Neighborhood Dynamics and the Fear of Crime

Like a man, I keep control of my eyes. Walking home at sunset a few days ago, I kept them averted from the two men who wereousting someone in the supermarket. At the corner, I kept them averted from the boy at the entrance to the Chico Maxine that at the most market those days, I kept them averted from the stranger who was walking toward me from the river lorm. Perhaps he was simply on his way to the supermarket for a quart of milk. But, hey, you can’t trust anyone anymore —(Cantwell, 1990).

Throughout history, residents of urban areas have expressed fears about many conditions of their everyday lives (see Tuan 1979, for an historical perspective on urban fear). While it is generally assumed that one of the hallmarks of modern urban life is the fear of criminal victimization, the number of urban respondents who report that they are “bothered” by crime in their neighborhood is actually less than the number who note problems with traffic or noise (Bureau of the Census 1989-94). Nevertheless, 40 percent of those interviewed in the 1989 General Social Survey indicated that they were afraid to walk alone at night in some areas within a mile of their homes (Plasgan and Maguire 1990:153), and political rhetoric that exploits such fears (as reflected in the notorious Willie Horton commercial used by George Bush in the 1988 presidential campaign) strikes a respondent chord among many citizens. Therefore, the emotions reported by Cantwell, which she recorded shortly after an apparently random shooting occurred in her middle-class neighborhood, are familiar to many residents of large cities.

Anyone who examines the fear of crime literature will be struck by several intriguing paradoxes. For example, it might understandably be assumed that the relatively high levels of reported fear that have characterized the United States in recent times reflect a perceived vulnerability to what former Attorney General Richard Thornburgh has described as “the carnage in our mean streets” (quoted in Krasberg 1991:141). Yet during 1989, only 29 violent victimizations occurred for every 1,000 persons over the age of 12 in the United States (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1991). While this rate of crime is certainly a justifiable source of concern, it is far less than one would expect on the basis of Thornburgh’s comments. Therefore, one paradox that has often been noted is that many more people are afraid of crime than one would expect given the risks of victimization. Likewise, a great deal of research has documented the finding that those least likely to be victimized (such as women and the elderly) report the highest levels of fear, while those populations most at risk (such as young, black men) report the lowest levels. As we will see, such findings indicate that the fear of crime is the outcome of much more subtle processes than a simple response to perceived risk.

The history of criminological inquiry into the fear of crime has its own interesting paradox. We noted in the last chapter that although the routine activities model is grounded in an ecological theory of group behavior, the implicit community dynamics have been relatively underdeveloped in the empirical literature. Therefore, since fear is one of the most deep-seated, personal emotions experienced by humans, we would expect that such group dynamics would not receive a great deal of attention. However, the neighborhood context of fear has been one of the most important themes of research tradition since the late 1960s, when the fear of crime emerged as a central consideration of criminology (see Biderman et al. 1967; Ennis 1967, Reiss 1967). To understand this development, it is necessary to examine briefly the concept of fear itself.

The Emotion of Fear

Although fear is one of the most basic of human emotions, it has been very difficult to define precisely. For example, although words such as fear and anxiety are often used synonymously, some psychologists differentiate between the two terms. Likewise, some criminologists (such as Garafolo 1981 or Taylor and Haie 1986) have argued that there is a difference between the fear of crime and worry about crime. In fact, Fred DuBow and his associates (1979:1) have noted that a wide range of different emotions and impressions have been subsumed in the literature under the common term “fear,” such as perceived risk, concern, worry, and anxiety. Therefore, contradictory findings concerning the fear of crime can often be explained simply by the different ways in which fear has been conceptualized (DuBow et al. 1979, 2).

DuBow et al. (pp. 2–6; see also Merry 1981 and Ferraro and LaGrange 1987) have identified three analytically distinct (but related) dimensions of crime perceptions that commonly have been used interchangeably in the literature as defining characteristics of fear. Some studies have asked questions pertaining to the seriousness of crime and the priorities that the political
process should give rise to the crime count. DuBow et al. argue that while these expressed values and concerns may be related to the fear of crime, they are not direct indicators of the emotional response that is assumed to be a defining characteristic of fear. Other studies have used perceived personal risks of victimization as a surrogate measure of fear. Again, while such judgments may be related to the fear of crime, they reflect a cognitive evaluation of environmental cues that may lead to the emotional reactions implicit to the concept (see Geisler & Fox 1981:10).

