



Jonathan Jackson

## Introducing fear of crime to risk research

Originally published in Risk analysis, 26 (1). pp. 253-264 © 2006 Blackwell Publishing.

**You may cite this version as:**

Jackson, Jonathan (2006). Introducing fear of crime to risk research [online]. London: LSE Research Online.

Available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/archive/00000805>

Available online: June 2006

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's final manuscript version of the journal article, incorporating any revisions agreed during the peer review process. Some differences between this version and the publisher's version remain. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>

Contact LSE Research Online at: [Library.Researchonline@lse.ac.uk](mailto:Library.Researchonline@lse.ac.uk)

# Introducing Fear of Crime to Risk Research

Jonathan Jackson

Risk Analysis

### **Abstract**

This paper introduces the fear of crime to risk research, noting a number of areas for future interdisciplinary study. First, the paper analyses the career of the concept of fear of crime and the politics of fear. Second, it considers research and theory on the psychology of risk, and particularly a *risk as image* perspective and interplay between emotion and cognition. Third, it speculates how people learn about risk and suggests how to customise a Social Amplification of Risk Framework to fear of crime. Finally, the paper argues that fear of crime may be an individual response to community social order *and* a generalised attitude toward the moral trajectory of society. Each of these areas of discussion has implications for future theoretical developments within risk research; each highlights how risk research can contribute to the social scientific understanding of an important issue of the day.

### **Key words**

Risk perception; fear of crime; emotion and cognition; image of crime; social amplification of risk; expressive function of risk perception

## 1. Introduction

This paper introduces public perceptions of crime to the risk literature, and sketches out new directions for interdisciplinary research on this topic. The fear of crime is widely recognised as a pressing concern among citizens of the US (Ferraro, 1995), Europe (Hale, 1996) and wider (van Kesteren *et al.* 2000). Such widespread anxieties have negative effects for the individual and for society (Hale, 1996). They may exacerbate the impact of crime by damaging an individual's quality of life. They may affect the community by deteriorating a shared sense of trust, cohesion and social control, thus potentially contributing to the incidence of crime itself. And in the political climate, in issues such as border controls, asylum and immigration policy, public fears exert force on policy that balances security against liberty.

Public perceptions of crime also influence specific Government policies. Anxieties about crime make themselves felt through public demands on the police to manage crime and its concomitant causes and effects. Clamour for more police, increasing calls for the Government to tackle anti-social behaviour, the seeming refusal of many people to believe that crime rates are not rising – all these evidence the influence of public perceptions of risk. And Governments respond: witness popular punitive Law and Order sloganeering, police strategies of reassurance, and community policing of incivilities and 'quality of life' issues. In some instances public perceptions of risk have encouraged the police to focus on reassurance at the expense of actual risk reduction.

This topic is thus a fascinating field of enquiry for risk research. But more than this, it speaks to basic ideas in the social sciences. In sociology, public attitudes toward crime raise fundamental sociological problems but with a twist – *public perceptions* of deviance, social order and social control. In psychology and social psychology, public attitudes disclose issues of (a) cognition, emotion and the psychology of risk, (b) stereotypes of groups according to race, class, age and other categories, and (c) appraisals and responses to one's immediate environment. A further interdisciplinary question is how images of crime and diagnoses of the crime problem circulate in society and are shaped by cultural and institutional processes and interests.

So far so good: this is an important issue; it is intellectually exciting; it straddles disciplines, touching on important problems in each. Yet the field of enquiry at the heart of these issues is the fear of crime, and herein lies the rub. Even a cursory survey of the criminological literature reveals a body of knowledge that has struggled to clarify this contested concept. It has failed to elucidate process explanations of the psychology of risk or seriously consider the cultural significance of crime and the threat of crime. The lack of concerted input from sociology and psychology is striking, but one more lost opportunity is the relatively independent development of the fear of crime literature to work on risk perception. Cross-disciplinary contributions are found in their parallel interests in emotional and cognitive features of threat appraisal, and the social meaning and amplification of risk. Yet despite the benefits to both fields, few crossovers have emerged.

This paper consequently tries to persuade the reader that fear of crime is a good topic for risk perception research. Let us begin with an analysis of the concept of fear of crime, and a consideration of the political and social context that has shaped its emergence and trajectory. This idea was borne out of turbulent times. The issue of crime gathered social meaning in the public imagination against the backdrop of social change, drawing out public perceptions of social order and moral consensus. Yet fear of crime research was motivated by political will to identify and respond to a limited conception of perceptions only as they related to crime levels. Research and debate has served a narrow remit, following a dynamic that will be familiar to many risk researchers.

## 2. The fear of crime: the career of a concept and the politics of fear

Public anxieties about crime are not unique to modern times. According to Pearson (1983) many generations have had their 'respectable fears' about particular social groups and behaviours, and

each generation believes itself uniquely threatened. Such respectable fears commonly express anxieties about a society whose secure, stable moral centre under threat from the pace and direction of social change. Today the most frightening figure might be typified by the hooded inner-city teenager – uncontrollable, with nothing to lose and no commitment to community, lacking in the norms, values and morals that underpin cooperation and mutual obligation.<sup>1</sup>

Societies create their own characteristic forms of deviance and criminality; one need not be reminded that a particular behaviour becomes labelled as criminal according to formally codified legal rules and normatively prescribed codes, operating within an array of complex social, institutional and cultural processes. At different times, in different places, one crime more than another has represented a threat to individuals, communities and societies. In the UK towards the end of the 1970s for example, Hall *et al.* (1978) identified a ‘moral panic’ about the young, black, male mugger. This figure operated as a vivid metaphor for the breakdown of social order and stability, a touchstone to racial tensions amongst the white population.

