

Middle School Life, Home and Community Perception in the Spring Hill Community

6 May 2008

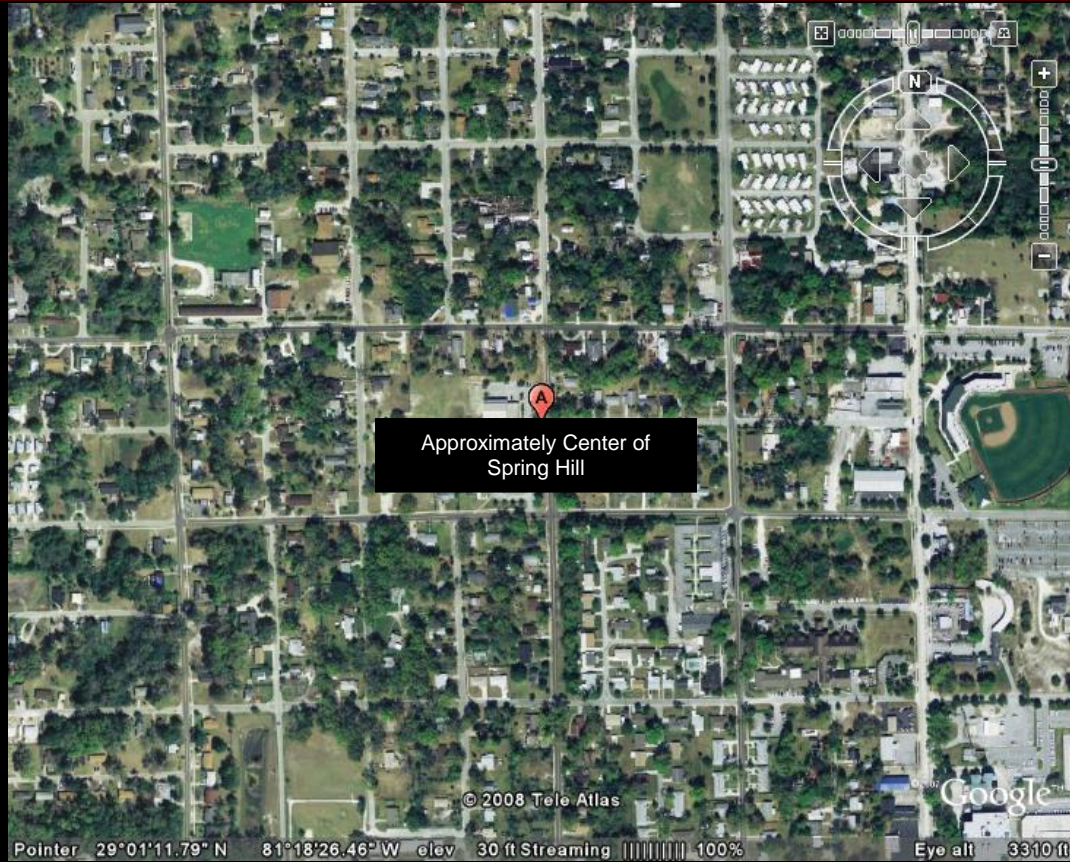
Dr. John Schorr

SY 363 – CBR Research Update

Overview

- Purpose
- Introduction/Background
- Methods/Instruments
- Results
- Future Work/Research
- General Conclusions

Where are we?



Introduction/Background

- A desire to seek out Middle School aged children, ages 10-14, and better understand their perception, complications and expectations from and for their community
- Current and past research has focused on elementary and high school
- Age bracket the “forgotten children”

Introduction/Background Cont'd

- For Florida students, can be easy to lose focus after elementary school; no major stepping stones after 3rd grade (FCAT)
- Transition into high school and older adolescent ages is critical
 - According to a study by Gilman and Huebner (2006), adolescent teens (grades 6-12) who reported positive conditions (global happiness) performed better in school and reported a higher satisfaction with their personal relationships

