experienced almost three times as many incidences of nonfatal victimization (rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault) away from school as compared to in school (p.6). There also were no differences found in the rates of serious violent crime at school among students living in urban, suburban, and rural areas (p.6). This is interesting given the number of teachers fleeing urban schools for "safer" suburban schools.

Although most studies support the idea that there has been no increase in school violence, there are a few reports that say school violence has increased over time. In 2001 a study concluded that since reports on school violence began, delinquency and violence in schools has increased, if those definitions of what defines violence and delinquency are defined more broadly (Gaughan).

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The definitions of violence in this study included kicking and hitting of teachers by kindergarten students, and pushing in the lunch line (Gaughan). Gaughan reported that if all aspects of aggression or physical intimidation, regardless of age group, were defined as violence, then there had been a significant increase in violent acts. These definitions, though, are problematic. There is no way to compare young children pushing each other in a lunch line, with more serious acts of school violence. Tjaden (1998) also, concluded that over time the incidents have risen as well. His data was based on results from research done on general bullying and low level school violence, such as fights without weapons. His information was said to be limited, in the respect of sample size, and reliability, and largely based on loose evidence of mild aggression. Each of these studies represent a minority perspective, and rely upon methodologically weak studies. Reports from the NCES, which are considered more reliable and consistent, find that levels of delinquency and violence have, at the very least, remained constant over time or decreased (Edwards, Kondrasuk, Greene, NaYak-Rhodes, & Waggoner, 2005).

Though the majority of the data support the perspective that there has been no increase in school violence or deviance, the construction of a "juvenile violence problem" has adversely affected school systems, including teachers. Initially most studies have focused heavily on what the students feel, or how the students perceive this issue. There have even been several studies on parental reaction to the possibility of their child being in danger while attending school.

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The fear among educators should be of great concern, considering their impact on students and issues associated with rates of retention for teachers. Studies have shown that teachers are leaving their profession for various reasons, including pay and general job dissatisfaction (Dworkin, Haney, & Telschow, 1988). More recently, pay has been less significant, when compared to fearing the possibility of being a victim of violence at school. If teachers fear crime in school, because of personal experiences, or because they believe media constructions of school violence, then it is important to understand and address this issue for the well being of the entire education system.

Interestingly, there is, relatively, little research on teachers and school violence. A few studies though, have examined their rates of victimization.

The U.S. Department of Educations National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) asked a national sample of 1350 public school teachers in 1991 to report on victimization by students (NCES, 1991). The largest complaint, verbal abuse, was reported by fifty-one percent of respondents; sixteen percent said that they had been threatened with injury, and seven percent said they had suffered physical attacks (NCES, 1991). It should also be noted that physical attacks included kicks and punches from kindergartners.

Another study on victimization rates of teachers was done in 2003 by the U.S Department of Education. Over a five year period from 1996-2000, teachers were victims of 599,000 violent crimes (rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault) at school. This translates to about 74 crimes per

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1000 teachers from 1996-2000. Male teachers were found to be victims of violent crime twice as much as female teachers. From 1996-2000 the study shows that teachers were victims of theft at a rate of 56 per 1000 teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

There has also been little research done to measure the rate at which teachers fear school violence. Most studies in this area focus on job dissatisfaction and turnover rate, as opposed to the impact school violence has on teachers and their fear of victimization (Ting, Sanders, & Smith, 2002). In response to this fear, and the lack of research concerning it, the Teachers Reactions to School Violence Scale (TRSV) was developed (Ting, Sanders, & Smith, 2002). This is a 35 item scale used to measure teachers' reactions to incidents of school violence (Ting, Sanders, & Smith, 2002). The sample used in this study consisted of 144 teachers, 103 female and 41 male (Ting, Sanders, & Smith, 2002). Using the TSRV scale, it was determined that teachers' psychological reactions to school violence should be considered (Ting, Sanders, & Smith, 2002). An understanding of the psychological reactions teachers exhibit in respect to incidents of school violence can possibly give insight into ways to improve the environment that these teachers are facing each day. The TSRV scale found there to be several negative emotional reactions in relation to incidents of school violence (Ting, Sanders, & Smith, 2002). In addition to a sense of intrusion and avoidance of thoughts concerning violence, teachers appear to experience avoidance behaviors toward students and situations of

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potential violence and indicate perceived personal safety issues with students (Ting, Sanders, & Smith, 2002).

A study of 291 urban, public school teachers revealed that they fear violence and delinquent behavior in schools, and that it affects their performance (Dworkin & Haney, 1988). Data has shown that teachers in American urban public schools are emotionally and physically victimized, and this results in a heightened level of stress (Dworkin & Haney, 1988). The levels of stress experienced vary by the grade that is taught and the race of the teacher; generally minority teachers are less likely to report high levels of stress or victimization as compared to white teachers (Dworkin & Haney, 1988).

Increased stress and an atmosphere of fear causes burnout and adversely causes some educators to leave their profession. If they don't leave altogether, many of them transfer to areas they consider "safer" (Smith & Smith, 2006). These "safe" havens that they flee to are often suburban schools with few minority students (Dworkin & Haney, 1988; Smith & Smith, 2006).

A recent study, (Smith & Smith, 2006) examined the perceptions of teachers who left urban schools and found that most teachers left within their first five years, in part because of fear of victimization (Smith & Smith, 2006). This daily fear led to increased stress, and hindered their ability to function in their position (Smith & Smith, 2006). Nonetheless, some of these teachers reported they felt that school violence and deviance were overplayed in the media (Smith & Smith, 2006).

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There are several observations to consider concerning the complex nature of how teachers perceive school violence, whether it be a personal encounter in an urban setting, or a disturbing event being repeatedly broadcast over national news. What can be counted certain is that teachers' perceptions, responses, and understanding of the nature of school violence, and the dramatization of events versus statistical data on actual violent acts at school has a significant impact on how they interact with students, choose their teaching locale, and policy they support surrounding this issue.

In order to address the circumstances that surround the mediating factors of school violence and its effects on teachers, four questions were examined in this research: 1) What are teachers' perceptions of the school violence problem? 2) Do teachers fear school violence? 3) Has media construction of a school violence problem influenced teachers' perception of the problem? 4) Do teachers advocate proactive policies to address school violence and what types of policies do teachers desire to address the issue?

CHAPTER TWO:

Research Methodology

Operationalization and Measurement

A 66-item survey was administered to teachers to assess their views about school violence. It was comprised of demographic questions, general questions regarding the school in which the teachers taught, and Likert scale items designed to assess the levels of fear and apprehension associated with school violence as well as media consumption and views about policy responses. The study used a convenience sample that was comprised of teachers from various types of schools.