The general approach focused on the emotional response of fear itself, and this is the orientation we have taken in this chapter. Yet even within such a restricted focus, the analysis of fear within a neighborhood context presents in special difficulties. As James Garafalo (1981:841) has observed, there is an important difference between actual and anticipated fear of crime. Classic fear theory (as described, for example, by it is triggered by some immediate cue. Therefore, Garafalo argues that a full understanding of the fear of crime is impossible without a determination of the types of situations and cues that have elicited such responses, how strongly people have experienced such emotional reactions in those situations, and how often they find themselves in such situations. One of the central situational contingencies that is related to the like- hood of a fearful response is that of “familiarity” with an environment since it imparts at least a partial sense of control over potentially threatening situations (Rachman 1990). Since the neighborhood represents one of the most intimately familiar contexts that provide a basis for distinguishing between “us” and “people different from us,” the degree to which the fear of crime represents the perception that a community has been invaded by “unknown strangers” (Emm 1967:80) is one of the dominant themes of contemporary research. Thus, the fear of crime may reflect in large part a fear of people whose actions may be unpredictable or untrustworthy, other whom one has little or no control (DuBow et al. 1979:4). In fact, in some of the earlier major studies of victimization (such as Sundeman et al. 1967; Emm 1967) concluded that the fear of crime was primarily a fear of strangers.

Dan Lewis and Christy Slem (1986:8) have noted that this inference was primarily an ex post facto attempt to explain some paradoxes that were observed in experimental relationship between victimization and the fear of crime. However, Sally Merry’s (1981) study of a public housing project indicates that fear of strangers is an important factor. She presents evidence that the residents of a housing project who are able to personalize neighbors involved in illegal behavior are less afraid of crime than those residents for whom anonymous strangers represent random attacks of unknown origin. Obviously, the systemic structure of relationships in a neighborhood is a key determinant of the degree to which information circulates concerning the level, nature, and sources of local criminal activity. The fear of crime also may be a highly symbolic emotional response to

a much broader set of neighborhood characteristics than the crime-related news that is transmitted through these networks. During the 1970s, “law and order” (and, by extension, the fear of crime) became an effective catchword used by some politicians to exploit public fears concerning many social issues (Kines 1991:143). Richard Taub et al. (1981:104; see also 1984) have argued that residents are often willing to tolerate relatively high levels of crime as long as other aspects of community life are sufficiently gratifying. However, when the economic future of an area is uncertain (Taub et al. 1984) or when there are visible signs of incivilities and disorder in the neighborhood (Garafalo and Laub 1979; Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Lewis and Slem 1986), higher levels of fear of crime may actually serve as an indica tion of a more general concern that the area is out of control. Therefore, general feelings of “urban unease” (Garafalo and Laub 1979) due to the perception of com munity dynamics that are publicly assumed to be related to crime. Given the complex conceptual nature of fear, the development of valid and reliable indicators of the fear of crime presumes some of the most difficult problems of measurement of all those discussed so far in this book. Unfortu nately, as we will see in the following section, many of the most widely used indicators of fear have led to a great deal of confusion and inconsistency within the literature.

Measuring the Fear of Crime

As noted in the preceding section, Fred DuBow and his colleagues (1979:2 6) have identified three conceptually distinct dimensions that have been used interchangeably to study the fear of crime: values pertaining to the tolerance of crime, judgments concerning the risk of victimization, and emotional responses to this risk. In addition, some studies have focused on personal aspects of these dimensions, while others have framed their questions in terms of a more general referent. Kenneth Ferron and Randy LaGrange (1987) have utilized this typologi cal framework to classify typical questions that have been used to measure the fear of crime (see Table 4-1). Of the examples included in this table, the personal judgment of safety indicator has had an important role in the development of the fear of crime literature. Not only is it included in the National Crime Survey, but the seminal work of Wesley Skogan and Michael Kuselden (1953) will be discussed extensively later in this chapter, bases its analysis of fear on this measure. Although Skogan and Maxfield (1981:49) clearly consider fear to represent the expected to a stimulus, the structure of this survey item makes it impossible to separate that response from the perceived risk of victimization (Garafalo and Laub 1979). Since the perceived risk of crime is correlated only moderately with
Table 4-1
Commonly Used Measures of the Fear of Crime: Types of Perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Judgments</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General:</td>
<td>Choose the single most serious domestic problem (from a list of ten) that you would like to see government do something about (Frumkin, 1971).</td>
<td>Do you think that people in this neighborhood are safe inside their homes at night? (Clarke &amp; Leis, 1982).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal:</td>
<td>Are you personally concerned about becoming a victim of crime? (Theising et al. 1981).</td>
<td>How safe do you feel or would you feel being out alone in your neighborhood at night? (Liska et al. 1982).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>General:</td>
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<td>Personal:</td>
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</table>


