

Place, social relations and the fear of crime: a review

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Abstract: This article reviews the literature on fear of crime of interest to the geographical and environmental disciplines. After discussing definitional and methodological issues, the article focuses on accounts which link fear with the physical environment, and then on fear, social identity and exclusion. It considers the significance of one area of recent research that attempts to link place and social relations through developing local ethnographies of fear. The review concludes with some suggestions for building upon this work, and highlights the relevance of the geographical themes discussed to current policy debates.

Key words: ethnographies, fear of crime, physical environment, situatedness, social identity, social exclusion.

I Introduction and scope

This is the third review of fear of crime to appear in this journal (see Smith, 1987b; Pain, 1991). Smith (1987b) first demonstrated the situation of fear of crime in the spatial organization of social relations. Aside from her own work, the geographical aspects of the subject were poorly developed at the time. At the turn of the millennium, the fear of crime has received significantly more attention in the academic literature, general media and in national and local politics. Similarly, debates over its nature, significance and resolution and, most recently, even its very existence, have multiplied. Increasingly, fear of crime is seen as inseparable not only from crime and disorder in western cities, but also from a range of other social and economic problems concerned with housing, employment, environmental planning and social exclusion (relating to poverty, gender, race and so on). Correspondingly, in the policy arena strategies are shifting from fear reduction via specific local ('situational') measures towards holistic approaches. Smith's (1987b: 17) conclusion that fear of crime 'impinges on a wide range of urban affairs, and as such, is particularly suited to scrutiny by the diverse expertise and undervalued eclecticism found within human geography' is just as relevant more than a decade later.

How much has geographical research and theory contributed to the understanding of fear of crime in the period which has elapsed? This article reviews some of the major developments over the last decade in Europe and North America, focusing on interfaces with current areas of interest in human geography. I suggest that geographers have only partly risen to the challenges identified by Smith, and that some of the most interesting recent work around fear, space and place has been employed outside the geographical and environmental disciplines. The article begins by considering definitional and methodological issues, before briefly examining fear of crime in relation to particular physical environments – the dominant focus of early work. As research in this field suggests, much attention has been given in the past to these concrete places at the expense of examining interactions with social influences. A major body of literature on fear and social identities is then reviewed. Here I argue that that fear of violent crime is best understood within a framework of social and spatial exclusion, though the nature of the power relations involved is sometimes obscured by the ‘othering’ of criminals, which takes various forms and is practised at various levels. The final section considers recent ethnographic research that has examined the situated nature of fear of crime and that is beginning to wed together the dimensions of place, social relations and social exclusion. I conclude that this latter work is most promising, and that human geographers might take forward the arguments they contain. A holistic geographical perspective, while no longer the exclusive preserve of geographers, is particularly relevant to current policy debates over community safety.

The review is necessarily selective and aims to reflect areas of research yielding most of current interest to geographers and those working in related disciplines. In particular, two sizeable bodies of literature are not dwelt upon in depth here. The first is work on fear at the neighbourhood level, earlier examples of which are summarized by Smith (1987b). The last section of this article focuses on one area of this literature (ethnographies of fear), which, I suggest, has accomplished analysis of fear at the neighbourhood level most successfully. Nor does this review dwell on research that has attempted to examine the relationship between patterns of fear and actual victimization amongst the general population. Also highlighted in Smith’s (1987b) article, this constituted a key question for fear of crime research until recently. Whatever the scale at which investigation has been attempted – national, local or individual – researchers’ conclusions have differed widely. The logic of comparing ‘objective’ risk and subjective fear is questionable (Young, 1988; Sparks, 1992), and the value of this ‘risk management’ approach to fear of crime has been challenged by Walklate (1995), amongst others. This article begins from the position that attempts to make general statements about the ‘matching’ of fear and crime are conceptually as well as practically difficult; indeed, ‘the assignation of any of the currently available polarities (high/low, warranted/unwarranted, reasonable/unreasonable, appropriate/excessive) is to risk making highly presumptive but theoretically under-justified judgements about the nature of emotions and cognitions’ (Sparks, 1992: 125). While the risk/fear debate itself is therefore not a main focus of the review, fear and risk are necessarily considered in relation to one another throughout the article, for example: the placing of fear by policy-makers in particular environments where risks may be relatively low; new evidence which is emerging about risks of violence for certain social groups; and the associated use of coping strategies individuals may employ.

