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AKERS' SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY: CHILDHOOD VICTIMIZATION,  
WITNESSING VIOLENCE, PEER VIOLENCE AND LATER VIOLENT OFFENDING

by

Pamela Annette Styles  
B.S. May 2008, Old Dominion University

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculties of  
Old Dominion University and Norfolk State University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

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## ABSTRACT

### AKERS' SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY: CHILDHOOD VICTIMIZATION, WITNESSING VIOLENCE, PEER VIOLENCE AND LATER VIOLENT OFFENDING

Pamela A. Styles  
Old Dominion University, 2010  
Director: Dr. Randy R. Gainey

The literature linking abuse and later violent offending is extensive. More importantly, the effects of witnessing violence and peer violence on later violent offending have been well established. Drawing upon Akers' social learning theory, the current study explored the effects of victimization, witnessing violence, deviant peer association on later violent offending comparing Blacks and Whites. Using data from the National Survey of Adolescents (NSA), the sample was comprised of 2746 Whites and 572 Blacks. Bivariate and multivariate analyses revealed similar effects for Blacks and Whites. Examining social learning theory variables, the effects of witnessing violence, associating with violent peers and being physically abused were significantly related to later violent offending for Blacks and Whites. The study found that all social learning theory variables excluding sex abuse were significantly related to later violent offending for Blacks and Whites. Notably, no racial differences in the effects were found. Limitations and policy implications are discussed.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Child abuse (maltreatment) occurs in many forms including physical violence, emotional abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. Physical abuse is any physically harmful action against a child (e.g., hair pulling, slapping, hitting, beating, and burning). Emotional abuse occurs when children are subjected to harsh criticism by a parent or caregiver. This usually involves name calling, irrational punishment, and inconsistent expectations. Sexual abuse is any form of sexual behavior with a child such as molestation, rape, or incest. Neglect occurs when a parent or caregiver fails to safeguard the health, safety, or well-being of the child (McWhirter et al. 2007).

It is estimated that 900,000 children in the U.S are victims of abuse or neglect (U.S Congress 2003). Regardless of how it is defined, the effects of abuse can be devastating on the child. The literature linking childhood maltreatment to delinquency is extensive (Widom 1992; Loeber and Farrington 2000). According to Widom (1992) not only do abused and neglected children have a significantly increased risk for becoming delinquent, but they are also more likely to begin engaging in delinquency earlier than nonmaltreated delinquents. In addition, being exposed to violence and witnessing violence increases the risk of later violent offending for juveniles (Nofziger and Kurtz 2005). It is estimated that juveniles account for 2.3 million arrests each year, including more than 92,000 arrests for violent crimes such as murder, aggravated assault, forcible rape, and robbery (McWhirter et al. 2007). Children who are exposed to violence are more likely to engage in violent and abusive behavior (Gelles 1997).

Although the relationship between abuse and crime has seen a substantial amount of empirical support, less is known about how this relationship may vary according to race. According to social learning theory, people learn to engage in crime primarily through their association with others. Social learning theory has been used to explain criminal, delinquent and deviant behaviors (Akers 1998). Akers (1998) uses four major concepts to explain social learning theory: differential association, differential reinforcement, imitation, and definitions. According to Akers (1998), individuals are more likely to commit violations when: he or she differentially associates with others who commit, model, and support violations of social and legal norms; the violative behavior is differentially reinforced over behavior in conformity to the norm; he or she is more exposed to and observes more deviant than conforming models; and his or her own learned definitions are favorable toward committing the deviant acts. Children who experience childhood abuse especially those who are physically abused will more likely be physically violent, this is often due to vicarious learning through exposure to violence (Dutton and Hart 1992).

There are many risk factors that contribute to violent offending by juveniles: exposure to violence, peer violence, and maltreatment. Are the effects of childhood victimization and exposure to violence stronger for African Americans as compared to Caucasians? Understanding what appears to be a differential effect of childhood victimization by race is an important challenge for future research (Widom and Maxfield 2001). Building upon Widom and Maxfield's (2001) notion, the current research will examine these issues. According to Lansford and colleagues (2007), the effects of physical abuse and later violent delinquency are more pronounced for African Americans as compared to Caucasians. Why is this so? Very few studies have been



conducted to examine the racial differences in childhood victimization, exposure to violence and later violent offending. Presently, most research has often focused on the gender differences associated with childhood victimization and later violent offending. Although research suggests that there is a strong link between childhood victimization and later violent offending, most studies have failed to examine whether the effects are stronger for African Americans as compared to Caucasians (Widom 1989; Smith and Thornberry 1995).

The current study examines Akers' social learning theory to determine whether the effects of childhood victimization, witnessing family/community violence, peer violence on later violent offending are different between Blacks and Whites. To date, no study has attempted to use Akers' social learning theory to explain the relationship between childhood victimization, witnessing family/community violence, peer violence and violent offending amongst juveniles. The purpose of the current study is to determine the explanatory power of social learning theory as it applies to childhood victimization, witnessing family/community violence, peer violence and violent offending. Following the logic of Akers' social learning, the unique impact will be examined on the current study.

This study will address several research questions: 1) What are the effects of victimization, witnessing violence and deviant peer association on violent offending? 2.) Are these effects dependent on race? To address these research questions the current study will use data from the National Survey of Adolescents (NSA).

The next chapter will provide an overview of the literature on childhood experiences of victimization and witnessing violence and their effects on later violent offending. The following section will provide a review of past empirical studies

addressing child abuse and maltreatment, exposure to violence, and other factors that predict violent offending.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature examining experiences in childhood and later violent juvenile offending. The chapter begins by explaining how social learning theory can help explain the relationship between witnessing violence, childhood victimization and later violent juvenile offending. An overview of the risk factors associated with violent juvenile offending is also provided. The chapter will conclude by introducing and discussing the research questions under investigation.

#### SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

Social learning theory was a reformulation of Sutherland's theory of differential association developed by Burgess and Akers (1966). They used social learning and differential association theory and applied it to criminal, delinquent, and deviant behaviors. Akers (1998) continued to expand social learning theory; the current version consists of four major concepts: differential association, definitions, differential reinforcement, and imitation.

Differential association has two dimensions: behavioral-interactional and normative. The interactional dimension usually involves direct and indirect associations. Direct association involves interactions with others who engage in certain kinds of behavior, and indirect association involves interaction and identification with different reference groups. Normative dimension involves individual's exposure to different patterns of norms and values. Definitions are beliefs, attitudes, or meanings that motivate one to participate in particular behaviors. Differential reinforcement refers to the rewards and punishments that follow certain behaviors. Imitation refers to the

engagement in behavior after the observation of similar behaviors in others (Akers 1998). Findings in past empirical studies demonstrate that social learning variables including differential association, differential reinforcement, definitions, and imitation are strongly related to various forms of deviant, delinquent, and criminal behaviors (Winfree, Backstrom, and Mays 1994; Benda 1994). Although the family is the primary group included in the concept of differential associations, the balance of associations, reinforcement, models and definitions are also affected by peer groups (Akers 1998).

