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Experience and expression: Social and cultural significance in the fear of crime

Jonathan Jackson

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Abstract

This paper argues that to ignore the social meaning that constitutes public perceptions of crime is to offer a shallow picture of the fear of crime – and survey research need not do either. Examining the symbolic links between community cohesion, disorder and crime, this study suggests that perceptions of risk are explicably situated in individuals' understandings of the social and physical make-up of their neighbourhood, as well as vulnerability and broader social attitudes and values. Furthermore, an explanation is offered for recent research that suggests the prevalence of fear of crime has been exaggerated. Namely, survey responses may articulate both 'experienced' fear—summations of the frequency of emotion—and 'expressive' fear, or attitudes regarding the cultural meaning of crime, social change and relations, and conditions conducive to crime.

Key words: fear of crime; risk perception; social meaning of incivility; social attitudes and values; survey measurement.

There is a theme running through the quantitative fear of crime literature that is under-developed and under-applied yet tantalisingly hints at the resolution of a number of outstanding dilemmas. Recent qualitative work has brought it to the fore, demonstrating the benefits of a fresh approach (see, for example: Evans *et al.*, 1996; Taylor *et al.*, 1996; Hollway and Jefferson, 1997; Tulloch *et al.*, 1998; Girling *et al.*, 2000). But this theme has bubbled beneath the surface ever since the first crime surveys, occasionally surfacing, even more rarely making the impact its full development might afford. At its heart is the notion that crime and the risk of crime represents things above and beyond the (actuarially considered) possibility of victimisation. Or more precisely, it is that public attitudes towards crime express and gather meaning within a context of judgements, beliefs and values regarding law and order and the social and moral make-up of one's community and society. Fear and risk acceptability become more explicable when framed in such a socio-cultural way.

This may sound both grand and vague, so allow me to elaborate. In the report of one of the first studies of the fear of crime, Biderman *et al.* (1967) struggled with data that suggested that public perceptions of the seriousness of the crime problem exist relatively independently to official estimates of the incidence and risk of victimisation. Starting a trend that finally seems to have been bucked (at least in the main), they argued that citizens are misinformed; public anxieties about crime are based less on experience and more on inaccurate beliefs about crime.

But the same report suggests one way of making sense of this phenomenon (*ibid.*, p. 164). The authors argued that the: ' . . . special significance of crime is at the social level.' Increasing levels of crime represent a threat to order and cohesion, they ' . . . evoke particularly intense public reactions in that the[y] can be taken as signs of threats to the fundamental moral order.' The public may view a perceived breakdown in law and order and increasing urban unrest as especially serious because of what it represents: the deterioration of cherished aspects of social and moral life that are seen to underpin society and community. From this viewpoint even small changes in crime levels can be seen as serious. Expressions of concern reflect the evaluations made of the importance of the social phenomenon and the implications that flow from itⁱ.

The debate quickly focused on the rationality of beliefs, risk perceptions and judgements of personal safety; until relatively recently the dominant agenda has been the documentation of population-level correlates, along with unfavourable comparison to crime figures. And even now, a few influential commentators scratch their heads over why sections of the population seem to consistently misunderstand relative risk, and thus have exaggerated fearsⁱⁱ. Yet increasingly, quantitative studies have addressed environmental perceptions that stimulate inferences about the personal threat of crime (Keane, 1998; Ferraro, 1995; Bursik and Grasmick, 1993; Covington and Taylor, 1991; Taylor and Hale, 1986). Considering how people gather a sense of possibility rather than judging why they do not neatly stack

against crime figures, this represents a bottom-up rather than top-down approach (cf. Lupton and Tulloch, 1999). This, as more and more the Government of the day views anti-social behaviour and so-called 'quality of life issues' as central determinants of public perceptions of crime.

This study has two aims. The first is to draw this contrast between bottom-up and top-down more sharply in the quantitative research literature by systematically developing theory regarding social and cultural significance in the fear of crime. In the process, this study seeks to expand on the subjective environmental interpretations that shape assessments of risk and vulnerability and consequently worry about crime. That public perceptions are explicably rooted in subjective inferences, vulnerability and representations of risk and of criminal events calls into question the usefulness of judging perceptions as irrational according to official risk estimates. It also brings to the fore the rich range of social-psychological content and process at the heart of how people make sense of their social world.

The second aim is to integrate into quantitative research the idea that responses to crime surveys distil a whole host of broader quality of life concerns regarding social relations and conditions (see Hollway and Jefferson, 1997, or Girling *et al.*, 2000). Everyday experiences of anxiety about the risk of victimisation make up one aspect of fear of crime, the 'experience' component. But one more aspect is 'expressive' fear. Not yet addressed in the survey literature, this considers the expression of worry in surveys to articulate broader concerns that share social meaning with crime and make risk more salient. The goal is to help explain recent suggestions that measuring fear of crime using an overall intensity of worry question exaggerates the prevalence of emotion (Farrall and Gadd, in press; Farrall, Jackson and Gadd, in press). But first, a discussion of 'incivilities' and 'disorder', before a review of recent developments in the fear of crime literature.

Disorder, crime and social cohesion

Over the last few decades, a number of studies have reported correlations between fear, perceptions of disorder (or incivilities, see Hunter, 1978, or 'broken windows', see Wilson and Kelling, 1982) and more recently social disorganisation (see Bursik and Gasmick, 1993). According to Taylor (1999, p. 65), 'Incivility indicators are social and physical conditions in a neighborhood that are viewed as troublesome and potentially threatening by its residents and users of its public spaces.' Features that include public drunkenness, graffiti and broken windows have become important variables (see, for example: Lewis and Maxfield, 1980; Lewis and Salem, 1986; Covington and Taylor, 1991; LaGrange *et al.*, 1992; Hough, 1995; Ferraro, 1995; Rountree and Land, 1996a, 1996b; Taylor, 1997; McGarrell *et al.*, 1997). Incivility has also been found to predict changes in crime levels (e.g. Sampson and Cohen, 1988; Skogan, 1990; Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999; but see Harcourt, 2001) and other changes relating to the more general

deterioration of a neighbourhood and residential stability (see, for example: Skogan, 1986; Skogan, 1990). In a similar vein, social disorganisation refers to the lack of influence of social norms upon individual members of the group, where different features of social control allow a neighbourhood to self-regulate (see, for example: Bursik, 1988; Bursik and Grasmick, 1993).