Three further areas that Smith suggested geographers might focus upon are

encompassed by this review: the effect of social structure, especially gender and age difference; the effects of fear of crime on activity patterns and urban life; and possibilities for fear reduction. Areas highlighted in my review of women's fear of sexual violence (Pain, 1991) have also received further attention in the last decade. These include how identities of class, race and sexuality relate to fear, as well as gender and age; extending consideration of the 'crimes' which may create fearfulness (for example, to domestic violence and harassment); the greater use of qualitative methods; and the development of theoretical links within geography and outside it.

II Definitional issues and changing methodological perspectives

Although a common understanding of 'fear of crime' was taken for granted in early research, different researchers and respondents (as well as others who employ fear discourses) may mean very different things when using the term. Smith (1987b: 2) alluded to this complexity, suggesting that 'broadly, what is being tapped is an emotional response to a threat: an admission to self and others that crime is intimidating; and an expression of one's sense of danger and anxiety at the prospect of being harmed', and noting that fear may be intermittent or constant. However, the generic 'fear of (all) crime' has indistinct meaning, as reactions to burglary, car theft and sexual assault may be as disparate as the crimes themselves (Warr, 1985; Gordon and Riger, 1989) and thus demand sensitivity to different experiences, issues and theorization. This review, which places more emphasis on fear of personal crime as the concern of most recent research in human geography, tries to maintain a distinction between property and personal crime. Despite this it is not always appropriate to consider them in isolation as, for example, some crimes involve both theft and violence (e.g., mugging), while others usually do not yet may still result in a deep sense of personal invasion (e.g., burglary). In addition, the localities and social groups that are at heightened risk of personal crime are often also at higher risk of property crime (Mirrlees-Black *et al.*, 1998).

Further, 'fear' is often unreflective of the broad range of reactions to crime of many people (Kinsey and Anderson, 1992) and, especially when applied to certain social groups, may be interpreted as implying weakness and vulnerability rather than the commonplace resistance with which many people respond. Growing attention is being given to 'fear discourses' – the notion that not only is the problem of fear of crime frequently used for political ends by certain groups and individuals (Sasson, 1995; Garland, 1996), but also that its very existence may have been misunderstood, misrepresented or overstated (Farrall *et al.*, 1997). Based on their own investigation into the unreliability of survey questions, Farrall *et al.* (1997: 676) have recently asserted that 'levels of fear of crime . . . have been hugely overestimated', even that 'there was no "fear" of crime in Britain until it was discovered in 1982' (Ditton *et al.*, 1998: 10).

For the purposes of this discussion, 'fear of crime' describes the wide range of emotional and practical responses to crime and disorder individuals and communities may make. This position accepts that, while a number of fear discourses exist, constructed at the local and national levels and employed for different purposes, people's identification with these discourses (Hollway and Jefferson, 1997; Loader *et al.*, 1998) and their impact on everyday social and spatial life present a tangible social

problem worthy of academic and policy attention. While there is no single accepted definition of 'fear of crime' there is growing awareness that it is not a fixed trait some people have and some do not, but rather 'transitory and situational' (Fattah and Sacco, 1989: 211). In other words, we all move in and out of shades of fear over our life courses, influenced by our own experiences and by spatial, social and temporal situation (Valentine, 1989; Stanko, 1990a; Pain, 1997a). This recognition has implications both for theorizing fear and assessing its extent.