the emotional response to crime (see Ferrari and LaGrange 1987:79), the confounding of the two dimensions in a single indicator introduces a significant amount of measurement error into statistical models of fear. In addition, Skogan and Maxfield argue (p. 50) that the phrase "being out alone in your neighborhood at night" orients the question to a fear of street crime that is likely to be committed by people from outside the house- hold. However, as Garofalo observes, crime is not even mentioned in the question (much less particular forms of crime), leaving the issue implicit. Skogan notes in a later work (1990:76) that responses to this question may also reflect perceptions of neighborhood disorder that are not specifically criminal. Thus, in addition to confounding perceived risk and emotional response, such safety-based questions confound crime and disorder, which are related but conceptually distinct. Ferrari and LaGrange (1987:77) argue that survey questions that address the personal emotional response to crime through the notion of "being afraid" come much closer to providing valid and reliable indicators of fear. However, as noted in the preceding section, fear represents an emotional response to particular situational contingencies. Although studies that have examined the fearful reactions to such contingencies are relatively rare, there are some notable exceptions. Mark War, for example, has examined the extent to which unfamiliar environments, darkness, and the presence of others provoke fears of criminal victimization. Arel van der Wurf and his colleagues (1989) also have investigated the roles of novelty and darkness, as well as the effects of contact with a potential aggressor, the presence or absence of a deviant behavior, and the existence of sexual connotations. Unfortunately, the neighborhood contexts of such situational contingencies have received very little attention.

A final problem with many measures of the fear of crime is that the nature of the potential victimization is often unspecified. For example, Ferrari and LaGrange note (1987:77) that while questions concerning "areas around here, i.e., within a mile of your home, where you would be afraid to walk alone at night" have emerged as standard indicators of the fear of crime, the nature of the perceived potential victimization that may lead to reported levels of fear is rarely made explicit. This is critical, as Ferrari and LaGrange note (1987:77) that the fear of crime is a multiplicative function of both the risk of victimization and the seriousness of the potential event. Thus, their research clearly suggests that fear can only be understood fully within an offense-specific framework. For example, later work by War (1990) indicates that the relationship between perceived risk and fear is not consistent across sixteen different offenses.

The very general nature of the indicators typically used to measure the fear of crime raises a very important issue in the evaluation of this body of literature. On the one hand, perhaps the emotional reactions to all crime share enough common characteristics that the unique features of particular situations and types of potential victimizations can be safely ignored (see the discussion of J. Smith 1991). On the other hand, perhaps such "omnibus" approaches (War 1984) obscure the dynamics of this reaction more than they illuminate it.

To address this issue, we factor-analyzed the correlation among the various questions posed by the index offenses presented in War (1984:679); see Table 4-2. These two populations have generally been found to be the least and must fearful, respectively, in the United States. Despite their very different compositions, a single dimension was found to underlie the fear-related responses of both groups, thereby indicating that crime-specific perceptions tend to have a significant degree of shared variation. Therefore, while omnibus models of fear of crime cannot provide a full sense of the situational dynamics that may lead to such responses, they do appear to reflect a more emotional response that seems to be fairly generalizable across crimes. Nevertheless, due to the other measurement problems noted in this section, especially concerning the wording of the fear of crime survey items, the conclusions concerning the fear of crime that legitimately can be drawn from the research to be discussed in this chapter should be considered very carefully.
Table 4-2  
Factor Structure of Reported Fear of Crime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Young Men</th>
<th>Elderly Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>0.796</td>
<td>0.910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>0.695</td>
<td>0.904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>0.733</td>
<td>0.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bully white home</td>
<td>0.579</td>
<td>0.793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto Theft</td>
<td>0.697</td>
<td>0.278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary white away</td>
<td>0.686</td>
<td>0.828</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on data presented in War (1984). The rape item was not asked of male respondents.

Fear and the Threat of Crime: Neighborhoods and Indirect Victimization

It would seem to be logical to propose that those people with the highest risk of victimization or who have actually been victimized would exhibit significantly greater levels of fear. However, although some studies have confirmed the relationship between prior victimization and the fear of crime (see Skogan 1986), the significance of this relationship is not as strong as one might suppose, even when adjustments are made for the degree to which people are exposed to risky situations (Stafford and Galle 1984). For example, while Skogan and Maxfield (1981:60–61) observe that robbery vic- tims were more likely than nonvictims to report that they felt very unsafe in their neighborhoods, they also note that almost one-quarter of the non- victims reported such emotions. In fact, the findings of some studies (such as Taylor et al. 1986; Greenberg 1986) suggest that the relationship between victimization and fear is essentially zero at the individual level.