While any level of association with delinquent peers increases the risk of delinquent conduct, gang membership produces more frequent, intense, and enduring association with delinquent friends, exposure to delinquent models and definitions and reinforcement for delinquent behavior (Winfree, Backstrom, and Mays 1994; Curry et al. 2002). For example, Winfree, Backstrom, and Mays (1994) conducted a study examining youth gangs by applying selected elements of social learning theory. Data were collected on 197 high school students from southern New Mexico and was comprised of 138 males and 59 females between the ages of 12 to 16 years of age. Participants were required to complete a survey about gang related activities. The dependent variable was delinquency and for the independent variables; differential associations, differential reinforcements, and definitions were measured. The researchers examined whether differential association was linked to self reported gang involvement and gang related delinquency. In the study, the researchers defined differential association as the proportion of one's best friends who were involved in gang activity. To measure differential reinforcement subjects were asked to review two lists of good and bad things associated with gang membership and required to report their beliefs. Definitions was measured based on subjects attitudes towards the gang experience. The

researchers argued that delinquent conduct is more likely to ensue when young people develop definitions favorable rather than unfavorable to delinquency through reinforcements and punishments. The researchers found that social learning theory provided considerable insights into gang membership. Differential associations, gang attitudes, and active gang membership all made significant contributions to personal crime.

Benda and Corwyn (2002) conducted a study examining the effect of abuse in childhood and in adolescence on violence among adolescents comparing social learning theory, social control, and social strain theory. In the study, the researchers wanted to examine whether there were any differential effects of abuse between younger and older adolescents. The researchers assumed that social learning theory has differential effects according to age. Data were collected on 1,031 adolescents between the ages of 13 to 18 years of age from two public high schools in a large metropolitan city on the East Coast. Participants were administered a 150 item questionnaire. The sample was comprised of 69% African Americans, and 31% other minorities. The dependent variable used in the study was violent behavior. Social learning measures of peer associations, definitions, differential rewards, and modeling served as the independent variables. It was reported that differential rewards and modeling were not significantly related to violent acts among younger adolescents. However; among some older adolescents, peer affiliations and associated experiences such as definitions, differential rewards, and modeling were more influential than familial factors on violence.

To summarize, Akers' (1998) social learning theory contends that juvenile delinquency increases as juveniles are exposed to delinquent role models, and are associated with people who have favorable attitudes toward delinquency. In addition,

primary groups such as family and peers are more likely to have stronger effects on delinquent attitudes and behaviors among juveniles. Many studies have been cited using Aker's (1998) four major concepts of social learning theory (McGee 1992; Benda 1994; Burton et al. 1994). The present study, will examine the effects of victimization, exposure to violence, peer association on violent behavior using the aforementioned concepts.

## CHILD ABUSE AND MALTREATMENT

Childhood maltreatment has been identified as a serious threat to children's well being which may negatively impact their development (Herrenkohl, Herrenkohl, and Egolf 2003). Past studies have indicated that children who are physically, emotionally, and/or sexually abused are much more likely to engage in delinquent activities (Widom 1990; Smith and Thornberry 1995). There is substantial evidence that maltreated children are more likely to engage in delinquency and juvenile offending than children whom there is no evidence of maltreatment (Smith and Thornberry 1995; Stewart et al. 2008; Darby et al. 1998; Widom 1992; Yexley, Borowsky, and Ireland 2002).

Several studies have linked family abuse to later violent offending (Darby et al. 1998; Herrera 2003). For example, Darby et al (1998) examined the psychosocial characteristics and the characteristics of 112 juveniles between the ages of 14 to 17 who were prosecuted and convicted of a homicide related crime. Data were collected using archival records such as school and medical records, pre-sentencing investigation reports, and caseworker interview reports. The sample was comprised primarily of males (94.6%). To determine whether having a history of family abuse played a role in the homicide, subjects with a history of family abuse were compared to those without a family history of abuse. The findings suggest that abused subjects were more likely to

experience suicidal ideation or attempts prior to the commission of the homicide than subjects who were not abused. It was also reported that females who committed homicide were more likely to have experienced family abuse than their male counterparts.

Yexley, Borowsky, and Ireland (2002) conducted a study examining the relationship between different experiences of family physical violence and violent behaviors of adolescents. Using the Minnesota Student Survey (MSS), the researchers obtained data on 133, 794 adolescents. In the MSS study, 83% of the sample was White, 4% were Black/African American, 5% were Mexican/Latin American, 2% were mixed-race, 1% was American Indian, and 5% were Asian/Pacific Islander. The independent variables used in the study were demographics (grade, race/ethnicity, and family structure) and the dependent variables were attempted suicide, fighting, and gun carrying at school. The results indicated that being exposed to family violence was strongly associated with increased levels of violence against self and others. It was also reported that having a history of physical family violence was correlated with having attempted suicide, fighting, and gun-carrying. Furthermore, being a victim of physical violence and witnessing family violence are strong risk factors for youth involvement in violence.

Other scholars have reported similar findings when examining violent offenders. For example, Sepowitz (2009) conducted a study comparing male and female juveniles charged with homicide. In the study, 136 juveniles charged in the juvenile justice system with a homicide related crime over a 5- year period were examined using information collected by juvenile probation officers. Of the 136 participants in the study, 107 were male and 29 were female between the ages of 11 to 18, and 55.9% were African

American, 33.1% were Caucasian, 10.3% were Hispanic, and 1% were Asian. In the study, 68.4 % were charged with homicide, and 31.6% were charged with attempted murder. The attempted murder and completed murder groups were compared using a t-test and chi-square analysis. The findings suggested that female juvenile homicide offenders had higher rates of reported childhood abuse, more serious substance abuse, and mental health problems as compared to male juvenile homicide offenders.

Zingraff and colleagues (1993) conducted a longitudinal study examining childhood maltreatment and delinquency. Data was collected from the North Carolina Central Registry of Child Abuse and Neglect. In the study, 655 children with a mean age of 15 who reported being maltreated were examined. In order to compare the maltreated against nonmaltreated youth, the researchers drew a non random sample of youth from the general school population and from the total child caseload of the county Division of Social Services (DSS). The sample size for the nonmaltreated group was 281 and the mean age was 15.3 years of age.