Public anxieties about crime thus have a long history; the ‘fear’ of ‘crime’ is not new. Nor do public perceptions of risk exist independently to evaluations of the cultural significance of crime, the criminal and what crime says about society. Yet the contemporary label ‘fear of crime’ was born out of the early US crime surveys of the 1960s, emerging as an object of social scientific investigation against a backdrop of increasing governmental interest in ‘Law and Order’ (cf. Lee, 1999; 2001), and a State in the throes of becoming ever-more a ‘knowledge society’ (see Melanson, 1973; Lee, 2001), collecting increasing amounts of information about its citizens. With the growing sophistication of statistical collection and analysis, and the political will to understand and intervene in the lives of its population, crime surveys documented with greater accuracy than recorded police figures the prevalence of crime. At the same time, these surveys took a temperature reading on public feeling about crime.

Feelings were high. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, riots flared up in twenty inner-city ghettos in the mid-1960s, the issue of civil rights boiled over in numerous arenas; race, disorder and unrest had become national anxieties. The 1967 President’s Crime Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice, which commissioned some of the first crime surveys, located White anxieties about crime within this context (Stanko, 2000). Survey data allowed the assessment of the prevalence and distribution of anxieties about crime and an examination of their correlation to crime rates themselves. Researchers found levels of fear that did not match statistical estimates of risk. More people were anxious than fall victim; the groups least at risk were those most afraid (e.g. Biderman *et al.*, 1967).

Since these beginnings, crime surveys have migrated across the world with the fear of crime becoming an important policy issue in and of itself in many countries. Until more recently the dominant motif was the somewhat perplexing relationship between public perceptions and actual crime levels. Studies focused on the relationship between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ risk, examining who felt unsafe walking alone after dark, or worried about falling victim of a range of crimes. Public opinion was contrasted with expert assessments of risk, and if public fears were deemed out of proportion to statistically estimated risk then they were thought to be misplaced and irrational. Partly an artefact of method that enumerated fear and statistically estimated risk (one could look at so-called ‘disparities’ between these estimates) the debate attained a level of polemic because there were real political points to be made and agendas to be played out. It was a question around which criminological and political positions solidified; it was an issue that could be interpreted in divergent ways to serve different agendas (Sparks, 1992; Lee, 1999, 2001; Jackson, 2004a).

But why was crime so salient in the public imagination? Why were people anxious? For Garland (2001), the last few decades saw crime move from a problem that afflicted the poor to increasingly become a daily consideration for many. Liberal sensibilities about the seriousness of crime as a problem were dented, as victimization became a prominent fact for the middle-classes. Increasing direct and indirect experience, mass media raising the salience of crime and

‘institutionalising’ public concern, and the growing visibility of signs of crime—in the form of physical incivilities, such as vandalism, and social incivilities, such as groups of intimidating youths hanging around in the street—all helped to bring crime and the perceived risk of victimization into people’s everyday lives. As Garland (*ibid.*, p. 153-154) puts it, ‘rising crime rates ceased to be a statistical abstraction and took on a vivid personal meaning in popular consciousness and individual psychology . . . diffuse middle-class anxieties [became shaped] into a more focused set of attitudes and understandings, identifying the culprits, naming the problem, setting up scapegoats.’ Images of excluded and disaffected young males of the inner city became resonant as the perception grew of them ‘as a newly dangerous, alien class’ (*ibid.*, p. 154). Crime reflected and refracted a whole host of social issues and problems.

Such an explanation is plausible, focusing as it does on the social meaning of crime that gathered during this period, analysing how cultural significance connects to public attitudes and concerns about social change and social relations. Yet the remit of the fear of crime work in the 1980s and early 1990s was politically charged, mobilising around the question: Were public perceptions of risk irrational? This was partly because of the real increase in expenditure on the criminal justice system and crime control in the 1980s. ‘. . . [The] emotional temperature of policy-making ha[d] shifted from cool to hot . . . the new discourse of crime policy consistently invokes an angry public, tired of living in fear, demanding strong measures of punishment and protection’ (Garland, *ibid.*, p. 11). Along with a greater concentration on the victim, the empirical ‘discovery’ of fear of crime was invoked to support ‘tougher’ neo-conservative political agendas and policies, exemplified by the vast increase in the funding of the criminal justice system (Lee, 1999). At the same time, those who wished crime policy to be less authoritarian sought to downplay public anxieties, arguing that policy should not be based on inaccurate public perceptions.

With the 1990s came a change of emphasis away from the rationality question – in the UK at least. The fear of crime began to be treated as a legitimate problem, no longer independent of crime. It was increasingly seen as a public response to anti-social behaviour and incivilities. Together, fear of crime and disorder became part and parcel of police dealings. Now the police undertake more high visibility patrols and tackle what are sometimes called ‘quality of life’ issues, all the while engaging in what might rather uncharitably be termed ‘public relation activities’. Currently the fear of crime is a performance indicator for the police and for the Home Office, its reduction forming a key aspect of high-profile reassurance interventions and the day-to-day operation of the criminal justice system.

Public perceptions of the risk of crime have thus had a powerful effect on public debate and criminal justice system policies during the previous two or three decades (Lee, 1999, 2001). Yet we should stop and pause for a moment. Serious doubts remain about the clarity of the concept of fear of crime and how it is measured (Garofalo, 1979; Ferraro and LaGrange, 1987; van der Wurff *et al.* 1989; Bernard, 1992; Fattah, 1993; Skogan, 1993; Warr, 1994; Hale, 1996; Farrall *et al.* 1997; Jackson *et al.* in press; Jackson, 2004a; Farrall & Gadd, 2004). Few studies have addressed the psychology of crime risk or the cultural meaning that underpins the social perception of crime.

