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# THE FEAR OF CRIME: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

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In a paper presented more than eight years ago, Furstenberg made an observation that has proven to be the understatement of the decade for researchers studying the fear of crime: "the relationship between crime and its consequences is neither obvious nor simple."<sup>1</sup> His observation is no less accurate today than it was eight years ago, despite the fact that our knowledge about the causes and consequences of the fear of crime has increased steadily during the period. Every advance that is made—whether by refining concepts, by specifying and testing relationships, by obtaining more comprehensive data, or by some other means—seems to generate more questions than it answers. But that should be expected; part of the nature of complex social phenomena is that their complexity becomes more apparent as they are examined more closely.

From a purely scientific standpoint, research on the fear of crime can continue indefinitely. There is no critical experiment that will answer all the questions, so there will always be hypotheses to test and new paths of inquiry to follow. However, from both a scientific and practical standpoint, it is useful periodically to take stock of where we are, so that policy implications can be drawn from what is known and general priorities can be set to guide future research. This paper is such a stock-taking endeavor. After a preliminary discussion of concepts and indicators, a model of the causes and consequences of the fear of crime is presented, and the components of the model are described in light of what we already know about the fear of crime. Finally, suggestions for future research are given, and some policy implications are discussed. No attempt will be made to present a comprehensive assessment of existing literature because that would duplicate much of the review recently completed by Northwestern University.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Furstenberg, *Fear of Crime and Its Effects on Citizen Behavior*, in *CRIME AND JUSTICE* (A. Biderman ed. 1972).

<sup>2</sup> F. DuBow, E. McCabe & G. Kaplan, *Reactions to Crime: A Critical Review of the Literature* (unpublished report, Center for Urban Affairs, Northwestern University, 1979).

## CONCEPTS AND INDICATORS

## FEAR AND PHYSICAL HARM

What is the fear of crime? We can define fear as an emotional reaction characterized by a sense of danger and anxiety. We restrict our definition to the sense of danger and anxiety produced by the threat of *physical harm*. Furthermore, to constitute fear of crime, the fear must be elicited by perceived cues in the environment that relate to some aspect of crime for the person.

By linking fear to potential physical harm, we do two things. First, it forces us to differentiate the reaction elicited by the potential of property loss from the reaction elicited by the potential of physical harm. The former is more cerebral and calculating (and might be described as "worry"), while the latter is more autonomic and emotional. Certainly, it seems reasonable to assume that the internal state of a person who remembers, at three a.m., that his ten-speed bicycle has been left outside unlocked is different than the internal state of a person who finds himself alone on a dark city side-street at three a.m.

This does not mean that the potential for property loss will never elicit fear. If the item at risk of being stolen is of sufficient value, especially relative to a person's resources (such as a very poor family's welfare check), then the possibility of theft could elicit fear. But in such extreme cases, theft ultimately represents a threat to physical well-being.<sup>3</sup> A more important point is that some property crimes contain cues about potential physical harm. To varying extents, property crimes involve a possibility of confrontation with the offender—someone who is assumed to be a stranger and whose predatory behavior with respect to property leads one to suspect that he might use violence if encountered. Thus, burglary should elicit more fear than simple larceny of some item left in the yard, which should elicit more fear than price-fixing by a remote corporation.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, a perception that crimes of *any* type are pervasive may—in itself—act as a cue to infer that more fear-evoking crimes are also prevalent.

If there are important qualitative differences between responses elicited by threats of physical harm and threats of property loss, it is difficult to differentiate them with currently used survey items. For example, asking respondents, "How fearful are you of . . ." and tacking

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<sup>3</sup> A piece of property can also be valued highly because it is an integral symbol of self. Theft of such property is similar to a physical attack.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, other factors are involved here, such as images of the "types of people" who commit various kinds of crime and whether any potential confrontation with an offender would occur in public or somewhere hidden from public view.

on descriptions of various crimes is inadequate; subjects are only given one dimension on which to respond.

The second thing that linking fear to potential physical harm accomplishes is setting a conceptual framework in which to examine fear of crime relative to fear elicited by events that have a potential of physical harm but that are not generally perceived as crimes (e.g., automobile accidents, pollution of the environment, inadequate testing of new drugs). Perhaps, as Silberman suggests, different degrees of invasion of self cause crime to elicit more fear than do non-criminal events with equal (or even higher) probabilities of physical harm.<sup>5</sup> In any case, linking fear to physical harm encourages studying the fear of crime within a broader social context by forcing the recognition of communalities in the objective aspects of crimes that do elicit fear and non-criminal events that may or may not elicit fear.

#### ACTUAL AND ANTICIPATED FEAR

In conceptualizing and measuring the fear of crime, we should keep in mind the distinction between actual fear and anticipated fear.<sup>6</sup> Accepting the definition of fear as an emotional reaction characterized by a sense of danger and anxiety about physical harm, it is obvious that the person walking alone in a high crime area at night is experiencing something quite different than the suburbanite who is telling an interviewer that he or she *would be* fearful in such an area at night.