The development of methodological understanding in this field mirrors broader methodological debates in human geography over the last decade. Growing critical awareness of the use of different methods underpins many theoretical developments and differences. This is most obvious in attempts to assess the extent and effects of fear, but also affects understanding of the nature of fear of crime and the ways in which it has been constructed by academics, the media and policy-makers. Smith's (1987b) review of the field was partly prompted by the profusion of new data from local and national crime surveys available by the mid-1980s. These produced a far more extensive picture of both crime and fear than police statistics and other previously available information had been able to offer. In the UK, a number of local crime surveys that followed the first sweeps of the national British Crime Survey offered further detailed information on the social and geographical focusing of crime, identifying blackspots in poorer inner-city areas where fear of crime had become a major social problem (e.g., Kinsey, 1984; Anderson *et al.*, 1990b; Crawford *et al.*, 1990). Since this time the crime survey, usually based on researcher-administered face-to-face questionnaires, has been subject to heavy criticism, and some now suspect that the methodologies frequently employed in fear of crime research in the past have concealed more than they have revealed (Farrall *et al.*, 1997).

A number of epistemological and operational problems have been raised (see Stanko, 1987; Young, 1988; Walklate, 1995). Most fundamental is that 'quick tick' surveys are used inappropriately to quantify human behaviour, given the psychosocial complexities of experiencing and fearing crime. This not only arguably promotes errors in reporting but also exacerbates the tendency for survey analysis to relate what is measured – present-day fear of crime – solely to individuals' immediate social or environmental circumstances. Further common problems lie in how fear tends to be conceptualized (LaGrange and Ferraro, 1987). Differences in definition do not facilitate easy comparison between studies (Hale, 1996). Various assumptions have commonly pre-empted research findings: for example, that fear is a public space phenomenon as measured by the inadequate gauge 'how safe do you feel walking in this area after dark?' (Ferraro, 1995), leading to the risk and fear of crime elsewhere being underplayed (Stanko, 1988). Owing to these criticisms, the national surveys of North American and European countries have been improved with more sensitive and specific questioning about a wider range of criminal events. Many concerns still stand, belying the continuing popularity of the survey approach. Walklate (1997) relates the positivist approach to knowledge production which is dominant in criminology and related disciplines to the modernist project with which they are engaged: the imperative of feeding crime prevention policy with usable information. So, for example, the crime and community safety audits expected of local authorities under the Crime and Disorder Bill 1998 in the UK are expected to result in a rash of new but largely unchanged crime surveys (Ditton *et al.*, 1998).

Meanwhile, qualitative research has been put forward as a way in which the plurality of meanings and nuances in experience of fear can be explored, a challenge first addressed by feminist researchers such as Valentine (1989) and Stanko (1990a), and recently taken up more widely (e.g., Pain 1995b; Hollway and Jefferson, 1997; Burgess, 1998). One of the benefits of a qualitative approach is that it facilitates exploration of fear of crime as multifaceted and dynamic, an emotion which is situated in the local details of individuals' circumstances and life courses (Hollway and Jefferson, 1997) and sensitive to spatial, temporal and social contexts (Pain, 1997a). Such research is unable to measure the extent of fear, or generalize about its experience in isolation. Further, although the qualitative research undertaken to date has encompassed a wide range of methods and approaches, it has still tended to represent more easily accessed sections of the population rather than disaffected and socially excluded groups for whom fear might be most marked. None the less, qualitative accounts are growing in number, have raised new issues and challenged a number of long-standing assumptions and, when considered together, are capable of providing theoretical support about the nature and causation of fear of crime.

While the contributions of quantitative research are also recognized in this article, I suggest that the use of ethnographic studies provides the most promising recent development. Ethnography is a research tool that uses a range of methods, including participant and nonparticipant observation, interviewing and documentary analysis, typically aiming to understand the functioning of a particular community and/or locality (Jackson, 1985). These studies, along with a small number of others in the past (e.g., Merry, 1981), have begun to draw out the situated nature of fear of crime (e.g., Brown, 1995; Taylor, 1995; Evans *et al.*, 1996; Loader *et al.*, 1998). Some are discussed in the final section of this review. They have rarely involved geographers, despite often having an explicit focus on space and place. Ironically, then, it is criminologists who are currently asserting that fear of crime is 'best grasped in an ethnographically intensive way and with careful attention to the question of *place*' (Girling *et al.*, 1998: 305, emphasis in original).

