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Perception of Oakland by three Bay Area Cities

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Perception of Oakland by three Bay Area cities

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**PERCEPTION OF OAKLAND BY
THREE BAY AREA CITIES**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

By

Sonya Yvette Bradley

August, 1993

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND MASS
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ABSTRACT

PERCEPTION OF OAKLAND BY THREE BAY AREA CITIES

by Sonya Yvette Bradley

This study sought to find a relationship between residence and perceptions of personal safety regarding the city of Oakland, CA. Based on the theory that the further away one resides from a city, the more likely a person constructs an opinion based on what the media reports, this thesis surveyed the opinions of three Bay Area cities--Oakland, San Francisco and San Jose--to determine if distance did effect people's opinion on Oakland, which has become increasingly negative.

The research revealed that people residing in San Jose and San Francisco perceived Oakland as far more dangerous than their own city, while Oakland residents assessed their city as safe as San Francisco (which was Oakland's comparison city). Furthermore, personal experience did not influence non-resident's perception on the city and that media coverage on Oakland did indeed paint a negative picture, particularly when compared to other Bay Area cities.

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The city of Oakland, CA, population 372,242 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1990) is a study in a spectrum of economics, diversity and 20th century urban problems, where the most opulent hill residents live 10 minutes away from the poverty-stricken in the "flatlands," where multiculturalism is not just the newest politically correct term, but a way of life, and where drugs and crime and all its related problems can and do consume whole middle class neighborhoods.

Incorporated in 1854, Oakland has enjoyed some economic success due to its large port areas and commercial shipping business plus its large manufacturing base. It is a city with an enviable climate, a museum that is an architectural and artistic treasure, space for industry growth ("Oakland looks," 1992), two major league sports teams and a central location in Northern California. However, in recent years, the city did not share in the 1980s economic boom of nearby San Jose's Silicon Valley, nor truly enjoy the urbane reputation of its cross-Bay neighbor, San Francisco (Morain, 1991).

In fact, the perception of Oakland has generally tended to run towards the negative. From the time Gertrude Stein remarked "there's no there, there" in 1937 to the establishment of the Hell's Angels in the 1960s and to the amassing of some of the highest murder rates in the country during the 1980s and into the 1990s, Oakland has been portrayed in the media as a haven for drugs and violent crime ("Oakland; There's there," 1991). As a result, the image and reputation of Oakland through the years has been perceived as economically depressed and crime-ridden.

The result is that the images become the reality, and with crime dominating

news broadcasts and newspapers it is understandable that individuals or groups who are routinely targeted become critical of the impact media may have on society over time (Jeffres, 1986, p. 167).

As a city where no race is the majority, including a 44 percent African-American population, 14 percent Asian-American, 14 percent Hispanic and 28 percent Caucasian, (East Bay Almanac, 1993), there is a belief among residents that an undercurrent of racism contributes to public opinion when it comes to Oakland. And, the news media consciously or unconsciously continue to foster the negative images when reporting on Oakland.

For example, Ron Davis of the Oakland Convention & Visitors Bureau criticized (personal interview, Jan. 21, 1993) the association of race and crime when he referred to a national broadcast he saw in 1992 that reported on the growth of Asian gangs. Davis pointed out that the network chose Oakland as the focal point assuming that Oakland has the largest Asian gang population, when in fact, the Asian gang population in San Francisco has numbered up to 3,000 versus the 700 to 1,000 members in Oakland (personal interviews, Sgt. H. Hu, July 7, 1993; Sgt. D. Foley, July 9, 1993).

Oakland Tribune columnist Bill Wong (personal interview, March 31, 1993) also believes that the racial and ethnic makeup in Oakland also has something to do with its reputation, particularly when the local news media continuously report on Oakland's crime problems and ignore the non-crime stories.

A 1990 *Los Angeles Times* report comprising interviews of reporters, editors and publishers from newspapers across the country found a wide range of criticism of the negative portrayal of minorities in the media, and just as importantly the absence of people of color from the mainstream of daily news coverage.

If all one knew about real-life blacks and Latinos was what one read in the newspaper or saw on television news--and in our still largely segregated society, that's where most whites do get most of their information about blacks and Latinos--one would scarcely be aware that there is a large and growing middle class in both cultures, going to work, getting married, having children, paying taxes, going on vacation and buying books and VCRs and microwave ovens. (Shaw, 1990)

Van Dijk (1988), while looking at racism in the press, found that "the media may not always tell us what to think about minorities, but rather they define the communicative situation and the social context that dictate how most of their users think about minority groups" (p. 208).

Hence, in crime news where stories are distorted, usually due to omission of sources and in-depth coverage, the possibility increases that the media may have significant unplanned effects on attitudes, particularly for persons with limited alternative sources of information (Surette, 1991, pp. 86-87). Ishmael Reed (1991) wrote in *Time* that "news organizations blame blacks for the drug problem and ignore the participation in the drug trade of other ethnic groups...during early August, NBC aired the typical black-grandmothers-raising-crack-babies story when there are plenty of suburban white grandparents in the same situation."