Actual fear of crime is triggered by some cue, and it is unlikely that a respondent is experiencing actual fear during a survey interview. Actual fear of crime is probably experienced chronically by a relatively small number of people and intermittently—in very delimited situations—by most. Adequate measurement of the fear of crime requires that we try to determine not only the types of situations in which people say they would experience fear, but also how often they find themselves in such situations and how strongly they have reacted to such situations in the past.

This does not mean that anticipated fear is unimportant. Anticipation of being fearful in particular situations may or may not be based on having experienced actual fear in similar situations during the past. If such a situation is encountered in the future, actual fear may or may not be elicited (or may be stronger or less strong than anticipated). However, assuming that people avoid or try to minimize the effects of stress-

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<sup>5</sup> C. SILBERMAN, CRIMINAL VIOLENCE, CRIMINAL JUSTICE 17-18 (1978).

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., G. Fisher, The Fear of Crime in Public Housing Developments (Ph.D. dissertation 1978).

ful situations before they occur, we can expect that anticipated fear—as well as actual fear—will produce behavioral responses.

The distinctions between fear of physical harm and worry about property loss and between actual and anticipated fear are not exercises in conceptual hair-splitting. Later, the implications of these distinctions on people's response to fear and for designing programs to alleviate fear will be discussed.

A number of conceptual issues have been omitted from this section. Specifically, differentiating the fear of crime from (a) concern about crime as a social/political issue, (b) perceptions of the extent of crime, and (c) subjective assessments of the likelihood of being victimized, have been discussed by others.<sup>7</sup>

#### A GENERAL MODEL

Figure 1 presents a tentative model of the causes and consequences of the fear of crime. It is complex, yet it is a simplification of even greater complexity. The model is not meant to be causal in the sense of a path diagram, but rather is meant to illustrate hypotheses about how categories of variables are interrelated.

The model could easily be modified to apply to worry about property loss—assuming that the conceptual distinction made earlier is useful. However, in this article the model will only be applied to fear of crime as it was defined in the preceding section.

Space limitations preclude a complete discussion of every component in the model, but the following sections present the basic features of the components.

#### POSITION IN SOCIAL SPACE

The model starts with a set of variables that—operating within a given socioeconomic structure<sup>8</sup>—determine a person's position in social space. Part of this position in social space is captured in the term, lifestyle: "routine daily activities, both vocational activities (work, school, keeping house, etc.) and leisure activities."<sup>9</sup> But it is more than that. Position in social space has a temporal aspect, extending into the past to

<sup>7</sup> See F. Furstenberg, *supra* note 1, Block & Long, *Subjective Probability of Victimization and Crime Levels: An Econometric Approach*, 11 *CRIMINOLOGY* 87 (1973); T. Baumer & F. DuBow, "Fear of Crime" in the Polls: What They Do and Do Not Tell Us (paper presented at annual meeting, American Ass'n of Public Opinion Research, Buck Hill Falls, Pa., 1977); F. DuBow, E. McCabe & G. Kaplan, *supra* note 2; G. Fisher, *supra* note 6.

<sup>8</sup> The broader effects of the socioeconomic structure are extremely important, but they cannot be discussed adequately within the present format.

<sup>9</sup> M. HINDELANG, M. GOTTFREDSON & J. GAROFALO, *VICTIMS OF PERSONAL CRIME: AN EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION FOR A THEORY OF PERSONAL VICTIMIZATION* 241 (1978).

