

In 2004, Robert J. Sampson of Harvard University, and Steven W. Raudenbush of the University of Michigan conducted a study to learn more about actual and perceived disorder in Chicago neighborhoods. They studied 22,000 blocks in Chicago, and interviewed more than 3,500 residents and 700 community leaders.

They found that in these neighborhoods, THE largest factor influencing peoples' perception of disorder was NOT actual physical disorder— graffiti, broken windows, abandoned buildings, litter, prostitution, or actual crimes committed.

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Appendix A

Walkability, Safety, and Racism

Several studies have examined the relationships between crime, safety, perceived safety, walkability, and quality of life. This appendix summaries some of those issues, which are essential considerations in making Lansing a walk and bike friendly city.

How Important is Walking to Americans?

In 2002, the Surface Transportation Policy Project commissioned a national random telephone survey of 800 adults age 18 and over, to measure public attitudes toward walking. The full report from the study is online at http://www.transact.org/library/reports_pdfs/pedpoll.pdf.

One of the survey questions was:

“In deciding where to live, please tell me how important each of the following would be to you: very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important...”

This chart highlights the levels of “very important” and “somewhat important” responses to the choices offered:

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Very + Somewhat
Feeling safe from crime	86%	10%	96%
The quality of public Schools	69%	12%	81%
Sidewalks and places to take walks for exercise or fun	44%	35%	79%
Being within walking distance to stores and restaurants	25%	31%	56%
Being within walking distance to schools	29%	21%	50%
Places to walk your pet	23%	27%	50%
Being within walking distance to public transit	25%	23%	48%

Feeling safe from crime (96%), quality of public schools (81%), and having sidewalks and place to take walks for exercise or fun (79%) were obviously big factors for the survey participants. Being able within walking distance of stores, restaurants, schools, good pet-walking, and transit—those things are all important too— but only about HALF of Americans said these were very or somewhat important.

While there may be other, even more important factors to Americans that weren't asked in the study (like jobs, affordable housing, anti-discrimination laws, etc.), of the factors that were offered, these responses send a clear message that feeling safe, good schools, and walking opportunities are each of nearly equal importance to Americans.

About “Feeling Safe from Crime”

Feeling safe from crime and *being* safe from crime are not the same thing. With the rise of exaggerated crime media coverage on TV, in newspapers, and on the radio, many peoples' perceptions of safety, and of things they ought to fear, have become increasingly skewed. Government propaganda after the 9/11 attacks have not helped our sense of national “insecurity” about our risks of being attacked or victimized. For cities, where it is likely that more crimes will occur, simply because the population tends to exceed that of surrounding suburbs, the problem of an exaggerated “fear of crime” is a public relations issue that must be addressed, including working to diminish racial fears that bias many peoples' *feeling* of safety. (See sidebars this page and previous). In cities where crime is truly “rampant”, compared to other cities of similar size, then the actual crime rates do need to be dealt with— through increasing law enforcement efforts, enhancing social support systems, and/or or addressing social inequities that are adding up to excessive crime. However, reducing crime rates alone does not help people *feel* safer. Public relations, education, and addressing racism are also critical. Additional resources and information on this topic:

- Interpreting Fear, Crime, Risk, and Unsafety. Vanderveen, Gabry. 2006, BJU Legal Publishers
- Active Community Environments and Health: the relationship of walkable and safe communities to individual health. Doyle et al. January 2006, Journal of the American Planning Association.
- Race Manners for the 21st Century: Navigating the Minefield Between Black and White Americans in an age of fear. Jacobs, Bruce: 2006, Arcade Publishing, New York.

The percentage of Black residents in a neighborhood predicted subjectively perceived disorder substantially more than the objectively measured level of disorder in the neighborhood.

This “perception factor” held true not only for Whites, but for African Americans as well.

Racial biases, and their impact on our perception of neighborhood safety, must be addressed in order for people to feel safe in diverse urban areas.

Seeing Disorder: Neighborhood Stigma and the Social Construction of Broken Windows. Sampson, Robert and Raudenbush, Stephen. December 2004, Social Psychology Quarterly.