A look at crime statistics reveal Oakland's problems are not the worst in the

country, and are often in line with cities of similar size and makeup. In 1991 (last figures available) the U.S. Department of Justice Uniform Crime Reports showed Oakland's crime index at 46,308 (a measurement of selected violent crimes and property crimes used to gauge fluctuations in the overall volume and rate of crime reported to law enforcement), which is 33 percent lower than San Francisco at 69,350, population 723,959 and 8 percent higher than San Jose, which is 42,836, population, 782,248. The crime index per 100,000 places Oakland above the two cities at 124.4. Yet, San Francisco scored nearly two times higher than San Jose with a per capita crime index of 95.8 versus 54.8 for San Jose.

In comparison to other cities in the U.S., Oakland's per capita homicide rate in 1991 revealed that it is not the worst city and in fact is in line with other urban areas across the country (Figure 1).

As the mayor of Oakland pointed out: "Oakland's reality is not as bad as its reputation" (Morain, 1991).

Part of that perception is blamed on the media coverage of Oakland. In an *Oakland Tribune* editorial, Wong (1992) remarked on the multitude of local print and television reporters converging on Oakland during a period of weeks when certain criminal events were occurring:

When else does Oakland get such loving media attention? Almost never...So to the outside world...Oakland is a Wild West town with gun-toting bad guys looking to take down anything that moves. That's what the local news media tell us.

This is a sentiment echoed by many Oakland residents.

Figure 1

1991 Homicides per 100,000 people (U.S. Department of Justice, 1992)

In early 1992 when a series of murders took place, a local news station conducting informal "man on the street" interviews questioned people in downtown Oakland as to whether they felt safe living and working in the city.

Several people commented that while the city does have its share of problems, Oakland is not as bad as portrayed. The media, they said, contribute a great deal to the city's negative image by reporting only the negative, such as crime news about the city.

Does the press create the crime problems? Of course not. The purpose of this study is not to blame the crime problem on the media, nor the image of Oakland on the media. This study seeks to find a relationship between resident's location and perception of personal safety by looking at the source and context of communication situations and what the possible effects are when mass media and personal experience are working together.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Sources of Communication

In the process of constructing beliefs and opinions on the world, individuals consume and digest information from a variety of sources: intrapersonal communication, interpersonal communication and mass communication. Only mass communication relies on the impersonal mass media to relay information about the world. The mass media communicate to large, heterogeneous audiences using many sources. Sources such as news anchors, editors, camerapersons, desktop publishers, reporters, general managers and others formulate messages (Jeffres, 1986, p. 4) that allow individuals to begin constructing a "social reality" (Surette, 1992).

Before there were mass media, communication among a variety of sources including family, friends and social institutions provided social realities. Values, beliefs and patterns of behavior were handed down through customs and rituals (Cushman & Craig, 1976, p. 44). Now, they are perpetuated through the mass media. Furthermore, as other more personal sources decline, the mass media increase in importance (Cohen & Young, 1981, p. 4).

Zucker (1978, p. 239) summarized how individuals can only choose between their own experience or what the media present to them:

People today live in two worlds: a real world and a media world.
The first is bounded by the limits of the direct experience of an individual and

his acquaintances. The second spans the world, bounded only by the decisions of news reporters and editors. The individuals in our society have no real-world experience with many national and virtually all international problems. When they have to deal with (or have to choose whether or not to deal with) these problems, media-world experience must suffice.

Media Effects Theories

Studies on media's reach into individuals' lives are numerous and complex. The debate is not whether there is an effect, but to what extent. Liebert and Poulos (1976) in their study on children and television note that the specific roles the media play, particularly television, in the development of attitudes are difficult to analyze, especially as one factors in the child's environment and his many associations. The influence of television does not exist in a vacuum, for viewers have their own experiences and beliefs to filter through the television message (Hawkins & Pingree, 1981).

Nevertheless, it can be agreed upon that in the mass communication process the media exert influence on the "public's perception of reality--of what current public issues are about and what importance they have..." (Defleur & Dennis, 1985, p. 331). Key media effects theories, such as agenda-setting research, focused attention on the media's ability to bring salience to an issue by allotting time on the air, or space in a publication, thus a space in the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Similarly, Lazarsfeld and Merton (cited in Wright, 1986) identified status conferral as a means of assigning importance to persons, groups or social issues when they are continually reported on in the news, especially in the eyes of the public. For

example, Lang and Lang (1981) found that continued media coverage of a little-known political issue led to increased attention from the public and eventually became a priority in the public's mind.

Subsequent research has involved the individual's personal experience with an issue and to what degree familiarity influences an individual's opinion on a particular subject. Lasorsa and Wanta (1990) expected to find personal experience, as well as interpersonal experience to be a defense against the news media agenda, but found instead that personal experience conformed to the media's agenda, suggesting that people turned to the media to confirm their opinions. Media experience rather than personal experience was also found to be a better indicator of a persons's concern with crime and victimization (Einsiedel, Salomone & Schneider, 1984).

The lack of personal experience was also found to increase one's susceptibility to the media's influence (Entman, 1989; Zucker, 1978). Entman (1989) charged that when the media tell people what to think about, they are, in fact, shaping people's thoughts. He amended the original phrase of McCombs and Shaw to read: "The media do not control what people prefer; they influence public opinion by providing much of the information people think about and by shaping how they think about it" (p. 348). The variable news media influence theory (meant to rival the no-media influence theory) finds that "the less direct experience people have with an issue area, and the less time that area has been prominent in the news, the greater is the news media's influence on public opinion on that issue" (Zucker, 1978, p. 227).

