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Bridging the Social and the Psychological in the Fear of Crime

Jonathan Jackson, LSE

In Lee, M. & Farrall, S. (Eds.), *Fear of Crime: Critical Voices in an Age of Anxiety*

What explains the gap between the fear of crime and the reality of crime? How important to public anxieties are perceptions of the likelihood and consequence of victimisation? What about feelings of control and the personal vividness of risk? How significant is past experience of crime, or hearing from family and friends about danger and threat, or consuming mass media reports of criminals, victims, eroding norms, and loosening moral standards? What about perceptions of our social and physical environment – the people we encounter, our feelings of community trust and social cohesion, the state and ownership of public space and social decay?

More questions arise. Do anxieties about crime distil a broader set of concerns about neighbourhood breakdown, diversity, moral consensus? Does the fear of crime fuel stereotypes, dramatise what is wrong with our culture and define and redefine moral boundaries in society? Do panics about crime reflect a cynically manipulated culture of fear? Might political discourse, the mass media, and social scientific research be implicated in the creation and feedback of fear?

These are some of the queries that scholars have in the back of their mind – or perhaps in the front of their mind – when they question the theoretical base of much fear of crime research. That such questions have so far gone to some degree unanswered reminds us that this literature has been rather more successful at providing information on who reports what (in standardised interviews) than at producing descriptions of how worry manifests in people's everyday lives or explaining why they feel anxious in the first place (Hale, 1996; Farrall *et al.*, 1997; Girling *et al.* 2000; Farrall & Gadd, 2004; Jackson *et al.*, 2007; Gray *et al.*, 2007). As Vanderveen (2006, p. 7) notes, '…many studies are concerned what might be called the prevalence of "fear of crime" in socio-demographic categories . . . less is known about the variety in the nature, meaning, relevance and experience of "fear of crime" in people's personal lives.' A literature dominated by survey research might be aptly described as *abstracted empiricism* (in the words of C Wright Mills – see Mills, 1953), where the sophistication of large-scale surveys and statistical procedures are not matched by impoverished theory:

> 'Overall, reading the literature on fear of crime produces a sense that the field is trapped within an overly restrictive methodological and theoretical framework . . . What is needed is a strategy which begins by unpacking the concept of fear of crime. So doing will open up a rich area for debate.' (Hale (1996: 141)

The questions posed at the very beginning of this chapter might be divided into those of a predominantly psychological nature and those of a predominantly sociological nature. The processes that link risk perception to emotion fall in the first group. The social and cultural significance of crime, deviance and social stability are more sociological issues. In this chapter I argue that a comprehensive account of the fear of crime needs to bridge these two levels of analysis. I present a tentative and briefly sketched out theoretical treatise that tries to do just that. In order to integrate and develop disparate insights I draw upon an area of interdisciplinary research that has so far gone untapped within criminology: risk perception. Working within what Thompson & Dean (1996) call a contextualistic formulation of risk, the framework considers the psychology of risk; how risk is constructed and information circulated; the institutional processes and interests at play in amplification and attenuation; and the social meaning of crime that infuses and inflects public perceptions of risk.

Overall the framework states that the public thinks about risk in terms of likelihood, control, consequence, vividness and moral judgement. People generate representations of risk which include imagery of the criminal event and its consequences, a sense of who might be responsible and where it might take place, and a sense of outrage – the 'who dare they' factor. Moreover, information about crime and images of risk circulate around society, creating what Sunstein (2005) calls 'availability cascades.' Certain actors amplify risk for their own institutional ends. Finally normative and cultural dispositions influence which risk individuals pay attention. Indeed because of the nature of crime, I argue that public concerns reveal their

evaluations of moral and social order that operate as a kind of lay seismograph of social disorganisation and anomie (see Jackson, 2004, 2006). Rather than fear of crime being solely about crime, it encompasses and expresses a whole set of public perceptions of symbols of crime. And these symbols reveal neo-Durkheimian evaluations of moral and ideological boundaries: people identify things in their community that are hostile to social order; they designate these as representative of criminal threat; and they identify individuals, behaviours and communities as somehow lacking – on the wrong side of acceptability.

Towards an integrative framework

Thompson & Dean (1996) distinguish between two conceptions of risk. One formulation, they write, is probabilist. From this standpoint, risk is purely a matter of the probability of an event or its consequences. Broadly mapping onto the scientific/quantitative approach and on the dominant mode of Governmental rationality, the hazard that gives rise to the possibility of this possible event is real, independent of our perception of it. Any particular risk will be laden with other characteristics, e.g. GM food may engender fears about infection and illness, nuclear power risks may invite horror of environmental catastrophe. However, just as the colour of an eye plays no part in deciding whether something is or is not an eye, these "accidental" attributes of a risk do not provide criteria in themselves for deciding whether something is, or is not, a risk.

On the other hand is a contextualist formulation of risk. This opens the door to a wide range of other questions that colour public understanding and response, including control, the cultural resonance of a risk and its consequences, and aspects of trust and blame. As such, risk has no single determining criterion. A risk will always be associated with a number of characteristics such as whether it is voluntarily undertaken, whether it is familiar or unfamiliar, or whether it involves societal or personal danger. Probability, in this view, is simply one among a number of risk attributes, none of which is singularly a necessary condition for something to be classified as a risk.