Delinquent involvement was the dependent variable and was measured by use of complaints brought to the attention of the courts by citizens, schools, and the Division of Social Services. Maltreatment was the primary independent variable and was measured by physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. It was reported that sexually abused children were more likely to be arrested for status offenses as compared to the nonmaltreated group. Children who were maltreated were more likely to engage in violent delinquency as compared to nonmaltreated offenders. In addition, it was reported that males and African Americans were more likely than females and Caucasians to be arrested for violent offending.



Other studies have found similar outcomes. Widom and Maxfield (2001) conducted a longitudinal study comparing the arrest records of abused and/or neglected children with arrest records for children who were not abused or maltreated. A sample of 1,575 subjects was tracked over a twenty-five year period. It was reported that being abused or neglected as a child increased the likelihood of being arrested by 59%, and being arrested for a violent crime by 30 percent. It was also reported that physically abused and neglected children were more likely to be arrested for a violent crime as compared to sexually abused children.

Some research has focused on the long-term effects of childhood abuse and maltreatment on juveniles. According to the growing body of literature, children who are abused are more likely to engage in violent offending as juveniles. Smith and Thornberry (1995) conducted a study examining the relationship between childhood maltreatment and adolescent involvement in delinquency. Data were collected using official and self report data from the Rochester Youth Development Study. In addition, data were collected from Rochester public schools, the police department, and the Department of Social Services. There were 1,000 participants in the study. Maltreatment was the primary independent variable and was measured by a classification system: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional maltreatment, moral/legal maltreatment, educational maltreatment, physical neglect, and lack of supervision. Delinquency was the dependent variable and was measured by the number of times each subject had an official contact with the police as a juvenile or an arrest as an adult. Results suggest that maltreatment is a significant predictor of the prevalence of moderate and violent offending when race, ethnicity, sex, social class, family structure, and mobility are held constant.

Lansford et al. (2007) conducted a longitudinal study examining the links between early physical abuse and violent delinquency. The participants in the study were part of a longitudinal study called the Child Development Project. There were 574 children followed from age 5 to age 21. Approximately, 80% were White, 17% were African American, and 2% were other ethnic groups. The sample was made up of 52% males and 48% females. The following variables were analyzed: reports of physical abuse, violent delinquency, nonviolent delinquency, and aggression. In the study, 12% of the sample was classified as having experienced early physical abuse. It was reported that individuals who were physically abused in the first five years of life were at greater risk for being arrested as juveniles for violent and nonviolent offenses.

There is a growing body of research that suggests that experiencing physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect are predictors of negative consequences (Widom 1992; Smith and Thornberry 1995; Zingraff et al. 1993). Dutton and Hart (1992) conducted a study examining the impact of various types of childhood abuse and neglect on violent and aggressive behavior in adulthood. Data were collected from seven federal institutions within the Pacific Region of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). Data were collected from the CSC Offender Record System files, and included information on criminal history, demographic characteristics, family background, education, employment history, intimate relationships, incidents of violence and aggression, and mental health history. In the study, the relationship between childhood abuse (e.g, physical, sexual, and neglect) and adult offending patterns were examined. Overall, 41% of the subjects had been exposed to some type of serious childhood abuse. It was reported that 31% of subjects had suffered physical abuse as children or adolescents, 11% had suffered sexual abuse, and 13% had either witnessed

parental abuse or suffered serious physical neglect as compared to the no abuse group. Individuals who suffered abuse were three times more likely than their non abused counterparts to commit violent acts as adults. It was also reported that childhood abuse significantly increased the risk of violent offending as an adult.

Ferguson and Lynskey (1997) conducted a study examining the relationship between physical punishment and maltreatment during childhood and adjustment in young adulthood. Using data from the Christchurch Health and Development Study, the researchers obtained data on 1,265 children. The dependent variable used was offending, and the independent variables used were: exposure to physical punishment and or maltreatment, mental health and substance use. It was reported that children who were exposed to harsh or abusive treatment during childhood had a greater risk of violent offending and being a victim of violence. Subjects who reported harsh or abusive treatment by parents and or caregivers, had higher rates of psychiatric disorder, suicide attempts, juvenile offending, and victimization as compared to those who reported that their parents did not use physical punishment.

Hamilton, Falshaw, and Browne (2002) conducted a study examining the link between recurrent maltreatment and offending behavior. Data were collected on 79 young people who were residents in a secure center for emotionally and behaviorally disturbed children. Information was obtained from the admission file of each young person during a two year period. The admission files contained background details on offense history, maltreatment history, self-harming behaviors, childhood referrals, medical problems, educational achievements, and family environment. It was found that young people who had experienced revictimization were more likely to have committed

a violent and or sexual offense than children who reported no abuse. In addition, many risk factors for abuse were proven to be risk factors for later offending.

Several other researchers have analyzed the relationship between childhood maltreatment and violent offending. For example, Stewart, Livingston, and Dennison (2008) conducted a study examining the links between child maltreatment and juvenile offending. Using data from Queensland's (Australia) child protection agency and juvenile justice system, the researchers obtained data on 5,849 maltreated youth. Data were collected based on child protection officers' assessment. The dependent variable used was offending and was measured by court appearances which resulted in a guilty outcome. The independent variables were victimization and maltreatment. It was reported that children whose maltreatment extended into adolescence were more likely to offend as juveniles as compared to children whose maltreatment occurred prior to adolescence.

Salzinger, Rosario, and Feldman (2007) conducted a study examining physical child abuse and adolescent violent delinquency. The sample was comprised of 100 physically abused urban schoolchildren between the ages of 10 to 16 years of age. Abused children were recruited based on confirmed cases of physical abuse documented from the New York City Register for Child Maltreatment. The racial/ethnic breakdown of participants were 38% Black, 7% White, 54% Hispanic, and 1% Asian. They were compared to 100 nonabused classmates matched for race, gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Physically abused children were recruited from confirmed cases from New York City Register for Child Maltreatment from 1992 to 1996. The dependent variable used was violent delinquency, and the independent variables used were physical abuse, attachment to parents, and attachment to friends. It was reported

that physical abuse was significantly related to increased violent delinquency. In addition, high levels of abusive behaviors with best friends increased the risk for violent delinquent behavior more abused adolescents than for nonabused adolescents.

The studies discussed above have found a strong association between childhood maltreatment and delinquency. In terms of outcomes, no differences were observed with regards to the effects on race. The following studies below will shed some light on childhood maltreatment and delinquency examining racial differences.