III Fear and the physical environment

The dimension of place that has provided the most common focus of work on fear of crime in human geography and related disciplines is the physical environment (e.g., Smith, 1987a; Van der Wurff *et al.*, 1989; Coleman, 1990; Herbert and Davidson, 1995; Fyfe and Bannister, 1996). This interest is based on the well documented spatial element of many people's fears, confirmed in surveys as well as qualitative studies (Van der Wurff and Stringer, 1988; Valentine, 1990; Pain, 1997b). People commonly report fear of personal and property crime being heightened when they are in particular environments. Typically, research has shown that these are dark, lonely, unattractive or uncared-for places (Warr, 1990; Vrij and Winkel, 1991), and the poor design of subways, housing, streets and so on is often implicated directly. Owing to the urban focus of much early research, this relationship between fear of crime and built environments has been the main emphasis. On a theoretical level, support is offered by Newman's (1972) ideas about defensible space, which were already influencing a generation of planners by the time the problem of fear of crime had been labelled. Residents' perceptions about

crime, as well as about the places they lived in, were central to Newman's thesis (tested on US high-rise estates) that poor design both creates opportunities for crime and decreases residents' territoriality and willingness to use and defend local space. Coleman (1990) extended these ideas in a UK context, claiming to replicate Newman's evidence that rectifying design flaws could have a significant effect in reducing crime and associated problems of fear amongst residents.

However, the principle that fear can be 'designed out' of built environments has been contested. Some of the propositions and problems of situational fear reduction are summarized below, after which some alternative environments to the urban blackspots that have been the usual focus of research are considered. The discussion underlines the assertion developed in later sections that social relations operating in particular spaces and places are more integral to fear of crime than the physical character of particular environments (Painter, 1989; Warr, 1990; Koskela and Pain, 1988).

1 Situational fear reduction in built environments

The situational approach to crime prevention achieved political popularity in the 1980s in North America and a number of western European countries, shifting the onus of crime prevention away from the government and police to focus on the socioeconomic causes of crime (Walklate, 1989). While fear reduction was a later development in most countries, the effort to 'design out' fear of crime, or at least moderate its worst effects by changing built environments, has played a role in many policy initiatives (Vrij and Winkel, 1991; Nassar and Fisher, 1992; Rowe, 1996; Oc and Tiesdell, 1997). Researchers have also sought to examine the impact of visible social controls, or lack of them, upon fear in different environments. Examples include 'visible incivilities' or signs of disorder and sub-criminal activity such as litter, vandalism and youths hanging around (Skogan and Maxfield, 1980; Lewis and Salem, 1986), and, more recently, the effect of streetlighting (Painter, 1989; Atkins *et al.*, 1991; Ramsey and Newton, 1991; Herbert and Davidson, 1995) and closed circuit television (CCTV) (Fyfe and Bannister, 1996; Tilley, 1997; Short and Ditton, 1998). Some strategies have aimed to improve the feelings of safety in public space of certain groups, especially women (Trench *et al.*, 1992; Whitzman, 1992). Evidence of the ability of all these initiatives to reduce crime itself has been mixed, but several authorities maintain that the impact on people's fears about becoming victims is more reliable (Smith, 1987a; Herbert and Davidson, 1995).

However, a lack of consistency in findings about the long-term benefits to feelings of safety characterizes much of the literature on the effects of these schemes. For example, the suggestion that brighter streetlighting will improve feelings of safety assumes that people feel safer if not only potential assailants, but they themselves, can be seen: less of an advantage if assailants are the only people watching (Painter, 1992). Better lighting might also increase fear if it makes signs of disorder more visible (Herbert and Davidson, 1995). Fyfe and Bannister (1996), who found anecdotal evidence supporting fear reduction after the introduction of CCTV in Glasgow city centre, note that this is unlikely to be due to one cause alone and that schemes may have negative effects in promoting bystander indifference and complacency about crime. It is likely that people's perceptions and reactions are more complex than experimental studies have allowed for (see Painter, 1991; Nair *et al.*, 1993). However, proponents have never

suggested that amelioration can be more than local or partial (Herbert and Davidson, 1995), and it is important to recognize that such initiatives may have a range of other intended benefits including satisfaction with local area and community (Bennett, 1991).