### **3. So, what is the fear of crime?**

Clarifying this concept is not merely an ‘academic’ endeavour. Developing our sense of what fear of crime actually *is* will have clear implications for policy. For example, it may be that standard research tools exaggerate the fear of crime problem. Farrall *et al.* (1997) and Jackson *et al.* (in press) argue that standard measures may be leading, misrepresenting the frequency with which people actually ‘worry’ or are ‘fearful’ in their everyday lives. Technical flaws could be to blame. Certainly fear of crime survey questions impose the word ‘worry’ or ‘fear’; people are simply not given the opportunity to say they are ‘concerned’, ‘aware of risk’, ‘angry’ or ‘manage risk by taking precautions’; if they choose the option given to them (most often ‘worry’ or ‘fear’), they

risk exaggerating the severity and deleterious nature of their emotions. Moreover, asking people 'how worried are you' could also suggest a premise that it is normal to be worried (see Knauper, 1998, and Sterngold et al. 1994, for methodological experiments that raise this possibility, albeit on topics other than the fear of crime).

But survey questions may exaggerate the fear of crime problem for two other reasons – assuming one defines fear of crime as the everyday experience of 'fear' of falling victim. Firstly, it could be that measures tap into whether respondents hold a vivid image of the risk of crime; possession of such resonant images may be unrelated to how often respondents actually find themselves in threatening situations and thus feel fearful on a day-to-day basis. This is discussed later in the paper. Secondly, people may have come to use the language of 'fear' and 'crime' to express other concerns: qualitative studies have shown how the issue of crime speaks to a range of complex and subtle lay understandings of the moral trajectory of society and community, of anomie, social integration and organisation (e.g. Girling *et al.*, 2000). Criminologists commonly treat surveys as indications of the everyday experience of fear – as specific events, where people feel personally vulnerable to being victimised, as events that damage the quality of their life. Yet fear of crime may sometimes be something other than such everyday experience (Jackson *et al.*, in press; Jackson, 2004b).

Future contributions to the topic from risk research, social psychology and sociology will hopefully provide answers to these and other dilemmas. With this in mind, the remainder of the paper analyses the component parts of 'fear' and 'crime'. It identifies current thinking, documents gaps in our knowledge, and sketches out some promising avenues of research into the fear of crime.

### *3.1 Emotion and cognition in fear of crime research*

Many emotions may arise when thinking about crime and the idea that one may fall victim. One may feel sad or anxious about the health of one's community and society, worried about the morals and values of particular individuals and groups, unsettled by a sense of disorder and 'lawlessness'. One may feel indignant or outraged about the prevalence of crime, angry that others might make one feel unsafe and intrude on one's way of life. And one may feel worried or afraid of the immediate prospect of victimization, anxious about one's safety. Some emotions will be fluid and transient, felt at particular times and in specific situations (see Farrall, 2004); others may be more diffuse yet more constant, persistent over time, resistant to location in time and space (see Hough, 2004).

A key task for criminology – and for risk research – is to investigate emotional responses to the perceived threat of falling victim of crime. Much is currently speculative, but the fear of crime literature is beginning to develop a psychological perspective on the relationship between emotional and the cognitive appraisals. The feature that has received most attention is the personal estimation of likelihood. Ferraro (1995) found that such estimates were an important predictor of fear, mediating most of the impact of environmental perceptions of the symbols that a person associates with crime.

Another aspect to the psychology of risk is a personal sense of the impact of falling victim. For Warr (1984, 1985 and 1987), differential perceptions of the consequences of victimization constitute sensitivity to risk. Such perceptions of the seriousness of offences combined with subjective probabilities of its occurrence to strongly predict fear (Warr, 1990). As such: ' . . . 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 – with regard to 'relevance, explanation and consequences' (Gabriel and Greve, 2003, p. 6) – may mean that the same crime could have a 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. Similarly, 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.’

A further concept at the heart of cognitive features of risk perceptions is a sense of control over the risk. Jackson (2004b) found feelings of control were associated with worry about crime as well as perceptions of the likelihood of falling victim. Intriguingly, the sphere of control might be broadened to include a sense of efficacy over the environment (Tulloch, 2003). An environment seen to be 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 – a sense that ‘ . . . anything could happen.’ Tulloch (*ibid.*, p. 475) used qualitative methods to show that her ‘ . . . participants deploy discursively constructs of locus of control and self-efficacy that are more commonly identified through psychometric measurement.’ Mirroring Carvalho & Lewis (2003), Tulloch (2003, p. 475) found that those who were fearful saw themselves at the ‘mercy of powerful others (criminal gangs, predatory males, armed gunmen, paedophiles, etc.) and chance (through the random lottery-like nature of attacks).’ In contrast, the unfearful individual felt protected, claiming high levels of control over their environment, feeling that others were not aggressively dominating public space.

### 3.2 *The worry about crime model*

One study has drawn together these features into one framework, developing Ferraro’s ideas (1995) from a psychological perspective (Jackson, 2004b; Jackson, in press). In the worry about crime model, worry comprises both an emotional evaluation of an immediate situation (interpreting cues in the environment that signify a sense of possibility and threat) and an anticipatory state (a concern about potential danger, of imminent and distal threat or events yet to transpire). Jackson (2004b) found that the frequency of worry about personal crime was shaped by an appraisal of threat comprising perceptions of likelihood, control and consequences. In turn, inferences about victimization risk were shaped by beliefs about crime incidence, and both were largely a product of interpretations of the physical and social environment.