According to Thompson & Dean (1996) the distinction between these poles is most apparent in informal discussion. When a probabilist talks of the "risk of an earthquake" occurring, s/he really speaks of the probability of the event occurring. By contrast, a contextualist would speak of the risk of an earthquake according to the particular danger relevant from a given perspective. For example, the risk would be different for someone who had no choice but to live in the hazardous area compared to the risk as seen by a geologist who chose to move to the area in order to study it. The implication of the strong contextualist position is that probability estimation may be irrelevant to determining the existence of a risk, much less for understanding it or communicating related information to others.

The practical result of these competing conceptions of risk is that misunderstandings and disputes occur that are difficult to resolve. Within a more contextualist understanding of risk, it is apparent that people who raise questions about particular risks – for instance violent crime – may be using risk language to articulate all kinds of legitimate claims dependent on the context in which these claims are made. For the probabilist, such claims will likely as not make little sense because probability is the single essential component of any discussion about risk: i.e. how probable is it that one will become a victim of such crime? Furthermore, it is generally experts that incline towards the probabilist pole. The communication of quantified probability estimates as input to public deliberations on such risks may sometimes, as a result, be simply irrelevant.

In a recent paper, Thompson (1999) suggests that the language of risk has been adopted by scientists doing risk assessment and is, in general functionally equivalent to the language of probability. The practical use for such language is in the field of decision-making. Risk analysis utilises mathematical and scientific techniques to arrive at the best estimate of likely costs and benefits to any course of action. This process is highly deliberative, in the sense that people are engaged explicitly in evaluating and weighing the options.

But much human behaviour and cognition is not deliberative. It is habitual, even unconscious that any particular course of action is being adopted. Risk in lay or "everyday" usage, Thompson argues, "functions as a cognitive gatekeeper between the deliberative and the non-deliberative dimensions of practice…in this respect, the concept of risk functions as a category for organising or prioritising the expenditure of deliberative resources" (Thompson 1999: 499). In this account, in the practice of risk assessment, once something is categorised as being a risk, the deliberative process of determining probabilities and weighing costs and benefits begins. Where risk or risk language enters lay discourse, it can be dysfunctional in the sense that once something is categorised as risky, the layperson no longer acts as if there is zero or negligible risk, but often neither has the resources, nor the information to arrive at a more "rational" judgment.

A contextualistic conception of risk opens up the definition of risk perception beyond just lay judgements about the chances of falling victim. Decades of psychometric research have shown the primacy of control and consequence in public perceptions (reference). A sense of efficacy over the possibility of victimisation speaks to the differential sense of vulnerability in the general population. A differential sensitivity to the impact and effects of crime explains why one person worries more than another. Thus, people may develop an image of risk which includes a sense of its likelihood, a sense of one's control over it happening, and a sense of the event and its aftermath – the resonance and impact of the event from a material, physical, emotional and psychological perspective. Moreover, 'crime' is not some abstract category; it is attached, by the observer, to individuals and contexts. Social influence plays a key role and issues of morality and blame come quickly to the fore (Sparks, 1992).

It is the goal of the rest of the chapter to sketch out such images or narratives of risk in more detail.

Emotion and risk perception in the fear of crime

Vulnerability and the fear of crime

Perceived vulnerability to victimisation is a key theme in fear of crime research (Hale, 1996). Killias (1990: 98) identifies three dimensions: exposure to risk; the anticipation of serious consequences; and the loss of control ('that is, lack of effective defense, protective measures and/or possibilities of escape'). All of these are necessary to produce fear according to Killias, and each is associated with physical, social and situational aspects of vulnerability. For example more serious consequences are expected to occur amongst women, the elderly and people in bad health (physical factors), amongst victims without networks of social support (social factors), and in deserted areas where no help is available (situational factors).[1]

Anticipated vulnerability to victimisation can explain differences in levels of anxiety between certain social groups. Examining the puzzle that females are typically at less risk of personal crime (e.g. mugging or physical attack rather than burglary or car crime) than males[2] yet worry more frequently, Jackson (2007a) found that the gender difference in the frequency of worry either disappeared or was attenuated once one controlled for any single of the following self-assessments:

- Ability to fend off attack;
- Assessment of the personal consequence of victimization;

[1] To explore one aspect of this model, Killias & Clerici (2000) drew upon data from a sample survey of Swiss nationals to show that respondent assessments of their physical ability to defend themselves was an important predictor of anticipated feelings of safety in a number of situations.

[2] At least according to mainstream statistics – for critiques and alternative perspectives see: Stanko, 1985, 1987, 1990, 1997; Pain, 1993, 1997; Madriz, 1997; Gardner, 1995; and Hollander, 2001, 2002.

- Judgements of control over the risk;
- Perceptions of the likelihood of victimization; and,
- Beliefs about the relative-risk levels.

The gender difference in worry was thus partly explained by females (compared to males) typically feeling less able to fend off attack, judging themselves to be less able to control risk than males, and judging the consequences of the event to be more serious.