The first suggests that certain groups perceive themselves as particularly vulnerable to crime in the sense that they are more open to attack, powerless to resist attack, and more exposed to traumatic physical and emotional consequences (Skogan and Maxfield 1981:69). As Mark War (1984:695; 1991) has argued, such considerations may be used to a "differential sensitivity to risk," that is, some groups will exhibit higher levels of fear than others when in equally risky situations. War argues that this may be due to other differences in the perceived seriousness of particular offenses (since the seriousness of the activity affects the degree to which fear and perceived risk are related) or to the tendency of some groups to perceive certain clusters of illegal activities as being temporally coincident in particular criminal events. As War notes, "A high perceived probability of residential burglary... may provoke intense fear among many women because assaults, rape, and even homicide are viewed as likely contemporaneous offenses" (War 1984:695). In particular, some women perceive rape to be a logical precursor or outcome of a variety of offenses, such as burglary, robbery, or homicide (War 1985, 1991).

While the vulnerability hypothesis emphasizes particular individual-level characteristics that may heighten a person's sense of fear, the systemic structure of residential neighborhoods is the core element of a second explanation that has been proposed to account for the paradoxical relationship between victimization and fear. Criminal events affect far more people than those directly experiencing the victimization. Rather, Taylor and Hale (1986:156) note that accounts of such experiences can spread throughout the local relational networks of a community, thereby creating a "shock wave" that spreads the impact of the victimization. Therefore, the degree to which one is embedded in local community networks affects the amount and nature of crime-related information to which one is exposed. Since people who listen to descriptions of crime may model the anxiety felt by those who actually have been victimized (Riggs and Kilpatrick 1990:131), exposure to such information may increase a person's fear of crime. That is, the fear of crime may reflect the vicarious or indirect effect of victimizations that have occurred to others.

One important source of information that directly inflates the fear of crime is certainly the media, whose coverage of crime emphasizes violent activities (Skogan and Maxfield 1981:Chapter 8). Tom Tyler and Fay Lomax Cook (1984:693) have shown, however, that mass media presenta- tions concerning crime and violence are generally unrelated to individual perceptions of the risk of victimization. Tyler (1984:34) offers two expla- nations for the lack of such a relationship. First, most citizens do not find such crime-related news particularly informative because the less spectacular crimes for which citizens are at the greatest risk (such as burglary and purse snatching) are significantly underreported relative to their rate of incidence. Second, news presentations concerning serious crime tend to concentrate on activities within high-crime areas, rather than providing a representative depiction of the distribution of crime within an entire city. As a result, Tyler and Cook (1984:694) argue that people develop their perceptions of the risk of experiencing victimization on the basis of their own experiences or, more important, that they learn about indirectly through their friends, co-workers, or neighbors. Thus, victimizations that occur outside one's extended network of relationships are unlikely to be given serious attention when a person evaluates his or her risk of victimization and, by extension, should only be weakly related to the fear of crime.

Two basic processes are implicit to the indirect victimization model (Skogan and Maxfield 1981:147–152; see Figure 4–1). First, conversations concerning crime problems are most likely when residents perceive that
there are such problems in the neighborhood. Thus, the degree to which local networks transmit crime-related information is a function of the per-ceived frequency and seriousness of crime in the neighborhood. Second, the level of exposure to indirect sources of victimization is related to the degree to which residents are embedded in these networks.

It is worth highlighting an interesting implication of the indirect victimi-zation model. We have argued throughout this book that the capacity for systemic control is greatest in those neighborhoods whose residents are highly integrated into relational networks. Yet, it is precisely these same networks that facilitate the transmission of crime-related information. Thus, as Skogan (1986:211) notes, those areas in which these stories can spread most widely are also those in which the levels of victimization tend to be fairly low (see also Furstenberg 1971; Skogan and Maxfield 1981).

The systemic implications of the indirect victimization model make it difficult to make direct predictions concerning the relationship between networks of relationships and the fear of crime. On the one hand, one might expect that those persons who are strongly integrated into their neighbor-hoods would be exposed to the greatest amounts of crime news and, as a result, would report the greatest fear of crime. On the other hand, neighbor-hoods with high levels of integration also have greater capacities for collective responses to crime, which may in turn reduce the fear of crime (Gates and Rohe 1987:426). Therefore, the role of the systemic structure in the indirect victimization model is not clear.

Unfortunately, the resolution of this issue is not straightforward, for very few studies have directly measured the central group processes of the indirect victimization model. For example, Taylor and Hale’s (1986) test of the model includes no measures of the degree to which neighborhood residents have been exposed to reports of local crime through relational networks. Rather, they focus on the effect of whether or not the respondent had witnessed a street crime during the last six months. Since this variable is significantly related to the degree to which a person is embedded in local networks as well as the reported level of worry about street crime, Taylor and Hale (p. 173) argue that their findings suggest that “witnessed crime leads to crimes being shared with others ... leading witnesses to inquire about local events from co-residents.” However, their analysis does not provide a direct test of this proposition. Therefore, while their findings are congruent with the vicarious victimization thesis, they certainly are not conclusive.