Site Selection

Beginning in May 2006 and continuing through April of 2007, 230 questionnaires were given to teachers who were employed at five high schools, three in Hamilton County and two in Sevier County, Tennessee. Three of these schools were located in rural settings (Sevier County High School, Seymour High School, and Soddy Daisy High School) and two of them were in urban areas (Hixson High School, and Lookout Valley High School.) These particular schools were selected because of their ease of access and willingness to participate in this study.

Although not specifically correlated with any demographic information related to the teachers in each school surveyed, demographic information about each schools students is given because it has been shown that in several

instances the demographic makeup of the teachers and the students is similar. (Jackson, 2009) Sevier County High School is located in the Smokey Mountains of east Tennessee. It is attended by 1720 students with 53% of the students being male and 47% being female (Public School Review, 2008). The student demographic makeup of the school is predominantly white; 96% of the students are white, which is far higher than the Tennessee public school average of 67%. The school is only one percent African American, two percent Hispanic, and one percent other minorities. The state average for each of these particular groups is 23% African American, 4% Hispanic, 5% other minority, and 1% Asian (Public School Review, 2008). It is clear that Sevier County High School has little ethnic diversity in relation to Tennessee's overall school composition.

Seymour High School is also located in the Smokey Mountain area just north of Knoxville and is a part of the Sevier County School System. Seymour is attended by approximately 1096 students, with approximately 53% of the students being male and 47% female. The demographic constitution of Seymour is again predominantly white; 98% of their students are Caucasian which, again, is far higher than the earlier mentioned state average. Hispanic and African American students each comprise one percent of the student body (Public School Review, 2008)

Soddy Daisy High School is located on the perimeter of Chattanooga, Tennessee and is a part of the Hamilton County School System which is home to 18 High Schools. Soddy Daisy is attended by 1471 students, 51% of them being

male and 49% female (Public School Review, 2008). The student population of

Soddy Daisy High School is consistent with the other two rural schools in that the

students are overwhelmingly Caucasian, with 97% of the students being

classified as such. The African American student body was slightly higher than

the other two rural schools, with two percent of Soddy Daisy's student body being

classified as such. Hispanics comprised only one percent of the total student

body population. (Public School Review. 2008).

      Hixson High School is located in Hixson, Tennessee which is a more

urban area of the greater Chattanooga area. Hixson is also one of the 18 schools

that are a part of the Hamilton County School System. Hixson is attended by

1019 students, 52% of them being male and 48% female. The student body

population of Hixson offers more diversity than any of the rural schools sampled,

and is more closely consistent with state averages; 70% of the students at

Hixson are Caucasian. The African American student population is actually

higher than the state average,with 25% of the student's being classified as such.

The Hispanic student population comprises two percent of the total student body,

and Asian students comprise three percent (Public School Review, 2008).

      Lookout Valley High School is the final school sampled, and completes the

urban representation in this sample. Lookout Valley High School is located just

outside of Downtown Chattanooga. This school is unique because it is the

smallest school in the sample. It is comprised of 430 total students, 54% being

male and 46% female. Lookout Valley, like Hixson, is more closely consistent

with Tennessee State Averages for demographic make up with 78% of the student population being Caucasian, and 21% African American. The remaining one percent of the student body is classified as other (Public School Review, 2008).

Sample

A convenience sample of teachers was surveyed from these particular high schools. After obtaining permission from the principals at each institution, the survey was delivered to the mail box of each teacher at each locale. A cover letter was included that explained the survey, assured anonymity, and provided instructions for returning the instrument (see Appendix A for a complete copy of the survey and cover letter).

A total of 230 teachers were sampled. At Hixson High School, 25 of the 63 (39.6%) teachers surveyed completed the instrument. The number of teachers receiving the survey Lookout Valley High School in Chattanooga was 35, and 17 (48.5%) of them were returned completed in full. A higher response rate was achieved at Soddy Daisy High School where 34 of the 50 surveys (68%) were completed. At the Sevier County High School, 22 of 42 teachers completed the survey (52.3%) and at Seymour High School 20 of the 40 surveys distributed (50%) were returned fully completed. In total, the survey was returned full completed by 118 of the teachers, therefore the overall response rate for the survey was 51.3%. While a higher response rate is always preferable, this was deemed an acceptable level for research of this nature and consistent with other

attitudinal research.

Operationalization of Variables & Descriptive Findings

Demographic Variables

Several demographic variables were included as control variables including age, sex, race, household income, education level, teaching experience, and marital status. Each of these variables were measured rather straight forwardly. As Table 1 demonstrates, the range of the age for the sample was 23 to 69, with a mean age of 44 years.

Not surprisingly given the make up of most teachers in school systems, over two-thirds of the respondents (68.6%) were women. White females were clearly over-represented in the sample; 63.5% of the sample were white women.

The respondents were provided with several categories to assess race, but the sample lacked racial diversity; 95.8% of the sample self-idenitifed as Caucasian or White (n=112). African Americans represented only two and a half percent of the sample (n=3). Hispanic/Latinos represented less than one percent (n=1) and less than two percent (n=2) identified themselves as "other." Although it was included, no one chose the category bi-racial and all races were collapsed for further analyses into two groups – people of color and whites. Household income was measured by having respondents fill in the total household income, which for married, included the income of the spouse as well. This variable had lots of variation; income ranged from $22,000 to $190,000. Total household income was used to determine affluence and proximity of respondents given

Table 1: Description of Variables

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Variable	Description
Age	Age to the nearest year: M=44.65; SD= 11.45
Sex	Female=0; Male=1; 31.4% Female; 68.6% Male
Race	White=0; Other=1; 94.9% white; 5.1% other
Income	Income to the nearest dollar: M= 74674.34; SD= 29462.72
School Experience	No private exp.=0; Private exp.=1; 79.7% No private exp.; 20.3% Private exp.
Education	Bachelor deg.= 0; Advanced deg.=1 25.4% Bachelor; 74.6% Advanced
Marriage	Married=0; Other=1; 74.6% Married; 26.4% Other
School location	Urban=0; Rural=1; 35.7% Urban; 64.3% Rural
Time Watching T.V Daily	High score=multiple hours daily watching t.v; 12.3 % >1 hour; 73.4% 1-3 hours; 14.3% 3+ hours
Time Reading News Daily	High score= reading news daily;Local-48.7% daily;29.1% weekly;12.0%monthly; 10.2% none; National-16.2% daily;13.7%weekly; 19.7% monthly; 50.4% none; National Mag.-5.1% daily;22.2%weekly; 35.9%monthly;36.8% none

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Table 1: Description of Variables Con't
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Variable	Description
Perceptions of Violence in their School	High score=high violence their school: range =4 to 16;M=9.51;SD= 2.59
Perception of Violence in General	High score= perception of high violence in general:range=5 to 20; M=14.53
Media Portrayal Sensational	High score= perceive media as sensational: range=7 to 28; M=18.28
Prefer Proactive Policies	High score= prefer proactive policy: range=5 to 25;M=14.81;SD=2.50
Fear of Violence in their School	High score= fear of violence in school: range=11 to 44; M= 18.80; SD= 5.71

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the relationship between income and fear of crime. The mean for this variable was $74,674.