Cultivation analysis theories hold that when there is little opportunity to learn first-hand, television becomes most powerful in cultivating assumptions about the world, particularly in regards to excessive crime reporting, where the world is seen as a very dangerous place (Gerbner, 1976, 1978). Yet, later research discovered that the amount of television exposure had less to do with cultivation than did individuals' beliefs, attitudes, the presentation of crime news and the way individuals used media to construct social reality (Hawkins & Pingree, 1981; O'Keefe & Reid-Nash, 1987; Potter, 1986). Perse (1990) linked the attention given to televised crime news reports to the cultivation of perceived personal risk.

The construction of social reality for groups of people with shared interests can lend itself to building similar knowledge among others with the same beliefs as personal and interpersonal experience becomes part of the socialization process (Surette, 1991, p. 4). Smith (1984) showed that when the media continually reported on social conflict in Louisville, KY, the press coverage did not have an adverse effect on the image of the community among the residents and that the residents actually viewed their local media as a positive aspect of the community. This would seem to suggest a level of intense involvement where an issue possesses such great importance that there is a higher degree of cognitive processes about an issue (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). As a result, the attention the media bring to a situation can have a cohesion effect, bringing together subgroups of people for resolution of problems (Tichenor, Donohue & Olien, 1973).

Effects of crime news

With the increased urbanization of society, individuals are forced to rely on the mass media as a source of public information about social problems such as crime (Jaehnig, Weaver & Fico, 1981, p. 81). As pointed out earlier, this dependence helps to shape and form opinions and beliefs. In the area of crime, where research has focused primarily on the amount of crime news versus actual crime statistics and/or people's fear of victimization, studies have shown that people's perception of crime more closely resemble the media's reporting rather than the actual crime statistics (Davis, 1952; Graber, 1980; Sheley & Ashkins, 1981). And what emerges is a very frightening picture. Lotz (1991, p. 15) claimed that newspapers in "America's large cities are bent on creating the disquieting impression that crime and disorder are rampant."

In spite of this, the reporting of crime news must be put into the context of news values, where crime news simply becomes a part of what makes the news. Journalists view occurrences to determine if they "merit the title of news. The more characteristics contained in a single occurrence, the stronger the connection with your audience" (Jeffres, 1986, p. 106). The characteristics, or news values that help make up the news include, but are not limited to those incidents having impact, timeliness, prominence, conflict, unusual nature, currency, consequence, eminence, progress, proximity, disaster and magnitude (Jeffres, 1986; Johnston, 1979; Mencher, 1991).

Crime, which turns out to be the most newsworthy of all subjects quite simply

embodies several of the aforementioned news values. "The routine phenomena of violent or non-violent crime," is an enduring news value, which is timeless and subject to little change (Gans, 1979). It is most often the "spectacular, unexpected or violent events... (that) have a much higher chance of becoming news" (van Dijk, 1988, p. 155). What emerges from the media is a consistency of not only what is deemed newsworthy but also what fits into the news organization routine of processing the news, in effect making them "co-creators of the news" (Surette, 1991, p. 58).

It is the emphasis on just a few selected traits where the media have repeatedly been criticized for their perpetuation of stereotypes (McCombs & Shaw, 1977), that lends itself to news bias. This is perhaps most evident as the media place continuous focus on infrequent violent crimes--murder, rape and assault--and virtually ignore the far greater number of property crimes. (Einsiedel, et al., 1984; Graber, 1980; Roshier, 1981). Indeed, in Skogan and Maxfield (1981) research on the impact of crime, 50 percent of the respondents recalled crime stories that were most violent in nature, far exceeding the distribution of crime.

In concert with excessive crime news reporting is the presentation of crime news that is at best a recitation of the events. Ample detail in crime stories is the exception rather than the rule (Graber, 1980). As such, the paucity of analytical details forces people to make generalizations from skeletal information and construct their own stereotypical images (Graber, 1980). In a study on crime waves, Fishman

(1981) concluded that the news media create the perception of a crime wave when they link a series of related incidents (such as crimes against the elderly) into a theme: "Every crime incident that can be seen as an instance of the theme, will be seen and reported as such" (p. 106). In turn, news media organizations search for and report on any new instances (in the crime theme) thereby confirming and justifying the so-called crime wave.

Fishman (1981) also noted that while the media play a substantial role in the creation of crime waves, they are essentially relying on law enforcement agencies to supply much of the information, primarily across the police wire. Reliance on two or three official sources rather than on a varied and a greater number of sources, such as non-officials and documents was shown to contribute to a lack of thoroughness and fairness of a story, particularly when the proximity of the news organization to the story is not within close geographical distance to the story (Martin, 1988). What the public receives is a one-dimensional story, often built from the imagination of editors and producers, complete with inherent biases.

Perception of personal safety

The research on effects of crime news and its relation to personal safety (or victimization) consistently indicates a complex relationship between the two, particularly as personal experience is factored into people's perceptions. What is known is that individuals receive most of their information on crime from the media,

not necessarily through amount of exposure, but rather through the level of attention (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981). What is unclear is to what extent that information affects their views of personal safety. This is not to disregard the effect media have on constructing a social reality, for it has been shown that the presentation of crime news in a sensationalistic fashion is an indicator of increased fear and concern (O'Keefe & Reid-Nash, 1987) and Heath (1984) found that when crime news is given in-depth treatment there is a marked difference on perceptions of crime and personal safety.