A number of studies have focused on general perceptions of the neigh-borhood crime rates without restricting such perceptions to those activities which have been witnessed personally. Jeannette Covington and Ralph Tay-lor (1993), for example, find that respondents who have heard about the victimization of other neighborhood households have higher levels of fear. However, several studies have found that the relationship between indirect victimization and the fear of crime is not completely straightforward (see Lewis and Salem 1986:51). For example, Merry (1981:136) observes that the black residents of the housing project she studied learned the identities of both victims and offenders through their personal associations. However, the information networks of the Chinese residents transmitted news only about Chinese victims, thereby making it seem that they were the primary targets of a population with whom they had very little contact and famili-arity. Thus, black residents integrated into informational networks had more of a sense of control than similarly integrated Chinese.

Merry concludes (p. 136) that the manner in which social networks “channel and block the flow of information about crime and criminals significantly influence[s] the way each group perceived the dangers of the project.” Therefore, the effect of integration on the fear of crime may be conditional on the nature of the information that is transmitted through personal networks. Such confounding influences may explain why Ronald Akers and his colleagues (1987) find only a very weak (although significant) relationship between personal fear of crime and the knowledge of neigh-borhood crime among elderly persons living in four communities.

Few studies have examined the full set of neighborhood and group dynamics involved in the transmission of information that are at the heart of the indirect victimization model. The most noteworthy exception is the work of Skogan and Maxfield (1981), which explicitly examines the degree to which the transmission of crime-related information is related to the fear of crime. While their work confirms the prediction of the model that persons who perceive greater problems of crime in their neighborhood are more likely to talk about this issue with others, perceived crime in itself does not guarantee that such discussions are disseminated throughout local networks.
Rather, those residents with strong residential and social ties to the community are significantly more likely to discuss these issues with other neighbors than those who are more weakly integrated into the area.

Skogan and Maxfield examine the effects of these patterns of communication through an analysis of the degree to which their respondents were aware of anyone in the neighborhood who had experienced a burglary, personal theft, assault by a stranger, or rape. Those respondents who talked to other neighbors about local crime problems were significantly more likely to know local victims. In turn, those who had such knowledge were significantly more likely to feel "very unsafe" in the community.

The findings of Skogg and Maxfield concerning the content of information transmitted through local networks have important implications for the evaluation of the body of research that has examined the indirect victimization hypothesis strictly on the basis of neighborhood integration. Albert Hunter and Terry Baumer (1982), for example, present evidence that people who are more likely to recognize strangers in their community and who feel like a part of the neighborhood are less likely to express a fear of crime. Similarly, Covington and Taylor (1991) find that neighbors in which more respondents feel that neighbors would call the police if kids were spray-painting a building have significantly lower levels of fear. On the other hand, Timohy Hartnagel (1979) finds no relationship between neighborhood integration and the fear of crime while studies based on the Greenberg Atlanta data discussed earlier in the book (such as Taylor and Hale 1986; Gates and Rohe 1987) report that highly integrated residents tend to exhibit higher levels of fear.

A key consideration in the resolution of the contradictory findings of these integration-based studies is the manner in which the variable has been measured. Skogan and Maxfield (as well as Hunter and Baumer 1982 and Lewis and Salem 1986) differentiate between social ties (the ease of identifying strangers and local juveniles in the neighborhood, and feelings of belonging) and residential ties (years in the neighborhood, homeowner ownership, and residential expectations). While the Skogan and Maxfield research suggests that the relationship between integration per se and the fear of crime is primarily conditional, they note that the fear of crime has a weakly negative zero-order relationship with the level of social ties. The relationship is even more attenuated when residential ties are considered and is significantly conflated with age (Skogan and Maxfield 1981:116; see also Lewis and Salem 1986:54). Unfortunately, the great variation in the measures of integration that have been used in the indirect victimization literature makes it difficult to directly compare findings. The study of Hunter and Baumer utilizes a measure of integration that is nearly identical to those used by Skogan and Maxfield and by Lewis and Salem. On the other hand, Taylor and Hale construct their measure of community integration on the basis of involvement in neighborhood activities, the likelihood of sharing information with neighbors, perceived similarity with neighbors, and the number of friends and relatives in the neighborhood. Likewise, the integration measure of Covington and Taylor reflects community responsiveness, those of Hartnagel reflect neighborhood activities, and those of Gates and Rohe reflect perceived similarity and neighborhood activities.

Such disparities in the operationalization of the key variables make it very difficult to reach definitive conclusions concerning the effects of indirect victimization. Given the fact that the fuller consideration of these dimensions is impossible, however, it is only fair to assume that to some extent, the fear of crime is a reflection of the neighborhood context of indirect victimization. Thus, it is also apparent that these vicarious effects are not of such a magnitude that they can fully account for the paradoxes concerning the fear of crime that have been noted.