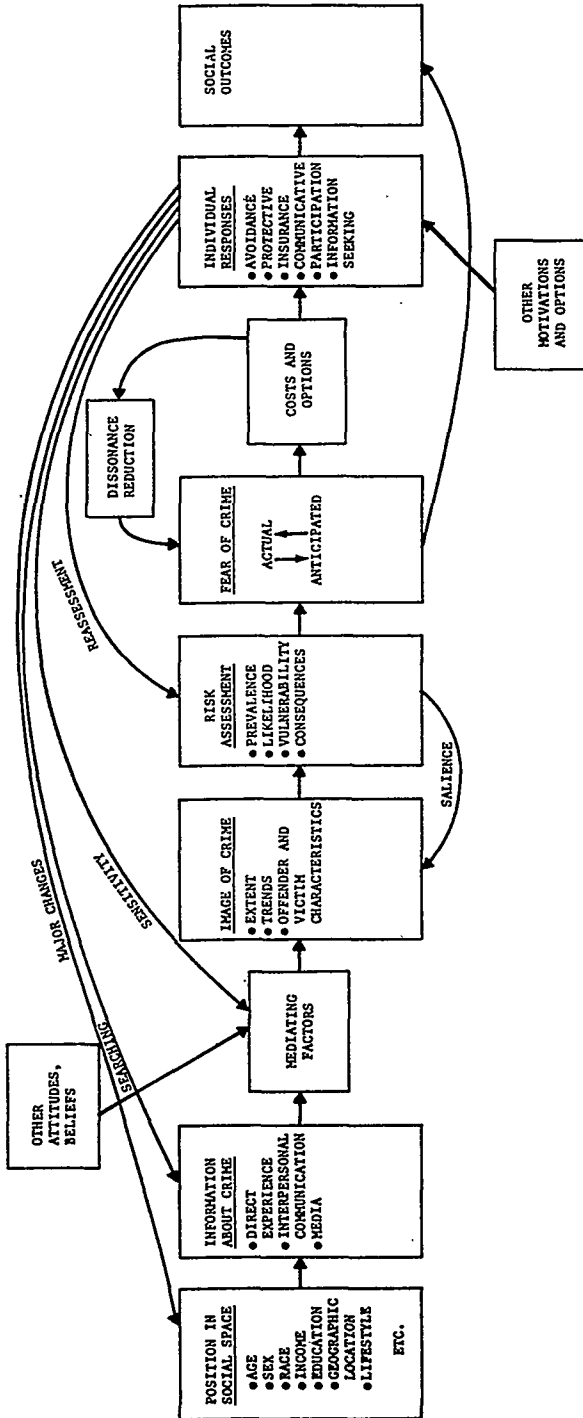


FIGURE 1  
A GENERAL MODEL OF THE FEAR OF CRIME AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

incorporate a person's learning experiences and into the future to incorporate a person's life chances.

Although position in social space is shown only as a starting point in the model, it probably should also be seen as having a direct effect on each successive component in the model.

#### INFORMATION ABOUT CRIME AND IMAGES OF CRIME

Position in social space strongly influences the amount and nature of information about crime to which the person is exposed. The model shows three major sources of information about crime: direct experience (as a victim or a witness), interpersonal communication about the direct or indirect experience of others, and the mass media. This information, mediated by other factors, provides the individual with a somewhat nebulous image of crime.

The mediating factors consist primarily of attitudes and interests which affect selective perception of the information available to the individual. For example, an individual with a great deal of racial prejudice may be more likely to notice that the offender in a news story about a crime was described as being black, or may be more likely to assume that the offender was black when the story does not mention racial characteristics.

The image of crime held by an individual consists of a number of elements: the extent of crime (both current and changed levels in the neighborhood, in the entire city and various parts of it, in the state, and in the nation), the nature of crime (relative proportions of different types of crime and the amount of violence involved), characteristics of offenders and victims (physical, psychological, and social), and the consequences of crime (injury, financial loss, and stigma). These images also inform the individual about the appropriate cues from which the threat of crime can be inferred—such as the presence of strangers under certain circumstances or indications of “incivility” in a neighborhood.<sup>10</sup>

#### RISK ASSESSMENT

The images of crime and the cues they imply must be made relevant to the individual's situation before they can have any effect. Thus, the next component in the model reflects considerations that “personalize” the image of crime. Four considerations, all subsumed under the concept of risk assessment, are shown in the model:

(1) Prevalence: What are the amounts of certain types of crimes in places and situations of which I am aware?

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<sup>10</sup> Lewis & Maxfield, *Fear in the Neighborhoods: An Investigation of the Impact of Crime*, 17 J. RESEARCH CRIME & DELINQUENCY 160, 179-80 (1980).

(2) Likelihood: Given the prevalence of crime in certain places and situations and my exposure to such places and situations, how likely is it that I will be the potential target of a victimization?

(3) Vulnerability: Given my physical characteristics and protective resources, how attractive a target will I be for offenders? How well will I be able to resist an attempted victimization?

(4) Consequences: If someone attempts to victimize me or succeeds in victimizing me, what physical, psychological, and financial losses can I expect to suffer? How well can I absorb those losses?

Making these considerations clear and distinct for purposes of presentation is not meant to imply that individuals weigh each of them separately in a rational, calculating manner. The considerations will often enter into the fear-producing process unconsciously and/or indirectly. For example, a young man may have an unstated sense of invulnerability which dampens fear of crime, even though he lives in a high-crime area and frequents situations and places that involve relatively high risks of victimization.

The model shows a feedback loop—labelled “salience”—from the risk assessment component back to the image of crime. This illustrates that people’s determinations of how relevant their images of crime are to their personal lives will affect how close to consciousness the images are kept.

#### ACTUAL AND ANTICIPATED FEAR

We are now to the point in the model at which some level of fear is assumed to have been produced, at least initially. Both actual and anticipated fear are shown in the model, and they are presented as mutually influencing each other. If a person has felt actual fear in particular circumstances during the past, that person is more likely to anticipate feeling fear in similar circumstances in the future; if a person anticipates feeling fearful in some hypothetical situation, he or she is more likely to experience actual fear upon encountering a comparable situation.

#### COSTS AND OPTIONS

Responses to the fear of crime are mediated by a consideration of various costs and options. Although not shown in the model, these costs and options can be traced back to position in social space. The lack of necessary income may make it impossible to buy a car or use a taxi even though riding a subway produces fear; staying away from bars and discos at night may mean foregoing opportunities to meet interesting people of the opposite sex; moving to a safer neighborhood may be precluded by financial factors, racial bias, or a desire to maintain family



ties. There are many examples, but the basic point is that responses to fear involve some costs that people are more or less willing and able to endure. Whether fear leads to a particular response depends not only on the intensity of the fear itself, but also on what options the person has available and how the person values those options.