There has been a great deal of speculation over why disorder affects fear of crime and how disorder and social disorganisation relate. Biderman *et al.* (1967: 160) suggested that people assess the threat of victimisation from information communicated through interpersonal relationships and the media, and the interpretation of symbols of crime in their immediate surroundings. This was particularly through ‘highly visible signs of what [people] regard as disorderly and disreputable behaviour in their community.’ Residents read into the presence of incivility (or perhaps one should say read into the *interpretation* of the presence of incivility) that people and authorities have lost control over the community and are no longer in the position to preserve order (Hunter, 1978). In this way, incivilities may symbolise the erosion of commonly accepted standards and values (Lewis and Salem, 1986: xiv) and norms concerning public behaviour (Skogan, 1990: 4), as well as a loss of social control in a neighbourhood (Lewis and Maxfield, 1980; LaGrange *et al.* 1992; Smith, 1989; Donnelly, 1988). Indeed, Bursik and Grasmick (1993) argue that the density and quality of formal and informal social networks are at the heart of social control. One could therefore reasonably propose that if disorder suggests a loss of that control, then it also signifies deteriorating social structures. Finally, incivility may also symbolise the presence of a variety of sub-cultural groups whose public behaviour is seen as different or foreign, with different values, norms and behaviour (see: Merry, 1981; Parker and Ray, 1990; and, Covington and Taylor, 1991). Aspects of the community may symbolise crime and the conditions conducive to crime; disorder may, in turn, represent the quality of social relations and the ability of the community and authorities to ensure order.

Some observers may be troubled that such suppositions have not been empirically demonstrated; others may not consider this a problem – so plausible do these ideas seem. But there is a gap in the literature, elaborating whether, when and why such public interpretations of disorder occur, to what effects.

Some recent developments in studies into the fear of crime

We now turn to recent studies that have furthered our understanding of the fear of crime. This sets up the conceptual ground for the present research, which hopes to develop the links between environmental disorder, community cohesion and crime, and institute a distinction between ‘expressive’ fear and ‘experienced’ fear.

Ferraro (1995) uses symbolic interactionism to flesh out how interpretations of incivilities, as well as perceptions of structural aspects of a community, provide information that shape subjective estimates of the chances of victimisation. Ferraro (*ibid.*, p. 9) elaborates that the situation: ‘ . . . includes a person’s physical location and activities as well as actual crime prevalence, the physical environment, and victimization experiences and reports.’ Central to individuals’ evaluations of risk is the way in which they make sense of their world – how they define their situation through the formation of judgements and interpretations. Perceived risk and fear of crime should be located within the actor’s definition of the situation, their subjective experience or interpretation placed in its social context. These are themselves fluid and under the process of re-interpretation as new information are gained through by social interaction.

For Ferraro (*ibid.*), two broad classes of stimuli are important with respect to judgements of situations and criminal activity and threat. The first is the physical environment, the second socially shared information about crime and danger in that environment. Considering how such beliefs and interpretations shape the appraisal of threat of victimisation, the model specifies that incivilities provide ecological information that shape perceptions of the chances of victimisation. Furthermore, areas that have reputations for crime or suffer from problems of poverty are signals of potential danger. Finally, the actor reacts in a number of different ways to perceiving danger. Fear (dread or anxiety) is one way (although there is no theoretical specification of the processes involved in the movement from perceived risk to anxiety). Other reactions include: ‘ . . . constrained behaviour, community or political activism, compensatory defensive actions, and avoidance behaviours including relocation’ (*ibid.*, p. 12).

This sociological model has since been transposed into a social-psychological framework and extended (Jackson, 2003a). The first introduced feature is vulnerability, operationalised as self-efficacy and perceptions of the consequences of victimization. These factors combine with perceptions of the likelihood of victimization to form an overall appraisal of threat that then shapes worry (cf. Tallis and Eysenck, 1994). Also added are perceptions of social cohesion, informal social control, and the values, trustworthiness and predictability of individuals. Placing centrally the notion of trust and how individuals make attributions about the traits, values and behaviours of particular individuals and groups, such variables combine with perceptions of incivilities to predict inferences about the prevalence of crime in an area, as well as subjective estimates of the likelihood of victimization. The psychological nature of the model also offers an account of how worry can feed back into perceptions of risk and the environment – for example, those who worry may be more likely to interpret their neighbourhood as disorderly and threatening, to see individuals and groups as unpredictable and untrustworthy, and to make links from ecological cues to crime.

This study is one among a number of recent applications of psychological theory on the nature of fear and worry and the interplay between affect, cognition and behaviour (Greve, 1998; Gabriel and Greve, 2003), even if it is the first to empirically apply the ideas. Gabriel and Greve (*ibid.*, p. 2) begin with the premise that: ‘...previous interpretations of empirical results lack the theoretical background necessary for sensitive conclusions to be drawn.’ They address this deficiency by dividing fear of crime into ‘dispositional’ and ‘situational’ elements. The first is the tendency to interpret situations as threatening and act fearful. The second represents transitory experiences of fear, specific to a situation. Further distinctions are made between cognition, emotion and behaviour, as well as an important reminder about the heterogeneity of various acts of crime with regard to ‘relevance, explanation and consequences’ (*ibid.*, p. 6).

Another feature of Gabriel and Greve’s (*ibid.*) piece echoes aspects of Goffman’s *Relations in Public* (1971). Observers may find the violation of norms threatening simply because we rely on social and moral rules in everyday life, as well as the capacity to represent crime and threat. In a similar vein, another excellent theoretical article, this time by Innes and Fielding (2002), introduces the concept of ‘signal crimes’. Certain criminal or disorderly events may have a disproportionate effect on fear through their semiotic properties. They convey a sense that a neighbourhood lacks particular features of cohesion, control and normative pressures. These are valued aspects of the social environment, so the perceived deterioration can be unsettling to the observer, as well as stimulate beliefs about crime.

A number of qualitative studies have taken similar approaches but broadened the focus (e.g. Taylor *et al.*, 1996; Tulloch *et al.*, 1998; Girling *et al.*, 2000). Listening to how people talk about crime, disorder and social order—how they define and make connections to the broader cultural significance of crime—researchers have examined the interpretative and evaluative function of stories that individuals told. Narratives impose coherence on perceptions and beliefs concerning crime, social relations and social change. And critically, the researchers found that crime often operates as a symbol, expressing or condensing a number of other issues, conflicts, insecurities and anxieties regarding one’s neighbourhood, its social make-up and status, its place in the world, and the sense that problems from outside were creeping in.

This qualitative work has emphasised how crime can condense a wide range of related social issues, but there is only one quantitative study that has done so. In an analysis of data from the 1995 sweep of the British Social Attitudes, Dowds and Ahrendt (1995) showed that feeling unsafe walking alone after dark was associated with a strikingly variable set of social and political attitudes according to respondents’ gender and age. For example, young men who held libertarian attitudes and were of higher social class were more likely to feel unsafe than those who did not. Men in the middle age group who favoured the restriction of immigration and held more authoritarian values were similarly more likely. For

women in the higher age category, important predictors were negative attitudes towards those on welfare benefits, and the feeling that the acknowledgement of rights of minority groups had 'gone too far'. Interestingly, attitudes towards limiting the availability of pornography were the most predictive among young women.

The study

Despite these advances, the paradigm of survey research into the fear of crime has only begun to provide a convincing subjective (bottom-up) risk approach, at least in the UK. Put another way, the implications of the theme outlined at the beginning of this article have not been developed to their full extent. To do so, we need to place concepts within a coherent theoretical framework that spans content and process, cultural meaning and psychological mechanism – developing the work of Ferraro (1995), Jackson (2003a), Gabriel and Greve (2003) and Innes and Fielding (2002), but bringing in an expressive function of fear. Then perhaps we might rephrase the fear of crime problem, asking how and why perceptions and attitudes are formed and what these variously constitute.