Introduction/Background Cont'd

- What happens when problems are overlooked and frustration sets in?
- A study by Valois concludes there may be an overall decline in global satisfaction and or willingness to participate in the community
- Valois *et al.* (2006) defines the term global life satisfaction as:
 - ...an overall cognitive evaluation by the person of his or her life...based upon personal comparisons between individuals' self-imposed criteria and perceived life circumstances

Introduction Cont'd

- Responses to declines include activities ranging from physical behavioral changes to gang related activities, and later potentially yielding high school dropouts (Valois *et al.*, 696)
- In addition, perceptions of the community or school system (that are often correlated) lead children to “behave in ways consistent with their perceptions” (Pearson and Toby, 1991)

Introduction Continued

- Middle schools attended: Southwestern and DeLand Middle Schools
 - As of 2005-2006 school data, only 671 registered at Southwestern Middle School (change...?)
 - > 51% on reduced and or free lunch programs (District average = 42.9%, State = 47.7%)
 - >42% served at least one in school suspension (District average = 27.5%, State = 16.1%)
- 46 respondents said they have attendend Starke Elementary School (closing?!?!)

Problem Statement

- The basic purpose of this study was to determine how the middle school's relationship was with *their* community
- Overall, three areas chosen to explore:
 - 1. School relationships and experiences
 - 2. Home/group dynamics (who do they live with, how do they live)
 - 3. Community perception (appearance, past experiences, needs, wants)

Methods/Instruments

■ Participants:

- 1. Polling 6th-8th (a few 5th/9th) graders, ages 10-14, with various locations including, but not limited to:
 - Street polling at random times (w, v)
 - Parks in immediate areas and similar facilities (Earl Brown, Spring Hill Community Park) (w, v)
 - Local Church Youth Group (w)