Responses to actual fear may be less influenced by considerations of costs and options than are responses to anticipated fear. For example, if one senses imminent threat while in a darkened hallway, very few considerations (e.g., physical impediments) will interfere with the appearance of a response meant to decrease the danger (e.g., running to safety, calling for assistance). But if one anticipates feeling fearful in a darkened hallway, one is freer to weigh various considerations (e.g., the need to get to a particular destination, the desire to avoid being embarrassed) in deciding whether or not (or how) to enter the hallway. At the very least, the immediacy of actual fear changes the values in the costs/options equations.

The model contains an important feedback loop—labeled “dissonance reduction”—between the consideration of costs and options and the feeling of fear. Basically, the psychological theory of cognitive dissonance<sup>11</sup> claims that there is a strain toward resolving inconsistencies among a person’s attitudes, beliefs, and feelings. In the present context, the theory implies that the fear of crime might be redefined in light of the extent to which certain responses to fear are found to be possible/impossible or attractive/unattractive after a consideration of costs and options. Two primary scenarios of redefinition are suggested:

(1) Redefinition might *dampen* fear. If the person cannot or will not respond to deal with the fear provoked by a situation (e.g., cannot afford to move to a different neighborhood, prefers to remain close to family in a high-crime neighborhood rather than move), the situation can be redefined as less threatening.

(2) Redefinition might *aggravate* fear. If the person chooses to expend a great deal of time and/or resources in responding to fear of a situation (e.g., investing in expensive locks and alarm systems), the situation can be redefined as even more threatening in order to cognitively justify the expenditure.

In addition to fear of crime itself (mediated by costs/options considerations), the model shows a set of exogenous factors that influence fear-relevant responses. This is meant to indicate that many of the responses that we normally associate with the fear of crime can be produced by factors other than fear.<sup>12</sup> For example, surveys consistently

<sup>11</sup> L. FESTINGER, A THEORY OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE (1957).

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., M. HINDELANG, M. GOTTFREDSON & J. GAROFALO, *supra* note 9, ch. 9; Sko-

indicate that the elderly have greater fear and go out at night less often than younger people.<sup>13</sup> But this does not mean that the elderly go out less often primarily because they are more fearful; there are many other factors which influence the elderly to stay home (e.g., poor health). In fact, if we examine individual-level correlations in the National Crime Survey city data (8 cities surveyed in 1975), fear of crime does not "account for" much of the association between age and the frequency of going out in the evening for entertainment.<sup>14</sup> The simple correlation between age and going out is  $-.41$ , and the introduction of a fear of crime indicator as a control variable does not produce a major change (partial  $r = -.38$ ).

#### RESPONSES TO THE FEAR OF CRIME

Rather large proportions of people report that they have done *something* in response to crime or the fear of crime; the proportions of respondents who had "limited or changed" their activities in some way because of crime ranged from 27 to 56% among 13 cities in the National Crime Survey.<sup>15</sup> Other research has dealt with a variety of specific responses that people make. In their review of the literature on individual behavior reactions to crime, DuBow and his colleagues<sup>16</sup> define the following five categories:

(1) Avoidance: "actions taken to decrease exposure to crime by removing oneself from or increasing the distance from situations in which the risk of criminal victimization is believed to be high."

(2) Protective behavior: behavior which "seeks to increase resistance to victimization." Two types are identified: Home protection—"any action that seeks to make a home better protected whether it involves purchasing a device or merely using existing devices." Personal protection—"actions taken outside the home, other than avoidance, to reduce . . . the vulnerability when encountering threatening situations."

(3) Insurance behavior: behavior which "seeks to minimize the costs of victimization . . . [I]t alters the consequences of victimization."

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gan, *Public Policy and the Fear of Crime in Large American Cities*, in PUBLIC LAW AND PUBLIC POLICY 1 (J. Gardiner ed. 1976).

<sup>13</sup> See M. HINDELANG, M. GOTTFREDSON & J. GAROFALO, *supra* note 9, at 175-202.

<sup>14</sup> See J. GAROFALO, PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT CRIME: THE ATTITUDES OF VICTIMS AND NONVICTIMS IN SELECTED CITIES app. d (Nat'l Crim. Just. Information & Statistics Serv. Analytic Rpt. SD-VAD-1, 1977).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> F. DuBow, E. McCabe & G. Kaplan, *supra* note 2, at 93-99.

(4) Communicative behavior: "the sharing of information and emotions related to crime with others."

(5) Participation behavior: "actions in concert with others which are motivated by a particular crime or by crime in general."

DuBow and his colleagues are dealing with "reactions to crime" which is a more general phenomenon than responses to the fear of crime, especially as fear of crime is conceptualized here. Clearly, some of their categories are more relevant to "worry about theft" than to the "fear of physical injury in a criminal victimization." However, one of the most attractive features of their categories—in addition to the fact that they seem to make meaningful differentiations among behaviors—is that they cover the general idea of reactions to crime yet are flexible enough to be easily modified and used in a more focused discussion of either fear of physical injury or worry about property loss.

Of course, the *contents* of the categories would differ somewhat depending on whether one were examining worry about property loss or fear of physical injury. Insurance behavior, for example, is a frequent response for people who worry about theft; it seems less likely that people purchase medical insurance as a response to the fear of being physically injured in a criminal victimization. Perhaps the most important insurance behavior resulting from fear is passively handing over one's money when faced with a threat during a robbery.