Warr (1987) has a phrase for this: 'differential sensitivity to risk.' His study found that individuals were more 'sensitive' to a given level of perceived risk when they viewed the consequences of victimisation to be especially serious. In other words, a certain level of perceived likelihood resulted in higher levels of fear when a crime was generally judged to be especially serious. Extending this model, Jackson (2007b) showed that subjective probabilities strongly predicted the frequency of worry but also that control and consequence each: (a) shaped the judgement of likelihood; and (b) moderated the impact of likelihood on worry. Both judgements of consequence *and* control operated as differential sensitivity to the risk of criminal victimisation: when individuals judged crime to be especially serious in its personal impact, and when individuals judged that they have little control over the event, a lower level of perceived likelihood was needed to raise the frequency of worry.

These studies, in sum, support the argument that: '…circumstances or events that appear innocuous or comparatively minor to males or younger persons are apt to be viewed as more dangerous to females and the elderly because of the offences they imply or portend' (Warr, 1994, p. 19). The heterogeneity of different types of crime regarding 'relevance, explanation and consequences' (Gabriel and Greve, 2003, p. 6) means that the same crime has different anticipated resonance or impact from one individual to the next. For example one person may associate burglary with the risk of physical or sexual assault; another person may associate burglary with the loss of material goods and a great deal of inconvenience. Indeed Ferraro (1995, p. 87) argues that sexual harassment: 'may shadow other types of victimization among women. Rape may operate like any other master offence among women, especially younger women who have the highest rate of rape, heightening fear reactions for other forms of crime.'

Representations of risk: lessons from psychology

A large body of empirical evidence from risk perception research suggests that the public think about crime risk in terms of likelihood, consequence and control (see Jackson, 2006). Examining the psychological mechanisms which underpin lay perception of terrorism-risk in Turkey and Israel, Shiloh *et al.* (2007) differentiate between (a) cognitive representations of risk and (b) emotional representations of risk. An initial qualitative study explored individual's thoughts and feelings about terrorist attacks and the findings fed into the development of a questionnaire. Subsequent survey data showed one theme of 'negative affect' and four cognitive themes: cost (perceived consequence of terrorist attack); vulnerability (perceived likelihood of terrorist attack); control (perceived self-efficacy over becoming a victim in a terrorist attack); and trust in authorities (assessment of the ability of government and security forces to prevent terrorist attacks). Negative affect was measured using semantic differential scales where individuals reported their feelings about terrorist attacks on a seven-point scale (1='I do not feel' and 7='I strongly feel') for each of fear, helplessness, hopelessness, anger, intolerance, pain, loneliness, insecurity, sadness, and anxiety. Of the four cognitive themes, perceived consequence was the most powerful predictor of negative affect. Indeed while perceptions of likelihood and feelings of control were associated with affect at the bivariate level, there was a strong correlation between affect and consequence.

The *availability heuristic* (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973) predicts that the size of a class tends to be judged by the ease with which instances of it can be retrieved from memory. This offers one explanation why people tend to over-estimate the probability of victimisation:

individuals substitute a relatively difficult question (how likely is it that I will become a victim of crime?) with a relatively easy question (how easy can I imagine becoming a victim of crime?). In other words, people overestimate the frequency of very rare, spectacular events, and underestimate the incidence of more frequent, less spectacular events (Lichtenstein *et al.*, 1978). When individuals hold a particularly resonant and vivid image of the risk event – which may involve mental imagery of victimisation with especially serious consequences – they judge the likelihood of victimisation to be especially high. As Loewenstein et al. (2001, p.279) suggest:

> 'To the extent that anticipatory emotions are generated in response to mental imagery about the experience of decision outcomes [including judgements of risk], factors that influence the occurrence or vividness of mental images are likely to be important determinants of anticipatory emotions.'

Emotion and cognition may also show independence. Feelings may arise without cognitive mediation. Thoughts may arise without emotional mediation. Cognitive evaluations may tend to be composed of assessments of likelihood and cost; emotional reactions may involve the vividness with which consequences can be imagined, mood and prior experience with the event (Loewenstein et al. 2001). And two modes of information processing may be important. On the one hand is a formal, logical and numeric style of reasoning, a style more applicable to conscious cognitive assessments of risk. On the other hand is a type of thinking that Epstein (1994, p.710) calls 'intuitive, automatic, natural, non-verbal, narrative, and experiential'. For Slovic et al. (2004), the 'experiential' system is affect-laden rather than formally logical like the 'analytic system'. It involves rapid processing and the encoding of reality in images and metaphors rather than abstract symbols and numbers. Sloman (1996) suggests that such associative processing operates by using more rapid pathways based on context and similarity rather than the conscious use of logic and evidence.

Consistent with this, Sunstein (2003) argues that when strong emotions are involved, individuals focus more on consequence than likelihood (cf. Rottenstreich & Hsee, 2001).

> 'The resulting "probability neglect" helps to explain excessive reactions to low-probability risks of catastrophe … As a result of probability neglect, people often are far more concerned about the risks of terrorism than about statistically larger risks that they confront in ordinary life.' (Sunstein, 2003, abstract).

Thus, once people become anxious about crime, they might be unlikely to think about the low probability of victimisation, instead focusing on the many unpleasant consequences. This idea has interesting parallels with Warr's (1987) model of risk sensitivity, which predicts a relatively low level of perceived likelihood will tend to result in relatively high levels of fear when anticipated consequences are especially high.