Not surprisingly, the sample was relatively well educated; approximately (25%) of the respondents had a Bachelor degree and (75%) had an advanced degree.   Men were significantly more likely than women to have advanced degrees.

Most respondents in the sample were married; approximately 75% were married, 14% were divorced, 9% were single, and 2% were separated. Less than one percent (n=1) of the sample was widowed. This variable was also recoded to married and unmarried when conducting additional analyses. Interestingly most respondents had no experience working in a private school setting. Only 20% of all respondents had any private school experience, while approximately 80% had none. With regards to their public school experience, nearly 9% of the respondents had less than three years of experience, 18% had three to six years experience, 30% had seven to fifteen years experience, nearly 25% had sixteen to twenty five years experience, and about 19% had greater than twenty five years experience. Whites were significantly more apt to work in rural and private schools than were people of color.

Control Variables

A variety of variables were included as control variables including perceptions of levels of violence in their schools, views about school violence, in general and nationally, and attitudes toward media sensationalization of school

violence. Teachers were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement with a variety of statements using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Items were then scaled for use in multivariate analyses.

There were five other variables in the survey which examined crime related information about the respondents and their schools. These responses indicated that few residents (2%) believed they lived in a high crime area. Only one percent of respondents' schools employed a school resource officer. Two percent of respondents' schools used metal detectors and nine percent thought they had been used some time in the past; however, 22% of the teachers reported that the school had considered using metal detectors. This information provides some context about the context in which respondents deal with daily issues related to crime and school violence. There was, though, insufficient variance in these variables to include them in any further analyses.

Levels of Violence in their School

The literature review indicates there is a relationship between levels of violence and types of violence in the teachers' schools, and their responses to school violence in general. To evaluate whether teachers believed that there was a high level of violence in their particular schools, four statements were used (see Table 2). While less than one-fifth (19%) of the teachers indicated there are many incidents of violence in their school, slightly more than one-fourth (29%) of them reported it was a problem in their school. Just under two-thirds of them (60%) believed violence increased in the past five years in their schools and

Table 2: Levels of Violence in their School

	Response							
	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
Statement	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Violence is a Problem in at my school.	5	4.2	29	24.6	65	55.1	19	16.1
Violence has increased at my school in the last 5 years.	18	15.4	52	44.4	36	30.8	11	9.4
There are many incidents of violence at my school.	7	5.9	15	12.7	63	53.4	33	28.0
My students are capable of violence at my school.	14	11.9	68	57.6	28	23.7	8	6.8

almost three-fourths of them (70%) suggested that their students are capable of violence. Thus, while most of the teachers find that the levels of violence are relatively low at their schools, they also believe it is increasing and that their students have the capability for violence. These items subsequently were scaled for use in multivariate analyses, to construct the control variable: Levels of Violence in Their School. The scale had a range of 4 to 16 and a mean of 9.52. The scale was reliable (alpha=.83).

Perceptions of School Violence in General

How teachers perceive school violence at a macro level possibly has a direct influence on their levels of fear. Using five statements, teachers perceptions of school violence in general were evaluated. Each statement was measured at an ordinal level with four response categories. As Table 3 demonstrates, over three-fourths (84%) of the respondents reported that students today are more violent than they were in the past and that school violence is a problem in the United States (89%). In contrast, less than one-half (47%) of the respondents believed that most teachers actually fear school violence and slightly more than one-fourth of them (29%) believe that the problem has been exaggerated. Over three-fourths of them (76%) responded that there were many incidents of school violence in the United States. Thus, the data indicate that, although teachers believed that school violence is a problem in the United States and that students are more violent than they were in the past because there have been many incidents, there is nearly an even split as to

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Table 3: Perceptions of School Violence in General

Statement	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Students today are more violent than in past.	39	33.1	60	50.8	16	13.6	3	2.5
School violence is a problem in the United States.	31	26.3	74	62.7	13	11.0	--	--
Most teachers are afraid of school violence.	7	6.0	49	41.8	59	50.4	2	1.8
School violence is exaggerated in the United States.	3	2.5	31	26.3	67	56.8	17	14.4
There are many incidents of school violence in the United States.	17	14.4	73	61.9	27	22.9	1	.8

The header row "Response" spans the data columns.

whether they believe this increase in violence has increased fear among

teachers. These five items subsequently were scaled for use in multivariate

analyses to construct the control variable: Perception of School Violence in

General. The scale had a range of 5 to 20 and a mean of 14.53. The scale was

reliable (alpha=.77).

Media Portrayal of School Violence is Sensational

This literature review discusses how media coverage of school violence is

sensationalized, which affects how school violence is perceived. To evaluate

whether teachers believed that the portrayal of school violence in the media was

sensationalized, seven statements were used. Each of them was measured at an

ordinal level with four response categories. As Table 4 demonstrates, nearly half

(44%) of the respondents agreed that the media portrays school violence

accurately, but almost two-thirds of the teachers (63%) believed that the media

sensationalizes high profile cases concerning school violence. Although over half

(54%) of the respondents felt that the media ignores school violence unless there

is a mass murder, slightly less than half (44%) believed that the media spends

too much time discussing school violence. Slightly over one half of the teachers

(51%) agreed that the media interest in school violence was ratings driven. When

asked if the media should spend more time covering school violence, less than

one- fourth (27%) felt that it should. Likewise, nearly half of them (48%) believed

that the media should spend less time covering high profile school violence

cases like Columbine. The data then, indicate that the respondents were divided

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Table 4: Media Portrayal of School Violence is Sensational

	Response							
	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
Statement	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
The media portrays school violence accurately.	4	3.4	48	40.7	59	50.0	7	5.9
The media spends too much time discussing school violence.	7	5.9	45	38.2	62	52.5	4	3.4
School violence is ignored by the media unless it's mass murder.	15	12.8	49	41.9	46	39.3	7	6.0
Media sensationalizes high profile cases of school violence.	22	18.6	52	44.1	40	33.9	4	3.4
Media interest in school violence is ratings based.	14	12.1	45	38.7	54	46.6	3	2.6
Media should spend more time covering school violence.	2	1.7	30	25.6	79	67.5	6	5.2
The media should stop spending so much time covering high profile cases like Columbine.	10	8.6	46	39.7	57	49.1	3	2.6

as to whether they felt the media coverage in general was sensationalized. These items subsequently were scaled for use in multivariate analyses to construct the control variable: Media Portrayal of School Violence Sensational. The scale has a range of 7 to 28 and a mean of 18.28. The scale was reliable (alpha=.69).