A sixth category of responses can be added to the five identified by DuBow and his colleagues, and a differentiation can be made within one of their categories. The differentiation involves the first category, avoidance, and parallels the distinction between anticipated and actual fear. Avoidance generally results from anticipated fear, while the comparable response to actual fear is more properly called escape.

The sixth category that could be added to the five of DuBow and his colleagues is information seeking. It involves two types of responses. First is the consulting of other sources; the individual actively looks for crime information in the media and questions other people for whatever information they might have.<sup>17</sup> The second type of information seeking is environmental scanning; the person increases the frequency and intensity with which he or she "checks out" the situations for cues that are thought to indicate danger.

There is no need to go into detail about the specific nature of the various responses that fall into each of the six categories. A few summary comments will suffice:

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<sup>17</sup> I would keep the questioning of others separate from DuBow and his colleagues' "communicative behavior" category, which should probably be restricted to interpersonal communications aimed at catharsis or at increasing social solidarity.

(1) As mentioned earlier, relatively large proportions of survey respondents claim that they have done *something* as a response to crime or the fear of crime.

(2) When asked about the specific actions they have taken, the most frequent responses involve relatively simple avoidance behaviors and home protection behaviors, especially staying away from certain areas at night and installing locks or locking doors at home.<sup>18</sup>

(3) The proportions of respondents who mention any one specific action they have taken is generally higher in surveys that give respondents a list of actions to choose from than in surveys that use open-ended questions.<sup>19</sup>

(4) Many of the actions that effectively insulate people from the threat of physically harmful criminal victimizations are not motivated primarily by the fear of crime. Among these actions are moving from a neighborhood, selecting a new neighborhood, choosing different places to shop, and going out less in the evening for entertainment.<sup>20</sup>

Such regularities in research findings lead one to conclude that, for *most* people, the fear of crime is not a very salient force in determining a wide range of behaviors. Rather, it acts to condition or modify behaviors in certain delimited situations or it produces a rationale for avoiding places and situations that the person would rarely enter in any case.

This does not deny that, for *some* segments of the population, fear of crime is a very salient force in people's lives—and often with good reason. For those people, individual responses to the fear of crime are made daily and become an integral part of their lives. The problem is that these same people are concentrated among the poor and powerless; thus, the options available to them do not permit them to make the types of responses (e.g., moving to a safer neighborhood, living in an apartment building with private security guards) that would effectively insulate or protect them from fear-producing situations. Fisher's description of the plight of the public housing residents that he studied sums up the problem for the poor in high-crime areas:

They live in an environment where the threat of crime is already present. The awareness of crime . . . brings the emotion of the fear of crime into the foreground of their consciousness. There is little they can do to reduce

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<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., A. BIDERMAN, L. JOHNSON, J. MCINTYRE & A. WEIR, REPORT ON A PILOT STUDY IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA ON VICTIMIZATION AND ATTITUDES TOWARD LAW ENFORCEMENT 128-29 (1967); MARKET OPINION RESEARCH CO., CRIME IN MICHIGAN (7th ed. 1979); Sundeen & Mathieu, *The Fear of Crime and Its Consequences Among Elderly in Three Urban Communities*, 16 GERONTOLOGIST 211 (1976).

<sup>19</sup> F. DuBow, E. McCabe & G. Kaplan, *supra* note 2, at 105. Compare A. BIDERMAN, L. JOHNSON, J. MCINTYRE & A. WEIR, *supra* note 18, at 129, with MARKET OPINION RESEARCH CO., *supra* note 18, at 26.

<sup>20</sup> M. HINDELANG, M. GOTTFREDSON & J. GAROFALO, *supra* note 9, ch. 9.

their fear. It must be suffered in silence as part and parcel of their underclass status.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, the anticipation of fear experienced by more affluent members of society can have important, if more subtle, consequences. But before moving from fear-of-crime responses to the broader social outcomes of those responses, brief mention should be made of the feedback loops going from responses back to earlier components in the model.

#### FEEDBACK EFFECTS OF RESPONSES

Avoidance behaviors can result in decreasing the amount of crime that the person is exposed to and, therefore, his or her risk of being victimized. These behaviors can consist of major changes in the person's lifestyle; thus, one loop in the model goes from individual responses back to position in social space. More likely, avoidance responses will consist of less encompassing behavioral adjustments. These more minor adjustments are shown in the model as influencing a direct reassessment of risk. Of course, the effects of either type of avoidance behavior—major change or minor adjustment—on risk assessment will depend on the amount of distance placed between the person and the threatening situation. For example, staying home at night in a high-crime area will not be as effective as moving out of the area.

Because avoidance responses lead to changes in risk assessment, one would expect them to dampen the fear of crime. They probably do, but the effect would seem to be on actual fear; anticipation of fear might remain unchanged. Thus, indicators of the fear of crime that do not differentiate between actual and anticipated fear might not be sensitive to the impact of avoidance behaviors.

The other factors in risk assessment—vulnerability and consequences—can also be changed by individual responses to fear through the "reassessment" feedback loop. Again, the resulting changes in risk assessment can affect actual and/or anticipated fear. For example, carrying a weapon (protective behavior) or joining with others in a neighborhood watch program (participation behavior) could decrease a person's feeling of vulnerability, and communicative responses might make the person feel more social support, thereby easing the threat of dire consequences.