The worry about crime model has implications for the nature and upkeep of emotion and cognition regarding the risk of crime. Feedback may occur where emotion directs and strengthens cognition regarding the nature of crime and its specific threat. For example, worry may feed back into perceptions of the environment, so that those people emotionally animated about crime are more likely to see disorder in their environment, and more likely to link that to the threat of crime. Emotions can create and shape beliefs, amplifying or altering them and making them resistant to change (Frijda *et al.* 2000). Emotions may provide information and guide attention, just as beliefs backed up by emotion direct attention towards belief-relevant information (Clore and Gasper, 2000). Moreover, in a heightened emotional state, one might more quickly see risk in ambiguity and associate people, situations and environments with crime. Worry can stimulate a preoccupation with negative information and future unpleasant outcomes, increasing the scanning of the environment for salient material relating to threat (Mathews, 1990), making ambiguous events more threatening (Butler and Mathews, 1983, 1987; Russell and Davey, 1993).

### 3.3 *Emotion, cognition and the psychology of risk: an alternative perspective*

The risk perception literature offers an alternative model. Rather than worry being shaped by a set of interacting cognitive risk perceptions, Loewenstein *et al.* (2001) argue that emotional and cognitive appraisals of the risk object can actually operate *side by side*. A stimulus can evoke images that have both affective and cognitive dimensions (Slovic *et al.* 2002; Slovic *et al.* 2004), and these assessments can interact but also operate independently.

Important in this account is the distinction between two modes of information processing. On the one hand is a formal, logical and numeric style of reasoning, a style more applicable to



conscious cognitive assessments of crime risk. On the other hand is a type of thinking that Epstein (1994: 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', involving 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.

Cognitive and affective appraisals may interact; feelings about a risk object may infuse more formal and numeric appraisals. The affect heuristic describes when a representation becomes tagged with affect – a good or bad quality – when this affective assessment is more influential than cognitive appraisal on the overall judgement of risk (Slovic *et al.* 2004). Such affect may shape assessments of risk and benefit. Readily available images of GM food that are tagged with 'badness', for example, are more likely to increase judgements of riskiness and decrease the perceived level of benefit (Finucane *et al.* 2000).<sup>ii</sup>

According to the risk as feeling model cognition and emotion can also diverge. Affective reactions may be shaped by different things and arise without cognitive mediation (Loewenstein *et al.* 2001). Cognitive evaluations may tend to be composed of assessments of likelihood and cost, but emotional reactions are suggested to constitute factors such as the vividness with which consequences can be imagined, mood and prior experience with the event. Emotions can then directly influence judgement or behaviour. Indeed, when cognition and affect diverge there is a tendency for feelings to hold sway; our evolutionary makeup strongly influences fear responses and threat appraisal.

The risk as feeling model can be applied to crime risk. Threat may be judged cognitively *and* emotionally. Someone may process information using both the analytical and associational routes. When the emotional response to the threat of crime, which uses the associationist mode of information processing, differs to a cognitive sense of its likelihood, feelings are expected to hold sway and affect behaviour and outcomes such as emotions. Equally, if crime is judged to have severe consequences, and the outcome is vivid and affect-laden, then that individual is likely to be insensitive to probability variations (Rottenstreich and Hsee, 2001). That individual is unlikely to feel better if he or she is told that their chances of victimization are rather slight.

### *3.4 The risk as image perspective*

Such discussion brings us to a fuller consideration of what is being perceived and responded to here. There are many types of criminal victimization: property crimes; personal crimes in public space by strangers; personal crime in private space by intimates – to name but a few. And the prospect of falling victim of each is likely to have a different resonance from one person to the next. 'Crime' may involve the representation of that event, an image or narrative of how it would proceed, and emotional responses to such images. Feelings are likely to involve '...thoughts with themes with the emotion; and a mode of thinking, a style of mental processing, which [increase] the speed of image generation and make images more abundant' (Damasio, 2003, p. 84) – an appraisal of the object, the generation of more and more images of the event, its situations, its character and its effect.

The image of the risk of a particular type of criminal victimization may be central here. One study has found worry about crime to be strongly shaped by the vividness of the image of the victimization event and perceptions of the severity of the consequences, alongside feelings of control and perceptions of likelihood (Jackson, 2005). Moreover, an interaction effect meant that as vividness increased so the predictive power of consequences on worry increased. This study suggests that people say they are worried about being attacked in the street partly because they can easily bring to mind an image of themselves being targeted and victimised in this way – an event that they feel vulnerable towards. In other ways, they hold a particularly resonant and vivid image of risk. Rundmo and Sjoberg (Rundmo and Sjoberg, 1998; Sjoberg, 2000; Rundmo, 2002;

Sjoberg, in press) argue that such an image is some kind of ‘underlying mental substrate [that] drives the elicited beliefs and values connected to a concept or an object’ (Sjoberg, in press, p. 3). Similarly Loewenstein *et al.* (2001, p. 279; see also Slovic *et al.* 2000) argue: ‘To the extent that anticipatory emotions are generated in response to mental imagery about the experience of decision outcomes, factors that influence the occurrence or vividness of mental images are likely to be important determinants of anticipatory emotions.’

The type of information processing may shape such an image of risk. The risk of rape may be appraised through the affective route because of its severe consequences. Risk in this case may be constituted by a sense of the resonance of the consequences, the vividness of the event and 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. A feedback system might then mean 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. This might then make the risk more substantial, structured and relevant to that individual. Emotional systems may lead to the structuring and differentiating of risk images – personalising them, fleshing them out, bringing affect into the picture; with a disinterested, cognitive appraisal comes less of a vivid image.