Applying such findings promises to stimulate criminological research into the fear of crime (cf. Chadee *et al.*, 2007). Individuals may develop over time a set of cognitive and affective representations of the risk of various forms of victimisation. Representations or narratives of risk may originate in mass media and interpersonal communication, but get picked up and translated by individuals into personal concerns. These representations of risk may involve, from one individual to the next, different weightings of consequences, likelihood, control and affect to the potential of particular forms of criminal victimization. One individual may imagine that being burgled would involve serious material, physical and psychological effects; another may feel that the consequences would be comparatively manageable. For the first person the risk may be weighted by consequence more than likelihood; for the second person may be most important in their composition of perceived risk. What is important therefore is the vividness and composition of risk. Another example: the risk of rape may be appraised through the affective route because of

its severe consequences, constituted by a sense of the resonance of the consequences, the vividness of the event, and the ease with which one can summon up a frightening image. By contrast, another crime, such as car crime, may be appraised through the cognitive route, with the perceived likelihood of it happening more important than any resonant image of the impact of the event.

Once one is emotionally animated by the possibility of an event, a knock-on effect may be that one's judgements about that event and surrounding issues are then influenced. Someone already emotionally animated by risk builds over time a more extensive and vivid image of the risk event, fleshing out effects, protagonists and relevant causes and circumstances, making the risk more substantial, structured and relevant to that individual. Emotions can create and shape beliefs, amplifying or altering them and making them resistant to change (Frijda et al. 2000), providing information and guiding attention. Beliefs backed up by emotion additionally direct attention towards belief-relevant information (Clore and Gasper, 2000). For example, those who worry may interpret ambiguous environmental cues or situations as threatening. In a heightened emotional state one might more quickly see risk in ambiguity; one might more readily associate people, situations and environments with criminal intention and threat. Preoccupied with negative information and future unpleasant outcomes, worriers scan the environment for salient material relating to threat (Mathews, 1990), making ambiguous events more threatening (Butler & Mathews 1983, 1987; Russell and Davey 1993). Indeed, those who worry frequently are likely to think about the consequences, mull over the effects, and thus make the possibility more salient and more available.

Emotion and the effects of the 'fear' of crime

The focus thus far has been on the psychology of risk and emotion. But what does the fear of crime mean as a 'daily' experience? The answer to this straightforward question may be more complicated than one might at first expect. For a series of studies have questioned whether fear of crime necessarily manifests as an 'everyday' experience which damages well-being and reduces quality of life.

Farrall *et al.* (1997) found that allowing individuals to talk about their perceptions and feelings in some depth (through a qualitative interview) revealed that anxieties were rather rare. By comparison, standard quantitative measurement tools led to a rather inflated sense of the impact of anxieties on people's quality of life. Turning to data from an omnibus survey of England, Wales and Scotland, Farrall & Gadd (2004) subsequently showed that the frequency of 'fear of crime' was relatively rare. One more study drew on data from the 2003/2004 British Crime Survey for confirmation. 35% of respondents reported worry about mugging, yet only 16% had worried once in the past year (Gray *et al.*, 2007); a full 60% of those who were 'very worried' had not experienced a single event of emotion in that period (Jackson *et al.*, 2007).

This series of studies suggests that there is, on the one hand, the everyday experience of worry about crime. On the other hand there is something more akin to diffuse anxiety (see Hough, 2004; and Farrall, 2004). In fact those who reported being worried about crime but did not actually worry (i.e. the anxious) tended to live in lower crime levels, have fewer victimisation experiences, and know fewer victims (Jackson *et al.*, 2007). This suggests that the fear of crime manifests in the everyday when individuals are typically at the 'sharp end life' – perhaps they find themselves in threatening situations more frequently than those who lead more protected lives, who if they have some kind of 'fear' are more likely to be 'anxious.' An account of the fear of crime may consequently need to consider two 'types' of emotion: everyday worry which manifests as concrete moments; and a more diffuse but emotionally-tinged attitude towards risk (more akin to ambient insecurity). Both involve emotional representations of risk but everyday worry also involves specific moments of emotion (perhaps stimulated by environmental cues).

Moreover there is some evidence for the existence of *functional fear*. Jackson & Gray (2007) found that around one-quarter of those who said they are worried about crime when

probed also stated that they took precautions, that their quality of life was not affected (by worry or by the precautions they took), and that their precautionary activities only served to make them feel safer and less at risk. In such instances worry is arguably something adaptational and malign (at least compared to those individuals who worry, who take precautions, and whose quality of life is affected in significant ways). Indeed clinical psychologists have long been clear about the functional or problem-solving characteristic of worry. According to Mathews (1990): 'In the same way that fear has been described as a biological alarm system preparing the organism for escape … so worry can be seen as a special state of the cognitive system, adapted to anticipate future dangers.' As Warr (2000) asks: if we could turn a magic dial to control or regulate the fear of crime, would we want to? Would it not reduce people's natural defences to crime?

Bridging the social and the psychological in the fear of crime

Adding 'flesh and blood' to public representations of risk

So far this chapter has painted a rather solipsistic picture of the fear of crime. The focus has been on the psychology of risk and how people's emotions about the threat of crime manifest in their everyday lives. Perceptions of risk have been presented as complex and multi-faceted. Cognitive and emotional representations of risk interact and develop over time. Yet it is as if the social world has been bracketed out. 'Crime' is not something that drops from the sky (Sparks, 1992). It is a deeply symbolic issue. Attached by the observer to individuals and contexts (Girling *et al.*, 2000), it speaks to our sense of community cohesion and social decay (Jackson, 2004). Issues of morality and blame and battles over world-views come to the fore (Douglas, 1992; Sparks, 1992).