Information seeking—the sixth category of responses to fear that we previously added to the five suggested by DuBow and his colleagues—affects both the amount of information about crime to which the individual is exposed and how that information is selected. These processes

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<sup>21</sup> G. Fisher, *supra* note 6, at 186.

are indicated, respectively, by the "searching" and "sensitivity" feedback loops in the model. The person actively seeks out a greater quantity of information about crime and is more sensitive to information and cues which he or she might not have noticed previously. Generally, we would expect increased searching and sensitivity to lead ultimately to increased fear. However, it is possible that information-seeking responses will result in the person discovering that the threat of victimization is not as serious as he or she had believed; potentially, this could dampen fear.

#### SOCIAL OUTCOMES

The final component in the model represents the broader social outcomes produced by individual responses to the fear of crime. These social outcomes are not the simple summations of individual responses; individual responses can be viewed more appropriately as catalysts that initiate social processes which then assume their own dynamics and logic.

Conklin<sup>22</sup> was among the first to investigate social processes generated by individual responses to the fear of crime, although the processes had been discussed by previous writers.<sup>23</sup> Conklin questioned the Durkheimian notion that crime leads to increased social solidarity as members of society reinforce the normative order by jointly reacting to crime. Instead, Conklin argued that crime produces fear, and that responses to fear unleash a series of negative social outcomes: heightened interpersonal distrust, withdrawal of support from the systems of formal authority devised to control crime, and decreased levels of social interaction.<sup>24</sup> The latter, according to Conklin, leads to a weakening of informal social controls in the area affected; this, in turn, leads to an even greater amount of crime. Other features thought to characterize this cycle are the closing of businesses in an area and the moving away of the area's more affluent residents, both of which tend to decrease the area's tax base and depress the situation even further.

A limited test of Conklin's hypotheses has been conducted by Fisher in a study of public housing units.<sup>25</sup> He found little support for the position that individual responses to fear generate more crime; any small effect of that type was offset by the decreased likelihood of victimization produced by individual responses to fear. In addition, Fisher found that crime had little effect over time on the propensity of people to leave the

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<sup>22</sup> J. CONKLIN, *THE IMPACT OF CRIME* (1975).

<sup>23</sup> See generally J. JACOBS, *THE DEATH AND LIFE OF GREAT AMERICAN CITIES* (1961).

<sup>24</sup> J. CONKLIN, *supra* note 22, at 6, 9, 131, 248.

<sup>25</sup> G. Fisher, *supra* note 6.

project or on the mix of types of families living in the units. The small effects that he uncovered would take a long time to change the characteristics of the community and were probably negligible in comparison to the effects of public policy choices unrelated to crime (e.g., housing, welfare, transportation policies).

Fisher did speculate that crime and the anticipated fear of crime might have greater effects in deterring people from moving into an area with a high-crime reputation. Most people who have the resources enabling them to make such a choice, however, probably don't even seriously consider high-crime areas in deciding where to live. And, to the extent that crime and anticipated fear enter such decisions, they are difficult to separate from other considerations (e.g., housing quality, aesthetic features, good schools) which are associated with levels of crime.

The discussion above applies mostly to social outcomes produced by avoidance and protective behaviors. Among the other categories of individual responses to fear, communicative behavior and information seeking would seem to have little effect on broader social processes, except to the extent that they "cycle back" to aggravate or dampen the fear of crime, which might in turn affect other categories of individual responses. Similarly, the effects on insurance behavior produced by fear of crime would seem to be limited to the individuals involved.<sup>26</sup>

Possible social outcomes produced by the final category of individual responses to fear—participation behavior—are much more open to question. Polar possibilities include an increased sense of community spirit and interpersonal trust versus repressive vigilante episodes which increase social conflict.

Finally, the model shows a direct link between the fear of crime and social outcomes, by-passing behavioral responses to fear. The idea communicated by this link is that the fear of crime, if widespread,<sup>27</sup> can feed directly into attitudes that have broad social consequences, regardless of the behavioral responses that people make to fear. For example, fear might lead to a sense of distrust and alienation from social life. Once such generalized attitudinal sets become common, they can lead to important social outcomes that are not specifically related to crime—such

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<sup>26</sup> One could argue, however, that worry about the theft of property could result in a greater use of market insurance, which in turn leads people to be more careless with their property, thereby increasing the likelihood of theft.

<sup>27</sup> In a Canadian study, Hartnagel found no relationship between the fear of crime and indicators of neighborhood cohesion and social activity. He notes that, in order for the fear of crime to affect these phenomena, the fear would have to be above a certain threshold necessary to disrupt ingrained habits and attitudes and be widely shared in the community; "[r]elatively isolated individuals experiencing fear of crime may not be sufficient." Hartnagel, *The Perception and Fear of Crime: Implications for Neighborhood Cohesion, Social Activity, and Community Effect*, 58 SOC. FORCES 176, 189 (1979).

as non-interest and non-participation in political processes or a disregard for the plight of less fortunate members of society. In this sense, fear can be viewed as an impediment to attitudes and feelings which encourage a fully social existence.