Methods/Instruments

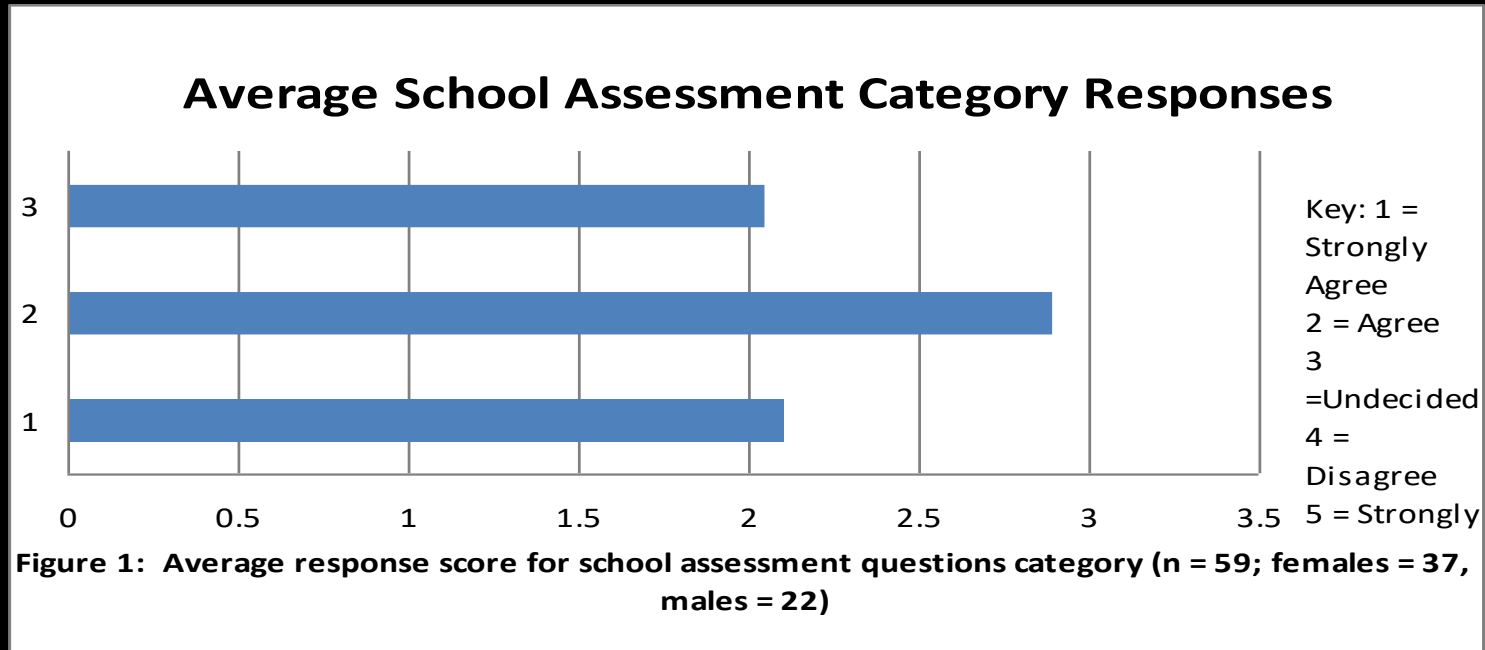
■ Instruments

- 1. 31 question written survey; distributed approximately 100 and received 59 total and complete;
 - Using “ranks” for written responses (Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Unsure (U), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD), Non-Applicable (NA))
 - 1 = SA, 2 = A, 3 = U, 4 = D, 5 = SD, 6 = NA
 - Split into three main sections: School, community and home assessment

Methods/Instruments

- Recorded Interviews
 - 2. Open Ended Vocal Survey; 23 total applicants/takers
 - Included questions pertaining to their current perception in school setting, whether they would choose to leave and any future plans suggested to them

Current Results; School Assessment (n=59)

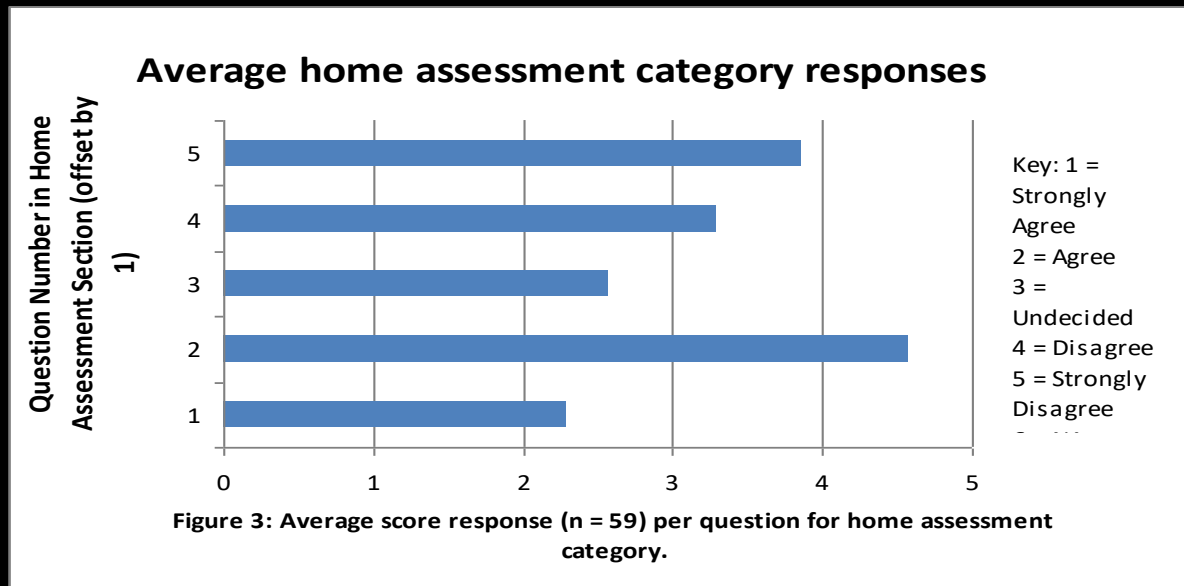


Important Notes: Question 1 = I enjoy attending school.

Question 2 = There are enough activities.