Perhaps a more censorious criticism, then, is that the situational approach to crime and fear reduction can be harmful both to people within communities and to wider notions of community, as its worst excesses (generally identified with larger US cities) have demonstrated. Based on Los Angeles, Davis (1992) has mapped an 'ecology of fear', a throwback to the Chicago school models of urban development highlighting containment and exclusion zones, area watch schemes and armed units ready to respond to intrusion of the gated suburbs which now account for an estimated third of all new communities in southern California, largely for the reason of security from crime (Dillon, 1994). Davis argues that these tactics create more fear, isolation and social exclusion rather than less, and that the disbenefits are fewest for the rich and greatest for those already marginalized from urban life. Gilling (1997: 186) too concludes that the situational approach 'at best neglects [fear of crime], and at worst . . . is alleged to contribute to it', through the encouragement of 'mutual suspicion and a profoundly anti-communitarian fortress mentality'.

2 Fear in 'rural' and 'semi-natural' environments

Since the heavily urban focus of much early research, geographers and sociologists have broadened their consideration to fear in rural areas and semi-natural environments. This research tends to reinforce the conclusions from the urban contexts discussed above. A clear distinction in levels of fear of crime has commonly been cited – higher in larger towns and cities (Hough, 1995) and lower in rural areas (Kennedy and Krahn, 1984). However, the rapidly changing nature of rural areas and rising rural crime rates (Povey *et al.*, 1997) are undermining traditional wisdom about fear of crime and leading to significant variations in fear of crime between rural communities (Krannich *et al.*, 1989). Although fear of crime in rural areas in the USA has been related to the spatial nature of farming regions, including distance from neighbours and isolation from police (Bankston *et al.*, 1987; Saltiel *et al.*, 1992), little research has implicated physical environments in constructing fear. Differences in the nature of fear between urban and rural areas may not, in fact, be great. In the UK, studies of rural communities have found fear of crime to be lower than comparable urban surveys, but similarly focused amongst certain groups such as women and council tenants (Shapland and Vagg, 1988; Koffman, 1996).

A growing number of studies have examined people's reactions to 'natural' or semi-natural environments and landscapes both within and outside urban areas, and highlighted the existence of fear of attack in open countryside, woodland, parks and other green spaces (Burgess *et al.*, 1988; Burgess, 1998; Koskela and Pain, 2000). These authors have focused on social relations and as such might have been included in the next section; their research undermines the myth of a 'safe' countryside as opposed to a 'dangerous' city, and has identified that it is not so much fear of 'natural' hazards such as darkness or supernatural spirits that is responsible but the same muggers and rapists as feared by users of built urban spaces (Burgess, 1998). Koskela (1998) makes a related point in her discussion of the 'social night'. The women in her Helsinki study

tended to perceive summer and winter nights as equally dangerous, despite the differences in the amount of light: in winter because of fears that attackers might be hiding in the darkness; in summer because the warmer temperatures mean that more men are around in parks and forests. As Valentine (1989) asserted, many women's fear in particular places is simply fear of men.

3 Physical space, social space and the charge of determinism

Evidence is increasing, then, that particular features of the built environment play a minor role in the constitution of fear of crime. Rather, fear is expressed in particular environments, as their social associations may bring existing fears to the surface. Women's fear of men will not be easily unsettled by correcting environmental flaws (Koskela and Pain, 2000). While in the past the social and physical have been viewed as separate properties of space in the environmental disciplines (Madanipour, 1996), and it has suited policy imperatives to make such a distinction (Walklate, 1989), the fear of crime in particular spaces inevitably has social meaning. Recently, geographers have turned their attention to what and who is feared. This conclusion is a far cry from the determinism for which early accounts of defensible space have been critiqued (e.g., Mawby, 1977; Smith, 1987a; Gilling, 1997). However, to accuse the 'designing out fear' thesis of determinism is not to say that it ignores the social construction of physical space altogether. Planners and architects are increasingly recognizing that relationships between physical, objective space and its social and psychological dimensions are complex and constantly changing (Madanipour, 1996). Planning strategies that aim to reduce fear do so by attempting to encourage people to make more use of particular spaces, in order to break the vicious cycle that currently exists (Oc and Tiesdell, 1997). None the less, as a broad response to fear of crime these strategies can be critiqued for ignoring the social in terms of relations and power which, to an alternative body of literature (discussed next) are central to the construction of fear of crime.