Media Consumption

Media consumption was considered only in respect to the number of hours that respondents spent daily watching television or reading. The respondents reported that less than one half (40%) watched television two to three hours daily, while nearly as many of them (34%) reported watching television one to two hours per day. Less than one fourth of respondents (14%) reported watching more than three hours of television daily, and nearly equal that many (12%) reported watching less than an hour of television daily. The respondents indicate that they spend more time watching television than they do reading, considering that over half (53%) spend time reading the news for less than an hour daily, and five percent of them not reading the news at all. Less than half of them (37%) read one to two hours daily, and less than one fourth of them (8%) read two to three hours per day. Only two percent of respondents report reading more than three hours daily.

Dependent Variables

Two dependent variables were used in this study. They assess teachers' fear of violence in their schools and their desire for pro-active policies to address

school violence.

Proactive Policies Needed Against School Violence

This research sought to evaluate attitudes toward policies regarding

school violence. Five statements were chosen to evaluate teachers' perceptions

about policies related to school violence. As Table 5 demonstrates, nearly the

entire sample (91%) agreed that there should be better policies to address

school violence. Three-fourths (75%) of the respondents believed that students

who commit acts of violence at school should be dismissed from school

permanently, though less than one-half (43%) of the respondents felt that it was

necessary to have metal detectors in all schools. Over three-fourths of

respondents (85%) believed that more resource officers should be employed in

the schools, and about three fourths of them (74%) also desired more police

officers assigned to schools. Thus, it is clear that a significant portion of this

sample feels that there is more that can be done to address and deter school

violence.

Two items ultimately were excluded from the items above to create a scale

assessing views about pro-active policies. These items assessed whether

teachers should be trained to handle school violence and if principals should do

more to deter school violence. Nearly (80%) of the respondents felt that

principals should do more to deter school violence and 82% of the participants

felt that teachers should be trained to handle school violence. Factor analysis

indicated that these two items did not represent a similar construct as the other

Table 5: Proactive Policies Needed Against School Violence

	Response							
	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
Statement	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
There should be better policies against school violence.	34	29.3	71	61.2	10	8.6	1	.9
Students who commit school violence should be dismissed from school permanently.	47	40.9	39	33.9	26	22.6	3	2.6
There should be metal detectors in all schools.	12	10.3	38	32.4	60	51.3	7	6.0
More resource officers need to be in schools.	28	24.2	70	60.3	16	13.8	2	1.7
More Police Officers need to be in schools.	24	20.9	61	53.1	28	24.3	2	1.7
Principals should do more to deter school violence.	29	25.2	62	53.9	22	19.2	2	1.7
Teachers should be trained to handle school violence.	24	20.5	71	60.7	16	13.7	6	5.1

statements used to construct the scale. The remaining variables were scaled for use in multivariate analyses, to construct the dependent variable: Proactive Policies Needed Against School Violence. The scale has a range of 5 to 25 and a mean of 14.81. The scale was reliable (alpha=.71).

Perceptions of Fear of Violence in their School

This survey used 11 statements to determine teachers' fear of violence in their schools. Table 6 indicates that a small minority (9%) of teachers said they worried about being in the hall alone at school and less than one-fifth (20%) of them said that they think about violence at their school. Only a small minority of them (9%) said they felt unsafe at their schools. Only six percent of the teachers said they avoid weekend visits to their schools because of fear and only ten percent worry about their personal safety at their schools.

Very few (13%) of the teachers sampled had any fear of being alone at school. Even fewer of them (5%) showed any indication of fear being in or around their campuses. Over three-fourths (77%) of them felt safe disciplining their students and being alone with a group of students (83%). In fact, only 13% of them reported avoiding confrontation with students because they were afraid. Surprisingly, with so little worry of personal safety, or fear for their own well being, worry about the safety of students was slightly higher. Over one-fourth (26%) of teachers were concerned about the safety of their students. These findings indicate that very few teachers have significant fear of violence being directed towards them at their school, and no real fear of their own students. Although, to

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Table 6: Perceptions of Fear of Violence in Their School

	Response							
	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
Statement	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I worry about being in the hall alone.	2	1.7	8	6.8	38	32.2	70	59.3
I think about violence at my school.	6	5.1	17	14.4	52	44.1	43	36.4
I do not feel safe at my school.	2	1.7	9	7.7	41	34.7	66	55.9
I am afraid to go to my school at night and on weekends.	--	--	7	5.9	37	31.4	74	62.7
I worry about my personal safety while at my school.	4	3.4	8	6.7	39	33.1	67	56.8
I am afraid to be at my school alone.	1	.8	14	11.9	39	33.1	64	54.2
I am afraid at my school.	1	.8	5	4.2	37	31.4	75	63.6
I worry about the safety of my students while at school.	3	2.5	28	23.7	56	47.5	31	26.3
I feel safe when I am disciplining my students.	24	20.4	67	56.8	20	16.9	7	5.9
I feel safe when I am alone with a group of students.	35	29.7	63	53.4	13	11.0	7	5.9
I avoid confrontation with students because I am afraid.	7	5.9	8	6.8	57	48.3	46	39.0

a greater degree, there is some concern for the student body and their actions toward each other. These items subsequently were scaled for use in multivariate analyses, to construct the dependent variable: Fear of Violence in Their School. The scale has a range of 11 to 44 and a mean of 18.80. The scale was reliable (alpha=.89).

CHAPTER THREE:

FINDINGS

Correlation analysis was used to assess and determine the effect that demographic variables (e.g., age, sex, race, income, education, marriage, school location, private school experience) had upon each of the scaled control variables and the dependent variables. This analysis also examined significant relationships between independent and control variables.