#### *Racial Differences in Childhood Maltreatment and Delinquency*

The association between childhood maltreatment such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect and juvenile delinquency has been recognized widely in the social science literature (Rivera and Widom 1990; Smith and Thornberry 1995; Swanston et al. 2003). While many studies demonstrate the existence of this relationship, few have examined whether the effects vary by race. Widom (1992) conducted a study examining whether abuse and neglect leads to adult criminality. The study followed 1575 cases from childhood through young adulthood comparing arrest records of two groups. The study group was comprised of 908 subjects who were identified as being abused and or neglected. The comparison group was comprised of 667 children who were not abused or neglected. Widom (1992) found that maltreatment had more severe effects on African American than on Caucasian children. It was reported that Caucasian and African American youths who were physically abused or neglected were more likely to be arrested by age 29, however; the difference was more pronounced for African American youths. Widom's (1992) explanation behind the racial differences were that Blacks were more likely to be neglected as compared to Whites.

To summarize, although previous studies explain the relationship between child maltreatment and delinquency, a comprehensive review of the literature reveals a remaining gap. Very few studies have examined the racial differences in childhood victimization and later violent offending. After reviewing the previous literature, I conclude that more research needs to be done on race related findings explaining the differences of Blacks and Whites.

#### WITNESSING VIOLENCE

Often, children are both the victims and witnesses of violent crimes and maltreatment within the close confines of the family and the community. Children's exposure to such violence may adversely affect them, not only in their youth but also as they mature into adults (Grych 2000). The relationship between witnessing and being exposed to abuse and future offending has been supported in various studies (Kennedy and Baron 1993; Yexley, Borowsky, and Ireland 2002; Nofziger and Kurtz 2005; Wilkinson and Carr 2008; Selmer-O'Hagan et al. 1998; Durant et al. 1994; Williams, Stiffman, and O'neal 1998). Kennedy and Baron (1993) argued that routines and lifestyles that expose juveniles to certain lifestyle patterns increased opportunities for violent offending, victimization, and witnessing violence. In the qualitative study, the researchers studied a group of 35 delinquent street youths by obtaining information through unstructured interviews. The subjects reported engaging in many crimes such as stealing, using drugs, and fighting. During the interviews, the researcher learned that most of the subjects were exposed to violence and because of their subculture, engaging in delinquent activities were considered the norm for this particular group of individuals.

Several studies suggest that exposure to violence is a strong predictor for later involvement in violence. Yexley, Borowsky, and Ireland (2002) conducted a study

examining the relationship between different experiences of family physical violence and violent behaviors of adolescents. The results indicated that being exposed to family violence was strongly associated with increased levels of violence against self and others. They concluded that witnessing family violence is a strong risk factor for youth involvement in violence. Although witnessing family violence is a strong predictor for youth involvement in violence, the researchers failed to examine racial differences.

Nofziger and Kurtz (2005) conducted a study examining the relationship between various types of exposure to violence and violent offending. Using data from National Survey of Adolescents (NSA), the researchers examined how being a witness to violence, having violent friends, and being a victim of violence is associated with an increased risk of violent offending. Data were collected on 4,023 adolescents between the ages of 12 to 17 years old. There were three sets of variables used in the study: demographic characteristics, exposure to violence, and violent offending. In the study, 72% of the sample reported witnessing violence in the community or the home and 68% of those indicated that the violence was a beating. A third of the sample reported witnessing a threat with a weapon, while eleven percent of the sample reported witnessing the use of weapons, sexual assaults and mugging. A majority, (70%) of the respondents reported that they had witnessed violence directly and the act was committed by a friend. It was reported that 26% of the respondents reported one form of victimization (sexual assault, physical assault, and physical abuse). Eight percent of the respondents reported being victims of sexual assault, 5.6% of the respondents reported being involved in a gang fight, 3% respondents reported having committed attempted rape, actual rape, or sexual assault, and 1.5% reported having been a victim to all three types of violence.

Wilkinson and Carr (2008) conducted a study examining youth's responses to witnessing and being exposed to community violence. Data were collected from 416 active violent offenders from two of New York City's most disadvantaged neighborhoods. Interview data were gathered over a three year period. Respondents were obtained via a snowball sampling technique. Of the sample, 49% were African American, 39% were Puerto Rican, and 12% Caribbean, Latin American, or mixed ethnicity. Interviews covered a range of topics including family experiences, school, employment, peer relationships, neighborhood processes, neighborhood violence, direct and vicarious victimization, guns, drug use, criminal activity, future goals, and perspectives on possible solutions to the youth violence problem. In the study, 416 violent youth reported witnessing or engaging in 780 violent events over a two year period. Nearly all (93%) of the respondents reported witnessing someone being beaten up badly, 75% had seen someone get stabbed, and 62% reported an event involving a gun.

The studies discussed above have found a strong association between exposure to violence and delinquency. In terms of outcomes, no differences were observed with regards to the effects on race. The following studies below examine racial differences.

#### *Racial Differences in Witnessing Violence*

While many of the previous studies demonstrated the relationship between exposure to violence and delinquency, only a few have examined whether the effects vary by race. Selmer-O'Hagan et al. (1998) conducted a study assessing the exposure to violence in urban youth. Using the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN), the researchers obtained data on 80 subjects. Just over 60% of the sample was male, 47% were African American, 38% were White, 10% were



Latino, and 5% were from other ethnic groups. The independent variables used in the study were exposure to violence and victimization, and the dependent variable was self-reported offending.

A majority (88%) of the subjects reported seeing someone hit during their lifetime, and 3% reported being sexually assaulted. It was also reported that African American subjects were exposed to more violence than Whites. African Americans were 3.5 times more likely than Whites to report seeing someone shot during their lifetime. In addition, African Americans were ten times more likely to have seen someone shot during the past year as compared to Whites. The result showed that exposure to violence, and negative peer environment are significant predictors of violent offending among African American males but not among African American females. It was also reported that males were more likely to have witnessed more violence than females. In addition, African American males reported higher rates of violence than African American females.

In another study examining the effects of exposure to violence, Durant et al (1994) conducted a study examining social and psychological factors associated with the use and nonuse of violence among Black adolescents. In the study, 225 Black adolescents between the ages of 11 to 19 living in nine housing projects in Augusta, GA. were administered an anonymous questionnaire. Exposure to violence, personal victimization, hopelessness, depression, family conflict, corporal punishment and purpose of life were examined. It was reported that symptoms of depression and hopelessness, corporal punishment and childhood victimization were found associated with self reported use of violence.

To summarize, despite the abundance of literature on the effects of exposure to violence and delinquency, there is a scarcity of studies examining racial differences in exposure to violence and later offending. After reviewing the previous literature, I conclude that future research needs to investigate the current issues examining racial differences.