One key component is the situation of day-to-day perceptions of risk and vulnerability in ecological interpretations of the physical and social environment – of conditions, individuals and groups that have become symbolic of crime. This brings together work by Ferraro (1995), Jackson (2003a), and some aspects of the theoretical and qualitative-based research articles just outlined. So, this study examines the ways in which individuals interpret incivility, focusing on the links made to community features such as collective self-efficacy (Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999), informal social control and the presence of trustworthy and predictable people with similar values to oneself. It also looks at how these aspects influence perceptions of the incidence of crime and the sense of personal vulnerability and threat of victimisation. A further strand involves the role of broader social and political attitudes in shaping how people make sense of their environment. For the first time then, the present study focuses on the social meaning of incivility and community cohesion, on the potential shaping role of broader social attitudes that frame and shape how individuals make sense of their immediate local environment.

The other key component expands on the work of Farrall and colleagues (Farrall, Jackson and Gadd, in press; Farrall and Gadd, 2003a). Finding that frequencies of fear tend to be lower than intensities of fear, and that using a filter question that asks whether respondents have worried at all in the past year actually reduced levels of self-reported intensity, Farrall, Jackson and Gadd (in press) suggest that responses to crime surveys express: (a) summations of experiences of emotion about the threat of victimisation; and (b) attitudes about the social conditions and groups that have come to be associated with crime, as well as values that underpin these concerns. Perhaps data reflect public expression of

values, attitudes and concerns regarding cohesion and order, local identity and change, and justice and morality – this, just as much as actual experiences of ‘fear’ of the immediate threat of ‘crime’? This study more solidly addresses their tentative conclusions by further analysing their data (the second dataset they report on).

Method

Sample

Data are from a single-contact mail survey of a randomly drawn sample of residents of seven sets of towns and villages within the Tynedale District, a predominantly rural area in the North-East of England. According to the 2001 Census, Tynedale has a population of 58,808 with the vast majority white (99.3% compared to 90.9% across England) and an equal gender mix (49% male, 51% female). There was a significantly lower incidence of crime and disorder than the North East as a whole and England and Wales more widely, according to the 1998 Crime and Disorder Audit and police figures relating to the period of April 2000 to March 2001. But despite the comparatively low crime levels, the Tynedale Citizen’s Panel Baseline Survey (1999) found that, of 600 people interviewed, around eighty per cent felt that the safety and security of the community was the issue that mattered most to them.

Questionnaires were sent to 5,906 named individuals drawn from the 2001 Electoral Roll. Because of an arrangement with Royal Mail, those that that could not be delivered (e.g. residents had moved) were returned to sender. There were 223 of these. A total of 1,023 completed questionnaires were returnedⁱⁱⁱ, yielding a response rate of 18.0% - I will return to the implications of this low response rate in the discussion section.

Measures

Table 1 provides the wording of the following measures: attitudes regarding social change and authoritarianism in relation to law and order; perceptions of social and physical incivilities; perceptions of the social environment; beliefs about the incidence of personal crime in public space; perceptions of the risk of criminal victimization in public space; and worry about becoming a victim of a personal crime in public space. The majority of these have been validated elsewhere (Jackson, 2003a), with the wording informed by a multi-stage study into issues of question wording in standard measures of the fear of crime (Jackson, 2003b). Table 1 also provides descriptive statistics^{iv}. The measures of attitudes towards social change and authoritarianism were only fielded to a randomly assigned half of the sample.

INSERT TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) allows the *a priori* theoretical specification of a model of the latent construct(s) and indicators, and facilitates the empirical assessment of whether this fits the data^v; each uni-dimensional scales had adequate to good scaling properties – indeed, most had an excellent fit^{vi}.

Results

The social meaning of incivility: social attitudes, disorder and social cohesion

Examining first the correlations between the latent constructs using Structural Equation Modelling^{vii} (SEM), we find that respondents tended to equate their interpretations of incivility to their feelings that local people and authorities did not, and could not, intervene to regulate and enact norms of behaviour, and that there were members of the community who were unpredictability, untrustworthy, with different values to oneself^{viii}. Incivilities were consequently visible cues of the lack of social order, control and consensus in one's neighbourhood. Physical incivility was the biggest sign of the lack of collective efficacy – that the community and its authorities had lost immediate control over the environment.

Recall that respondents in this study lived in very similar rural environments. Consequently, perceptions of disorder amongst some represents an interpretive difference in comparison to others. The next question is: why might some see incivility whereas did not?

We find that social attitudes shaped the tendency to interpret ambiguous ecological cues as disorderly, and shaped the social meaning regarding community cohesion, control and incivility. Perceptions of problems increased as respondents became more authoritarian and concerned about long-term social change in their community. Dividing the sample into three groups for each set of attitudes, as authoritarianism and concern about social change increased, so perceptions of the problem of incivility increased^{ix} (for authoritarianism, $F(2,454)=11.488$, $p<.001$ for social incivilities and $F(2,454)=4.740$, $p=.009$ for physical incivilities; for social change, $F(2,454)=8.922$, $p<.001$ for social incivilities and $F(2,454)=3.662$, $p=.026$ for physical incivilities). However, this was not true for perceptions of collective efficacy, trust and predictability, and informal social control: none of the ANOVAs were statistically significant.

These attitudes also moderated the relationships between perceptions of disorder and social cohesion. Splitting the sample into three groups – low, medium and high authoritarianism and social change – showed that as these attitudes increased (e.g. respondents were more authoritarian or concerned

about long-term and negative social change), the correlations between incivilities and perceptions of the social environment tended to increase, especially in the movement to the highest category of these attitudes^x.

Testing the social psychological model of victimisation worry

Having investigated relationships between different environmental perceptions and two sets of background attitudes, we now test a social-psychological model of the fear of crime using SEM (replicating Jackson, 2003a, where full details of the theory can be found). This allows the integration of these concepts within a broader account of underlying processes that explain mediating relationships between environmental inferences, beliefs about the incidence of crime, the appraisal of personal threat of victimisation and worry (see Figure 1).

INSERT FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE

The fit of the model was good according to approximate fit indices (RMSEA=.047, CFI=.988), but not in terms of exact fit (χ^2 1170.492, 362 df, $p < .001$), although a relative Chi Square statistic of 3.23 is close to an acceptable fit (Kline, 1998). Perceptions of incivility predicted inferences about social cohesion ($\beta = .466$), accounting for 21.7% of the variance. Visible cues of disorder in the environment thus provided day-to-day clues about the social makeup of the community. Together, these environmental perceptions predicted a moderate amount of the variance of beliefs about the incidence of crime ($R^2 = .298$) and the perceived likelihood of victimisation ($R^2 = .340$). Indeed, beliefs also predicted likelihood estimates ($\beta = .270$) – as did perceived control ($\beta = .150$) and consequences ($\beta = .064$). Thus, vulnerability had an impact on perceived likelihood: feeling less able to control whether one becomes victimised, and that the effects would be more severe, increased the estimated chance of victimisation.