IV Fear, social identity and social exclusion

This literature, developed during the 1990s, places emphasis on the links between social structure, identity, power relations and fear of crime. Prompted by the work of Smith (1986) and Valentine (1989), which marked a divergence from the environment-centred perspectives described above, the work discussed in this section has been carried out by geographers, sociologists and criminologists who have an interest in gender, sexuality, age, race and other forms of social power and exclusion. As such it has congruence with current themes in social and cultural geography: crime, violence, harassment and fear have clear roles to play in the spatial and social exclusion of marginalized social groups. In this introductory section some of the features that characterize this body of literature are identified.

First, the literature largely focuses upon fear of personal crime, especially violence. Evidence is mounting of risks of violent crime that are specific to certain gender, sexual, age and ethnic groups. These forms of violence have been labelled 'systemic violence' (Young, 1990) and 'hate crime' (Herek and Berrill, 1992; Levin, 1993; Jenness, 1997); in

other words, discriminatory violence targeted on the basis of social and/or political identity. Several authors have also considered the effect of low-level abuses such as harassment. Different forms of harassment may or may not create fearfulness, according to the nature and context of incidents but, especially when experienced frequently, these minor abuses may also effectively reinforce social and spatial exclusion (Pain, 1991). This argument was first made about the sexual harassment of women in the workplace, which polices masculinist, heterosexual environments (McDowell, 1995), and has since been extended to harassment in public places and elsewhere, and involving other social groups (Stanko, 1987; Painter, 1989; Gardner, 1995).

Secondly, in contrast to the research discussed in the previous section which focuses on fear of becoming a victim of personal or property crime in public space, this literature has examined a wider range of places, including semi-private places such as the workplace and social and leisure sites, and also the home. For women, children and older people, domestic violence is more common than stranger violence, and there is growing evidence about fear of crime in private space (Stanko, 1988; Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Walklate, 1995). Crime surveys which have examined this dimension of fear have found that high proportions of women feel unsafe in their homes (e.g., Crawford *et al.*, 1990; McLaughlin *et al.*, 1990). Where this fear is of known offenders, it radically influences perceptions and the meaning of this particular space (Pain, 1997b). As geographers have recently argued, for some the homespace is anything but the safe haven constructed in popular ideology and in academics' assumptions about harmonious heterosexual family life (Johnston and Valentine, 1995).

Thirdly, this literature can be drawn together under a common theoretical framework which centres upon social exclusion. For Young (1990), systemic violence is a significant dimension of oppression. Those who feel at risk may experience particular spaces as particularly threatening, and resulting restrictions, segregation and isolation play an important role in maintaining the social and spatial order of the city (most of the literature focuses on urban areas, though constraints may be as great or greater elsewhere). On the other hand, as Sibley (1995) has discussed, there is a general tendency to fear stereotypical 'others' who are marked out by their colour, class or other impurity and whose presence threatens disorder to mainstream life and values. Social 'others' may therefore be simultaneously fearful and feared. The notion of the 'dangerous other' can be seen in the geographical and social distancing of threat which many people employ in order to feel safer – the belief that violence happens to people unlike ourselves, in places we would not use or would use with more care (Pain, 1997b). It is also reinforced by the insistence of many fear discourses on danger in the form of unpredictable strangers. The feminist criminologist Stanko has been a key critic of this tendency which she identifies in crime prevention strategies, particularly advice literature disseminated by the police and other interested organizations (Stanko, 1990b; 1996); in the informal education about danger women and children receive (Stanko, 1990a); and in academic research (Stanko, 1988). Further, as Garland (1996: 461) has outlined, 'criminologies of the other' – the association of danger with 'the threatening outcast, the fearsome stranger, the excluded and the embittered' – are also invoked at the level of governance in order to excite fear and promote support for punitive strategies. This notion reinforces the situation of oppressed groups on the boundaries

of society. Yet, paradoxically, many who suffer violence do so at the hands of people they are intimate with rather than strangers. At the same time the 'other' groups and places frequently demonized as a threat to law and order may themselves be at highest risk of violence and abuse of all. In this way 'othering' can obscure the nature of the power relationships involved in fear of crime – a point returned to at the end of the article.