Bivariate Relationships involving Demographic Variables

There were few significant relationships found when examining the correlations between demographic variables and teachers' fear of violence in their schools (see Table 7). There was only one significant relationship. Not surprisingly, those teachers who work in urban schools were more likely to fear violence taking place in their school than were teachers employed in rural schools.

There also were few significant relationships found when examining the correlations between demographic variables and a desire for proactive policies. One exception was sex. Women were more apt than men to endorse proactive policies to address school violence. There was also a significant relationship between race and proactive policies. Respondents who self identified as white were more likely to want proactive policies to combat school violence than were people of color.

Also considered in the research was time watching television daily, as well

as reading news sources daily. When examining a variety of relationships, it
was discovered that age, sex, race and education were related to watching
television. Men and whites spent significantly more time watching television
daily and reading the news daily than did women, and people of color. Likewise
individuals not married and older people were significantly more likely to watch
television daily than were married and younger people. The research also
determined that people who worked in an urban environment and those who had
advanced degrees were significantly more likely to read the news daily than were
teachers working in urban schools or teachers with only a bachelors degree. Not
surprisingly, the research found that those teachers who watched television daily
were significantly more likely to read the news daily than those who did not
consume television daily.

Bivariate Relationships involving Control Variables

In addition to establishing correlations between demographic variables,
the research found some theoretically important correlations between control
variables.

The first intersection between demographic variables and control variables
was found in the negative relationship between violence in teachers' schools and
school location. It was determined that those teachers who worked in an urban
school environment had experienced more school violence than those working in
a rural school.

Second, it was posited in the literature review that media coverage and

portrayal of school violence had an impact on how people, in general, and more

specifically, teachers perceived the issue of school violence. This research

discovered that the portrayal of school violence through media coverage led the

respondents to perceive school violence was a pressing issue. As Table 7

demonstrates, respondents who believed that the media sensationalized school

violence were significantly less apt to perceive school violence was a problem in

general, fear violence in their own schools, and desire proactive policies than

were teachers who found media portrayals less sensational. In addition, the

amount of media exposure proved important, but in an unexpected manner.

Teachers who watched more television were less apt to report being afraid of

school violence in their schools that were infrequent television consumers.

Perceptions of school violence also were interrelated in several ways.

Respondents who were more likely to perceive school violence was a problem in

general were more likely to perceive school violence as a problem in their

schools and were more apt to fear violence in their schools than were teachers

who thought school violence throughout the U.S. was not an overly serious

problem. Finally, teachers who feared violence in their schools were significantly

more apt to want proactive policies than were teachers who did not fear school

violence in their institutions.

Multiple Regression Findings

Multiple regression is used to assess the effect of several independent

variables on a dependent variable. The goal is to determine the degree and to

what extent the independent variables affect the dependent variables. Standard multiple regression was used in this study. In using this method, all independent variables enter the equation at one time. Thus, each independent variable, in conjunction with other independent variables and control variables, is evaluated in terms of its unique contribution toward explaining the variance in the dependent variable.

In preparation for the regression analysis, those variables that were not significantly related to the dependent variables at the Bivariate level (p<.05) were eliminated because the model is too big to enter all variables given the sample size. As such, the following variables were included: Age, Sex, School Location, Time Watching Television Daily, Time Reading the News Daily, Perceptions of School Violence in General, Media Sensationalize School Violence, Violence in their School.

In the first equation, demographic and control variables were regressed on the dependent variable Fear of Violence in Their School and two of the independent variables were significant. Time Watching Television Daily, which measures how much the respondents watched television daily, was significant with a Beta of -.20. Perceptions of Violence in Their School, which measures how much violence actually occurs in their local school, was significant with a Beta of .58. Thus, those respondents who experienced violence in their schools, or who watched a limited amount of television daily had a greater degree of fear of violence in Their

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Table 8: Regression of Perceptions of Fear of Violence in Their School on Independent and Control Variables

Variables	Standardized Coefficients Beta	Significance
Age	.04	.61
Sex	.04	.61
School	-.02	.85
Time Watching Television Daily	-.20*	.02*
Time Reading News Daily	.10	.24
Perceptions of School Violence Generally	.01	.90
Media Sensationalizes School Violence	-.12	.11
Perceptions of Violence in Their School	.58*	.00*
R^2	.44	.44
F	10.85	10.85
Significance of F	.00	.00

*$p < 0.05$

Table 9: Regression of Proactive Policies Needed Against School Violence on Independent and Control Variables

Variables	Standardized Coefficients Beta	Significance
Age	-.02	.84
Sex	.21*	.01*
School	.09	.34
Time Watching Television Daily	-.00	.97
Time Reading News Daily	.07	.44
Perceptions of School Violence Generally	.56*	.00*
Media Sensationalizes School Violence	-.02	.79
Perceptions of Violence in Their School	.12	.16
R2	.42	.42
F	9.46	9.46
Significance of F	.00	.00

*p<0.05

School. In addition, the model was significant at the .05 level with an R^2 of .44. R^2

In the second regression, demographic and control variables were regressed on the dependent variable Proactive Policies Wanted. Again, two of the variables were significant in the model. Sex was significant at the .05 level with a Beta of .21. This finding suggests that female respondents were more likely than males to want proactive policies to address school violence. Perception of School Violence Generally was also significant at the .05 level, and it had Beta of .56. This finding suggests that those respondents who perceived there was a school violence issue in general, were more likely to desire proactive policies to address school violence than were those teachers who did not see school violence as a general widespread problem. The model was determined to be significant at the .05 level with an R^2 of .42. R^2 The R^2 from both models suggests that, although only a few variables were significant, the model predicts a fairly sizable percentage of the variance in each of the dependent variables.

Summary of Methodology and Findings

To investigate teachers' perceptions of school violence this research has utilized survey research to assess the degree to which teachers perceive school violence as a local and a national problem and to evaluate factors that affect these views. Variables such as age, sex, race, household income, education level, teaching experience, and marital status were used as control variables. In addition, other variables were included as control variables that more directly

influenced teachers' perception of school violence as a pervading issue. These variables included perceptions of levels of violence in their schools, views about school violence, in general and nationally, and attitudes toward media sensationalization of school violence. These variables were examined to determine their influence on fear of school violence and a desire to have proactive policies addressing school violence. The significance of the findings in this chapter are discussed in depth in the remaining chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR:

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Fear of crime has emerged as a serious social issue (Liska, Lawrence, & Sanchirico, 1982; Burns & Crawford, 1999). Over the last several years there have been several surveys (Harris, Gallop, National Opinion Research Center, and the National Crime Survey, 2004) which report that many Americans fear criminal victimization (Liska, Lawrence, and Sanchirico, 1982).