Overall, such a *risk as image* perspective predicts that people attach 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 individual the risk may be weighted by consequence more than likelihood; for the second likelihood may be most important in their composition of perceived risk. What is important therefore is the vividness and composition of risk. This perspective conceives that perceptions of crime therefore take place against a ‘. . . background of expectation, experience and thresholds of tolerance’ (Sparks, 1992., p. 12). While speculative, this approach offers a potentially powerful explanatory tool, and it is to be hoped that future research will test its validity and utility on crime and other issues.

#### ***4. Learning about risk: circulating images of crime and deviance***

Now, where do people get their sense of the crime problem and cultivate particular images of criminal victimization? Despite an abundant literature on media effects – particularly the ‘mean world’ hypothesis – little work has been done into how representations, imagery and symbols of crime are transmitted and transformed by the mass media and by interpersonal communication.

One promising route is to base such an analysis within the loose but inclusive set of concepts organized by the SARF (Pidgeon *et al.* 2003). The specifics of crime and fear of crime could thus populate the detail of this ambitious framework. According to Pidgeon *et al.* (2003, p. 2): ‘[SARF] aims to examine broadly, and in social and historical context, how risk and risk events interact with psychology, social, institutional, and cultural processes in ways that amplify and attenuate risk perceptions and concerns, and thereby shape risk behavior, influence institutional processes, and affect risk consequences.’ The goal is to understand why some hazards and events come to be of social and political relevance, even while experts judge them to be relatively unimportant (risk amplification), and why other events (to experts, more serious events) induce comparatively low levels of concern and activity (risk attenuation).

Perhaps the greatest strength of SARF is its attention to communication processes. The framework states that risk signals are received, interpreted and passed on at a series of ‘amplifier’ stations and diffused through different channels. Kasperson *et al.* (2003, p. 15) argue 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 are increased or decreased in intensity, transformed in their cultural content.

Crime certainly is a key theme in drama, film, television, on radio, and in newspapers (Reiner, 1997). Crime narratives and representations abound, and if deviance is defined as broadly as anything that strays from the normal then a surprising proportion of the news has deviance at its essence (Ericson *et al.* 1987). Using a stricter definition of deviance, the ‘mean world’ hypothesis accuses the media of exaggerating the risks of crime, regularly presenting ever-more sensational and dramatic violent or criminal events, despite their low frequency of occurrence (Gerbner *et al.* 1986). Whether content has a strong effect on the audiences is disputed, but the media clearly demonstrate a fondness for the eye-catching violent and sexual crimes rather than the more mundane (Reiner, 1997).

A plural set of media may amplify or attenuate risks if they resonate with public feelings and mood – if the symbols and representations deployed capture existing public concerns and frames of reference. The mass media are important agenda-setters and providers of information, and a key concept here is framing (Murdock *et al.* 2003; Petts *et al.* 2001). Issues are more likely to receive media attention if they can be easily integrated into a narrative that motivates interlinked processes: (a) connecting; (b) contextualising; and, (c) anchoring. In the first, links are made between new events and already familiar instances and narratives, providing a readily available frame in which to understand novel phenomena. In the second, links are made to more abstract but still resonant contemporary issues. In the third, the imagery and connotations of an event are placed within popular anxieties and fears.

Symbols are important in shaping and reproducing the social meanings attached to risks. One interpretive account of lay perceptions can be found in Horlick-Jones *et al.* (2003). They were interested in the ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973) that communicate, for them, so much of the meaning and interpretation present in how people make sense of risk. For example, a risk issue might stimulate a set of concerns and debates quite apart from a narrowly conceived idea of the risk object itself. This is because the issue might involve a set of ‘symbolic tangles’ (Horlick-Jones *et al.* 2003, p. 284). Wiedemann *et al.* (2003) stress a narrative structure, arguing that laypersons see risks ‘primarily in a social and relationship-oriented context . . . based on common patterns for interpreting events, which are heavily influenced by the media, such as scandal stories, investigative exposes, tragedies, and disaster reports’ (*ibid.*, p. 289). At the heart of such narratives is a range of regularities, they argue. These include: the designation of heroes and villains to actors; the assignation of intentions and motives; dramatizing the conflict by filling out a logic to its build-up; drawing out a moral of the story, particularly around the consequences; and, bringing in other instances that strengthen and clarify the ‘moral of the story’.

Such theory could profitably be applied to crime. The reception and engagement with media reporting of serious criminal events may make the risk more available and salient, especially when crime chimes with existing public concerns and debates about social cohesion and moral consensus. Put another way, 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. 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.

Individuals may also pick up from media and interpersonal communication circulating images of the event, the perpetrators, victims and motive – namely, particular images of the risk event. The notion of ‘stimulus similarity’ may be crucial here (Winkel and Vrij, 1990). If the

reader of a newspaper, for example, identifies with the described victim, or feels that their own neighbourhood bears resemblance to the one described, then the image of risk may be taken up and personalised. In a related study, Stapel *et al.* (1994) found subjects who received car crash information and who shared social identity with the victims provided elevated estimates of risk compared to those who had no basis for assumed similarity.

### ***5. Learning about risk: day-to-day perceptions of social order***

Raising the idea that crime gets into a symbolic tangle with other issues of social order broadens out 'fear' of 'crime' to 'fear' of 'symbols associated with crime'. Risk perceptions may be shaped by the presence of signifiers (Ferraro, 1995; Innes, 2004). Jackson (2004b) found that assessments of vulnerability and risk perception were explicitly situated in people's understanding of their social and physical environment. Perceptions of social cohesion, trust and informal social control were just as important in shaping risk perception as interpretations regarding 'broken windows' and incivility; equally important in shaping perceptions of risk were interpretations of the values, norms and morals of the people who make up the community. Thus people used such day-to-day perceptions to derive information about crime and the probability of threat.