Question 3 = I feel I am learning enough to go to high school or beyond.

Current Results; Home Assessment (n=59)



Important Notes:

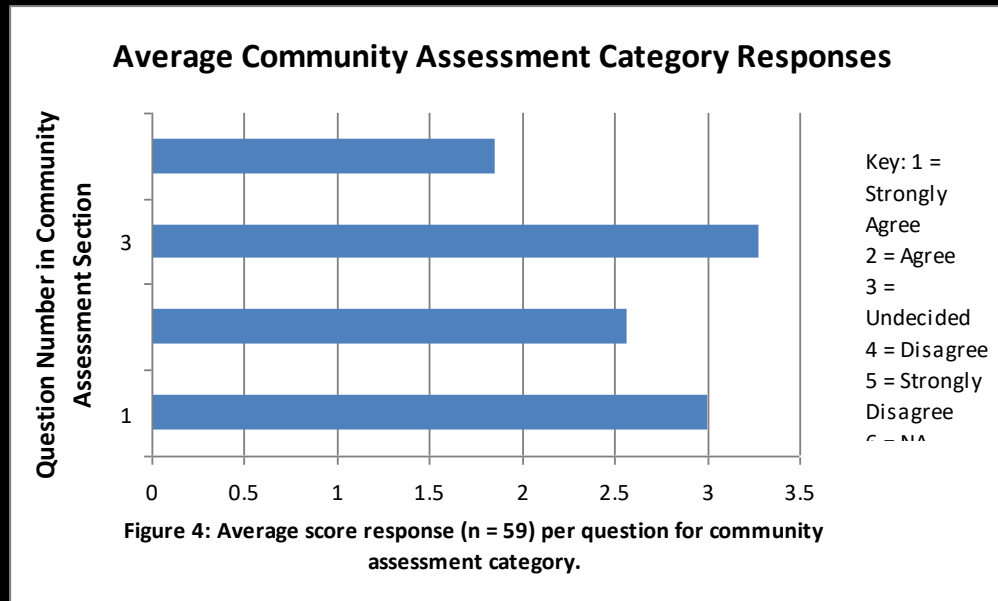
Question 1 = I feel physically safe at home.

Question 2 = I participate in activities at home

Question 3 = My home is a safe place.

Question 5 = I am often tempted to runaway from home.

Current Results; Community Assessment (n=59)



Important Notes: Question 1= I feel safe walking alone in my community (approximately 40% responded D or SD)

Question 2 = I feel there are enough safe activities.

Question 3 = I believe there are enough positive activities in the community (approximately 20% responded D or SD)

Question 4 = I feel the police treat me fairly in the community.