The media has contributed to this fear with a constant barrage of sensationalized coverage of school shootings that, "could happen at any moment." This onslaught has done much to alter policies and has painted a picture of schools as war zones, essentially sending some of our kids into school environments that resemble prisons.

Most heavily affected, and least examined has been the effect of school violence and sensationalized media coverage on public school teachers. Increased stress and an atmosphere of fear causes burnout and adversely causes some educators to leave their profession (Smith & Smith, 2006). If they don't leave altogether, many of them transfer to areas they consider "safer" (Smith & Smith, 2006). These "safe" havens that they flee to are often suburban schools with few minority students (Dworkin & Haney, 1988; Smith & Smith, 2006). Nonetheless, some teachers report they feel that school violence and deviance are overplayed in the media (Smith & Smith, 2006).

Four questions were posed in this research to address these issues: 1) What are teachers' perceptions of the school violence problem? 2) Do teachers fear school violence? 3) Has media portrayal of a school violence influenced teachers' perception of the problem? 4) Do teachers advocate policies to address the issue of school violence and are these recommendations influenced by their perceptions of school violence and/or media constructions of the issue?

Teachers Perceptions of School Violence

Teachers believe that school violence is an issue in America. In general, teachers (84%) reported that students today are more violent than they were in the past and that school violence is a problem in the United States (89%); however, there is nearly an even split as to whether they believe most teachers are afraid of school violence. Nonetheless, only 29% of them believe that the problem has been exaggerated. When all related items were scaled it revealed that teachers generally expressed that it is a problem in the U.S., but this sentiment was only moderately endorsed.

Teachers were even more divided about the nature of school violence in their schools. When all related items were scaled it revealed that teachers were somewhat divided about the extent of the problem in their schools. Ironically, while most of the teachers (81%) reported that the levels of violence were relatively low at their schools, the majority of them (60%) also believe it is increasing in their schools and that their students (70%)have the capability for violence. Thus, the data indicate that, teachers perceive that school violence is

becoming "worse" and that their students are capable of violence even in the absence of actual violence in their schools. In addition, Bivariate correlations indicated that respondents who were more likely to perceive school violence as a problem in general were more likely to perceive school violence as a problem in their schools and were more apt to fear violence in their schools than were teachers who thought school violence throughout the U.S. was not an overly serious problem.   In addition, perceptions of violence in their schools was one of only two variables that predicted fear of school violence in the regression equation and it was the strongest predictor. On the whole then, these findings indicate that while perceptions of violence generally may affect levels of fear that teachers, understandably, are most fearful if they perceive there is, in fact, violence in their school. While this study was not able to establish whether or not teachers' perceptions of school violence were accurate, these findings suggest that fear of crime may be a product of realistic exposure to school violence rather than sensational media accounts or unrealistic, over-stated fears.

Teachers' Fear of Violence

Although teachers believed that school violence is a problem in the United States and that students are more violent than they were in the past because there have been many incidents, on the whole teachers were less inclined to indicate they were afraid of violence in their schools. Although there is no significant evidence of there being more fatal violence in urban schools than in other settings, teachers who work in an urban environment expressed a greater

degree of fear of violence taking place in their schools than did teachers employed in rural schools. This finding is not totally surprising given the increased propensity for violence in urban areas in general and the long standing sociological tradition of viewing urban areas as more dangerous than rural ones irrespective of empirical data. Similarly, women teachers were more afraid of violence in their schools than were men. Here again, this finding is not surprising given the vast body of literature which consistently indicates that women are more fearful than men of crime, regardless of the context (Madriz, 1997).

Scale data demonstrate that most teachers were, on average, unafraid. A small minority of teachers (9%) said they felt unsafe at school or worry about their personal safety while there (10%). They do not worry about as being in the hall alone at school with a group of students or being in or around the campus. A few of them (13%) reported avoiding confrontation with students because they were afraid, but, over three-fourths of the teachers (77%) disciplined their students without fear. Surprisingly, however, with so little worry of personal safety, worry about the safety of students was higher. Just over one-fourth of teachers (26%) were concerned about the safety of their students.   These findings indicate that very few teachers have significant fear of violence being directed towards them at their school, and no real fear of their own students. Although, to a greater degree, there is some concern for the student body and their actions toward each other. Many of the teachers appear to resonate with a major problem "out there," but it had not yet become a significant enough issue at home

to draw any fear response at home. The interesting contradiction, as will be discussed later, is that while there seems to be little fear, there is a strong push for policy to address an issue that is not highly prevalent in their schools.

Media Effects on Perceptions of School Violence

The scale assessing media effects indicates that teachers were only slightly likely to believe that the media sensationalizes school violence. Slightly under one-half (44%) of the teachers believed that the media portrays school violence accurately, but slightly over one-half of them (54%) also believed the media ignores school violence unless there is a mass murder and almost two-thirds of the teachers (63%) believed that the media sensationalizes high profile cases. Nearly half of them (48%) believed that the media should spend less time covering high profile school violence cases like Columbine. The data then, indicate that the respondents were divided as to whether they felt the media coverage in general was sensationalized.

It was posited in the literature review that media coverage and portrayal of school violence had an impact on how people, in general, and more specifically, teachers perceived the issue of school violence. This research discovered that the portrayal of school violence through media coverage had an important connection. At the bivariate level respondents who believed that the media sensationalizes school violence were significantly more apt to perceive school violence was a problem in general and were more likely to fear violence in their own schools. Thus, teachers who appear to have a more "realistic" view of

school violence who are less affected by media sensationalism are, in fact, less fearful of school violence. Interestingly, however, the amount of time watching television was not associated with endorsing media sensationalism. It is likely that this finding reflects the fact that the study did not capture the type of television watched or the extent to which participants consume media coverage of school violence specifically.

Media consumption, however, had an important effect but not in the expected direction. At both the bivariate and multivariate level, teachers who watched less television daily were significantly more apt to fear school violence. As such, it appears that while acceptance of sensationalistic views of school violence is important when attempting to understand school violence, the overall amount of television consumed is even more important (given that sensationalism is not significant at the multivariate level). It is not entirely clear why less television consumption is associated with greater levels of fear. One would presume that increased exposure to crime related television creates a generalized fear of crime that also translates in terms of fear of school violence.