We may also consider 'fear' to be a visceral response to social order, less explicitly about 'crime' and more about a diffuse sense of unease within a seemingly unpredictable and disorderly environment (cf. Tulloch, 2003). 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 are behaving 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), interrupting the trust that screens out negative expectations, opening up unpredictability. 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), that there has been a 'loss of authority over space' (Smith, 1989, p. 280).

If people associate crime with people, community conditions and behaviours, and if these perceptions shape risk perceptions and worry, then fear expresses these interpretations of the social world (Jackson, 2004b). Quite possibly, people use the issue of crime as a kind of 'diagnostic check' of the health of their community (Jackson, in press). Perhaps public perceptions of crime reveal how people conceive social order (including the norms, values and morals that bind communities and constitute social glue) and what they see as hostile to that social order (may be specific groups or wider social changes regarding values and morals, ethnicity diversity and transformations in the political and economic arenas).

### ***6. The fear of crime as an expressive social attitude***

This paper so far has considered the psychology of risk and the ways in which people learn about risk. However, as just touched upon, there may be another, more discursive aspect of the concept (e.g. Taylor *et al.*, 1996; Tulloch *et al.*, 1998; Girling *et al.*, 2000). Fear of crime may operate as a 'sponge', absorbing all sorts of anxieties about related issues of deteriorating moral fabric, from family to community to society. People may use the language of 'worry' and 'crime' to express connecting conflicts, insecurities and anxieties. From such a perspective, the fear of crime expresses complex and subtle lay understandings of the social world – about the nature and make-up of society and the value placed on crime in its symbol of deterioration. Data from crime surveys may reflect everyday experience of fear, and the possession of a vivid image of the risk event. But data may also reflect a more generalized and expressive attitude toward social cohesion and moral consensus (Jackson *et al.*, in press; Jackson, 2004b).

If crime does resonant with broader concerns about the moral and social trajectory of society and of communities, then people are more likely to attend to information about crime in the mass media: crime dramatizes the symbolic tangle of people's diagnoses of the health of their community and nation. The resonance will then raise the salience and significance of crime, disorder and crime risk, and thus influence the personal sense of threat. Moreover, if politicians and criminal justice system agencies use public anxieties to serve agendas, 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), this will further raise the salience of crime. The individual psychology of risk may thus be embedded within a broader cultural system that shapes the meaning of crime and influences the salience and power of risk images.

Intriguingly, research itself may serve to hype anxieties and keep fear of crime as a salient issue. Results of crime surveys feed back into the wider world. It is worth quoting Lee's (2001) summary of his analysis of the fear of crime feedback loop:

' . . . [this means that] research into victims produces and maintains the criminological concept of "fear of crime" quantitatively and discursively; that this information operates to identify fear as a legitimate object of governance or governmental regulation; that the techniques of regulation imagine particular types of citizens—*fearing subjects*; that these attempts to govern "fear of crime" actually inform the citizenry that they are indeed fearful; that this sensitizes the citizenry to "fear of crime"; that the law and order lobby and populist politicians use this supposed fearing population to justify a tougher approach on crime, a point on which they grandstand, and in doing so sensitize citizens to fear once again; and that this spurs more research into "fear of crime" and so on.'

(p. 480-481)

### ***7. Where next?***

This paper is a call for more inter-disciplinary research into public perceptions of crime and the risk of crime. This is an issue on which social scientists from many disciplinary camps can develop and share concepts, bridge levels of analysis, and contribute to an important social and political debate of our day. It is also an ideal topic on which to develop risk perception theory. On a final note therefore, here are some promising areas for future work for criminologists and risk researchers.

Firstly, future research should examine emotion and the psychology of risk. Studies might investigate: (a) whether emotion and cognition interact or operate independently to form an individual's appraisal of threat; and, (b) whether individual images of the risk (that can be vivid, resonant, affectively tagged, etc.) are fundamentally important. For risk research, such work will contribute to the understanding of emotion and risk imagery in judgements under uncertainty. For criminology, research will clarify the nature of the fear of crime and offer new explanations for how it begins and sustains over time. For example, much fear of crime research has implicitly focused on how emotional responses to the risk of victimization are experienced in everyday life. Such research understandably assumes that standard measures disclose straightforward data on how afraid an individual is during their daily activities. Yet it may be that everyday experiences of emotional responses to crime are actually relatively rare. Instead, crime surveys may pick up on vivid and emotionally tagged images of risk. This has implications for the basic diagnosis of the fear of crime as an important social problem, and whether Governments and police forces can and should be concerned with fear reduction.

Secondly, future research should consider circulating images of crime and risk. Studies should investigate: (a) how representations of the criminal event get picked up by individuals and transformed into personally held images of risk; and, (b) how the mass media create a sense of the

prevalence and nature of the crime problem. Research on these topics would be a fascinating case study of populating a SARF with the specifics of a given topic.

Finally, asking people whether they worry about crime taps into their everyday experiences of 'worry' about 'crime' or images of risk. But studies may also disclose more generalised attitudes toward social cohesion and social change in their community or society. Fear may consequently be as much an expressive as an experiential phenomenon (Jackson, 2004b). Perhaps this is true with other risk perceptions topics such as nuclear power and GM foods. Might the public use the opportunity that surveys or interviews provide to voice their opposition that, at its most basic, serves to express their broader values and attitudes regarding a particular issue? Perceptions of risks and benefits are an important part of public attitudes for sure, but a more complete understanding may be found in the analysis of the expressive function, an account which bridges levels of analysis, integrating accounts of the psychology of risk *and* the cultural significance of the topic at hand.