Personal experience was found to increase fear of victimization among persons who knew the victims or felt the victims shared the same characteristics as them, either by sex or age (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981). On the other hand, Einsiedel et al. (1984) and Lasorsa and Wanta (1990) concluded that personal experience had little effect on individuals' concerns about crime victimization and that the media reinforced opinions already held.

In the end, however, it just may be that until persons are personally (or know of someone) affected by crime, perceptions of personal safety are not high on their agenda. Or, as a defense mechanism, people believe crime happens to other people (Graber, 1980, p. 59). Heath (1984) invoked the "downward comparison" theory to help explain how people reduced anxiety and increased their well-being by comparing themselves with others in more dire straits. The idea being that even people living in a high crime area will not see their community worse than another community that

experiences high crime. Essentially, "the grass is browner on the other side" (Heath, 1984, p. 274).

Chapter 3

Hypotheses

The literature presented points to a reliance on the mass (news) media for information not readily or easily available. In the case of crime, studies have shown that people get their information directly from the news.

However, given the news media's propensity for focusing on crime, individuals can be lead to believe that the world is a particularly dangerous place.

Combine the emphasis on crime news with an inherent bias, particularly the reliance on negative news for stories further away from the news bureaus, misperceptions begin to form in the minds of people who are dependent on the news.

Yet, it has been shown that familiarity with an issue either through intrapersonal communication or interpersonal communication makes a difference in how individuals relate to news in the media. Given these points the following hypotheses are proposed:

- A. Residents of a city will see their city at least as safe as their surrounding cities.
 - 1. Oakland residents will perceive Oakland as safe as San Francisco.
 - 2. San Francisco residents will perceive San Francisco safer than Oakland.
 - 3. San Jose residents will perceive San Jose safer than Oakland and San Francisco.

B. Residents who have familiarity with surrounding cities will find the familiar cities equally safe.

1. San Francisco residents with familiarity of Oakland will perceive Oakland as safe as San Francisco.
2. Oakland residents with familiarity of San Francisco will perceive San Francisco as safe as Oakland.
3. San Jose residents with familiarity of Oakland will perceive Oakland as safe or as San Jose.
4. San Jose residents with familiarity of San Francisco will perceive San Francisco as safe as San Jose.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Subjects

A sample of 65 adult residents (18 and over) were surveyed in three Bay Area cities: Oakland, San Francisco and San Jose. Because the primary measurement for this study was Oakland, the remaining cities were chosen for their relative proximity to Oakland, and because they constitute the largest cities closest to Oakland.

The survey was only intended to detect tendencies and trends in the responses. Therefore, the study is not generalizable to the parent population and a representative sample was not selected. The survey was conducted over the telephone and every attempt was made to choose a cross-section of residents in each city. Oakland and San Francisco residents were selected via random telephone numbers. To pick a sample as random as possible, prefixes taken directly from the telephone directory were coupled with four digits drawn from the random number table. San Jose residents were randomly selected using the telephone directory.

The survey was completed over a three-week period, using six callers in the Spring of 1993.

Method

Pre-testing

The city of Oakland was the primary measurement for this study, with city of

residence being the independent variable.

A pre-tested questionnaire was devised for each city to test the terminology, order of questions and general ability to understand and respond to the questions, regarding crime and perception of safety. After gathering nine completed questionnaires from the three cities, any problems relating to the questions were corrected.

Procedure

A script was written (see Appendix 1) to provide information to the individual as to what the survey was about, and to guarantee confidentiality to the respondent. All residents were asked whether they were 18 or over. If not, the interviewer was instructed to inquire as to whether there was anyone else in the household who was 18 or over, and, if not, to terminate the interview.

The control questionnaire was the San Jose version (see Appendix 2), which was designed to compare against Oakland and San Francisco. The San Francisco and Oakland questionnaires were only compared to each other (see Appendix 3, 4).

The measurement of the independent variable, city of residence was operationalized by location of the phone call.

The dependent variable, perception of safety was operationalized three ways. Residents were asked to give their knowledge of crime in four of the major offense categories (as determined by law enforcement agencies) in the form of raw numbers, whether they felt each city had comparable crime rates and their perception of

personal safety for their city and a comparison city or cities on a rating scale.

To test the intervening variables, personal experience with outside cities, and media exposure, respondents were asked where they worked, whether or not they had friends or relatives living in other cities, how much news media they consumed in a week and their opinion of the news coverage for each of the cities tested for that area (see Appendix 2, 3, 4).

Measurement

After approximately 20-25 responses from each city, the data was analyzed and the hypotheses looked at to determine a pattern. If a pattern was found, the survey for that particular city was discontinued.

If no significant trend was found after the initial results, then the survey would increase by 10, until 50 responses were done. Each city tested revealed a trend, therefore the interviews concluded with a total of 65.