The final level of the model was the frequency of worry. Around one-third (34.2%) of the variance was explained by likelihood ($\beta = .500$) and control ($\beta = .088$), although there was no statistically significant effect of consequences on worry. Perceived likelihood, in turn, mediated the relationships between beliefs and environmental perceptions. There was also a direct effect of perceptions of incivility on worry ($\beta = .120$). Worry articulated a sense of a disorderly environment, above and beyond the specifics of inferences about crime.

Women were more worried according to the intensity measure, but not according to the frequency one^{xi} (respectively: $t(670) = 2.459$, $p = .014$; and, $t(655) = .967$, $p = .334$). Age was correlated with both intensity and frequency (respectively: $r(661) = .082$, $p = .034$; and, $r(666) = .113$, $p = .003$). One

advantage of the present social-psychological model of the fear of crime is that it allows one to explain these findings. We find that the age effect on worry was entirely mediated by: the feeling that community spirit and the social bonds surrounding young people in particular has deteriorated over a long time-span; perceptions of social cohesion; beliefs about the incidence of crime; and self-efficacy regarding the possibility of victimisation^{xii}. While gender had no effect on the frequency of worry, women were less likely to feel control over the risk and more likely to see the consequences as severe. Yet, they were more worried when the intensity measure was used – if we view intensity measures as tapping into expression *and* experience then perhaps the females in this study were articulating underlying values and attitudes more strongly than males on average.

How do social attitudes fit into all this?

We next examine the moderating effect of background attitudes on the associations between environmental perceptions and inferences about crime. In other words, did these orientating attitudes increase the propensity to link disorder to crime? On this question, the answer is no. Earlier we saw that incivility became more associated with social cohesion as respondents became more authoritarian and concern about long-term community changes. But the correlations between each of these two constructs and beliefs about the incidence of crime, estimated likelihood of victimisation and worry did not differ across each set of attitude categories^{xiii}.

Another role for these attitudes regards environmental perception. We have already established that they are related; the next step is to integrate this set of variables within the structural equation model (see Figure 2), simultaneously testing indirect and direct effects on the frequency of worry. Again, the model fitted according to the approximate fit statistics (RMSEA=.052, CFI=.982), but not in terms of exact fit (χ^2 1333.528, 595 df, $p < .001$).

INSERT FIGURE TWO ABOUT HERE

Broader social and political attitudes oriented more proximate inferences about the social meaning of aspects of the environment. These inferences about the social meaning of features of the community then shaped a sense of crime and personal threat. Beliefs about the incidence of crime were predicted by incivility ($\beta=.311$) and social cohesion ($\beta=.273$). Around one-thirds of the variance of estimates of the likelihood of victimisation was in turn accounted for by beliefs about crime ($\beta=.220$), incivilities ($\beta=.259$) and social cohesion ($\beta=.259$).

However, there were no statistically significant direct effects of the broader social attitudes on the frequency of worry – the final role of these attitudes. This indicates that the frequency of worry does not express underlying social and political attitudes in addition to reflecting the perceived risk of crime.

Substituting frequency and intensity in the final model

Testing the same model but substituting the strategy for measuring worry from frequency to intensity, we can examine the importance of how worry is measured. As Farrall, Jackson and Gadd (in press) suggest, expressions of the intensity of worry may also express a set of underlying attitudes and values. Indeed, these authors suggest that the expressive function is specific to intensity measures – that measures of frequency provide more of a summary of individual experiences of worry during a particular timescale, while intensity measures produce a mix of generalised attitudes and summaries of discrete periods of worry.

Table 2 provides the parameter estimates. The various predictors explained a greater amount of the variance of intensity (56.1% compared to 34.7%), with attitudes towards social change having a statistically significant direct effect ($\beta=.120$) and a larger coefficient for perceived likelihood ($\beta=.643$).

INSERT TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE

Testing Farrall, Jackson and Gadd's (in press) hypothesis, an estimate of the direct effects of attitudes on the intensity of worry showed that the response variable was predicted by attitudes towards social change ($\beta=.153$, $b=.133$, $SE=.062$), but not authoritarianism ($\beta=.103$, $b=.101$, $SE=.067$).

Discussion

This study found that the frequency of worry about personal crime was shaped by subjective appraisals of the threat of victimisation (replicating Jackson, 2003a). Such threat appraisal mirrored a psychological conception of vulnerability, made up, as it was, of perceptions of likelihood, control and consequences. A difference in worry between males and females was partly explained by such vulnerability. Inferences about the chances of victimisation were, in turn, shaped by beliefs about the incidence of crime. Both were largely a product of interpretations of the physical and social environment. Namely, some respondents perceived disorderly aspects in the environment, and these were representational of a community that lacked trust, moral consensus and informal social control. Such subjective environmental

interpretations influenced judgements about crime among some because of they shared social meaning among these individuals.

Wider social attitudes shaped the social meaning of disorder and its links to community aspects. Respondents who held more authoritarian views about law and order, and who were concerned about a long-term deterioration of community, were more likely to perceive disorder in their environment. They were also more likely to link these physical cues to problems of social cohesion and consensus, of declining quality of social bonds and informal social control.

Day-to-day risk perceptions were consequently explicable because of the symbolic 'fit' between crime and a range of things that have come to be associated with crime. These include perceptions of young people 'hanging around', rubbish and graffiti, and the presence of individuals and groups who are 'different', with different values and who behave in unpredictable ways. These individuals and groups may have represented unwelcome social developments into this rural area with regard to the familiarity and diversity of interaction, the breakdown of social cohesion and consensus, and the loosening of moral standards and behavioural norms. And physical incivilities can create a sense that the neighbourhood is not 'owned' by people and authorities, that social order has been disrupted by certain people who lack acceptable values and a sense of respect.

This makes up the 'experience' aspect of fear. But, that these worries are so constituted by cultural content and social meaning suggests there is considerable overlap with an 'expressive' aspect of fear. Worries about crime articulate such social meaning because they are constituted by social meaning. Furthermore, transgressions of social norms can be unsettling in and of themselves. As Goffman (1971: 241) argues: ' . . . 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.' Only very minor patterns of unfamiliar behaviour in others, of divergences from that considered normal and appropriate, can stimulate disquieting inferences. Because some people link such cues to crime, perhaps day-to-day experiences of fear represent concerns about these cues as much as concerned about the threat of victimisation: there was a statistically significant direct effect of incivility on worry, even after controlling for the mediational layer of crime inferences. In this sense, reports of these encounters may be conceptualised as expressions of concerns about community as well as the number of crime worries experienced.

Finally, perhaps there is a purer 'expressive' aspect of fear, more removed from actual encounters and discrete periods of worry. Analysing the data from this survey, Farrall, Jackson and Gadd (in press) found that an intensity filter reduced the levels of reported worry in a split-ballot experiment. Asking people if they had worried once in the past year reduced the prevalence of worry using the intensity measure. Furthermore, levels of intensity translated into surprising low levels of frequency.

Consequently, some individuals said they were emotionally concerned about crime; but they not recently been in worrying situations.