### References

- Bernard, Y. (1992). North American and European research on fear of crime. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 41(1), 65-75.
- Biderman, A. D., Johnson, L. A., McIntyre, J. and Weir, A. W. (1967). Report on a pilot study in the District of Columbia on victimization and attitudes toward law enforcement. *President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, Field Surveys I*. Washington D. C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Butler, G. & Mathews, A. (1983). Cognitive processes in anxiety. *Advances in Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 25, 51-62.
- Butler, G. & Mathews, A. (1987). Anticipatory anxiety and risk perception. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 11, 551-565.
- Carvalho, I. & Lewis, D. A. (2003). Beyond community: Reactions to crime and disorder among inner-city residents. *Criminology*, 41, 779-812.
- Clore, G. L. & Gasper, K. (2000). Feeling is believing: Some affective influences on belief. In N. H. Frijda, A. S. R. Manstead & S. Bem (Eds.), *Emotions and Beliefs: How Feelings Influence Thoughts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Damasio, A.R. (2003). *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*. Harcourt
- Epstein, S. (1994). Integration of the cognitive and psychodynamic unconscious. *American Psychologist*, 49, 709-724.
- Ericson, R., Baranek, P. & Chan, J. (1987). *Visualising Deviance*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Farrall, S. & Gadd, D. (2004). The frequency of the fear of crime. *British Journal of Criminology*, 44, 127-132
- Farrall, S. (2004). *Can we believe our eyes?: A response to Mike Hough*. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 7, 177-179.
- Farrall, S., Bannister, J., Ditton, J. & Gilchrist, E. (1997). Questioning the measurement of the fear of crime: Findings from a major methodological study. *British Journal of Criminology*, 37(4), 657-78.
- Fattah, E. A. (1993). Research on fear of crime: Some common conceptual and measurement problems. In W. Bilsky, C. Pfeiffer, and P. Wetzels (Eds), *Fear of crime and criminal victimization*. Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke Verlag.
- Ferraro, K. F. & LaGrange, R. L. (1987). The measurement of fear of crime. *Sociological Inquiry*, 57(1), 70-101.
- Ferraro, K. F. (1995). *Fear of crime: Interpreting victimization risk*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Finucane, M. L., Alhakami, A. S., Slovic, P. & Johnson, S. M. (2000). The affect heuristic in judgments of risk and benefits. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 13, 1-17.

- Frijda, N. H., Manstead, A. S. R. & Bem, S. (2000). The Influence of Emotions on Beliefs. In N. H. Frijda, A. S. R. Manstead & S. Bem (Eds.), *Emotions and Beliefs: How Feelings Influence Thoughts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gabriel, U. & Greve, W. (2003). The psychology of fear of crime: Conceptual and methodological perspectives. *British Journal of Criminology*, 43, 600-614.
- Garland, D. (2001). *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Garofalo, J. (1979). Victimization and the fear of crime. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 16, 80-97.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorelli, N. (1986). *Television's Mean World: Violence Profile*, No. 14-15. Philadelphia: The Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania, 1986.
- Girling, E., Loader, I. & Sparks, R. (2000). *Crime and Social Control in Middle England: Questions of Order in an English Town*. London: Routledge.
- Goffman, E. (1971). *Relations in Public*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hale, C. (1996). Fear of crime: A review of the literature. *International Review of Victimology*, 4, 79-150.
- Hall, S., Critcher, C., Jefferson, T., Clarke, J. & Roberts, B. (1978). *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law*. London: Macmillan
- Horlick-Jones, T., Sime, J. & Pidgeon, N. (2003). The social dynamics of environmental risk perception: Implications for risk communication research and practice, in N. Pidgeon, R. E. Kasperson and P. Slovic. (Eds.), *The Social Amplification of Risk*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hough, M. (2004). Worry about crime: Mental events or mental states? *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 7, 173-176.
- Innes, M. (2004). Signal crimes and signal disorders: notes on deviance as communicative action. *British Journal of Sociology*, 55(3), 335-55.
- Jackson, J. (2004a). An analysis of a construct and debate: The fear of crime, in H. Albrecht, T. Serassis and H. Kania (Eds.), *Images of Crime II*. Freiburg: Edition Iuscrim (Max Planck Institute).
- Jackson, J. (2004b). Experience and expression: Social and cultural significance in the fear of crime. *British Journal of Criminology*, 44(6), 946-966.
- Jackson, J. (2005). Images of crime: Emotion, cognition and the vividness of risk. Manuscript in preparation, London School of Economics.
- Jackson, J. (in press). Validating new measures of the fear of crime. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*.
- Jackson, J., Farrall, S. & Gadd, D. (in press). Filtering fear? On the use of filter and frequency questions in crime surveys, *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*.
- Kasperson, R. E., Renn, O. & Slovic P. (1988). Social amplification of risk: A conceptual framework. *Risk Analysis*, 8, 177-187.
- Knauper, B. (1998). Filter questions and question interpretation: Presuppositions at work. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 62, 70-78.
- Lee, M. (1999). The fear of crime and self-governance: Towards a genealogy. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 32(3), 227-246.
- Lee, M. (2001). The genesis of 'fear of crime'. *Theoretical Criminology*, 5, 467-485.
- Loewenstein, G. F., Weber, E. U., Hsee, C. K. & Welch, E. S. (2001). Risk as feelings. *Psychological Bulletin*, 127, 267-286.
- Mathews, A. (1990). Why worry? The cognitive function of anxiety. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 28, 455-468.
- Melanson, P. (1973). *Knowledge, Politics, and Public Policy*. Cambridge: Winthrop.