Fourthly, a number of the debates within this broad literature have centred on the possibility of multiple identities and positioning in relation to violence and fear. While it is well documented that the social distribution of fear of crime tends to follow lines of power and exclusion, individuals may occupy different subject positions at the same time, and the relative importance of each shifts according to social and spatial context. While this theme is evident in research on fear of crime, gender, race and sexuality, the literature on old age provides perhaps the clearest illustration of the ways in which researchers have prioritized one social identity at the expense of others, leading to questionable conclusions which reinforce negative stereotyping of the group concerned. In the remainder of this section, the aspects of social identity that have received most attention in the fear of crime literature are outlined, and those that would benefit from further investigation are identified.

1 Gender and sexuality

The finding that women report being more fearful of crime than men continues to emerge in surveys (Mirrlees-Black *et al.*, 1996; Borooah and Carcach, 1997). Women's fear of sexual violence and harassment underpins their higher fear (Warr, 1985; Gordon and Riger, 1989): as a growing body of feminist research has highlighted, high rates of violence against women are hidden from crime surveys and the public at large (see Stanko, 1987). In feminist social control theory, women's 'well founded fear' (Hanmer and Saunders, 1984) is viewed as a manifestation of gender oppression and a damaging control on women's lives (for a review see Pain, 1991). Exploration of the spatiality of women's fear has focused on the outcomes of this control, particularly the well documented effects of the coping strategies involving social and spatial restrictions that many women employ to avoid harassment and violence (Gordon and Riger, 1989; Valentine, 1989; Painter, 1992; Pain, 1997b). Arguing that the precautions that women commonly take constitute a 'spatial expression of patriarchy', Valentine (1989) has demonstrated how fear reproduces traditional notions about women's roles and the 'places' considered appropriate for them to use (Gardner, 1990). Ideologies and images of sexual danger, supported by the media, rumour, first-hand experience and warnings from others, have a role in constructing fear in public space (Stanko, 1990a; Valentine, 1992; Goodey, 1994). While earlier commentators suggest that a 'conspiracy of silence' on domestic assault is also partly to blame (Hanmer and Saunders, 1984), recent research suggests that women are now more aware of the relative risks of different spaces (Pawson and Banks, 1993) but that this commonsense knowledge does not necessarily affect deep-rooted public space fears (Pain, 1997b).

Recent developments have questioned the emphasis on females as the most fearful gender, and the way in which feminists have represented women's fear. Some studies are uncovering higher rates of male fear than expected. For Gilchrist *et al.* (1998),

accepted wisdom about differences in gendered fear might be another legacy of the inadequate methodology of crime surveys – a well founded conclusion which, none the less, overlooks the qualitative efforts of much of the feminist research cited above. While it seems unlikely given the research evidence that women's fear has been overstated, it is increasingly clear that men's fear may have been seriously understated in the past. Men's low reported fear of crime has always seemed anomalous when, as a group, they experience high rates of violence, particularly from strangers in public places but also from partners and acquaintances (Mirrlees-Black *et al.*, 1998). Male respondents appear unlikely to give answers to survey questions on fear that challenge the image of male invulnerability, meaning their fear of crime is often hidden (Crawford *et al.*, 1990). Where men have been the subject of qualitative research, this suggests that, for some, the effects of fear may be just as great (Stanko, 1990a; Stanko and Hobdell, 1993; Gilchrist *et al.*, 1998). As Goodey (1997) argues, the stereotype of fearless men is also questionable in light of more theoretically informed perspectives which forefront the idea of fear as transient and shifting over the life course, and the concept of multiple identities. Of these she implicates age, race, sexuality and class: boys' fearfulness, which Goodey and other researchers have found ample evidence of, 'is progressively downplayed as normative adult identities are adopted' (Goodey, 1997: 402). The culture of heterosexual masculinity shapes risk, fear and the nature of associated coping strategies and constraints (Stanko and Hobdell, 1993; Walklate, 1995; Goodey, 1997). As yet the spatial dimensions of men's fear of crime are not well developed, though studies such as that of Hay (1993) suggest that fear leads to constraints on behaviour and use of space for a large proportion of urban resident men.