Chapter 5

Results

To test the first set of hypotheses, respondents were asked to rate on a 1 to 9 scale, how safe or how dangerous they felt living in their city and another city, with 1 representing safety and 9 equalling extreme danger. As hypothesized, San Francisco and San Jose saw Oakland as the least safest city among the three cities (Table 1), with a mean of 6.6 and 7.3, while Oakland residents rated themselves fairly even with San Francisco, 5.5 compared to 5.8 for San Francisco. An analysis of variance revealed significant results with the independent variable--city of residence--affecting perception $F(2, 59) = 5.98, p < .005$. Additionally, a t-test of all residents found that Oakland compared to San Francisco was perceived as least safe, $t(61) = 5.20, p < .001$. As hypothesized, San Jose residents found their city to be the safer of the three, with San Francisco being less safe and Oakland being the least safest. Twenty-three out of 25 (92%) San Jose residents felt San Jose was safer than both Oakland and San Francisco; the remaining two felt San Francisco was safer than San Jose. Twenty-four out of 25 felt San Francisco was as safe or safer than Oakland.

Table 1

The mean scores for rating of personal safety in living in Oakland, San Francisco and San Jose.

City of Residence	Personal safety scores for each city		
	Oakland	San Francisco	San Jose
Oakland $\underline{n} = 21$			
Mean	5.5	5.8	
S. D.	2.4	2.5	
San Francisco $\underline{n} = 19$			
Mean	6.6	4.7	
S. D.	1.4	1.4	
San Jose $\underline{n} = 25$			
Mean	7.3	5.6	4.2
S. D.	1.4	1.4	1.5

(Scale: 1 = extremely safe; 9 = extremely dangerous)

To further test perception of personal safety, respondents were asked about their knowledge of crime statistics. The table of means is meant to illustrate the lack of knowledge in this area, particularly in regard to property crime, which accounts for the vast majority of all crimes committed (Table 2). While it was expected that

residents would estimate their own city crime rates lower, San Francisco and Oakland residents rated themselves fairly equal, with the exception of murder. In fact, murder, was consistently over-estimated by all three cities. However, San Jose residents came closest in estimating the correct number of murders that took place in their city in 1992 (Table 3).

Table 2

Totals for crimes committed in 1992 in Oakland, San Francisco and San Jose.¹

1992 crime totals				
City	Murder	Robbery	Assault	Burglary
Oakland	169	4,610	4,947	8,870
San Francisco	121	8,293	4,883	11,814
San Jose	61	1,231	3,705	6,776

¹ Compiled from Oakland, San Francisco and San Jose police departments.

Table 3

Perceptions of crime in Oakland, San Francisco and San Jose by residents of those cities.

San Jose perception of crime in 3 cities ($\underline{n} = 25$)				
City	Murder	Robbery	Assault	Burglary
Oakland				
Mean	436.7	4445.8	4818.2	3477.1
San Francisco				
Mean	262.9	4184.5	4148.7	3477.1
San Jose				
Mean	60.4	2936.7	3027.3	2536.3
San Francisco perception of crime in 2 cities ($\underline{n} = 19$)				
Oakland				
Mean	146.2	1992.5	814.8	2596
San Francisco				
Mean	77.9	1601.9	1179.7	2075

(continued on next page)

Oakland perception of crime in 2 cities ($n = 21$)

Oakland

Mean	261	804.7	911.1	746.1
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San Francisco

Mean	196.2	778	801.3	603.9
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The second set of hypotheses were to reveal a correlation between personal experience and perception of personal safety. Unfortunately, there was no detection of evidence that knowing someone in another city had an effect on whether that city was safe or not, thus finding the second set of hypotheses null. In fact, the majority of San Francisco residents had friends or relatives in Oakland, but still rated their city higher in personal safety. The vast majority of San Jose residents had no friends or relatives living in Oakland, but did know people in San Francisco. In either case, San Jose residents felt their city was still the safest by a large margin (see Table 1).

An interesting finding was the perception of media coverage in the cities. Respondents were asked to rate the coverage of both television and radio in their city and the comparison city. Their choices were Very Positive, Mostly Positive, Mostly Negative and Very Negative (Smith, 1984), coded 1 to 4, respectively. Overall, residents of the three cities found San Francisco media coverage positive, while finding Oakland coverage decidedly negative (Table 4).

Table 4

Overall total scores for perception of media coverage in Oakland and San Francisco.

Medium	Media coverage scores by city			
	Oakland	San Francisco	t	p
Television <u>n</u> = 63	3.3	2.5	7.51	.001
Newspapers <u>n</u> = 58	3.1	2.3	9.73	.001

(Scale: 1 = very positive; 2 = mostly positive; 3 = mostly negative; 4 = mostly negative)

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine residents' perceptions of personal safety in their own city and a nearby city (or cities), with Oakland as the primary measurement because of the perception that the city is unsafe for people to live and or work in. The literature showed that the tendency of the news media is to place greater emphasis on stories that are negative, which heightens people's negative opinions on issues they are not personally involved in. Furthermore, when proximity is a factor, the only type of stories usually reported are the negative or the extraordinary ones. Given this preponderance of negative news, individuals who are removed from Oakland are likely to see the city as inherently dangerous, without having ever experienced the city for themselves. The study, therefore, looked at respondent's location because research has shown that individuals increasingly receive their information, especially crime news via the media, which has an affect on views of personal safety or victimization.