Elsewhere I have begun to sketch out the hypothesis that individuals infuse their representation of risk with *flesh and blood* (Jackson, 2006; Jackson *et al.*, 2006). The remainder of this chapter looks to develop this speculative framework.

Circulating representations of crime and danger

One of the earliest approaches to explaining the fear of crime focused on estimates of the risk of crime and on actual victimisation experience. According to this perspective, the more *actual* victimisation experiences (experienced directly), or the more *likely* victimisation is, the more fearful an individual will be (see *inter alia* Balkin, 1979, Liska *et al.*, 1988, Skogan, 1987). Yet such a simple model lacks empirical support. To be sure, there is some evidence (e.g. Garofalo, 1979; Skogan, 1981, 1987; Stafford & Galle, 1984; Liska *et al.*, 1988; Covington & Taylor, 1991; Hough, 1995; McCoy *et al*, 1996; Kury & Ferdinand, 1998; Rountree, 1998) that direct victimisation experience is related to worry about certain types of crime. But such experience seems but a small part of any explanation of the fear of crime (Hale, 1996). Weak correlations between fear and the risk of crime have given rise to the risk-fear paradox: more people worry about crime than are likely to fall victim and the wrong people seem to be worrying (Conklin, 1975; DuBow *et al*, 1979; Hale, 1996).

It therefore seems unlikely that people's representations of risk stem from their own personal, first-hand experience of criminal incidents. By contrast, a good deal of research suggests that *hearing* about events (via the mass media or interpersonal communication) and *knowing* victims play stronger roles in raising public perceptions of risk (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; Tyler, 1980, 1984; Covington & Taylor, 1991; LaGrange *et al.*, 1992; Ferraro, 1995; Hough, 1995; Chirico *et al*, 1997). Taylor & Hale (1986: 152-153) describe this as a 'crime "multiplier:" processes operating in the residential environment that would "spread" the impacts of criminal events.' Such evidence exists that hearing of friends' or neighbours' victimisation increases anxiety that Hale (1996) concludes that indirect experiences of crime may play a stronger role in anxieties about victimisation than direct experience. However, Skogan (1986: 211) offers a cautionary note: '… many residents of a neighbourhood only know of [crime] indirectly via channels that may inflate, deflate, or garble the picture.'

The mass media and interpersonal communication are obvious sources of second-hand information about crime. Stories are told, narratives outlined – perpetrators, victims and motives named and discussed. Surveying crime victims, Tyler & Rasinski (1984; see also Tyler, 1980) found that perceptions of risk and worry about future victimization were associated with both what individuals learnt from their particular experience of crime (how much the experience told them about the likelihood of victimization occurring again in the future, how much they learnt from the crime, and how much they learnt about how to protect themselves in the future) and the emotional reactions they had to the experience (whether they were upset, stunned, outraged, frightened, and shocked). In the last of three studies, Tyler & Rasinski (1984) also found the same processes at play when individuals read a report of a particular crime, thus suggesting that informativeness and affect are important mediators of the impact of first-hand *and* second-hand experience on fear of crime. Also important is the notion of 'stimulus similarity,' which describes how the reader of a newspaper (for example) might identify with the described victim or feel that their own neighbourhood bears resemblance to the one described (Winkel and Vrij, 1990). Stapel et al. (1994) found subjects who received car crash information and who shared social identity with the victims provided elevates estimates of risk compared to those who had no basis for assumed similarity.

Sunstein (2005) argues that hearing about events has an impact on public perceptions of risk through an interaction between availability and social mechanisms which generate so-called 'availability cascades':

> '[these are] social cascades, or simply cascades, through which expressed perceptions trigger chains of individual responses that make these perceptions appear increasingly plausible through their rising availability in public discourse. Availability cascades may be accompanied by counter-mechanisms that keep perceptions consistent with the relevant facts. Under certain circumstances, however, they generate persistent social *availability errors*—widespread mistaken beliefs grounded in interactions between the availability heuristic and the social mechanisms we describe.' [emphasis in original] (Sunstein, 1999: 685)

Thus, 'fear-inducing accounts' of events – such as the incident in 2002 in Virginia when two snipers killed ten people – are likely to be highly publicized, noticed and repeated, leading to cascade effects as the event becomes available to an increasing number of people. Sunstein (2005: 93) also speculates that existing predispositions may determine in large part what individuals pay attention to. One example he gives relates to genetic modification of food. Those who are predisposed to be fearful of this issue are more likely to seek out information about genetic modification. Furthermore, 'group polarization' describes how, when individuals discuss with each other certain events and risks, they typically end up with a more extreme view (p. 98).

People may therefore develop personalised images of risk as a result of hearing about specific events of crime that are brought home to them in a very vivid way – 'as if it could happen to me.' High levels of coverage make the events available. Personal images of risk develop. And through their focus on the sensational and dramatic, crime reports may end up stressing certain attributes to the criminal event which only increase the fearfulness. Crimes that are especially serious in their consequence or morally reprehensible in their character get the most attention (from both media outlets and readers), as do those which show a lack of control and predictability. Thus, in addition to increase availability, the consumer of media reports may give most attention to representations of events which have high levels of consequence and low levels of control for the victim. This, as outlined earlier in this chapter, may then have an especially strong influence on observers through probability insensitivity and consequent emotional response.