Fear as a Symbolic Response to Neighborhood Disorder

Although the indirect victimization perspective emphasizes the community context of the fear of crime, it still assumes that fear is primarily an emotional response to the perceived likelihood of victimization, based on the combined experiences of oneself and others in the neighborhood. While we have presented some support for this model, it neglects the possibility that the fear of crime may represent in part a symbolic response to a wide range of neighborhood conditions that are not intrinsically crime-related. A second important approach has emphasized the tendency for residents to associate the likelihood of criminal victimization with certain community characteristics that are perceived to be related to a lack of local control in the area. This approach generally has been referred to as the social control model or disorder model of fear (Lewis and Salem 1981, 1986; Greenberg et al. 1985). The disorder model argues that fear is a response to the perception or signs of disorder and activity (such as loitering groups of unsupervised teenagers, vandalism, graffiti, abandoned buildings, and public drug using. Unlike the indirect victimization approach, which focuses on the community response to activities that are intrinsically threatening (such as disorder may not in themselves be especially frightening. However, they certainly symbolize such potential threats to many people (see Warr 1990:903).
The presence of graffiti in a neighborhood clearly illustrates the symbolic implications of disorder. There has been a great deal of debate in the national media concerning the relative status of graffiti as art or vandalism. Graffiti is simply the unauthorized use of public space as a medium for the presentation of messages and, in itself, the application of spray paint to the side of a building is a fairly innocent, although sometimes irritating, behavior. However, graffiti may symbolize certain neighborhood behaviors that residents find very fearful, especially if the messages represent signs of gang activity or territoriality. These symbolic aspects were graphically illustrated recently in Norman, Oklahoma. A resident of a neighborhood that was characterized by a growing concern over the potentially illegal behavior of its adolescents celebrated his birthday by inviting many of his friends to to come to his new house and let their creative juices flow by spraying his backyard fence as an outlet for their 'artistic' talents. Unfortunately, the principal of a local school drove by the yard the next day, noticed the messages and drawings that were displayed on the fence, and called a special meeting of the faculty to inform them that she had observed signs that gang activity was now firmly entrenched in the neighborhood. To paraphrase Marshall McCluhan, the symbolic aspect of graffiti as a medium are much more important to many residents than the actual messages contained in those sprayings.

The relationship between community dynamics and symbols of disorder were discussed extensively in Chapter 2, and there is no need to duplicate that presentation at this point. However, it may be worthwhile to emphasize the central arguments of this perspective. First, it is assumed that the presence of disorderly behaviors reflects the breakdown of accepted standards of public behavior (Lewin and Salmen 1986:xiv). Second, it is assumed that disorder may be perceived by residents as leading directly to increases in crime (Wilson and Kelling 1982:31). Finally, the presence of disorder can lead to a breakdown of community cohesion as residents perceive that conditions in the neighborhood are getting out of control (Skogan 1990b:47). The relationships underlying the disorder model are presented in Figure 4-2.

Recall that earlier in this chapter we noted that fear is an emotional response to a particular situational contingency. Therefore, even though signs of disorder may not in themselves represent the outcomes of illegal behavior (as in the case of groups of unsupervised youth), they can significantly increase the fear of crime in a neighborhood if residents perceive them as harbinger of impending danger (Steinwachs et al. 1980:43). Lewis and Salmen (1986:79) note that fear may particularly increase if residents no longer feel that:

1. Neighbors will adhere to a shared set of expectations about appropriate behavior

2. Private property will be kept up in accordance with commonly accepted standards

3. Public areas will be adequately maintained

4. Access to the community is regulated in order to control the influx of groups, business, and institutions that threaten the integrity of the area

Such community dynamics may significantly exacerbate existing feelings of personal vulnerability in three primary ways. First, the presence of loitering groups of youth is often associated with the verbal and sometimes physical harassment of people using local streets and facilities, especially women and the elderly (Skogan 1979:26-29). Second, symbols of disorder may represent novel social or physical aspects of a neighborhood whose meaning may not be clear to residents who have not experienced them in the past (Wray 1990). As we have argued, a familiarity with one's residential environment is a key element in the sense of control over potentially threatening situations. The emergence of symbols of disorder where none had been previously perceived therefore may undermine this sense of familiarity and lead to increased levels of fear (Skeem and Maxfield 1981:112-115). For example, note that perceptions of undesirable trends in neighborhood conditions are strongly related to the fear of crime. Finally, and perhaps most important, the signs of actual impending criminal victimization are relatively sporadic and transitory during the course of a resident's neighborhood activities. However, as Arthur Stinchcombe and his colleagues note (1978), signs of community disorder are fairly enduring conditions that residents may be exposed to an ongoing basis. Therefore, these symbolic cues may increase overall levels of anxiety by continually reminding residents of the possibility of future victimization.