The findings indicated that location was the primary factor in finding a city safe or not safe just as the first set of hypotheses predicted, but personal experience could not be linked to the findings. This suggested that communities outside of Oakland rely more heavily on the news media for information about Oakland. A look at the official crime statistics for Oakland reveals that the city has a disproportionately

high crime rate, which provides plentiful material for the news media. And, based on what is known about crime news--encompassing accepted news values, focusing on violent crime and creating the impression of pervasive and seemingly never-ending danger and doom--it is little wonder people outside of Oakland believed that the city is a much more dangerous place to live than their own.

Yet, its own residents did not feel that their safety was seriously compromised compared to San Francisco, and in fact, found the cities very similar in regards to personal safety. This is possibly due to 1) the interpersonal communication between members of the community who are able to shed more light on what the media present to them, particularly television, and 2) less reliance on the news media for information concerning Oakland.

Perhaps more interesting was that San Francisco residents, as well, found their city to be considerably safer than Oakland, even though the city is twice as large as Oakland, and has a high number of property crimes (see Table 2). There are perhaps several reasons for this: 1) San Francisco is home to three of the top four Bay Area news broadcasts, as well as the number one Northern CA daily newspaper, the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Because of their location, the San Francisco stories receive well-rounded reporting and 2) the coverage of crime news occurring in San Francisco is less than the coverage of crime news occurring in other parts of the Bay Area, or the country as the Skogan and Maxfield (1981) content analysis study indicated. The *San Francisco Examiner* and *Chronicle* reported more crime stories occurring outside of

San Francisco than inside. Whether or not this is true 12 years later would have to be studied; nonetheless, the authors contend that such stories are "easier" to cover because they can be rewritten from the police wire reports. Without having to search for a variety of sources, the chances for reporting an in-depth story is virtually non-existent (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981, pp. 134-135).

This leads to the media coverage scores which concluded that Oakland receives more negative coverage than either San Francisco and San Jose. As one 61-year-old woman from Oakland put it, they (the media) only report the bad things about Oakland. The woman, as well as other respondents pointed to the fact that San Francisco also has its share of crime problems, but one doesn't hear about them as much. This is, at best, an oversimplification of the issue. What people aren't hearing or reading about is the high rate of property crimes, and instead are learning about violent crimes, which occur far less than crimes against property and receiving more non-crime news adding to the perception of better coverage.

What people are also being subjected to is the idea of the crime theme (Fishman, 1981). This was most evident in early 1992 when a series of murders took place in Oakland prompting a San Francisco newspaper to refer to Oakland as "Murderville" (Mahoney, 1992) and sending the San Francisco media across the bay to interview people on how safe or dangerous they felt living in Oakland.

Implications

This study in no way sought to blame the crime problem on the media, nor Oakland's entire image problem on the media, for the city of Oakland must share part of the blame for its image. Its lack of a coherent and aggressive public relations campaign, such as those done by San Francisco and San Jose, leaves to chance the number of positive stories done on Oakland (Levine, 1992). Unless the city actively seeks to reverse the negative trend, much of what appears in the media will revolve around crime and crime-related problems.

As a result, people unfamiliar with Oakland will construct their reality from the pictures they see and the words they read. When the pictures and words are consistently the same, and come without a deeper explanation than what a police wire provides, the seed is set for half truths and distortion which result in false perceptions. And, in many cases, perceptions are often more powerful than reality. In 1922, Lippman theorized that cultural stereotypes, which in addition to the images formed in our minds, guide our perceptions of the world.

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Appendix 1

Hello, my name is _____ and I'm conducting a study of _____ resident's opinion on the safety of their city as part of a graduate thesis for San Jose State University. Everyone's participation in the study is important to the findings and your help in this study would be greatly appreciated. Your telephone number was randomly generated, so your identity is completely anonymous, therefore your name or your family's name will in no way be published.

At any time during the survey you wish to end the session, you may do so. If you have any questions regarding the study, you can contact SJSU instructor, Dr. Bill Tillinghast at 408/924-3239 May I begin the interview now?

Are you 18 or over?

Once survey is completed:

Thank you for your time; your participation has been very valuable. If you have questions regarding the survey or wish to see the results, please contact SJSU instructor Dr. Bill Tillinghast at 408/924-3239. Thank you."

Appendix 2

This series of questions deal specifically with the frequency of particular types of crime. Please answer using the following scale: *Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often.*

1a. Estimate how frequently you believe the following crimes are committed in San Jose.

Murder	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Burglary	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Assault	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Robbery	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often

1b. Estimate how frequently you believe the following crimes are committed in San Francisco.

Murder	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Burglary	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Assault	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Robbery	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often

1c. Using the same scale, estimate how frequently you believe the following crimes are committed in Oakland.

Murder	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Burglary	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Assault	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Robbery	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often

This series of questions asks you to estimate the number of times you believe certain crimes are committed. Please give your estimates in occurrences per month.

2a. Estimate the number of times you believe the following crimes are committed in San Jose each month.

Murder _____

Burglary _____

Assault _____

Robbery _____

2b. Estimate the number of times you believe the following crimes are committed in San Francisco each month.

Murder _____

Burglary _____

Assault _____

Robbery _____

2c. Estimate the number of times you believe the following crimes are committed in Oakland each month.