## PEER VIOLENCE

Having peers that engage in violent acts is another form of exposure to violence. Most research on co-offending suggests that violent offenders usually have violent friends and their relationships usually develop into a pathway of violent offending and committing crimes together. Although friends' delinquency has been found to raise the risk for delinquent behavior for all types of children, it might be expected to have an especially exacerbating effect for abused children because of previously learned patterns of maladaptive behavior (Conway and McCord 2002; Thompson and Braaten-Antrim 1998). For example, Conway and McCord (2002) conducted a longitudinal study examining the relation between co-offending with violent accomplices and violent crime. The study was one of the first studies designed to track offenders and their accomplice's patterns of violent criminal behaviors over an 18 year period. The data were collected from a longitudinal study of juvenile offenders and their accomplices apprehended in Philadelphia between 1976 and 1994. Participants consisted of 616 offenders and accomplices. Crime data for the target offenders and their accomplices were collected from Philadelphia court records. There were 235 participants for the target sample group and 381 participants for the accomplice sample. For the target sample, the majority of the offenders 97% were male and 68% were African American. For the accomplice sample, 91% were male and 69% were African American.

Non-violent offenders who committed their first co-offense with violent accomplices are at an increased risk for serious violent crime. In addition, the findings suggest that “violence is learned on the street and is passed through social contexts, including those in which offenders commit crimes together” (p.97). They reported that of the 235 co-offenses, 37% were violent crimes, 53% were serious property crimes, and the remaining offenses were drug offenses. Although the researchers examined the relationship between juvenile offenders and accomplices in crime, the researchers did not examine race.

### *Racial Differences in Peer Violence*

Past and present research suggests that the delinquent behavior of an individual is positively related to the actual or perceived delinquent behavior of that individual's friends. The relationship between delinquent peer group association and delinquent behavior has been studied by many researchers. (Akers 1998; Elliot, Huizinga, and Menard 1989). Various criminology studies have suggested that individual attributes such as age and race play an important role in peer violence and co offending (Reiss and Farrington 1991). Exposure to deviant peers has been linked to increases in a wide range of delinquent behaviors (Thornberry and Krohn 1997; Elliot and Menard 1996). Deviant peer affiliation is a stronger predictor of delinquent behavior than variables related to family, school, and the community. Only a few studies report racial differences in peer association and violence. Silverman and Caldwell (2008) conducted a study examining peer relationships and violence exploring the differences of 128 female offenders from four racial/ethnic groups. The researchers wanted to examine whether there were any racial differences in the contribution of peer relationships to violence among adjudicated female offenders. The dependent variable was violence,

and the independent variable was peer relations. Peer relations were measured using a five point scale with questions related to the following categories: attachment, extrinsic rewards, peer attitudes toward delinquency, peer influence, and peer association. The results revealed that among Caucasians, greater time spent with peers was associated with higher levels of violence. For African Americans, it was reported that tangible rewards from peer relationships significantly contributed to violence.

In summary, very few studies have been conducted to examine the racial differences in childhood victimization, exposure to violence and later violent offending. To date, most researchers have often focused mainly on the gender differences associated with childhood victimization and later violent offending. More importantly, past studies have failed to examine these differences using social learning theory. The present study will fill this void and add to existing literature by examining the relationship between childhood victimization, witnessing violence and later violent offending comparing Whites and African Americans.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study will address two primary research questions: 1) What are the effects of victimization, exposure to violence, deviant peer association on violent behavior? 2.) Are these effects dependent on race? The next chapter will provide an overview of the research methods used in the study.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins by describing the research method that is used in the current study. A discussion of the research design and research hypotheses will be discussed. In addition, the independent variables and dependent variable will be included and the type of statistical analysis will be explained.

#### THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Using certain variables from Akers' social learning theory, the current study will examine the relationship between victimization, witnessing violence, peer violence and violent offending examining racial differences using data from the National Survey of Adolescents (NSA), a study of 4,023 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 years of age (Kilpatrick and Saunders 1995). Using Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) technology, data were collected through telephone interviews with adolescents and their parents or guardians. The NSA consists of two subsamples, a national probability household sample of 3,161 adolescents and a probability oversample of 862 adolescents residing in central city areas of the United States. The goal of the study was to test specific hypotheses illustrating the relationships among serious victimization experiences, the mental health effects of victimization, substance abuse/use, and delinquent behaviors in adolescents. The study assessed both familial and nonfamilial types of violence. Adolescents were asked a series of questions relating to delinquent behaviors, and victimization experiences. In addition, information was gathered on witnessing violence and exposure to violence. Demographic information was gathered from the adolescents on age, race, gender, number of people living in household, and

grade in school. Information on gender, marital status, number of children, employment status, education, race, and income was collected from parents and guardians. In the current study, only Blacks (572) and Whites (2746) were compared.

#### MEASUREMENT OF VARIABLES

The dependent variable for the current study is violent offending. Violent offending was measured by affirmative answers to any of the questions assessing the offender's involvement in violent acts. Violent offending was itemized as follows: Have you been involved in a gang fight? Have you used force or strong-arm methods to get money or things from people? Have you had or tried to have sexual relations with someone against their will? Have you attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting or killing that person? Responding In the study, 6% of the subjects reported being involved in gang fights, and 2% reported using strong arm methods for robbery. In addition, 5% reported attacking someone with the intentions of killing. The index ranged from 0 to 3 with a mean score of .1301. Because there was so little variation in the scale, I dichotomized it with one indicating yes to any of the following types of offending and no was coded as zero.

There are three primary independent variables in the current study: witnessing violence, peer violence, and victimization. Witnessing and or exposure to violence was measured by yes or no responses to the following items: Have you ever seen someone actually shoot someone else with a gun? Have you ever seen someone actually cut or stab someone else with a knife? Have you ever seen someone threaten someone else with a knife, a gun or some other weapon? Have you ever seen someone beaten up, hit, punched, or kicked such that they were hurt pretty badly? In the study, 5% reported actually seeing someone shoot another person, and 11% reported seeing someone stab

someone. Also, 35% reported seeing someone threatened with a knife or a gun, and a very high percentage (69%) reported seeing someone beaten up. The index ranged from 0 to 4 with a mean score of 1.20. Responses were coded as one for yes and no was coded as zero. Because there was so little variation in the scale, I dichotomized it with one indicating yes to any form of witnessing violence and no was coded as zero.

Peer violence was measured by yes or no responses reported by the respondents. Peer violence was itemized as follows: Peer identified as offender in acts of witnessed violence. Friend hit another person. Friend forced or attempted to force someone to have sex. In the study, it is noteworthy to mention that 21% of the sample reported witnessing a friend threaten or hit someone, and 4% reported that they witnessed a friend force someone to do more sexually. The index ranged from 0 to 2 with a mean score of .254. Because there was so little variation in the scale, I dichotomized it with one indicating yes to any form of peer violence and no was coded as zero.