Risk entrepreneurs, and the cynical amplification of risk

More should be said about the diffusion and circulation of reports of crime in society. Here we might turn to the loose but inclusive set of concepts organized by the Social Amplification of Risk Framework (SARF, see Pidgeon et al. 2003). According to this framework, risk signals are received, interpreted and passed on at a series of 'amplifier' stations and diffused through different channels in society. Kasperson et al. (2003, p. 15) state that: " . . as a key part of [the] communication process, risk, risks events, and the characteristics of both become portrayed through various risk signals (images, signs, and symbols), which in turn interact with a wide range of psychological, social, institutional, or cultural processes in ways that intensify or attenuate perceptions of risk and its manageability." While the media are primary amplifiers, stations can also include individuals, groups and organizations such as activist groups of government agencies, driven by their interests and functions. The results are signals that can be increased or decreased in intensity, as well as transformed in their cultural content.

There are some parallels here with the concept of the *moral panic*. While this is not the place for a detailed discussion, it is worth mentioning some equivalencies:

- The stereotyping, sensitising and sensationalizing of certain behaviours (e.g. 'hoodies' and 'feral' gangs of 'listless' youths);
- An element of disproportionately between media coverage and the reality *on the ground;*
- An affront to the moral order and the identification of 'folk devils; and,
- A call for moral regulation and the neo-Durkheimian re-establishment of order through punishment and Government action.

The SARF framework shifts our focus on those who amplify risk for their own ends. These might be insurance and real estate industries, whose interests lie in capitalising on anxiety to stimulate demand for gated communities, CCTVs and the like. Or they might be political parties, who use the rhetoric of danger and anarchy to further agendas and manipulate public opinion, whether inflating (to gain right-wing ground on crime and to justify hard-line solutions) or derogating fear of crime (to claim credit for reducing crime the public do not feel safer). Lee (1999, 2001, 2007) has argued for a kind of 'fear of crime industry' which includes politicians, corporate interests, and even academic researchers. According to his view, studies 'discover' anxieties about crime, then reify the phenomenon and present to the public and officials a legitimate social problem. When politicians then try to 'govern' fear, they only serve to sensitise citizens to crime. Moreover certain politicians push more right-wing approaches to criminal justice, which only heighten levels of public anxiety. The term 'the fear of crime' has been used to justify various crime control policies which some on the libertarian-left have found hard to accept. When introducing more punitive sentences, restrictions on the rights of the accused, or more intensive forms of supervision and surveillance, politicians have sought to justify the proposed measures in terms of reducing the fear of crime (Fattah, 1993:61).

An interlude

In the first part of this chapter I speculated that people develop particular representations of risk. These include judgements of likelihood, control, consequence and vividness, as well as emotional responses to these risks. I also discussed one way of bringing the social back into the picture, Namely, we might address how individuals learn about risk through the circulation of reports of crime in society. Under certain circumstances these circulating representations can be picked up by individuals and develop into specific personal risk perceptions. Moreover social and political actors influence the ways in which crime is talked about and risk is amplified.

Yet crime is a risk with a specific social character. In the public mind, 'crime' might be inseparable from (a) conditions conducive to crime and (b) signs of hostility to established group values. People may link crime with certain groups, with symptoms of social decay (the low-level

disturbance that has come to be called antisocial behaviour), and with certain community conditions (low social trust, cohesion, collective efficacy, and moral consensus). Fear of crime may thus be as much about judgements of actual criminal threat as it is about judgements of a range of things seen as threatening to social order.

Moreover, criminal victimisation has a social aspect in a more direct sense: it is typically a harmful act committed by one individual on another individual, and its commission erodes valued social norms and conditions. Indeed the very act of designating a certain group as a threat and representational of crime may lead to a neo-Durkheimian call for censure to re-establish that social order: people look to formal social controls to re-affirm group values when threats are identified (Jackson & Sunshine, 2007).

Let us consider in a little more detail some aspects of the social character of crime-risk.

Morality and outrage

Crimes stimulate outrage and moral judgement in the observer. Crime is typically intentional: someone is seeking to deprive someone else of something – to damage them physically, psychologically or emotionally. The 'how dare they' factor may thus add a certain inflection to the risk of crime, an extra layer of significance and importance, raising the salience and inflecting the meaning of crime and crime-risk.

Take a rather straight-forward example. Terrorism expresses a disdain for human life and the desire to damage a way of life. We may be outraged by terrorist acts partly because of what these acts express (consider how less outraged we are by car accidents that result in a comparable number of fatalities). First, our outrage may give it a charge and a resonance: the very idea that it is possible strikes at our sense of justice. Second, our identification of terrorism as a salient risk may be partly a defence of what it seeks to destroy: we give the risk of terrorism special significance because of the value we place on what terrorists seek to threaten.

