Some sloppy analytics have been pushed out by various media sources in recent days in

response to the Black Lives Matter movement. Anyone with basic Excel skills can gather some

data and throw together a pivot table, but to do so thinking that you’ve uncovered something

meaningful is arrogant, deceitful, and makes for a shabby analyst.

Real data comes from real life, and as such, it comes from many individual stories. A good

analyst is not a data pusher, but a storyteller – someone who asks the right questions of the

data until all those individual stories are woven into a single tale that has real and predictive

meaning in our daily lives.

Two of the main arguments spouted by these data “sharpshooters” [[1]](#footnote-1) center around:

1. Black people are most often killed by other black people, and
2. Cops kill more white people than black people

(1) The black-on-black crime argument has several problems:

1. You may not have heard about it, but black people are already trying to reduce black-

on-black crime. [[2]](#footnote-2) [[3]](#footnote-3) [[4]](#footnote-4) [[5]](#footnote-5) You don’t often see this in the national news because most

solutions come at the local level.

1. This argument is actually a Red Herring [[6]](#footnote-6) (or a Chewbacca defense, if you prefer).[[7]](#footnote-7)

Police shootings are civic issues and therefore are resolved through publicly addressing

the problem. Black Lives Matter is a Civil Rights movement about a civic issue; it must

be very public to be effective. You can’t protest march against criminals; they aren’t

going to line up to stop you.

1. Black-on-black crime is a complicated social issue that has been shown to have partial

roots in unequal social structures.[[8]](#footnote-8) [[9]](#footnote-9) [[10]](#footnote-10) [[11]](#footnote-11) Thinking that other social inequalities should

be addressed before police shootings is a valid argument, but unequal educational

opportunities aren’t going to walk up to your car window and shoot you – it’s killer

effects are much more subtle, so BLM (Black Lives Matter) has an urgent and emotional

nature. Many black boys grow up in an environment where the police lack legitimacy, [[12]](#footnote-12)

and their authority comes merely due to superior force of arms. This makes for a legal

authority that appears no different than another street gang. Many black men don’t

perceive that they will receive justice in the legal and court system, so violence becomes

the default system of authority. These perceptions of legal bias are somewhat

corroborated by the data.[[13]](#footnote-13) The very fact that BLM is addressing the police and legal

system is a positive sign that the legal and court systems are being perceived as more of

an authority by black communities. Now is the time to support that effort, not hinder it.

(2) Cops do kill more white people than black people.

This statement is true, and the most obvious counter is to say that the 60+% white population[[14]](#footnote-14)

greatly outnumbers the 12% black population, but this would also be a sloppy analysis if we

stopped there. The story of one member of the population is not statistically analogous to

another person’s story in every situation. What if one group is more often engaged in

dangerous situations with the police? There are real stories behind this data.

So, what exactly is the story here? We have a movement concerned about the apparent unjust

shootings of black men. What would constitute an unjust shooting? First, a reasonable person

(remember, all sides to an argument will have unreasonable people, but let’s focus on the

general consensus) will argue that a non-attacking and nonthreatening person does not deserve

to be shot. Second, shooting an unarmed person is often considered not justifiable (certain

circumstances may justify shooting a threatening unarmed person, but the argument for more

nonlethal options to these situations is an important topic not under discussion here). So, what

data do we have on these types of stories where unarmed and/or non-attacking people are

killed by police?

For over a year and a half, the Washington Post has tracked police shootings in the United

States. Of the 1,365 police shootings of confirmed white, black, and Hispanic suspects, the

majority are white (732), while 381 are black. However, 44.4% of black suspects were not

attacking, while only 36.8% of white suspects were not attacking. As you can see, the Hispanic

population deserves an investigation into that spike to over 50%, but that is for another time.

CHART 1

Now let’s add unarmed to non-attacking. White people are at an advantage with unarmed

suspect shootings only at 7% compared to nearly 12% for blacks.

CHART 2

Now let’s dig into the meat of the story. Let’s use non-attacking as the base of the data since a

reasonable person would conclude that deadly force would not be needed in non-attacking

situations. Of all non-attacking white suspects, 23.7% were unarmed while 36.3% of black non-

attacking suspects were unarmed, a 12.6% discrepancy.

CHART 3

Perhaps these differences seem small to you. Even this amount of a difference in policing has a

distinct societal effect that compounds other social wounds. This data comes from real stories,

and close investigation may reveal some of the shootings of unarmed non-attacking black men

were justified. However, there is a clear difference in how black men are handled in these

situations. Is that due to the color of their skin? Is this symptomatic of intentional racism, or is

there some type of psychological bias in our society toward dark skin that makes many people

assume bad intentions? These questions deserve answers precisely because we have these

serious symptoms.

To counter BLM with “All Lives Matter” is to either deliberately suppress the concerns of fellow

citizens or to unintuitively misinterpret their intentions. You may not agree with their

arguments or their methods, but the data is clear; Black Lives Matter at least deserves your

empathy.

1. https://yourlogicalfallacyis.com/the-texas-sharpshooter [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.preventblackcrime.com/pbc.nsf/pages/Details [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/columnists/ct-black-crime-glanton-talk-20151206-story.html [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://www.ulpbc.org/programs-services/community-development/140-black-on-black-crime-prevention.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://www.slate.com/articles/news\_and\_politics/politics/2014/12/black\_community\_is\_concerned\_with\_black\_on\_black\_crime\_suggesting\_otherwise.html [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://www.logicallyfallacious.com/tools/lp/Bo/LogicalFallacies/150/Red\_Herring [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chewbacca\_defense [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/21/us/school-data-finds-pattern-of-inequality-along-racial-lines.html [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. http://edlabs.harvard.edu/link-between-education-inequality [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2015/06/11/racial-gerrymandering-as-bad-as-the-other-kind/ [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/10/28/what-the-u-s-economy-would-look-like-if-racial-inequality-didnt-exist/ [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/07/the-near-certainty-of-anti-police-violence/490541/ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=702 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF [↑](#footnote-ref-14)