As opposed to the findings that were presented for the indirect victim-
Fear as Symbolic Response to Neighborhood Heterogeneity

One of the most visible and salient symbols of neighborhood status in the United States is the racial and ethnic composition of the area. Public opinion polls have generally documented an increasing trend in racial tolerance among American whites during the last few decades (see Schuman et al. 1985). In addition, Robert Lichter and his associates (1987) have discussed the significant changes that have characterized television portrayals of blacks (although not notably Hispanic) since the early 1950s. Nevertheless, a large concentration of blacks in a community is considered by many whites to be indicative of an undesirable neighborhood (Berry and Kanaara 1977:22) and crime control in heterogeneous neighborhoods often comes to be defined as "watching for people of particular races and aggressively monitoring the circumstances under which different races come into contact" (Skogan 1990:132). Therefore, it is not surprising that several studies (such as Lizotte and Bordua 1980; Loika et al. 1982; Moeller 1989) have observed that after controlling for the effects of crime rates and other relevant variables, the presence of racial minorities in a community is associated with relatively high reported levels of fear of crime among white residents. We will refer to this as the heterogeneity model (see Figure 4–3).

In part, these patterns of fear reflect the enduring public stereotype held by many whites that crime is primarily committed by members of minority groups (Swigert and Farrell 1976:2). This has especially important implications for the study of the fear of crime, for as Fishman et al. (1987) point out, stereotypes are created in part to predict how members of unfamiliar groups will behave. Thus the belief of many whites that minority groups have a higher propensity to crime would result in a perception that interaction with members of such groups is likely to lead to victimization. Such beliefs are more prevalent than many whites would like to admit. For example, Reynolds Farley and his colleagues (1979) note that 59 percent of the white Detroit residents interviewed in their 1976 study felt that blacks were more prone to violence than whites. More recently, large proportions of the adult, white population of Oklahoma City have reported that on the average, blacks are more violent than whites (48.9 percent of the sample agreed with this statement), more involved with drugs than whites (60.8 percent), and more involved in criminal activity than whites (69.2 percent; Souleiman et al. 1992). It might legitimately be argued that one cannot generalize the patterns of Detroit and Oklahoma City to the nation as a whole.
whole. Yet 56 percent of the white respondents interviewed during the 1991 General Social Survey of the United States expressed the opinion that blacks are more violence prone than whites; 50 percent felt the same way about Latinos (Folwwood 1991).

While the bulk of empirical research has focused on the reactions of whites to the actual or potential presence of minority groups within their neighborhoods, there is good evidence that the fear of crime reported by members of minority groups is also a partial reflection of existing intergroup hostilities. For example, Merry (1981:126-143) reports that many of the Chinese residents of the housing project in which she conducted her study felt that blacks were predatory, violent, and singled Chinese out for victimization. In turn, many of the black residents described the Chinese in similar terms. Very similar group hostilities have been observed among the Mexican, Puerto Rican, Black, and Cuban residents of the Wicker Park Chicago neighborhood (Lewis and Salem 1986). More generally, the findings of Covington and Taylor (1991) indicate that the fear of crime is a declining function of racial and ethnic similarity of one's neighbors.

Growing in the power of the New Right and religiously based social movements such as the Moral Majority during the Reagan era, social problems have come to be increasingly viewed as individual problems of weakness or immorality (Reinarman and Levine 1989:126-127). Thus, as Barry Kosberg (1991) has observed, crime has come to be identified with the activities of evil people. If members of competing racial and ethnic groups are perceived as being especially prone to crime and violence, it is a relatively small inferential step in today's social climate to conclude that members of such groups are inherently evil, thereby exacerbating the existing racial and ethnic schisms in our society. It is no accident that 48 percent of the white respondents interviewed in the Farley et al. (1986) study felt that blacks were less moral than whites. Thus, the actual or potential presence of rival groups within one's neighborhood not only may heighten one's sense of unfamiliarity with a formerly comfortable environment, but may also suggest to some residents that the area has been (or will be) invaded by "evil" populations.

Some sociologists, such as Craig Reinarman and Harry G. Levine (1988), argue that the images of violence that are often attributed to racial and ethnic groups are fostered by the manipulation of public perceptions of these groups. To the extent that this manipulation is deliberate, the heightened fears of crime that may result represent the outcome of an intentional attempt to represent these groups as threatening to a presumed social order. For example, despite the general positive trends in the portrayal of blacks on television noted by Lichter et al. (1987), some very popular shows have thrived on stereotypes of racial and ethnic minorities as criminal/
crime and hostility toward blacks among whites primarily reflects perceived potential economic losses in this market.