Crime may be similar. There may be something about the intentionality of crime that moves people, making it a more salient and symbolically charged risk. Victimisation may strike at our deep-seated sense of fairness and cooperation, the value we place on the sanctity of property and liberty, our desire to censure those who defect. We value a sense of safety and security of our home and neighbourhood. We value healthy and predictable norms of social conduct. Crime damages the community. Transgression of the shared moral values of society challenges the authority and appropriatedness of a moral and social structure, harming social cohesion, moral consensus and informal social controls. If transgression goes unpunished they further erode social order, tainting group identity. Thus, the desire to punish and censure defectors reflects our desire to protect order, stability and organisation.

Symptoms of social decay

There is another element to the social nature of crime-risk. Much criminological research has demonstrated that fear of crime is as much a response to day-to-day encounters with 'symbols associated with crime' as it is about specific beliefs about crime (Hale, 1996). Perceptions of the likelihood of victimisation are shaped by these individual evaluations of the social and physical environment (Ferraro 1995; Innes 2004; Jackson 2004), including judgements about (a) social cohesion, trust and informal social control, (b) incivilities or 'broken windows,' and (c) the values, norms and morals of the people who make up the community (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981; Wilson & Kelling, 1982; Taylor *et al.*, 1985; Smith, 1986; Lewis & Salem, 1986; Taylor & Hale, 1986; Box *et al.*, 1988; Skogan, 1990; Covington & Taylor 1991; LaGrange *et al.*, 1992; Ferraro, 1995; Perkins & Taylor, 1996; Rountree & Land 1996a, 1996b; Taylor, 1999; Innes, 2004; Robinson, et al. 2003; Jackson, 2004; Jackson & Sunshine, 2007).[3] Furedi (2006: 5) argues

[3] This body of empirical research has implications for the everyday experience of the fear of crime. Feelings of control may extend beyond control of concrete risks (i.e. explicit events of victimisation) to

that: 'The fear of crime is a distinctive feature of a society where the influence of informal relations and taken-for-granted norms has diminished in influence. It is anxieties about the uncertainties of day-to-day existence that people echo in discussions about the subject of crime. Insecurity towards expected forms of behaviour and suspicion about the motives of others provide a fertile terrain where perceptions of threats can flourish. These perceptions are intensified in circumstances where social isolation has become pervasive.'

The risk of crime therefore seems to be projected into a given environment and elaborated with a face (the potential criminal) and a context (the place it might take place); it is rooted and situated. A key process in fear of crime may thus be the evaluative activity that links crime with individuals or groups who are judged by the observer to be (a) hostile to the local social order, (b) untrustworthy, and (c) representative of some sort of social breakdown. Perceptions of risk may therefore express this evaluative activity. In other words, perceptions of the risk of crime may disclose a host of subtle evaluations of and responses to the social world – a way of responding to variable levels of social order and control, a sense of unease in an unpredictable environment, the association of particular individuals or conditions with deviance and hostile intent – just as much as they comprise specific appraisals of being attacked in the street, being burgled, or having someone stolen one's car.

If it is true that perceptions of crime risk reveal processes of designation (where certain groups, behaviours or community conditions are labelled as potentially criminal and dangerous) then another aspect moves into view on a contextualistic definition of risk. Crime may be used as a way of articulating evaluations of people, community conditions and social control, a lens through which people understand social order, low-level deviance and diversity.[4] The identification of dangerous individuals may operate to establish "moral communities" by locating "immoral communities" (cf. Douglas 1990, p. 4-5). Stereotypes of particular groups may operate as distancing strategies for placing others, perpetuating normative boundaries of social conduct, roles and judgements, strengthening one's own social identity. They may reinforce and identity the boundaries of a given community by identifying what that community is against: e.g. certain troublesome individuals, or particular groups defined by their social class or their ethnicity. Social psychology shows that the identification of an out-group operates the strength solidarity within the in-group. Scapegoating may also arise, where one group comes to embody a particular social problem. Such evaluative activity, if this analysis is correct, reveals how people define

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control over the social and physical environment. This is a good deal of evidence that the fear of crime is an emotional response to symbols of crime as well as concrete expectations of victimisation. Fear of crime may thus be a visceral response to the symbols associated with crime even in the absence of specific inferences about the threat of crime – a diffuse sense of unease and lack of control within an unpredictable and disorderly environment. An environment judged as unpredictable, unfamiliar and beyond the control of oneself or one's community may generate a sense of disquiet and an instinctive need to scan the environment for signs of trouble, and a sense that 'anything could happen.' As Goffman (1971) describes: '…the minor incivilities of everyday life can function as an early warning system; conventional courtesies are seen as mere convention, but non-performance can cause alarm.' Threat can be signalled by the presence of certain persons who act counter to the 'minor civilities of every day life', who behave in ways that are 'improper or appear out of place'. Such people or behaviours may signal an 'absent, weakened or fragile local social order' (Innes 2004). Other signs of the violation of norms of behaviour and symbols of the lack of informal social controls – such as graffiti, and vandalism – may generate the sense that the social order is in flux (Ferraro 1995; Innes 2004), through a loss of authority over space. People may feel they lack a sense of control over what may or may not happen – being unsure how to read a situation – leading to a lack of trust that screens out negative interpretations in the people around them.

[4] Fear of crime may express a broader sense of trust in strangers. In an examination of trust as a moral value, Uslaner (2002: I) argues that: 'Trusting strangers mean accepting them into our "moral community." Strangers may look different from us, they may have different ideologies or religions. But we believe that there is an underling commonality of values.' The fear of crime may consequently articulate individual's sense of common underlying values in their neighbourhood and their society more generally.

social order and what they think is hostile to social order. It also means that risk is culturally conditioned: what one defines as dangerous depends on where one stands.