Other Results: Sex Distribution

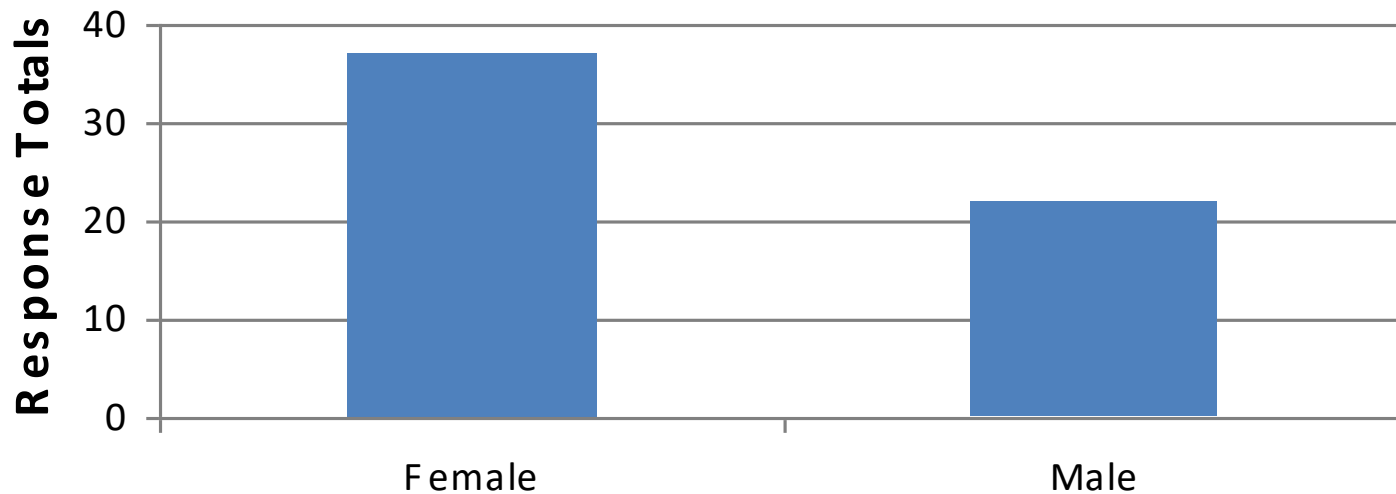
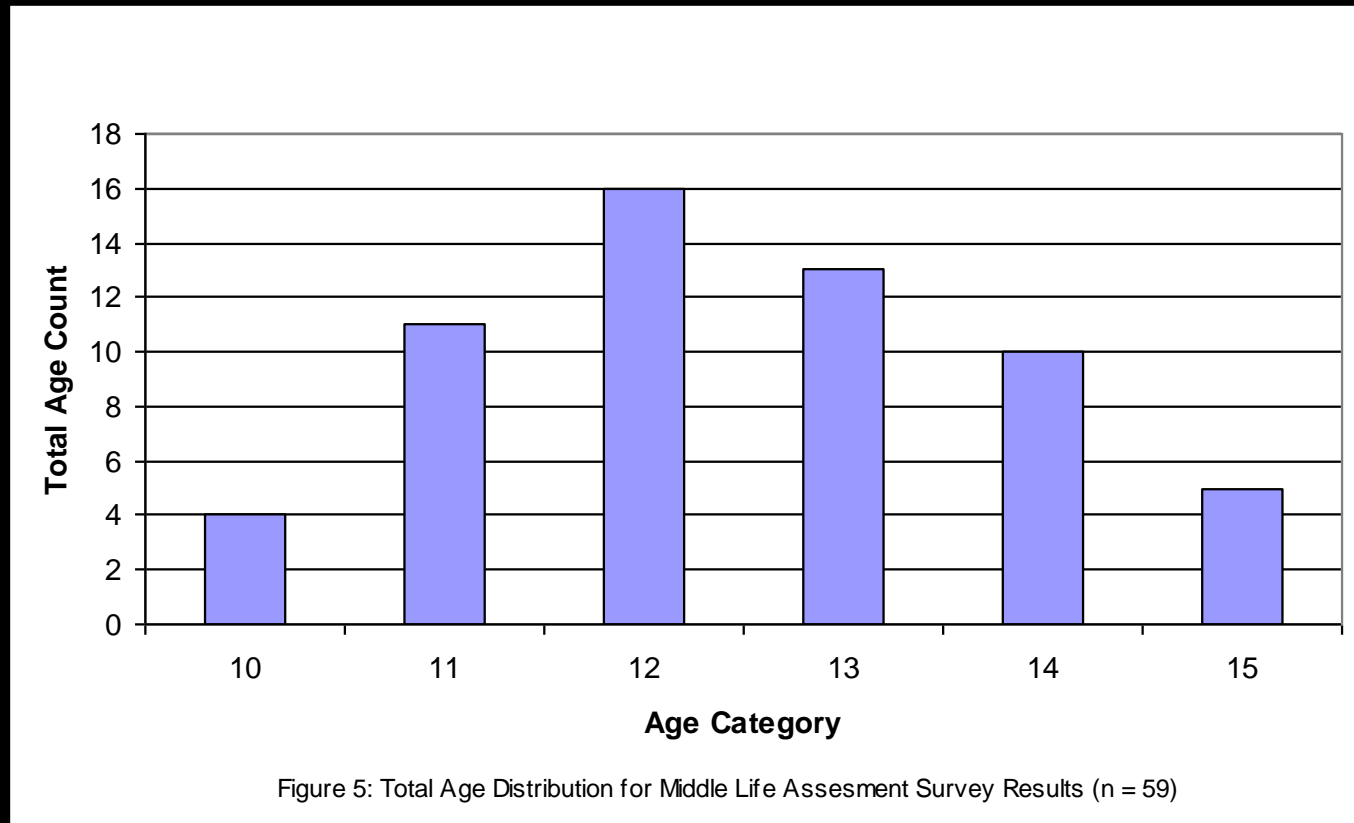