Murder _____

Burglary _____

Assault _____

Robbery _____

3a. Please give a number between 1 and 9, where 1 equals absolute safety or no danger at all and 9 equals extreme danger, that estimates how safe or how dangerous you believe it is to live in San Jose?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

3b. In San Francisco?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

3c. In Oakland?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

4a. Using the same scale between 1 and 9, please give a number that estimates how safe or how dangerous you believe it is to work in San Jose?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

4b. In San Francisco?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

4c. In Oakland?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

5a. Could you estimate the number of people who have been murdered in San Jose in 1992?

Burglarized? _____

Robbed? _____

Assaulted? _____

5b. Could you estimate the number of people who have been murdered in San Francisco

in 1992?

Burglarized? _____

Robbed? _____

Assaulted? _____

5c. Could you estimate the number of people who have been murdered in Oakland in 1992?

Burglarized? _____

Robbed? _____

Assaulted? _____

6a. The population of San Francisco and San Jose is roughly the same. Do you think the same number of murders occur in each city? _____

6b. The same number of assaults? _____

6c. The same number of robberies? _____

6d. The same number of burglaries? _____

7a. Oakland is half the size of San Jose. Do you think Oakland has half the number of murders of San Jose? _____

7b. Half the number of assaults? _____

7c. Half the number of robberies? _____

7d. Half the number of burglaries? _____

8. How many years have you lived in San Jose? _____

9a. Have you ever lived in San Francisco? Y N (IF NO, GO TO 10a.)

9b. How long? _____

10a. Have you ever lived in Oakland? Y N (IF NO, GO TO 11a)

10b. How long? _____

11a. Do you have friends/relatives who live in San Francisco? Y N (IF NO, GO TO 13a)

11b. How often do you visit them in a year? _____

12. Using a 1 to 9 scale where 1 equals absolute safety or no danger whatsoever and 9 equals extreme danger, what's your best guess regarding how safe or how dangerous your friends/relatives who live in San Francisco believe it is to live there?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

13a. Do you have friends/relatives who live in Oakland? Y N (IF NO, GO TO 15)

13b. How often do you visit them in a year?

14. Using a 1 to 9 scale where 1 equals absolute safety or no danger whatsoever and 9 equals extreme danger, what's your best guess regarding how safe or how dangerous your friends/relatives who live in Oakland believe it is to live there?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

15. What city do you work in? _____

The next series of questions deal specifically with media use and habits.

16a. Do you watch local television news? Y N (IF NO, GO TO 17a)

16b. On the average, how many times a week do you watch local television news?

17a. Do you read a daily Bay Area newspaper? Y N (IF NO, GO TO 18)

17b. On a daily average, how many total minutes do you spend reading the newspaper?

18a. From television and radio we get certain impressions about the community we live in. In general, what kind of impressions do you think people get about San Jose from television and radio? Are they ...

Very positive mostly positive mostly negative very negative

18b. What kinds of impressions do you think people get about San Francisco from television and radio?

Very positive mostly positive mostly negative very negative

18c. What kinds of impressions do you think people get about Oakland from television and radio?

Very positive mostly positive mostly negative very negative

19a. From newspapers, also, we get certain impressions about the community we live in. In general, what kind of impressions do you think people get about San Jose from newspapers? Are they ...

Very positive mostly positive mostly negative very negative

19b. What kinds of impressions do you think people get about San Francisco from newspapers?

Very positive mostly positive mostly negative very negative

19c. What kinds of impressions do you think people get about Oakland from newspapers?

Very positive mostly positive mostly negative very negative

The last few questions are about yourself.

20. Sex: M F (ONLY ASK IF UNSURE)

21. What is your race?

Black Asian Hispanic Caucasian

22. What was your age on your last birthday? _____

23a. Could you estimate your household income? _____

23b. How many are in your household? _____

24. What is the highest level of education you've completed? _____

APPENDIX 3

This series of questions deal specifically with the frequency of particular types of crime. Please answer using the following scale: *Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often.*

1a. Estimate how frequently you believe the following crimes are committed in San Francisco.

Murder	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Burglary	Never	Rarely	Sometime	Often
Assault	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Robbery	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often

1b. Using the same scale, estimate how frequently you believe the following crimes are committed in Oakland.

Murder	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Burglary	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Assault	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Robbery	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often

This series of questions asks you to estimate the number of times you believe certain crimes are committed. Please give your estimate in occurrences per month.

2a. Estimate the number of times you believe the following crimes are committed in San Francisco each month.

Murder	_____
Burglary	_____
Assault	_____
Robbery	_____

2b. Estimate the number of times you believe the following crimes are committed in Oakland each month.

Murder _____

Burglary _____

Assault _____

Robbery _____

3a. Please give a number between 1 and 9, where **1 equals absolute safety or no danger at all** and **9 equals extreme danger**, that estimates how safe or how dangerous you believe it is to live in San Francisco?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

3b. In Oakland?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

4a. Using the same scale between 1 and 9, please give a number that estimates how safe or how dangerous you believe it is to work in San Francisco.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

4b. In Oakland?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

5a. Could you estimate the number of people who have been murdered in San Francisco in 1992?

Burglarized? _____

Robbed? _____

Assaulted? _____

5b. Could you estimate the number of people who have been murdered in Oakland in 1992?

Burglarized? _____

Robbed? _____

Assaulted? _____

6a. Oakland is half the size of San Francisco. Do you think Oakland has half the number of murders of San Jose?

6b. Half the number of assaults?

6c. Half the number of robberies?

6d. Half the number of burglaries?