Clashing worldviews

In a review of Sunstein's (2005) work, Kahan *et al.* (2006) argued that cultural values play a greater role in risk perception than his account suggests. The idea is simple: individuals hold attitudes toward risk which reflect and strengthen their values, commitment to particular ways of life, and preferred visions of society (see for example Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982; Rayner, 1992):

> 'The priority of culture to fact is the organizing premise of the "cultural theory of risk." Associated most famously with the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas and political scientist Aaron Wildavsky, the cultural theory of risk links disputes over environmental and technological risks to clusters of values that form competing cultural worldviews – egalitarian, individualistic, and hierarchical. Egalitarians, on this account, are naturally sensitive to environmental hazards, the abatement of which justifies regulating commercial activities that produce social inequality. Individuals, in contrast, predictably dismiss claims of environmental risk as specious, in line with their commitment to the autonomy of markets and other private orderings. Hierarchists are similarly sceptical because they perceive warnings of imminent environmental catastrophe as threatening the competence of social and governmental elites.'

According to Mark Douglas, people's conception of what constitutes danger, or a risk, vary according to the way their social relations are organised. People select risks as being important or trivial because this reinforces established social relations within their culture, although they may revise their thinking over time. Moreover, beliefs about purity, danger and taboo are essentially arbitrary. Once they become fixed, they serve to organise and reinforce social relations according to hierarchies of power.

Kahan *et al.* (2006) go on to outline why risk regulation politics are so often conflictual and value-based. Referencing Gusfield's (1986) work on status politics and symbolic conflicts, they argue that the battlefield is often about values and opposing cultural positions about the 'ideal society.' So hierarchists will be especially attuned to the threat of crime, since crime threatens social cohesion and moral consensus, and quickly gets linked to individuals and behaviours that are seen to be hostile to social order. People may attend to information about crime risk from the mass media and interpersonal communication because crime speaks to and dramatises their concerns about social cohesion, relations and change. Crime may get into such a symbolic tangle with issues of cohesion because the act of crime communicates hostility to the social order of a community and damages its moral fabric. The prevalence of crime may thus signal the community to be suffering from deteriorating standards of behaviour, diminishing power of informal social control, increasing diversification of norms and values, and decreasing levels of trust, reciprocity and respect.[5]

[5] Sunstein's (2006) reasonable response to Kahan *et al.* (2006) was to defend his version of bounded rationality in risk perception. He questions whether the United States can best be divided into specific cultures. Instead, people have different normative positions, and these positions in his view bias their judgements in questions of fact. Moreover, he questions the evidence base for the notion that 'culture produces different *factual* judgements about the magnitude of social risks.' (Sunstein, 2006: 6, emphasis in original). He accepts that moral commitments, rather than factual judgements, can lead people to give special attention to certain risk. For a response to this, see Kahan & Slovic (2006).

Risks may quickly become battles over competing values and definitions of social order. Different groups select and dramatise dangers to make their points and maintain the solidarity of their group. As Tansey (2004, p. 24-25) suggests: "… groups with marginal political or economic power can only exert their influence by appealing to the populace through accusations that those in power are responsible for exposing them to danger." He continues:

> "Risk becomes politicized not simply because it is a threat to life but because it is a threat to ways of life. Rather than ask how a risk comes to be magnified or how risk perceptions are influenced by heuristics, irrationality or pure emotion, this approach asks indirect questions: At whom is the finger of blame being pointed? Who is being held accountable? What is being rejected and what is being defended in a particular collective social action? This implies that for issues such as genetically modified organisms, research that seeks to demonstrate the safety of the technology will not dissipate political opposition since protest is in defence of a moral boundary. (Tansey 2004, p. 29)"

All this raises doubts on whether, as Sparks (2001, p. 168-169) explains: 'risk can be domesticated, kept strictly within the bounds of probability calculations . . . one consequence is that moments of intense controversy or recrimination (such as those engendered in debates about criminal sentencing or prison escapes or the release of convicted sex offenders) crystallize social anxieties and expose lines of division about the competence, trustworthiness and legitimacy of authorities. But this is also why, in Douglas's view, the vocabulary and associations of risk are always semantically denser, more culturally embedded, more episodic in their appearance and more open to politicization than attempts by specialists to numericize and rationalize them can admit. Risk does not "unload its ancient moral freight".'

Concluding remarks

This chapter has sketched out some early thoughts on ways to integrate the social and the psychological in fear of crime research. The task has been integrative (bring together research from a number of disciplines) and speculative (developing ideas that may be useful in future empirical work). Culture does not hover over individuals. A cultural analysis of risk perception needs to account for the psychology of an individual: a sociological account needs to encompass individual thoughts and feelings about uncertainty and danger. Individuals do not operate in a vacuum. A psychological analysis of risk perception needs to account for the culturally embedded meaning of risk: psychology has tended to ignore why people select one risk and not another. I have argued that a contextualistic formulation of risk that bridges both levels of analysis offers a promising way forward. Much is brief. Much is speculative. More research is needed. But I hope the reader is convinced that research into the fear of crime needs to be more ambitious in its theory and more inter-disciplinary in its approach.

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