#### RESEARCH AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

As noted in the introduction to this article, our knowledge about the causes and consequences of the fear of crime has been increasing steadily, but each increment of knowledge gained seems to add to the proliferation of issues to be researched. Even in the simple model presented and described above, each component and each proposed connection between components present questions for further research: What is the nature of information about crime received by individuals, and how does that information vary across individuals? How do various attitudes and beliefs affect selective perception of information about crime? How accurately do people assess their victimization risks? What is the relationship between actual and anticipated fear? What are the costs and options conditioning an individual's responses to the fear of crime, and how do they operate? What are the social outcomes produced by individual responses to fear, and how can those outcomes be altered? The list could be expanded greatly, and a complete discussion of all the potential research issues is impossible here. In addition, no single research project could be designed to test all of the hypotheses contained in or derivable from the model; the gaps in our knowledge must be filled incrementally. Therefore, this article concludes with brief discussions of a few research issues that the author believes have the greatest relevance for policy.

#### RATIONALITY VS. IRRATIONALITY

Although not an issue on which research is recommended, the question of whether the fear of crime is rational or irrational will be disposed of first because it has become an unnecessary impediment to discussions about the fear of crime.

The question is generally raised in terms of whether a particular demographic group (e.g., the elderly) has an irrational fear of crime, given the relatively low rate of personal victimization for the group. There is no allowance for irrationality built into the model presented in this article. However, using the example of the elderly, the model does not preclude the possibility that the elderly might have both lower victimization risks and higher levels of fear than younger people; in fact, the model contains a number of factors which might produce such dis-



parities (e.g., differences in perceptions of vulnerability in the risk assessment component of the model).

The point is that we must look for *explanations* of findings such as the apparent fear/risk discrepancy between older and younger age groups rather than arguing about whether to label such discrepancies as rational or irrational. Balkin's attempt to show that the likelihood of victimization among the elderly is not low (relative to younger age groups) when a measure of exposure is taken into account, is a useful approach to the problem.<sup>28</sup>

#### FOCUS ON SOCIAL OUTCOMES

One of the highest priority research tasks is trying to untangle and specify the effects of fear and individual responses to fear on broader social processes. The media, particularly in large urban areas, often communicate a dramatic picture of social outcomes supposedly produced by the fear of crime: the image of the city under siege. However, it may be that fear and individual responses to fear have only minor effects on broader social processes, especially relative to other factors such as economic changes or race relationships. If so, then the policy imperative for conducting research on the fear of crime will be weak, and scarce research resources should be allocated to other topics.

In assessing the social outcomes of the fear of crime, it will be useful to place the topic in a broader conceptual framework. Previously, a colleague and I argued that the fear of crime should be understood within the more general context of "concern for community," which in turn should be viewed as a factor in the even more general experience of the quality of life.<sup>29</sup> Whether that particular approach is accepted or not, there needs to be special attention devoted to specifying the interrelationships between fear of crime and other phenomena that may produce the social outcomes of interest.

#### FEAR OF CRIME AND OTHER FEARS

Fear of crime was defined earlier as an emotional reaction characterized by a sense of danger and anxiety about the potential for physical harm in a criminal victimization. It was also noted that this definition encourages research into emotional reactions (or lack of such reactions) to non-criminal events which present risks of physical harm that are equal to or greater than the risks posed by criminal victimization. Research directed at determining why people fear street crimes but do not

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<sup>28</sup> Balkin, *Victimization Rates, Safety and Fear of Crime*, 26 SOC. PROB. 343 (1979).

<sup>29</sup> Garofalo & Laub, *The Fear of Crime: Broadening Our Perspective*, 3 VICTIMOLOGY 242 (1978).

fear automobile accidents or environmental pollution (or if they do fear such events, how the nature of that fear differs from the fear of crime) should serve to highlight, through contrast, the major elements involved in the fear of crime. Specification of the major elements is a necessary step in devising programs and policies to address the fear of crime.

#### NATURE OF ACTUAL AND ANTICIPATED FEAR

At many points in this article, the differentiation between actual fear and the anticipation of fear has been used. It seems reasonable to expect that different intervention strategies are appropriate for the two, and that anticipated fear can be alleviated more easily than can actual fear. For example, anticipated fear is probably more influenced by distorted information about crime than is actual fear, which is probably more influenced by the objective threat of crime (although both aspects of fear are affected by media depictions and objective threat to some extent).

Because the actual/anticipated distinction has many policy-relevant implications, research is needed to explore several issues raised by the distinction: What are the causal mechanisms producing each type of fear? How do the two types interrelate and affect each other? What are the individual responses and social outcomes produced by each type?

#### DEVELOPMENT OF INDICATORS

In the earlier section on concepts and indicators it was pointed out that current survey items do not differentiate well between fear of physical harm and worry about property loss or between actual and anticipated fear. We also must develop indicators that reflect differences in the saliency and intensity of both actual and anticipated fear experienced by people.