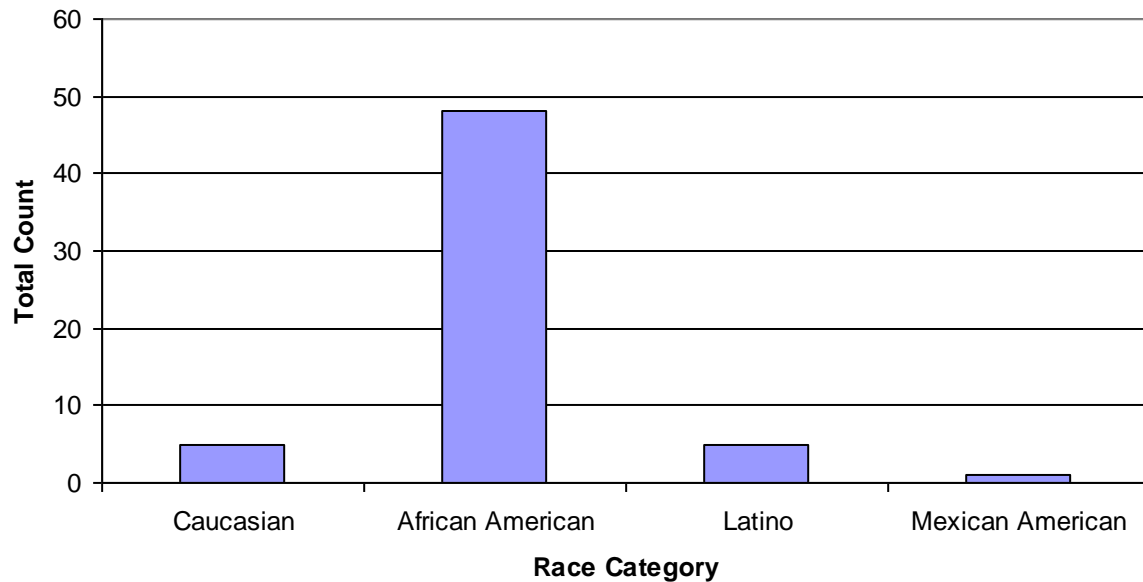
Figure 1: Sex distribution for survey results (n= 59)