Approximately 80% of all television programming contained violence of some sort, with 20% of local and 15% of national news being dedicated to crime. Also, approximately 33% of total television time in the United States is devoted to crime and law enforcement shows, with a concentration at prime time (Beirne & Messerschmidt, 2000). Unfortunately, we lack sufficient information to ascertain what types of television was consumed. It is possible that increased fear results

when individuals lack a balanced view of crime. In other words, perhaps some teachers only "tune in" for especially sensationalistic portrayals of school violence while ignoring other more balanced information. Additional research should explore this relationship in more depth.

Attitudes toward Proactive Policies

It is clear from the literature review that sensationalized coverage by the media causes knee jerk reactions requiring policy changes to address school violence. Some of these policies have been the institution of resource officers, metal detectors, and zero tolerance. Teachers have been cited as proponents for many of these policy changes. Nearly all respondents (91%), agreed that there should be better policies to address school violence. The overwhelming majority of them also believed that students who commit acts of violence at school should be dismissed from school permanently and, that more resource officers and police officers should be employed in the schools. Interestingly, teachers were much less likely to endorse metal detectors (43%). Thus, it is clear that a significant portion of this sample feels that there is more that can be done to address and deter school violence. Also fascinating is that while the overwhelming majority of teachers felt that principals should do more, they also wanted training to help teachers deal with school violence.

Women were significantly more apt than men to endorse proactive policies. Here again, this finding is not particularly surprising given women's greater fear of crime in general; however, women did not report higher levels of

fear of school violence in general or in their schools. In addition, gender did not

predict fear of school violence in the multivariate model. As such, it appears that

something other than fear is driving women's desire for proactive policies. This

study did not employ a gendered analysis of fear of school violence in that it did

not assess whether the theoretical perpetrators were male or female; however,

given that the vast majority of serious school violence is perpetrated by males

(Carmody & Danner, 2001), it is possible that women feel less able to control

teenage boys at all levels. It also is possible that they do not feel particularly

supported by administrators in terms of dealing with disciplinary problems in

general. Thus, this finding may reflect a desire for increases in general levels of

control in classrooms.

Interestingly, those who self identified as white were also more apt to

desire proactive policies to address school violence at the bivariate level. This is

interesting Despite small numbers of minorities. We cannot rely on these findings

to fully posit it, but it is possible that this reflects white fear of violence by inner

city black kids. Teachers who feared violence in their schools were significantly

more apt to want proactive policies than were teachers who did not fear school

violence; however, this relationship also disappeared in the multivariate model.

The variable representing perceptions of school violence in general was the

strongest predictor of a desire for proactive policies. Thus, the findings indicate

that abstract fear (that is perhaps unwarranted) is less important than general

views about school violence nationally. Thus, while sensational media portrayals

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and fear of violence have some relationship to a desire for proactive policies at the bivariate level, the most important factor appears to be general perceptions about the nature and frequency of school violence. This finding is interesting. Perhaps these general notions about school violence as a growing problem is more salient to the average teacher who feels little fear at their own school but does sense that "things are different" and "schools are getting worse out there." This interpretation would suggest that sensationalistic views about school violence such as never ending coverage of rare acts of severe violence fail to have much impact on teachers as a whole; however, the more daily and less sensational coverage of the changing nature of schools appears to result in a desire to endorse policy changes, even when teachers report little violence in their own schools.

Limitations and Strengths of the Research

The small sample size as well as limited amount of previous work on this subject pose limitations for this study. This exploratory study contributes to the body of literature concerning school violence especially as it relates to teachers' perceptions.

Conclusion

In sum, most teachers express concern over school violence generally throughout the United States but express little concern over school violence in their own schools where they report relatively little violence exists, although they do feel it is increasing in their schools and feel that many of their students have

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the capacity to commit violence. On the whole teachers failed to indicate they were afraid of violence in their schools, but there were somewhat fearful about the safety of students who might be at risk from their fellow students. While teachers overall expressed little fear, there was a strong push for policy to address an issue that teachers reported is not highly prevalent in their schools. Overall teachers were slightly inclined to endorse the notion that the media sensationalized most school violence; however, beliefs about the sensational nature of school violence had little impact on fear of school violence or a desire for proactive policies. Ironically, those teachers who watched less television and believed they had higher levels of violence in their schools were more fearful of school violence than those who consumed more television and were less fearful. Women and those teachers who felt that school violence in general was most problematic were more likely to report a desire for proactive policies than were men and those who felt school violence in the U.S. was not particularly prevalent. Virtually all teachers expressed a desire for more active participation from their principals and desired additional training for teaches to learn more about effective ways to intervene in school violence.

It is long standing practice for policy to surround dramatic anomalies; the media coverage of sensational instances produces a public outcry for something to be done. As a society we are witnessing a tragic misdirection of attention and resources as we overreact to school violence, while ignoring other serious threats to children such as abuse by parents and parental figures

(Donahue, 1998). Teachers whole heartedly desired proactive policies and felt that the administration was responsible for getting these policies in place. Some of the backlash of course with these policies is that the installation of programs such as zero tolerance, putting metal detectors in urban schools, and hiring officers to monitor the schools have all been linked to impeding the learning process (Salgado, 2005). Zero tolerance has empowered the school districts to automatically enforce severe punishment in disciplining students, even in the event of minor offenses. School resource officers (SRO) are quasi law enforcement officers who assist the police in an effort to increase school safety (Fessel, May, & Means, 2004). Metal detectors, resource officers, and other reactive policies, however, contribute to an atmosphere of fear (Toby, 1983; May, 1999; Thompkins, 2000). These efforts, although supported by teachers, have contributed to a prison like atmosphere for some, increasing the types of social control that students are subjected to in schools (Baily, Carona, Mebane, & Snell, 2002); For example, in 1999, 25% of all metal detectors sold by a leading national company were sold to schools. These policies have been implemented in an effort to increase a feeling of safety and address fear, but the question that remains is whether any of them were particularly necessary? This is not to say that the high profile shootings in our schools over the last several years lack importance, but these responses seem to be an effort to quickly deal with a socially constructed issue, instead of giving more responsibility to those who have the most direct contact with the students everyday, their teachers.

Teachers seem to desire training in preventative measures to able themselves to address issues of school violence, reinforcing that perhaps the most important policy change should be model programs that train teachers to react in coordinated ways with a clearly identified policy. It is possible that had the teachers involved in the high profile cases that have been dramatized continually had some preparedness training that they could have identified a potential issue before it boiled over into an act of violence.