Two types of victimization (sexual and physical) were measured by multiple responses and categorized into two separate groups: sexual assault and physical assault. Sexual assault was measured by yes or no responses reported by the respondents. Sexual assault was itemized as follows: Has a man or boy ever put a sexual part of his body inside your private sexual parts, inside your rear end or inside your mouth when you didn't want them to? Has anyone, male or female, ever put fingers or objects inside your private sexual parts or inside your rear end when you didn't want them to? Has anyone, male or female, ever put their mouth on your private sexual parts when you didn't want them to? Has anyone, male or female, ever touched your private sexual parts when you didn't want them to? Has anyone ever made you touch their private sexual parts when you didn't want them to? In the study, 2% reported unwanted sexual penile entry, and

1% reported unwanted sexual entry with fingers or foreign objects. Also, 1% reported unwanted sexual oral contact, 1% reported unwanted touching of their sexual parts, and 2% reported being forced to touch someone private parts. The index ranged from 0 to 5 with a mean of .1272. Because there was so little variation in the scale, I dichotomized it with one indicating yes to any form of sexual abuse and no was coded as zero.

Physical assault was measured by yes or no responses to the following questions: Has anyone, including family or friend ever attacked you with a gun, knife or some other weapon? Has anyone, including family or friend ever physically attacked you without a weapon, but you thought they were trying to kill you or seriously injure you? Has anyone including family members or friends ever threatened you with a gun or knife, but didn't actually shoot or cut you? Has anyone including family members or friends ever beat you up, attacked you, or hit you with something like a stick, club, or bottle so hard that you were hurt pretty bad? Has anyone including family members or friends ever beat you up with their fists so hard that you were hurt pretty bad? In the study, 5% reported being attacked with a weapon, and 8% reported being physically attacked. Also, 6% reported being threatened with a gun or a knife, and 5% reported being beaten up with an object and hurt badly. In addition, 7% reported being beaten up with a fist and hurt badly. The index ranged from 0 to 5 with a mean score of .3017. Because there was so little variation in the scale, I dichotomized it with one indicating yes to any form of physical abuse and no was coded as zero.

### *Control Variables*

The control variables used for the current study are gender, age, race, family residence and family structure. Gender is measured as a dichotomous variable with one indicating female and zero male. Age is measured as the respondents stated age at the



time of interview. All respondents were between the ages of 12 and 17. Race is measured as a dichotomous variable with one indicating White and zero African American. Family structure is measured as a dichotomous variable dividing those who report they have always lived with both biological parents coded as one and all other responses coded zero. Family residence is measured as a dichotomous variable dividing those who reported living in the suburbs/city as one and all other responses coded as zero.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Analyses include both bivariate and multivariate statistics. First, correlational analyses examine the relationship between childhood victimization, exposure to violence and later violent offending. Next, a multivariate analysis focuses on the unique effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable. To test the specific hypotheses, separate models will be run for Blacks and Whites and a z statistic will be used to compare the coefficients.

The next chapter provides the results of the descriptive, frequencies and multivariate analyses. By testing social learning theory and its relation to childhood victimization, the current research compare Blacks and Whites and examine whether there are any racial differences reported between the two groups.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

#### DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The descriptive statistics for the current study are depicted in Table 1. The descriptive analysis for each variable includes the percentage of cases in each category and valid N. The sample was comprised of 83% Whites and 17% Black and half of the respondents were female and half were male. Respondents were between the ages of 12 to 17 with a mean age of 14.64 (standard deviation = 3.64). The analysis indicated that 9% of the sample reported violent offending, and a large portion (72%) of the sample reported witnessing violence. Twenty-two percent of the sample reported that friends had engaged in any of the acts of violence measured in the study. Physical abuse was the most frequently reported form of victimization with 19% of the sample reporting being victims of physical abuse. Sexual abuse was the least common form of abuse with 6% of the sample reporting this type of abuse. Family structure was measured as whether or not the respondent's parents were married. Analyses indicated that 79% of the sample had parents who were married, and 21% were not married. Family residence was measured based on whether the respondent reported living in urban or rural area. The analysis indicated that 59% of the sample lived in cities while 41% lived in a rural area.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable		Percentage	N (3318)
<b>Gender</b>			
	Male	49.8	1640
	Female	50.2	1678
<b>Race</b>			
	White/European	82.8	2746
	Black/African American	17.2	572
Violent Offending		9	299
Witness Abuse		72	2390
Peer Violence		22	720
Physical Abuse		19	633
Sexual Abuse		6	201
<b>Family Residence (1=city)</b>			
	city	59	1946
	rural	41	1366
<b>Family Structure (1=married)</b>			
	married	79	2626
	not married	20.6	686
<b>Age</b>			
	Mean	14.64	
	SD	3.64	

## CROSSTABULATIONS

Crosstabulations are used to show the association between two categorical variables. For the current study, crosstabs were used to determine the racial differences between violent offending and witnessing violence, peer violence, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Chi-square tests of independence are generally used to investigate the relationship between two discrete variables that comprise binary or multinomial distributions (Bachman and Paternoster 1997). Analyses revealed that there was a significant relationship between race and violent offending. Blacks (18%) were far more likely than whites (.07%) to self report violent offending ( $p < .01$ ). There was also a significant relationship between race and witnessing violence, 83% of Blacks in the sample reported witnessing violence compared to 70% Whites  $p < .01$ . In addition, analyses revealed that Blacks (34%) were more likely than Whites (19%) to report being associated with deviant peers ( $p < .01$ ). Analyses for the current study also revealed that there was a significant relationship between race and physical abuse, 27% of Blacks in the sample reported being physically abused compared to 17% Whites  $p < .01$ . In addition, while it appears that Blacks (10%) were more likely than Whites (.05) to self report being sexually abused, the difference is not statistically significant. Analyses for the current study also revealed that 75% of Blacks lived in the city while just over half (55%) of Whites lived in the city. In addition, 45% of Whites lived in rural areas while 25% of Blacks lived in rural areas. Analyses also indicated that a large portion (84%) of Whites lived with parents who were married while just over half (56%) of Blacks lived with married parents. In addition, analyses indicated that 16% of Whites lived with parents who were not married while 44% of Blacks lived with parents who were not married.

Table 2. Crosstabulations by Race for all Variables

Variable	Black (N=572)		White (N=2746)		
	%	N	%	N	
Violent Offending	18**	101	.07**	198	
Witness Violence	83**	475	70**	1910	
Peer Violence	34**	194	19**	522	
Physical Abuse	27**	155	17**	475	
Sexual Abuse	10	55	.05	145	
Family Residence	city	75	429	55**	1511
	rural	25	139	45**	1226
Family Structure	married	56	322	84**	2298
	unmarried	44	246	16**	439

\*\* p<.01 indicates the relationship is significant at the .01 level.

## LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Multivariate logistic regression was used to examine the research questions. Logistic regression offers a feasible alternative to ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis when the dependent variable is a dichotomous measure (Long 1997; Warner 2008). The dichotomous dependent variable for the current study is “whether or not the juvenile was involved in a violent act”. This variable is regressed on a set of dichotomized independent variables measuring relevant concepts drawn from Akers’ social learning theory, and a set of control variables. Two models were created; one with social learning variables and the other adding controls. Separate analyses were performed for the sample as a whole and separately for Blacks and Whites.

Table 3 presents the logistic regression results of the social learning theory variables for the whole sample. First, focusing on social learning theory variables among the entire sample, Model 1a explains about (27%) of the variation in self reported violent offending. Witnessing abuse, peer violence, and physical abuse are statistically significant at the .05 level. Sex abuse was not statistically significant. Clearly witnessing violence is the strongest predictor of violent offending. The odds for youth who witnessed violence and engaged in violence were 10 times greater than those who had not witnessed violence. In addition, the odd for youth who associated with violent peers were around 4 times greater than those who did not associate with violent peers. Moreover, the odds of youth who were physically abused were 4 times greater than those who were not physically abused.

Other than sexual abuse, all variables remained significant when controls were added to Model 1b. Controlling for age, gender, family residence and family structure the results showed that witnessing abuse increases the odds of engaging in violent

offending almost seven fold. Moreover, associating with violent peers increases the odds of engaging in violent offending three times. Physical abuse increases the odds of engaging in violent offending nearly four times.

Whites were 46% less likely to engage in violent offending than Blacks. The odds of males engaging in violent offending were twice as high as females. In addition, the odds of individuals living in the city engaging in violent offending were 51% greater compared to individuals living in suburban or rural areas. Notably, the odds of those individuals living with parents who were married engaging in violent offending were 29% less than individuals not living with parents who were married.

Separate models were used to investigate factors that might uniquely affect Black and White youth. Model 2a presents logistic regression results of the social learning theory variables. Focusing on social learning theory variables among Blacks, the model explains about (18%) of the variation in self reported violent offending. Of the social learning variables; witnessing violence, peer violence and physical abuse significantly increases the odds of engaging in violence, sex abuse was not significantly related to violence. As depicted in Model 2a, witnessing violence was the strongest predictor of violent offending for Blacks. Blacks who witnessed violence were 3 times more likely to engage in violence than those who had not witnessed violence. Blacks who associated with violent peers were 2.8 times more likely to engage in violence than those who did not associate with violent peers. Blacks who were physically abused were 3 times more likely to engage in violence than those who were not physically abused.

When controls were added Model 2b indicates that the effect of witnessing violence was reduced appreciatively and was no longer statistically significant among blacks. Two control variables, age and gender appear to explain away this relationship

as they are both significant. Controlling for the demographic variables, the results show that associating with violent peers increases the odds of engaging in violent offending almost three times. Similarly, physical abuse increases the odds of engaging in violent offending almost three times.

For Whites, the social learning variables explain approximately 26% of the variation in self reported violent offending. Excluding the sex abuse variable, all variables are statistically significant. Clearly, as depicted for Model 3a, witnessing violence was the strongest predictor of violent offending for Whites. Whites who witnessed violence were almost 12 times more likely to engage in violence than those who had not witnessed violence. Whites who associated with violent peers were 3.4 times more likely to engage in violence than those who did not associate with violent peers. Whites who were physically abused were 4.5 times more likely to engage in violence than those who were not physically abused.

When controls were added Model 3b indicates with the exception of sex abuse, all variables were statistically significant at the .05 level. Controlling for age, gender, family residence and family structure it appears that witnessing abuse increases the odds of engaging in violent offending eleven fold. Moreover, associating with violent peers increases the odds of engaging in violent offending three times. In addition, physical abuse increases the odds of engaging in violent offending almost five fold. The odds of Whites living in the city and engaging in violent offending were 66% more likely than youth living in suburban or rural areas. Notably, the odds of Whites living with parents who were married and engaging in violent offending were 70% less likely than youth living without parents.



The models might appear somewhat different for blacks and whites in that most of the coefficients appear somewhat larger for whites than blacks. Prior to the introduction of controls, witnessing violence, peer violence and physical abuse were statistically significant for both Blacks and Whites. However; when controls were added, witnessing violence was statistically significant for Whites but not Blacks. Further, the odds of living in the city and engaging in violence were statistically significant for Whites but not Blacks. In addition, the odds of engaging in violence while living with both parents were significant for Whites but not Blacks.

In the current study, the sample sizes are quite different giving the White model has more power to detect significant differences. Multivariate analysis with logistic regression was performed to analyze the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Logistic regressions predict the odds of occurrences to non-occurrences. A statistical test of the differences was performed and none of the coefficients were statistically significant at the .05 level. The results suggest that the social learning variables and the controls operate similarly for each group.

Table 3. Logistic Regression for all Variables on Violent Offending

Variables	Entire Model (n=3318)		Black (n=572)		White (n=2746)		Z-test
	Model 1a Exp(b)	Model 1b Exp(b)	Model 2a Exp(b)	Model 2b Exp(b)	Model 3a Exp(b)	Model 3b Exp(b)	
Witness Abuse	10.007**	6.708**	3.118**	2.579	14.704**	11.792**	-1.89
Peer Violence	3.993**	3.222**	2.819**	2.600**	3.673**	3.488**	-0.97
Physical Abuse	4.096**	3.997**	3.060**	2.905**	4.658**	4.552**	-0.26
Sexual Abuse	1.219	1.39	1.32	1.558	0.942	1.271	0.42
Controls							
Race (1=white)		0.543**					
Age		1.217**		1.214**		1.223**	-0.07
Gender (1=male)		2.456**		2.587**		2.359**	0.28
Family Residence (1=city)		1.509**		1.122		1.657**	-1.12
Family Structure(1=married)		0.713**		0.806		0.659**	0.10
Pseudo R Square (Nagelkerke)	0.272	0.303	0.18	0.236	0.262	0.302	

\*\*p<.05 indicates significant at .05 level

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the current study was to examine the effects of childhood victimization, witnessing violence, associating with violent peers on later violent offending. Although previous research has attempted to explore this relationship, no published studies to date have included variables explored in the current study. The current study builds on these previous studies by utilizing variables from Akers' social learning theory to determine whether the effects of childhood victimization, witnessing violence, peer violence, and later violent offending are different between Blacks and Whites. The following research questions were addressed: 1.) What are the effects of victimization, witnessing violence, deviant peer association on violent offending? 2.) Are these effects dependent on race? The purpose of the current study was to expand the literature in the field of victimization, witnessing violence, peer violence on later violent offending.