7. How many years have you lived in San Francisco? _____

8a. Have you ever lived in Oakland Y N (IF NO, GO TO 9a)

8b. How long? _____

9a. Do you have friends/relatives who live in Oakland? Y N (IF NO, GO TO 11)

9b. How often do you visit them in a year? _____

10. Using a 1 to 9 scale, where 1 equals absolute safety or no danger at all and 9 equals extreme danger, what's your best guess regarding how safe or how dangerous your friends/relatives who live in Oakland believe it is to live there?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

11. What city do you work in? _____

The next series of questions deal specifically with media use and habits.

12a. Do you watch local television news? Y N (IF NO, GO TO 13a)

12b. On the average, how many times a week do you watch local television news?

13a. Do you read a daily Bay Area newspaper? Y N (IF NO, GO TO 14a)

13b. On a daily average, how many total minutes do you spend reading the newspaper?

14a. From television and radio we get certain impressions about the community we live in. In general, what kind of impressions do you think people get about San Francisco from television and radio? Are they ...

Very positive mostly positive mostly negative very negative

14b. What kinds of impressions do you think people get about Oakland from television and radio?

Very positive mostly positive mostly negative very negative

15a. From newspapers, also, we get certain impressions about the community we live in. In general, what kind of impressions do you think people get about San Francisco from newspapers? Are they ...

Very positive mostly positive mostly negative very negative

15b. What kinds of impressions do you think people get about Oakland from newspapers?

Very positive mostly positive mostly negative very negative

The last few questions are about yourself.

16. Sex: M F (ONLY ASK IF UNSURE)

17. What is your race?

African-American Asian Hispanic Caucasian

18. What was your age on your last birthday: _____

19a. Could you estimate your household income? _____

19b. How many are in your household? _____

20. What is the highest level of education you've completed: _____

APPENDIX 4

This series of questions deal specifically with the frequency of particular types of crime. Please answer using the following scale: *Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often.*

1a. Estimate how frequently you believe the following crimes are committed in Oakland.

Murder	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Burglary	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Assault	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Robbery	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often

1b. Using the same scale, estimate how frequently you believe the following crimes are committed in San Francisco.

Murder	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Burglary	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Assault	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Robbery	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often

This series of questions asks you to estimate the number of times you believe certain crimes are committed. Please give your estimates in occurrences per month.

2a. Estimate the number of times you believe the following crimes are committed in Oakland each month.

Murder	_____
Burglary	_____
Assault	_____
Robbery	_____

2c. Estimate the number of times you believe the following crimes are committed in San Francisco each month?

Murder _____

Burglary _____

Assault _____

Robbery _____

3a. Please give a number between 1 and 9, where **1 equals absolute safety or no danger at all** and **9 equals extreme danger**, that estimates how safe or how dangerous you believe it is to live in Oakland?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

3b. In San Francisco?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

4a. Using the same scale between 1 and 9, please give a number that estimates how safe or how dangerous you believe it to work in Oakland.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

4b. In San Francisco?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

5a. Could you estimate the number of people who have been murdered in Oakland in 1992? _____

Burglarized? _____

Robbed? _____

Assaulted? _____

5b. Could you estimate the number of people who have been murdered in San Francisco in 1992? _____

Burglarized? _____

Robbed? _____

Assaulted? _____

6a. Oakland is half the size of San Jose. Do you think Oakland has half the number of murders of San Jose? _____

6b. Half the number of assaults? _____

6c. Half the number of robberies? _____

6d. Half the number of burglaries? _____

7. How long have you lived in Oakland? _____

8a. Have you ever lived in San Francisco Y N (IF NO, GO TO 9a)

8b. How long? _____

9a. Do you have friends/relatives who live in San Francisco? Y N (IF NO, GO TO 11)

9b. How often do you visit them in a year? _____

10. Using a 1 to 9 scale, where 1 equals absolute safety or no danger at all and 9 equals extreme danger, what's your best guess regarding how safe or how dangerous your friends/relatives who live in San Francisco believe it is to live there?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

11. What city do you work in? _____

The next series of questions deal specifically with media use and habits.

12a. Do you watch local television news? Y N (IF NO, GO TO 14a)

12b. On the average, how many times a week do you watch local television news?

13a. From television and radio we get certain impressions about the community we live in. In general, what kind of impressions do you think people get about Oakland from television and radio? Are they ...

Very positive mostly positive mostly negative very negative

13b. What kinds of impressions do you think people get about San Francisco from television and radio?

Very positive mostly positive mostly negative very negative

14a. Do you read a daily Bay Area newspaper? Y N (IF NO, GO TO NEXT PAGE)

14b. On a daily average, how many total minutes do you spend reading the newspaper?

15a. From newspapers, also, we get certain impressions about the community we live in. In general, what kind of impressions do you think people get about Oakland from newspapers? Are they ...

Very positive mostly positive mostly negative very negative

15b. What kinds of impressions do you think people get about San Francisco from newspapers?

Very positive mostly positive mostly negative very negative

The last few questions are about yourself.

16. Sex: M F (ONLY ASK IF UNSURE)

17. What is your race:

African-American Asian Hispanic Caucasian

18. What was your age on your last birthday: _____

19a. Could you estimate your household income? _____

19b. How many are in your household? _____

20. What is the highest level of education you've completed: _____