For these individuals the fear of crime is perhaps more of an expressive phenomenon than an experiential one. Social psychologists have considered a value-expressive function of attitudes (see: Katz, 1960; Eagly and Chaiken, 1998; Maio and Olson, 2000). If worry is both an experience and evaluative expression, one might convey worry about crime in a survey situation, regardless of whether one has found oneself in a worrisome situation. This is because one places value on a cohesive society that has strong moral and social bonds and standards; perceived levels of victimisation reflect the deterioration of these cherished aspects. So crime survey responses express underlying attitudes to the existence and prevalence of crime: the importance and cultural significance of crime and disorder locally, and the personal possibility of victimisation. And intensity measures may bring out this expressive aspect of the phenomenon without necessarily an experiential aspect.

But what of the generalisability of these findings? Less than one in five of those sampled returned the questionnaire completed (although a low response rate is almost guaranteed with one-contact postal surveys). While there was enough statistical power to perform the analyses, such a low response rate must surely have an impact. The question is: how much of an impact?

When considering this issue one begins by comparing known quantities of the sample and population. The socio-demographic breakdown of the sample was close to that of the population of the area according to Census data, albeit with a slight bias towards females and older individuals. Yet despite this, one supposes that those who did not complete the questionnaire are likely to be busy and not interested in the topic; they may also be rather cynical about public opinion research and the more specific benefits of this study. In many other respects those who did not return the questionnaire may also differ to those who did. .

Yet, the extent of the impact of a low response rate depends to some degree on what you are estimating. One worries particularly about the representativeness of a sample when one estimates more basic population attributes such as means or proportions; relationships between constructs, as well as the measurement models in these structural equation models, are arguably less susceptible to low response rates. Following this logic, these findings – based on the estimation of measurement and structural elements of a number of models – may have greater validity than other studies that have low response rates but do not focus so heavily on relationships between variables.

Furthermore, some parts of the model may be more robust than others. The relationships between the more psychological aspects, such as threat appraisal, vulnerability and emotion, seem unlikely to be specific to the sample – even if effect sizes might vary somewhat. In contrast, perhaps the sociological or social-psychological processes are more contextually specific. As suggested above, this particular sample

may have contained more people with an interest in the topic. Crime might therefore be more salient to them, containing a wider range of social meaning. Relationships between social attitudes and environmental perceptions may therefore have been attenuated, so these particular aspects of the model might be more applicable to individuals who place greater importance on social cohesion and law and order.

Finally, this study should be seen within a context of an ongoing research programme. Many of the relationships were found in a similar study conducted in London (Jackson, 2003a). Future work will hopefully develop and test this work further.

Conclusions

Crime captures the public imagination. Upon reflection, this should not be particularly surprising. Reports of violence and abuse are frightening because of the immediate and long-term physical and psychological damage that can occur to the victim and their loved ones. But this topic also fascinates. It reminds us that the world is sometimes an unsafe place, that conflict and social instability can be a part of normal experience, that the state cannot guarantee security and cohesion for its citizens. Here is a nebulous and culturally resonant category; a slippery class of events that we try to make sense of, to account for. We delve into its causes, its nature, its effects and implications and its control. Public discourse about crime thus connects and draws upon changing norms and values, decreasing moral consensus and cohesion, and broader structural changes in the community and society more widely (Girling *et al.*, 2000). Spanning a multitude of meanings and associating a number of fundamental social issues when employed in everyday discussion, public perceptions are complex and nuanced, situationally specific and symbolically loaded – and they should be treated as such.

During the last two or three decades the ‘fear of crime’ has become a significant political theme and an issue that has attracted a substantial body of social scientific research literature. This concept has entered popular discourse (Lee, 1999; 2001), coming to name and classify in a nebulous form a range of perceptions, responses and vulnerabilities. Expressing or associating concerns about broader social issues that crime connects with in the public consciousness, it currently operates as a touchstone within policy-making and criminology to a myriad of public perceptions of problems and reactions to these problems – important both as a phenomenon and as a derivative of public mood, issues, opinions and behaviours. Crime surveys, such as the British Crime Survey, have become important sources of information in the public policy making process.

This article started by arguing that quantitative fear of crime research has failed to adequately develop the theme of shared social meaning in crime, disorder and community cohesion. Such theoretical

under-specification has led to a somewhat impoverished view of the phenomenon of the fear of crime, and contributed to the persistence of rather crude debates about the rationality of public opinion (Jackson, 2004). By examining public perceptions of these features, by orientating these within an account of psychological mechanisms underpinning risk perception and worry, and by considering that responses to crime surveys express a range of connected attitudes and underlying values, I hoped to further the debate and demonstrate that productive exchange can occur between qualitative and quantitative research. Survey research can be sensitive to the complexities of this phenomenon. One way forward is to treat fear as expressions of related concerns funnelled through this concept of crime (expressive fear), as much as summed expressions of threat and vulnerability (experienced fear).

Finally, it seems likely that the ‘prevalence’ of the fear of crime is somewhat a function of the particular type of question posed. The actual frequency of emotional responses to crime may be less than commonly assumed (Farrall and Gadd, 2003; Farrall, Jackson and Gadd, 2003). This study suggests one reason why. These measures are variously tapping into experienced and expressive fear, two overlapping components of this construct. Experienced fear is shaped by interpretative responses to the environment, inferences about crime rates and a personal sense of vulnerability. Frequency measures perhaps capture this most effectively. And day-to-day perceptions of the environment that lead to discrete anxieties and worries are also expressive: they articulate how people make sense of their social world, of encounters with the erosion of Goffman (1971) terms ‘normal appearances’.

Expressive fear articulates more generalised, broader attitudes and values. Crime acts as a lightning rod, a metaphor for social changes and problems that are both specific to the local community and to wider society. Attitudes toward crime express a range of complex and subtle lay understandings of the social world – broader social values and attitudes about the nature and make-up of society and community, the value placed on crime in its symbol of deterioration, and all the implications that flow from both its prevalence and its impact. Perhaps people are not as ‘fearful’ of personally being victimised as often as we think; rather, they are expressing their social concerns through the symbolically dense concept of crime. And the crime survey can be used to sensitively address these issues, so long as it involves sensible design and analysis, and a coherent and ambitious set of theoretical ideas and guidelines.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for: social and political attitudes; perceptions of incivilities; perceptions of the social environment; beliefs about crime; perceptions of risk; and, worry about victimisation.