Based on the findings, it is fair to conclude that witnessing violence and associating with violent peers increases the odds of engaging in violence for Blacks and Whites. More importantly, being physically abused, increases the odds of engaging in violence for Blacks and Whites. Several studies suggest that exposure to violence is a strong predictor for later involvement in violence. Yexley, Borowsky, and Ireland (2002) found that witnessing violence was strongly associated with increased levels of violence against self and others. Interestingly, in the current study, multivariate logistic regression analysis revealed that witnessing violence was positively associated with violent offending for Blacks and Whites however, when demographic control variables

were added, witnessing violence was not significant for Blacks. Because the z-test was not significant we cannot conclude that the effect of witnessing violence was more important for Whites.

Most research on co-offending suggests that violent offenders usually have violent friends and their relationships usually develop into a pathway of violent offending and committing crimes together (Conway and McCord 2002; Thompson and Braaten-Antrim 1998). For example, Conway and McCord (2002) found that non-violent offenders who committed their first offense with violent accomplices were at a greater risk for engaging in a violent crime. In the current study, multivariate logistic regression analyses revealed that the effects of associating with violent peers were no more severe for Whites than Blacks. This was not consistent with other studies which suggest that higher levels of violence are more severe for Whites than Blacks who associate with violent peers (Silverman and Caldwell 2008).

Several studies have linked abuse to later violent offending (Darby et al. 1998; Herrera 2003). Zingraff and his colleagues (1993) conducted a longitudinal study examining childhood maltreatment and delinquency. Children who were maltreated were more likely to engage in violent delinquency as compared to nonmaltreated offenders. In addition, it was reported that males and African Americans were more likely than females and Caucasians to be arrested for violent offending. Dutton and Hart (1992) examined various forms of abuse and aggression and found that individuals who suffered abuse were three times more likely than their non abused counterparts to commit violent acts as adults. It was also reported that childhood abuse significantly increased the risk of violent offending as an adult. Lansford and his colleagues (2007) saw similar results; examining only physical abuse and aggression variables they found

that individuals who were physically abused were at greater risk for being arrested as juveniles for violent offenses. Unlike past studies, results from the current study suggest that being physically abused was significantly related to violence for both Blacks and Whites. However; in the current study, logistic regression analyses indicated that the effects were no more severe on Blacks than Whites. When examining physical abuse and later violent offending, it was found that the odds of being physically abused was significantly related to later violent offending for Blacks and Whites. These results were not consistent with Widom's (1992) study which suggests that being physically abused has more severe effects on African American than Whites. One possible explanation could be that Blacks and Whites in the current sample demographics were similar. A majority of the sample lived in the city and lived with both parents. Perhaps physical abuse affected Blacks and Whites similarly. Notably, sexual abuse was not statistically significant for Blacks or Whites. This may be due to the sensitive nature of the subject or the rarity of its occurrence among both groups.

The current study suggests that the impact of social learning theory variables worked similarly for Blacks and Whites. Akers (1998) demonstrated that delinquent role models like peers and friends increased the likelihood of deviant behavior. Findings suggest that Akers' social learning variables did have an impact on both Blacks and Whites. Analysis indicated that the odds of engaging in violence due to witnessing violence, being physically abused and associating with deviant peers affected both Blacks and Whites.

In the current study, it is fair to conclude that social learning theory variables were predictive and fairly consistently related to violence among Blacks and Whites. One possible explanation for not finding racial differences in the current study when

other studies found them may be due to intentional omissions in self-reporting. Several studies indicate that African Americans are less likely to report delinquent and other risk taking behaviors than Whites (Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis 1981 ).

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although the National Survey of Adolescents study collected useful information from the broad sample of youths with diverse race, class, and cultural backgrounds, data were limited to measuring more serious forms of violent offending. It is possible that if different types of violence were measured, different results would have resulted between Blacks and Whites. In addition, it is possible that respondents were more likely to report less-violent forms of violence rather than serious forms of violence. More importantly, if more control variables such as poverty, unemployment levels, and educational achievement were available in the original survey; racial differences probably would have been discovered. The current study only measured variables using only two concepts from Akers' social learning theory (imitations and differential association). Future studies should include the remaining concepts (differential reinforcement and definitions). More importantly, because the current study relied on data from a cross-sectional survey, determining the casual effects of actual forms of engaging in violence are unclear and not possible to determine. Therefore; future research should consider data with longitudinal designs.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study points to several important issues for future research. The current study demonstrated that witnessing violence, associating with violent peers, and being physically abused increases the odds of engaging in violence for both Blacks and Whites. In order to develop intervention programs for troubled youth, society must

build a strong knowledge base concerning the casual factors associated with violence. Parents, teachers, caregivers, counselors, and social workers should be educated about the effects of childhood victimization, witnessing violence, peer violence and later violent offending. Every person plays an important role in the development of children. Early intervention is imperative when addressing children exposed to these risk factors. Because this thesis suggests that physical abuse affects Blacks and Whites similarly, universal programs should be designed to educate parents, guardians, and caregivers about the impact that physical abuse has on children regardless of race. For example, The Boys and Girls Clubs and School Collaborations' Substance Abuse Prevention Program includes a school component called SMART (Skills Mastery and Resistance Training) Teachers, an afterschool component SMART Kids, and a parent-involvement component called SMART Parents. Each component is designed to reduce specific risk factors in the children's school, family, community and personal environments (Tobler and Stratton 1997). This program would be effective for youth who witness violence and associate with violent peers. More importantly, the Boys and Girls Clubs and their components would be effective in helping abused children. In addition, programs should be designed to provide parents and guardians with the skills and resources to decrease the likelihood of their children developing strong associations with individuals who are likely to encourage them to be involved in delinquent behavior. For example, the Oregon Social Learning Center is the most widely cited parenting skills program founded by Gerald Patterson and his colleagues who believed that improving parenting skills can lead to reductions in juvenile delinquency. OSLC program uses behavior modification techniques to help parents acquire proper disciplinary methods. This program has proven to be a very cost effective method of early intervention (Patterson,

Chamberlain, and Reid 1982). More importantly, at the macro level, governmental officials can become involved by supporting legislation and funding research for victims of abuse. Given the small number of research studies that compare Blacks and Whites in regards to violence examining (witnessing abuse, peer violence, physical abuse, and sexual abuse), the present study confirms that more research is needed. The findings indicate that while similarities exist between Blacks and Whites, additional research is needed which focuses on the differences of Blacks and Whites in regards to delinquency. More importantly, In addition, future research should think more about how race interacts with social learning theory variables.



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