

Black male youth more fearful when visiting whiter neighborhoods

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Young black males feel less safe when they go to neighborhoods with a larger white population than occurs in areas they normally visit, a new study suggests.

Researchers gave 506 black youths in Columbus smartphones that tracked their locations for a week and asked the participants to rate how safe they felt (among other questions) five times per day.

Results showed that African American boys felt less safe even in areas that were only modestly more white than where they usually spent time, said Christopher Browning, lead author of the study and professor of sociology at The Ohio State University.

"It doesn't have to be a majority white neighborhood for African American boys to feel more threatened," Browning said. "It just has to be more white than what they typically encounter."

When outside their own neighborhoods, black teens in the study visited areas that were, on average, 13 percent more white.

Unlike boys, [black girls](#) did not report feeling significantly less safe in whiter areas.

Browning presented the research Aug. 13 in Philadelphia at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association.

The results are consistent with the hypothesis that young black males expect increased scrutiny, surveillance and even direct targeting when they are in white areas, according to Browning.

"We've seen a lot of stories in the media lately about the police being called on black people going about their business in white areas," he said.

"This may help explain why black youth felt more threatened in parts of town where they were exposed to more white people."

Data for the study came from the Adolescent Health and Development in Context study, which Browning leads. The AHDC is examining the lives of 1,405 representative youths living in 184 neighborhoods in Franklin County, Ohio. This includes Columbus and its suburbs.

This particular study involved 506 black youths aged 11 to 17 when the study was done from 2014 to 2016. They carried a smartphone with a GPS function that reported their location every 30 seconds. Five times a day they were sent a mini-survey to answer on their phones. By the end of the study, the researchers had collected 7,398 of these surveys.

In one question, participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) if the place they were currently at was a safe place to be.

Participants reported either strongly agreeing or agreeing that they were in a safe place about 91 percent of the time. That makes sense, Browning said, because the teens reported being at home about 71 percent of the time when they received the survey.

Much of the research that examines safety among [black youth](#) focuses on the neighborhood they live in. But this research suggests that the

immediate neighborhood may not be the most important area to focus on, he said.

What seemed to matter was how the places they visited differed from the areas where they spent most of their time.

Black boys felt less safe when they were in neighborhoods that were significantly poorer than ones they generally frequented, as well as in neighborhoods that were whiter.

"Part of the experience for black kids is having to leave their home neighborhoods to go to places that might not be as welcoming," Browning said.

"They are typically going to places with amenities like restaurants and movie theaters that may not be available in their neighborhoods. And these places are probably going to be whiter than the places they live."

The findings were similar for African American boys no matter where they lived in the Columbus area.

"Even black boys who were regularly exposed to integrated neighborhoods felt less safe when they went to white-dominated areas," he said.

Although African American girls in this study didn't report feeling less safe in whiter areas, Browning said that doesn't necessarily mean they aren't experiencing negative effects.

It may be that there are different features of [neighborhoods](#) not picked up in this study, such as the number of men in the immediate vicinity, that may affect whether black girls felt safe in a particular location, he said.

Provided by The Ohio State University

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