	Mean	Standard deviation	n
Social and political attitudes (1 = Strongly agree; 5 = Strongly disagree)			
Authoritarianism regarding law and order			
(a) Young people today don't have enough respect for traditional British values	2.05	1.00	440
(b) People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences	1.81	1.08	443
(c) Schools should teach children to obey authority	1.66	.96	442
Concern about long-term social change			
(a) A sense of belonging in the community	3.12	.90	439
(b) A sense of shared values amongst people who live here	3.11	.82	438
(c) A sense of right and wrong amongst people who live here	3.03	.82	437
(d) Young peoples' respect for rules and authority	3.66	.93	439
(e) Young peoples' respect for other people and their quality of life	3.62	.95	439
Incivilities (1 = Not at all a problem; 5 = A very big problem)			
Social incivilities			
(a) Teenagers hanging around in streets / in groups	2.19	1.01	991
(b) Drinking in the street	1.91	1.01	971
(c) Harassment, threatening behaviour or verbal abuse in the street	1.45	.84	979
Physical incivilities			
(a) Rubbish and litter lying about	2.38	1.12	996
(b) Vandalism / graffiti / damage to property	2.01	.96	984
Perceptions of the social environment (1 = Strongly agree; 5 = Strongly disagree)			
Close, friendly community			
(a) This area has a close, tight-knit community	2.09	.89	1,005
(b) This area is a friendly place to live	1.62	.72	1,010
(c) This area is a place where local people look after each other	2.00	.85	1,008
Collective efficacy			
(a) People act with courtesy to each other in public space in this area	1.86	.84	1,010
(b) You can see from the physical state of public space here that local people take pride in their environment	2.22	1.02	1,006
(c) Local people and authorities have control over the state of public space in this area	2.36	1.03	1,005
Informal social control			
(a) If I sensed trouble whilst in this area, I could 'raise' attention from people who live here for help	1.83	.85	1,008
(b) The people who live here can be relied upon to call the police if someone is acting suspiciously	1.82	.85	1,009
(c) If any of the children or young people around here are causing trouble, local people will tell them off	2.33	1.01	1,007
Trustworthy, predictability and the sharing of values			
(a) People in this area share my values	2.41	.87	1,000
(b) People in this area act in ways I find predictable	2.22	.81	994
(c) People in this area are trustworthy	2.06	.85	1,007
Beliefs about crime levels (1 = Never occurs here; 7 = Occurs once or twice every week)			
(a) Being attacked by a stranger in the street in this area	1.87	1.13	987
(b) Being harassed, threatened or verbally abused in the street in this area	2.71	1.63	967
(c) Being robbed / mugged in the street in this area	2.18	1.35	969

Perceptions of risk of personal victimization

Likelihood (1 = Very unlikely; 4 =Very likely)

(a) Being attacked by a stranger in the street in this area	1.18	.43	981
(b) Being harassed, threatened or verbally abused in the street in this area	1.36	.61	982
(c) Being robbed / mugged in the street in this area	1.25	.49	982

Ability to control becoming a victim (1 = Not at all; 7 =A great deal)

(a) Being attacked by a stranger in the street in this area	4.01	2.32	964
(b) Being harassed, threatened or verbally abused in the street in this area	3.96	2.25	961
(c) Being robbed / mugged in the street in this area	3.92	2.29	963

Extent to which everyday life would be affected (1 = Not at all; 7 A great deal)

(a) Being attacked by a stranger in the street in this area	5.53	1.78	983
(b) Being harassed, threatened or verbally abused in the street in this area	4.88	1.87	983
(c) Being robbed / mugged in the street in this area	4.57	1.78	982

Worry about becoming a victim of personal crime

Frequency in the past month (1 = Not once; 4 = Every day)

(a) Being attacked by a stranger in the street in this area	1.05	.31	1,023
(b) Being harassed, threatened or verbally abused in the street in this area	1.09	.40	1,023
(c) Being robbed / mugged in the street in this area	1.06	.34	1,023

Intensity (1 = Not at all worried; 4 = Very worried)

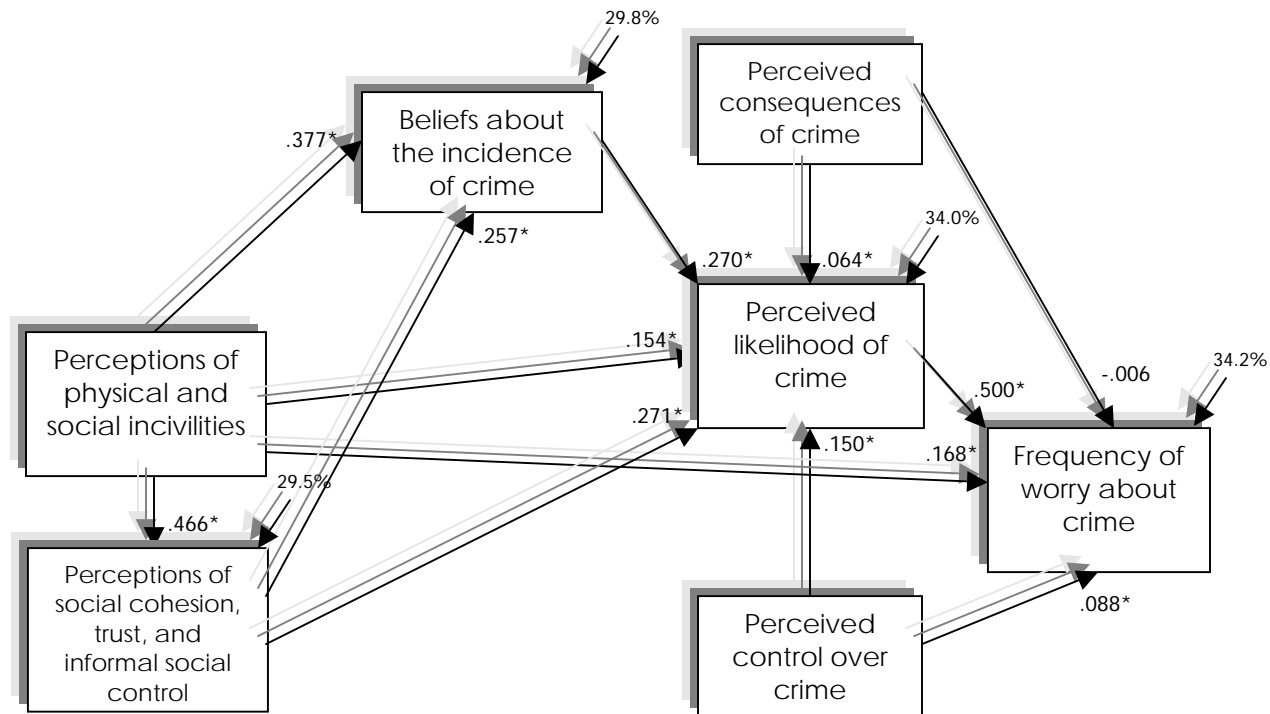
(a) Being attacked by a stranger in the street in this area	1.28	.57	1,023
(b) Being harassed, threatened or verbally abused in the street in this area	1.35	.64	1,023
(c) Being robbed / mugged in the street in this area	1.30	.60	1,023

Table 2. Standardised parameter estimates generated by AMOS 4.0 for structural model of the intensity of worry about personal crime in public space, risk perceptions, beliefs, incivilities and community cohesion, and broader social attitudes (authoritarianism and social change)