Other Results: Age Distribution



Other Results: Race Distribution

Figure 6: Total Race Distribution for Survey Results



Other Results: Total Grade Distribution

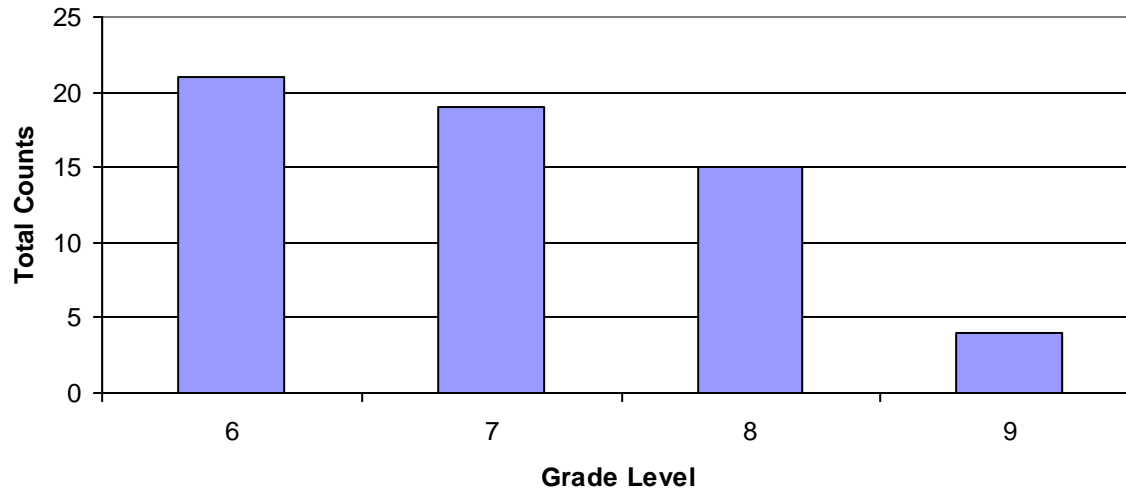


Figure 7: Total Grade Distribution for Survey Respondants (n = 59)

Vocal Survey Results: General Patterns

- Similar to written results, the home was found to be a safe haven for many respondents; mixed responses still exist though
 - “At home, we just watch TV or whatever; I usually don’t do much homework though.”
 - “My big brother helps me out with work, but usually leaves later in the afternoon.”
 - “My mom is always there and helps me out. But, she’s the only one there all the time.”

Vocal Survey Results: General Patterns

- For a few general questions about school life, responses generally favored no outside activities:
 - “We (my friends and I) always go home after school. There’s really not much to do afterwards anyways.”
 - “Basketball at the park; that’s all I do.”
 - “The school does not offer much for us in the way of doing things when school ends. Sometimes there’s a few sports or something, but I don’t like them.”

General Conclusions

- For the community, most claim they feel safe walking alone or with other friends; but others feel as though police treat them unfairly
 - Consequences? Perceived notion they are the culprits or are always at the wrong; can lead to negative attitudes
- However, there appears to be a lack of activities available
 - Consequences? As these children become older, if there are not many positive activities to resort to, what will they go towards?

General Conclusions

- Like many youth, it seems there is hesitancy or even resistance for them to express their opinion
- No true avenue or single person to relay information to besides parents and select leaders
 - Without the proper information, how is the community or anyone in general going to find and fill the needs of the community's future?

Recommendations

- Develop better programs to support youth; could include sports programs, increased leadership programs to develop future leaders or increased support by the school board for after school programs
- Parents and elders: It must all start with support by those caring for the children in the community; without any, the foundation for developing the future is lacking
 - Ideas: Developing an organization similar to Parent Teacher Organizations where parents can express concerns to community leaders; possible new ideas to emerge to satisfy the current unsatisfied needs

Future Work/Research

- Gain a better perspective of how adults are participating in the community; teachers, parents and others
- Inquiry into after school programs: are there actual pathways for students to apply themselves before high school?
- How do these children fare in the future? Long term surveys (>2 years) to track if attitudes change once reaching high school or beyond
- Youth Leadership: what is the best avenue to relay youth's voices to their community and how should it be implemented?
- Random sampling

Citations

- Gilman, Rich and E. Scott Huebner. "Characteristics of Adolescents Who Report Very High Life Satisfaction." Journal of Youth and Adolescence 35.3 (June 2006): 311-319.
- Valois, Robert F., Raheem J. Paxton, Keith J. Zullig, E. Scott Huebner. "Life Satisfaction and Violent Behaviors among Middle School Students." Journal of Child and Family Studies 15.6 (December 2006): 695-707.
- Huebner, E. Scott, Robert F. Valois, Raheem J. Paxton, and J. Wanzer Drane. "Middle School Students' Perceptions of Quality of Life." Journal of Happiness Studies 6 (2005): 15-24.
- Welsh, Wayne N, Jack R. Greene and Patricia H. Jenkins. "School Disorder: The influence of Individual, Institutional, and Community Factor." Criminology 37.1 (1999): 73 – 116.