But the need for more refined indicators does not just apply to aspects of the fear of crime. Consideration of the model presented in this article reveals a number of areas in which we lack good indicators. Measurement of the amount and nature of information about crime to which people are exposed—and how people select and process such information—has barely begun. Surveys have contained items bearing on some aspects of subjective risk assessment (particularly prevalence and likelihood), but perceptions of personal vulnerability and expected consequences remain untapped. The configurations of trade-offs—costs and options—that mediate between the fear of crime and individual responses to fear have yet to be measured. The development of sound indicators for these and many other concepts will have to precede any

research that makes more than a superficial examination of the complexities underlying the causes and consequences of the fear of crime.

#### FEEDBACK LOOPS

The model presented in this article shows several important feedback loops, indicating that the development and changes in levels of fear are not simple recursive processes. These loops have great policy relevance because they indicate potential points of intervention which can interrupt upward spiraling cycles of fear (when the loop represents positive feedback) or enhance fear-dampening processes (when the loop represents negative feedback).

Before the appropriate policy decisions about intervention can be made, research is needed to specify the exact nature of the feedback loops and the conditions under which they provide positive or negative feedback to fear-producing processes. And this requires longitudinal research with all its accompanying difficulties. Furthermore, much of this longitudinal research will require a level of depth that can detect subtle short-term changes—something that is difficult with large-scale panel surveys in which successive measurements are spaced months apart.

#### FEAR AND CAUTION

The discussion on which this article closes contains both a suggestion for further research and a conceptual warning. There is some danger of approaching the fear of crime as if it is an unmitigated evil that must be eliminated completely. Given current realities in the United States, complete elimination of the fear of crime is not only impossible, but probably undesirable. Fear is functional to the extent that it leads people to take reasonable precautions.

Figure 2 presents a visual hypothesis of how various intensities of fear might be functional or dysfunctional in a person's life. The complete absence of fear is dysfunctional because the individual is not motivated to take reasonable cautionary measures, such as avoiding the possibility of being alone at night in obviously dangerous places or not engaging in verbally aggressive behaviors in situations which can be expected to elicit physically aggressive responses from others. The figure posits that a small amount of fear is functional because it is sufficient to produce reasonable caution. However, increases in the intensity of fear quickly become dysfunctional again because responses, both behavioral and attitudinal, go beyond what is necessary to prevent victimization and produce effects such as unnecessary avoidance of potentially rewarding social interactions and unwarranted distrust of others. Of course, the pattern of the relationship shown in Figure 2 would differ

depending on the actual risk of victimization in one's social situation; for example, the area of the curve in the "functional" portion of the graph would probably be wider (extending to a higher intensity of fear) for a person living in a very high crime area.<sup>30</sup>

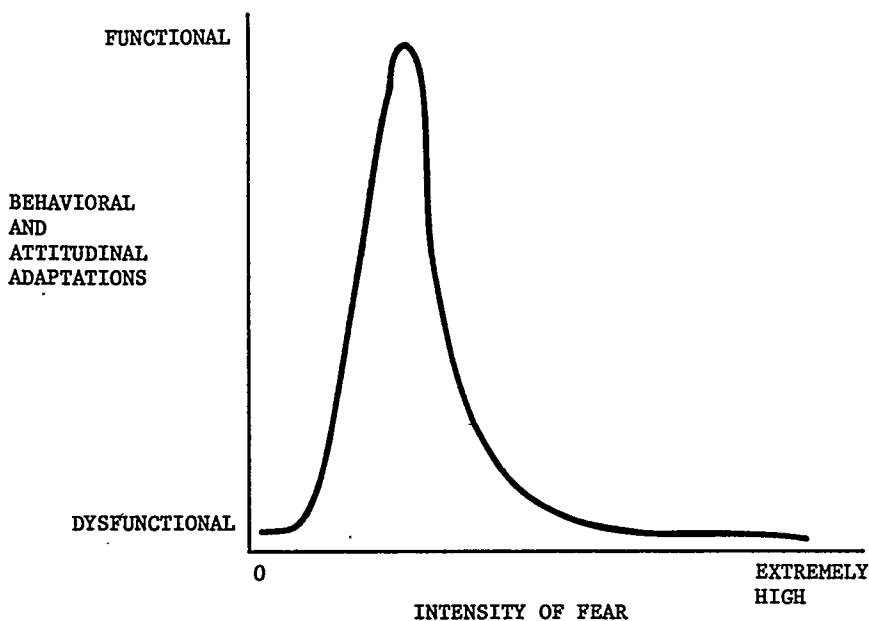


FIGURE 2

HYPOTHETICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTENSITY OF THE FEAR OF  
CRIME AND THE FUNCTIONAL/DYSFUNCTIONAL NATURE OF  
ADAPTIVE RESPONSES

Research is needed to determine how much fear is functional or dysfunctional for people. Figure 2 hypothesizes that only low intensities of fear are functional and that the functional nature of fear dissipates very quickly as it intensifies. In any event, it may be healthy to remind ourselves from time to time that elimination of fear would not eliminate the risk of being victimized, and that we may want to think in terms of how to elicit appropriate precautionary behaviors and attitudes without eliciting unnecessary fear.

<sup>30</sup> Although Figure 2 and this discussion apply to the fear of crime as defined in this paper, the same approach could be applied readily to fear of other events and to worry about property loss.