Response variable	Outcome variable	R² of outcome variable	Unstandardised regression coefficient	Standard error	Critical Ratio	Standardised regression coefficient
Estimated likelihood	Worry - Intensity	.575	1.024*	.095	10.734	.643
Control			.023*	.011	2.093	.086
Consequences			.045*	.015	2.913	.132
Incivilities			.155*	.058	2.682	.172
Authoritarianism			.007	.036	.208	.012
Social change			.118*	.058	2.029	.120
Control	Estimated likelihood	.348	.020*	.008	2.675	.120
Consequences			.003	.010	.290	.013
Beliefs			.059*	.015	3.905	.225
Social cohesion			.161*	.038	4.267	.225
Incivilities			.143*	.036	4.004	.254
Social cohesion	Beliefs	.245	.654*	.150	4.366	.274
Incivilities			.666*	.141	4.717	.310
Incivilities	Social cohesion	.250	.345*	.061	5.612	.383
Authoritarianism			.149*	.059	2.545	.150
Social change			.395*	.099	3.993	.244
Authoritarianism	Incivilities	.125	.134	.069	1.941	.121
Social change			.545*	.116	4.690	.166

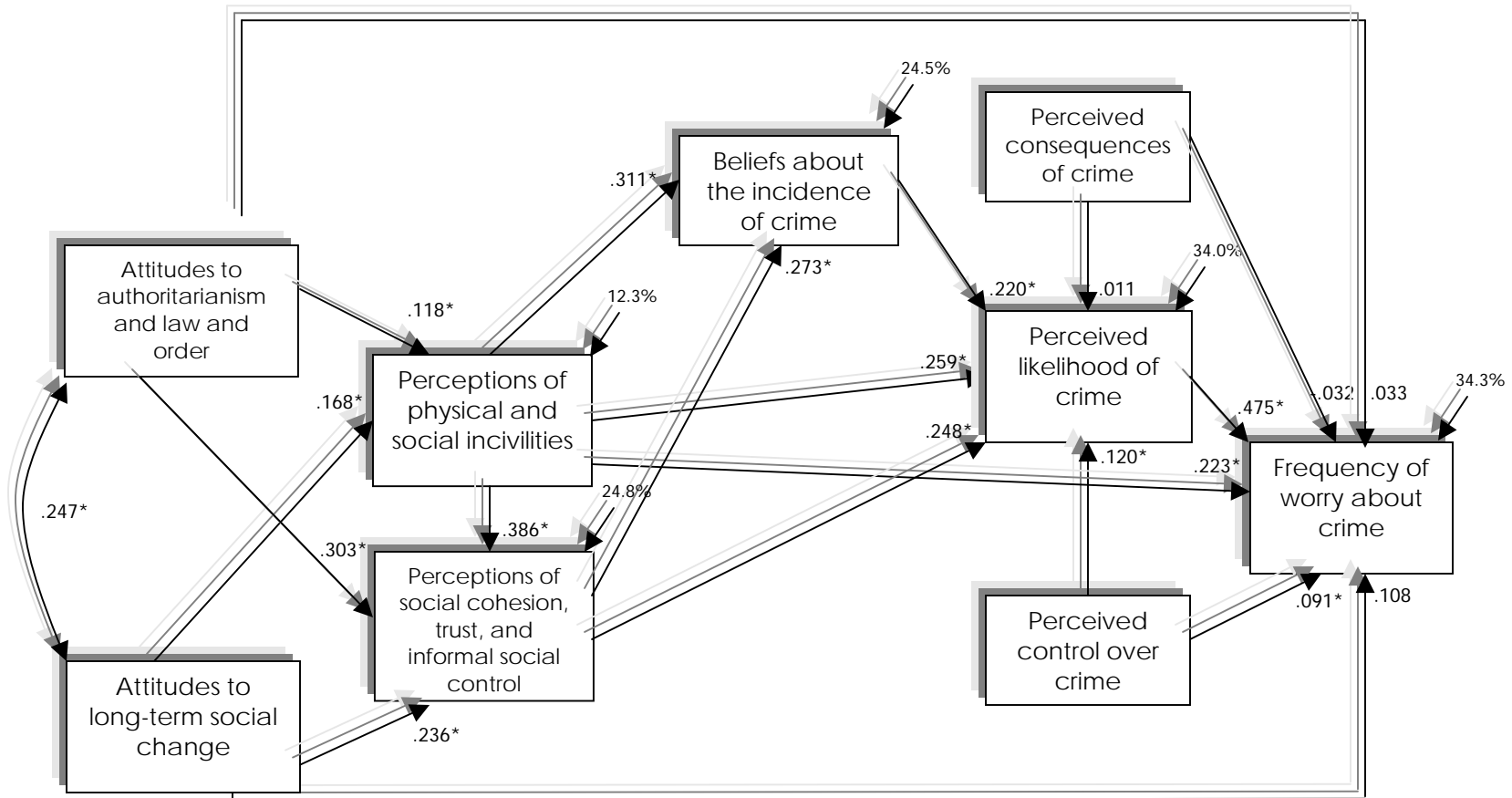
* significant, $p < .05$

Figure 1. Structural equation model of environmental perceptions, beliefs about crime, perceptions of the risk of victimisation, and worry about personal crime in public space. Standardized regression weights are provided. The measurement portion of the model is absent for visual ease.



Standardized coefficients
 Chi-square=1170.492 (362 df); $p < .001$
 RMSEA=.047; CFI=.988
 * significant, $p < .05$

Figure 2. Structural equation model of social and political attitudes, environmental perceptions, beliefs about crime, perceptions of the risk of victimisation, and worry about personal crime in public space. Standardized regression weights are provided. The measurement portion of the model is absent for visual ease.



Standardized coefficients
 Chi-square=1333.528 (595 df): $p < .001$
 RMSEA=.052; CFI=.982
 * significant, $p < .05$

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ⁱ This echoes work by anthropologists on risk acceptability where social values are believed to underpin such public judgements (see, amongst others: Douglas, 1985).

ⁱⁱ The classic fear-risk paradox refers to higher levels of feeling unsafe walking alone after dark among females older individuals, compared to the increased rates of victimisation among males and younger persons. Notably, the age effect disappears when one asks about worry about a specific personal crime.

ⁱⁱⁱ 462 (45.2%) were male and 528 (51.6%) were female, leaving 33 (3.2%) respondents who did not state their gender. There was consequently a slight bias towards females compared to Tynedale as a whole. The age distribution was somewhat skewed towards older people (M 55.46, SD 15.63, skewness -.13, kurtosis -.67). Of those who indicated their age (40 respondents refused), just over half were aged 55 or above (54.7%), and only around one-tenth were between 18 and 34 (10.9%). According to the 2001 Census, this compares to the region as a whole, where 40.5% are aged 55 or above, and 18.9% aged between 18 and 34.