- Murdock, G., Petts, J. & Horlick-Jones, T. (2003). After amplification: rethinking the role of the media in risk communication, in N. Pidgeon, R. E. Kasperson and P. Slovic. (Eds.), *The Social Amplification of Risk*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nerb, J. & Spada, H. (2001). Evaluation of environment problems: A coherence model of cognition and emotion. *Cognition and Emotion*, 15(4), 521-551.
- Pearson, G. (1983). *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears*. London: Macmillan.
- Petts, J., Horlick-Jones, T. & Murdock, G. (2001). Social amplification of risk: The media and the public. *Health and Safety Executive Contract Research Report 329/2001*. Sudbury: HSE Books.
- Pidgeon, N., Kasperson, R. E. & Slovic, P. (2003). *The Social Amplification of Risk*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice, Task Force Report* (1967), Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Reiner, R. (1997). Media made criminality: The representation of crime in the mass media', in M. Maguire, R. Morgan, and R. Reiner (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rottenstreich, Y. & Hsee, C. K. (2001). Money, kisses, and electric shocks: On the affective psychology of risk. *Psychological Science*, 12, 185-190.
- Rundmo, T. (2002). Associations between affect and risk perception. *Journal of Risk Research*, 5, 119-135.
- Rundmo, T., & Sjöberg, L. (1998). Risk perception by offshore oil personnel related to platform movements. *Risk Analysis*, 18, 111-118.
- Russell, M. & Davey, G. C. L. (1993). The relationship between life event measures and anxiety and its cognitive correlates. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 14, 317-322.
- Sacco, V. F. & Glackman, W. (1987). Vulnerability, locus of control and worry about crime. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, 6(1), 99-111.
- Sjöberg, L. (2000). Consequences matter, "risk" is marginal. *Journal of Risk Research*, 3, 287-295.
- Sjöberg, L. (in press). Will the real meaning of affect please stand up? *Journal of Risk Research*.
- Skogan, W. G. (1993). The various meanings of fear, in W. Bilsky, C. Pfeiffer and P. Wetzels. (Eds.), *Fear of Crime and Criminal Victimization*. Stuttgart: Enke.
- Slooman, S. A. (1996). The empirical case for two systems of reasoning. *Psychological Bulletin*, 119, 3-22.
- Slovic, P., Finucane, M., Peters, E. & MacGregor, D. G. (2004). Risk as analysis and risk as feelings: Some thoughts about affect, reason, risk, and rationality', *Risk Analysis*, 24(2), 311-322.
- Slovic, P., Finucane, M., Peters, E. and MacGregor, D. G. (2002). The affect heuristic in T. Gilovich, D. Griffin & D. Kahneman (Eds.), *Heuristics and Biases: The Psychology of Intuitive Judgment*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sparks, J. R. (1992). *Television and the Drama of Crime*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Stanko, E. A. (2000). Victims R us: The life history of 'fear of crime' and the politicisation of violence, in T. Hope & R. Sparks (eds.), *Crime, Risk and Insecurity: 'Law and Order' in Everyday Life and Political Discourse*. London: Routledge.
- Stapel, D. A., Reicher, S. D. & Spears, R. (1994). Social identity, availability and the perception of risk. *Social Cognition*, 12(1), 1-17.
- Sterngold, A., Warland, R. H. & Herrmann, R. O. (1994). Do surveys overstate public concerns?. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 58, 255-263.
- Taylor, I., Evans, K. and Fraser, P. (1996). *A Tale of Two Cities: Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England. A Study in Manchester and Sheffield*. London: Routledge.



- Taylor-Gooby, T. (2004). *Literature Review: Psychology, Social Psychology and Risk*. Working Paper for the ESRC Social Contexts and Responses to Risk Network.
- Tulloch, J., Lupton, D., Blood, W., Tulloch, M., Jennett, C. & Enders, M. (1998). *Fear of Crime*. Canberra: Centre for Cultural Risk Research for the NCAVAC Unit for the NCAVAC, Attorney-General's Department.
- Tulloch, M. (2003). Combining classificatory and discursive methods: Consistency and variability in responses to the threat of crime. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 42(3), 461-476.
- van der Wurff, A., Van Staalduinen, L. & Stringer, P. (1989). Fear of crime in residential environments: Testing a social psychological model. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 129(2):141-60.
- van Kesteren, J., Mayhew, P. & Nieuwbeetra, P. (2000). *Criminal Victimization in 17 Industrialised Countries*, NSCR report 187.
- Warr, M. (1984). Fear of victimization: Why are women and the elderly more afraid? *Social Science Quarterly*, 65, 681-702.
- Warr, M. (1985). Fear of rape among urban women. *Social Problems*, 32(3), 238-250.
- Warr, M. (1987). Fear of victimization and sensitivity to risk. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 3,(1), 29-46.
- Warr, M. (1990). Dangerous situations: Social context and fear of victimization. *Social Forces*, 68(3), 891-907.
- Warr, M. (1994). Public perceptions and reactions to violent offending and victimization, in Albert J. Reiss, Jr., & Jeffrey A. Roth. (Eds.), *Consequences and Control*, Volume 4 of *Understanding and Preventing Violence*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- Wiedemann, P. M., Clauberg, M. & Schutz, H. (2003). Understanding amplification of complex risk issues: the risk story model applied to the EMF case, in N. Pidgeon, R. E. Kasperson, & P. Slovic, (Eds.), *The Social Amplification of Risk*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Winkel, F. W. & Vrij, A. (1990). Fear of crime and mass media crime reports: Testing similarity hypotheses. *International Review of Victimology*, 1, 251-265.

---

<sup>i</sup> At least, one gets this impression from current UK mass media reportage.

<sup>ii</sup> Although see Nerb and Spada's, 2001, argument that the role of emotion is rather general and imprecise, limited as it is to simple dichotomous evaluations of good/bad or like/dislike.