In reality there has been a gross misdirection of attention and panic towards school violence. Although this is an important issue, it is not nearly as pressing as inadequate funding, deteriorating facilities, and an educational system that continues to produce fewer and fewer students prepared to move on to college. With the average American ninth grader having less than a 40 percent likelihood of enrolling in any college, and in a country where our educational achievement is quickly becoming inferior to most other industrial and developed countries, it has quickly become necessary to refocus attention, resources, and policy on restructuring the American education system, not combating an ever looming school shooting (Kingsbury, 2006).

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Appendix A:

Survey Material

This appendix contains the survey instrument and the survey letter used to

gather data for this research.

April 9, 2007

Dear Teachers:

I am Leonce B. Crump Jr, a graduate student at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. I am working under the direction of Dr. Helen Eigenberg at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. I am conducting a research study to understand how teachers view school violence.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve an anonymous survey. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your principal has approved this project. The survey should only take about 10 minutes. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. A copy of the anonymous survey is attached. Please complete it and place it in the box in your mailroom. Please do not put your names or any other identifying information on the survey.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (423) 716-4690 or e-mail me at Leonce-Crump@utc.edu..

This research has been approved the University Institutional Review Board.

Return of the questionnaire will be considered your consent to participate. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Leonce B. Crump Jr

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

615 McCallie Avenue

Chattanooga, TN

37403

Perceptions of School Violence Survey

This survey is key to research being conducted by The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Your time and effort is greatly appreciated. Please respond to all statements, and be as candid as possible in your responses.

For each of the following questions please circle the number that corresponds with your answer.

1. How old are you? _____

2. What is your sex?

    0. Male

    1. Female

3. What is your race?

    0. African-American

    1. Caucasian

    2. Native American

    3. Hispanic/Latino

    4. Asian-American

    5. Bi or multi-racial

    6. Other: List _____

4. What is your total household income? _____

5. Current level of education?

    0. Bachelors degree

    1. Masters degree

6. Current Rank or Pay Grade? _____

7. What is your marital status?

      0. Single

      1. Married

      2. Separated

      3. Divorced

      4. Widowed

8. What is the name of your school? _____

9. Have you ever worked in a private school?

      0. No

      1. Yes   For how many years? _____

10. How many years have you worked in the public school system?

      0. Less than 3 years

      1. 3-6 years

      2. 7-15 years

      3. 16-25 years

      4. > 25 years

11. Is the school where you currently teach in what is considered a high crime area?

      0. No

      1. Yes

12. Does your school employ a school resource officer?

      0. No

      1. Yes

13. Does your school use metal detectors?

      0. No

      1. Yes

14. Has your school ever used metal detectors?

      0. No

      1. Yes

15. If your school does not have metal detectors, have they been considered?

      0. No

      1. Yes

      2. Not Applicable-have detectors

16. How large is the school?

      0. less than 100 students

      1. 100-500 students

      2. 501-1000 students

      3. 1001-2000 students

      4. 2001 and above

17. On a scale of 1-10, how often do you believe incidents of school violence take place, with 1 being never and 10 being very often (at least once every 2 weeks)? _____

18. What is the demographic make up of the students in your school?

      0. Caucasian % ____

      1. Hispanic/Latino % ____

      2. African-American % ____

      3. Other % ___

For each item below circle the number that most describes your response. There is no right or wrong answer.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
19. Violence is a problem at my school.	1	2	3	4
20. Violence has increased at my school in the last 5 years.	1	2	3	4
21. I worry about being alone in the hall at my school.	1	2	3	4
22. There are many incidents of violence at my school.	1	2	3	4
23. I think a lot about violence at my school.	1	2	3	4
24. I do not feel safe at my school.	1	2	3	4
25. I do not go to my school on weekends or at night because I am afraid.	1	2	3	4
26. I worry about my personal safety while at my school.	1	2	3	4

For each item below circle the number that most describes your response. There is no right or wrong answer.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
27. My students are capable of violence at school.	1	2	3	4
28. I am afraid to be at my school alone.	1	2	3	4
29. I am afraid at my school.	1	2	3	4
30. I worry about the personal safety of my students while at school.	1	2	3	4
31. I feel safe when I am disciplining students.	1	2	3	4
32. I feel safe when I am alone with a group of students.	1	2	3	4
33. I avoid confrontation with students because I am afraid.	1	2	3	4
34. Generally, students in the United States are more violent today than in the past.	1	2	3	4
35. School violence in the United States. is a big problem	1	2	3	4
36. Most teachers in the United States are afraid of school violence.	1	2	3	4
37. School violence in the United States is exaggerated.	1	2	3	4

For each item below circle the number that most describes your response. There is no right or wrong answer.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	1	2	3	4
38. There are many incidents of school violence in the United States.	1	2	3	4
39. The media portrays school violence accurately.	1	2	3	4
40. The media spends too much time discussing school violence.	1	2	3	4
41. School violence in the media is ignored unless there is a mass murder.	1	2	3	4
42. The coverage of high profile cases of school violence, like Columbine, is sensationalistic.	1	2	3	4
43. Media is only interested in school violence as a way to get ratings or sell papers.	1	2	3	4
44. The media needs to spend more time covering school violence.	1	2	3	4
45. The media needs to stop spending so much time covering high profile cases like Columbine.	1	2	3	4
46. There should be better policies to deal with. school violence.	1	2	3	4

For each item below circle the number that most describes your response. There is no right or wrong answer.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
47. Students who commit school violence should be dismissed from school permanently.	1	2	3	4
48. All schools should have metal detectors.	1	2	3	4
49. Teachers should be trained to handle violent students.	1	2	3	4
50. More police officers need to be in schools.	1	2	3	4
51. More resource officers need to be in schools.	1	2	3	4
52. Principals should do more to deter school violence.	1	2	3	4

For each item below circle the number that most describes your response in relation to media consumption. There is no right or wrong answer.

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Not at all
53. How often to you watch the local news on television?	1	2	3	4
54. How often do you watch the national news on television?	1	2	3	4
55. How often do you watch CNN, Fox News, or a similar television network?	1	2	3	4
56. How often do you read the local news paper?	1	2	3	4
57. How often do you read the national newspaper?	1	2	3	4
58. How often do you read a national news magazine?	1	2	3	4
59. How often do you watch crime dramas on television?	1	2	3	4
60. How often do you watch reality programs on television that concentrate on crime?	1	2	3	4
61. How often do you watch crime based movies?	1	2	3	4
62. How often do you read crime novels?	1	2	3	4
63. How often do you receive news updates online?	1	2	3	4
64. How often do you read news on an internet news site?	1	2	3	4

65. On average how much time do you spend watching television daily? _____

66. On average how much time do you spend reading news sources daily (from any source)? _____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND PARTICIPATION.