^{iv} Rates of perceived disorder in this sample were low compared to the overall pattern in rural areas in England and Wales according to the 2001 British Crime Survey (Aust and Simmons, 2002). Only 8% thought that drugs were a very or fairly big problem in the present survey, compared with 18% across rural areas nationally. Also seen as less of a problem were vandalism/graffiti and teenagers hanging around, although perceptions of rubbish or litter were similar to the national picture. Turning next to perceptions of the likelihood of victimisation and worry about crime, we can see that respondents felt the personal threat of crime was less than those 2001 BCS respondents who lived in a rural area. Levels of 1% and 2% for feeling that mugging and physical attack were fairly or very likely during the following 12 months contrasted with 8% in the national picture. Similarly, 7% and 8% of the current sample were fairly or very worried about being mugged and physically attacked (respectively), compared to 31% and 28% nationally. It should also be noted that a split-ballot was used, with an intensity filter administered to half the sample. In practice, this meant that half the sample was asked whether they had worried about being a victim of a personal

crime in the previous year. If they had not, they were assumed to be ‘not at all worried’, and directed not to answer the intensity questions (for more details, see Farrall, Jackson and Gadd, in press).

^v The researcher examines whether a theoretical model that specifies patterns of relationships between variables according to operational procedures are consistent with data. One assumes that the inter-correlations between measures are caused by one single latent (if one specifies measures to reflect only one construct) and the remaining ‘noise’ to be measurement error. At a general level, CFA allows the researcher to assess the uni- or multi-dimensionality of a scale or set of scales. One can estimate the number of latent constructs, which items load on which, and even whether a higher-order factor structure fits the data. One can also assess the validity and reliability of individual indicators and hypothesized latent construct structure(s).

^{vi} The raw data were analysed using AMOS 4.0 (Arbuckle and Wothke, 1999). The estimation procedure was Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML: Maximum Likelihood Estimation with an item missing data imputation routine – see Wothke, 1998). Half were statistically significant using the Chi-square test, and using less restrictive measures of fit the least impressive was still adequate: the model of collective efficacy had an RMSEA of .096 and a CFI of .988 (χ^2 75.785, 1 df, $p < .001$). In three cases, a second-order factor model was specified, on the assumption that two constructs would together reflect a broader construct. The fit was acceptable according to the CFI goodness of fit test, with figures ranging from .989 to .998, but less so using the RMSEA test, this time ranging from .077 to .100. Exact fit statistics ranged from χ^2 28.315 (4 df, $p < .001$) to χ^2 267.354 (24 df, $p < .001$). Nearly all constructs had individual items with adequate to good reliability (R^2 s above .50 – a few were between .45 and .50) and validity (β s above .70 – a few were between .65 and .70).

^{vii} SEM is a statistical tool to assess whether a theoretical model of relationships between variables fits data. It has a number of other names, including LISREL (or linear structural relations—Hayduk, 1987; Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1988) causal modelling (Bentler, 1980; Reichardt and Gollob, 1986), latent variable models (Everitt, 1984), covariance structure analysis and analysis of covariance structures. At its most general, this is a linear statistical modelling technique, with confirmatory factor analysis, path analysis and regression all representing special cases of SEM. SEM allows the estimation of latent constructs that are measured by imperfect indicators (measurement models) and sets of paths between constructs (structural models). Models can then be tested that conceptualise how these variables (indicators and latent variables) co-vary or relate to one another in various ways. Each model implies a structure of the covariance matrix of the measures—the resulting model-implicated covariance matrix is then compared to the data-based covariance matrix. If the two matrices are consistent with one another then the covariance structure model can be considered a plausible explanation for relations between the measures. SEM should therefore be treated as a largely confirmatory rather than exploratory technique.

^{viii} Using AMOS 4.0, a model was tested that specified these five latent constructs, freeing the parameters so the variables covaried. Unsurprisingly considering the lack of structural restraints, the fit of the model was good using the approximate fit indices (χ^2 546.952, 67 df, $p < .001$, RMSEA .084, CFI .984)^{viii}. Table 4 provides the parameter estimates of the covariances. All were statistically significant. Physical incivility was highly and positively related to collective efficacy ($r = .655$) and moderately to informal social control ($r = .448$) and trust and predictability ($r = .491$). Social incivility was moderately related to informal social control ($r = .401$), collective efficacy ($r = .405$) and trust and predictability ($r = .384$).

^{ix} One new variable was created for each construct, consisting of the saved factor scores using the regression method and MLE Factor Analysis in SPSS 11.0.

^x For example: physical incivility and perceptions of the trust, predictability and value similarity of local people. With low authoritarianism and concern about social change, the correlations were $r = .384$ and $r = .374$ respectively. For those in the middle category, the correlations were $r = .456$ and $r = .452$; the final set were $r = .582$ and $r = .591$. In other words, incivility and aspects of the social environment became more and more representationally linked as respondents became more concerned about these broader social issues.

^{xi} Again, the factor scores were calculated using the regression method and MLE Factor Analysis in SPSS 11.0.

^{xii} Starting first with the frequency of worry, a third structural equation model (χ^2 343.577, 66 df, $p < .001$, RMSEA=.064, CFI=.992) indicated that age was correlated with control ($\beta = .278$) and likelihood ($\beta = .106$). These entirely mediated the effect of age on worry: the relevant regression path was no longer statistically significant once these new variables were controlled for ($b = .001$, $SE = .001$, critical ratio=1.437). Despite no gender effect, women were less likely to report self-efficacy ($\beta = .135$) and more likely to estimate severe consequences of victimisation ($\beta = .173$). Next the intensity of worry about crime (χ^2 543.824, 66 df, $p < .001$, RMSEA=.084, CFI=.986). Age was correlated with control ($\beta = .279$) and likelihood ($\beta = .106$), and this entirely mediated the effect on worry – the regression path was no longer statistically significant ($b = .002$, $SE = .001$, critical ratio=1.435). Similarly, there were

gender effects on perceived control ($\beta=.135$) and the severity of consequences of victimisation ($\beta=.173$), and again this mediated the effect on worry ($b=.062$, $SE=.037$, critical ratio=1.670). Did age and gender have an impact on variables further back in the model, e.g. social attitudes, environmental perceptions and beliefs about crime? A fourth structural equation model involving the frequency of worry ($\chi^2 1398.087$, 652 df, $\rho<.001$, RMSEA=.050, CFI=.982) indicated that age predicted attitudes towards long-term social change ($\beta=.169$) perceptions of community social cohesion ($\beta=.144$), beliefs about the incidence of crime ($\beta=.225$) and control over the possibility of victimisation ($\beta=.301$). In contrast to the model described above, the age effect on perceived likelihood disappeared ($b=.001$, $SE=.001$, critical ratio=.974) once paths were freed to broader attitudes, environmental perceptions and beliefs about crime. Were there similar patterns regarding gender? The answer is no. Only control and likelihood had statistically significant regression paths, as found in the simpler model estimated above.

^{xiii} Only the perceived likelihood of victimization differed across authoritarianism categories ($F(2,440)=3.257$, $\rho=.039$). Worry and beliefs about the incidence of crime were not statistically significant ($F(2,441)=1.009$, $\rho=.366$; and, $F(2,428)=.759$, $\rho=.469$ respectively). For social change attitudes, beliefs about the incidence of crime differed ($F(2,428)=3.115$, $\rho=.045$), but neither worry nor perceived likelihood varied (respectively: $F(2,441)=2.012$, $\rho=.124$; and, $F(2,440)= 2.227$, $\rho=.109$).