The primary implication of the Taub et al. research is that in areas with relatively high rates of crime, deterioration, and dissatisfaction, the fear of crime may lead to a fear of racial change that will be associated with further economic decline. Since this may lead to real estate relocation, these fears may therefore lead to further erosion of community stability and increased neighborhood deterioration. That is, as opposed to the models that have been discussed to this point, the fear of crime is not only an outcome of community dynamics but is also a determinant of those processes. We turn our attention to this issue in the final section of this chapter.

The Fear of Crime as a Source of Neighborhood Change

In Chapter 2 we discussed the degree to which criminal behavior can significantly shape the characteristic system of urban communities. Similar observations have often been made concerning the fear of crime. While high levels of anxiety about crime may lead individuals to avoid certain locations in the neighborhood or to take protective measures, they may also lead to formal and informal collective action directed against the source of that fear (Lavrakas and Herz 1981; Krohn and Kennedy 1985; Gates and Rehe 1987). Harvey Krohn and Leslie Kennedy (1985:698) have identified three basic types of such action: coproduction, which represents interactions between individuals or groups and public agencies with the goal of augmenting or contributing to the provision of urban services pertaining to local levels of crime; ancillary production, which represents individual contributions to the delivery of public services oriented to crime prevention; and parallel production, which represents individual activities that do not involve a public body. Given the arguments that we have made concerning neighborhood participation and systemic control, such activities might be assumed to lead to increasing levels of community integration. That is, the fear of crime would lead to an increase of local solidarity.

On the other hand, three countergaugements can be made to this position. First, there is good evidence that the fear of crime in itself may not be a primary motivating factor that leads to involvement in local activities. Paul Lavrakas and Elias Herz (1982), for example, find that the fear of crime does not significantly differentiate between residents who do and do not participate in neighborhood crime prevention programs. Rather, such participation was an outgrowth of a person's involvement in other broadly based community groups that were not oriented specifically toward crime prevention per se. Similarly, Timothy Hartvigsen (1979) concludes
that there is no significant association between the perception of changes in local levels of crime and neighborhood cohesion.

Another possibility is that high levels of fear of crime actually erode people's willingness to take positive action against crime, either individually or collectively (Skogan 1990:67). Finally, Hartnagel (1979) and Skogan (1990) both suggest that the effect may be curvilinear. That is, while an organized response to crime is not likely in neighborhoods in which the fear of crime is very low, it is also not likely in the most fearful areas in which "demoralization and distrust prevail" (Skogan 1990:69). However, moderate levels of fear may lead to such organization and a resultant increase in integration.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to evaluate the relative accuracy of such hypotheses on the basis of the available research. The simultaneous estimation of the reciprocal relationship between fear and community organization necessitates the use of fairly complex nonequilibrium statistical models. In fact, just as we noted in Chapter 2 in the case of crime, if fear and organization are reciprocally related, then models that calculate only the effects of one variable on another (i.e., either the degree to which organization affects fear or the degree to which fear affects organization) have produced biased estimates of those effects.

There have been some efforts to estimate nonequilibrium models of the fear of crime. D. Garth Taylor et al. (1986), for example, examine a system of equations in which fear and defensive actions (such as walking in groups, the avoidance of public transportation, and the installation of home security devices) are assumed to have simultaneous effects on one another (see also Liska et al. 1988). Likewise, Allen Liska and Barbara Warner (1991) have examined the relationship between city crime rates and changes in personal activities. However, both these studies focus on individual reactions to fear, and the research of Liska and Warner is framed at the city, rather than local community, level. We are unaware of any research that has used such an approach to examine the relationship between the fear of crime and various indicators of the systemic organizational structure of residential neighborhoods.

Conclusions

For over twenty years, criminologists have grappled with the sometimes paradoxical and puzzling patterns of crime-related fear that characterize residents of the United States. To some degree, these efforts have been hampered by inconsistent definitions and measures of the fear of crime, which sometimes has resulted in apparently contradictory findings. Nevertheless, it has become clear that while fear represents a response to the perceived likelihood of victimization to some degree, it also has clearly symbolic dimensions that reflect more general perceptions of residential neighborhoods. Although a great deal of valuable work has been conducted, we are not yet close to a complete understanding of how this complex emotional response is related to local community dynamics. As was the case in each of the previous chapters, the difficulty of collecting reliable and valid data pertaining to the central hypothesized dynamics is one of the most important shortcomings of this body of research. Nevertheless, work in this area has provided a rich set of insights into the neighborhood and crime relationship that are highly complementary to those discussed in the preceding chapters.