Meanwhile the stereotype of the fearful woman has also been subject to critique. Some earlier radical feminist stances on fear of crime were unintentionally essentialist (Walklate, 1995). To some extent any discussion of women's 'fear' further victimizes them (Hanmer and Saunders, 1993); at the least, it reproduces notions about feminine weakness. Certainly, one effect of the ways in which women's fear has been used is to entrench stereotypes further rather than challenge them. As a result Stanko (1990b; 1996) finds little to help women (in her terms, effective help must mean empowerment) in responses from police and government. As geographers' accounts of marginalized social groups focus increasingly on their resistance as well as oppression, Koskela's (1997) analysis of women's fear of attack in Finland emphasizes that women respond to the threat of crime with 'boldness' and the employment of 'spatial confidence' rather than simply 'fear'.

As feminist research has suggested, compulsory heterosexuality may be the biggest risk to women's safety and is also implicated in men's safety. Homophobic violence against gay men and women on grounds of actual or apparent sexual orientation also appears to be increasing as alternatives to heterosexuality become more visible (Herek and Berrill, 1992). Research suggests that gay men are more at risk in public places (Berrill, 1992), while for women, living a nonheterosexual lifestyle means the home environment is even less likely to be safe (Johnston and Valentine, 1995). Attacks and routine harassment may effectively police the behaviour of those who are seen to transgress the gendered, heterosexual nature of most public and private spaces (Valentine, 1993; Namaste, 1996). The coping strategies documented by a growing number of studies, such as taking care with appearance, avoiding certain places at certain times and not showing affection to partners in public (Von Schulthess, 1992),

reinforce cultural codes governing freedom of sexual expression in public and private space.

2 Age and intergenerational relations

While age, especially old age, provoked much earlier interest in the fear of crime research than sexuality (see Smith, 1987b), it has only recently been analysed as a cultural rather than a chronological category. Given recent evidence that children are more likely to be victims than perpetrators of crime (Anderson *et al.*, 1990a; Hartless *et al.*, 1995), there is growing interest in the direct and indirect impacts of victimization upon them, including fear. Partly prompted by increasing parental concerns about child abuse and bullying (Hillman *et al.*, 1990; De Vaus and Wise, 1996), geographers have begun to explore children's changing use of public space. Dramatic reductions in opportunities for independent play and exploration have been identified (Valentine and McKendrick, 1997), resulting from children's own concerns and talk with other children as well as parental warnings (Anderson *et al.*, 1990a). The predominant message children receive is that these public places are where the threat of violence lies (Stanko, 1990b; Valentine, 1992); coping strategies tend to centre upon the symbolically important image of the predatory stranger, despite most parents knowing that domestic space is the more usual arena for abuse (Pain, 1997b). Constraints imposed by parents are justified by the cultural image of children as 'vulnerable and incompetent in public space' (Valentine, 1997: 37). Stanko (1990a) and Goodey (1994) have stressed the importance of these childhood lessons about danger in identity construction in later life. There are valid concerns, then, that current high levels of parents' fear of abuse, and consequent restrictions on children's behaviour and protection from public space for those who can afford it, will mean future reproduction of entrenched and often damaging patterns of fear of crime (Hillman *et al.*, 1990).

The issue of older people's fear of crime has to some extent journeyed in reverse. Many authors have documented the severe effects fear of crime can have on the mobility, activity patterns and quality of life of older people (Yin, 1980; Feinburg, 1981). The common idea of older people as 'prisoners of fear' parallels constructions of older people in other fields of human geography as 'prisoners of space' (Rowles, 1978). However, just as ageist notions of older people's geographical experiences have been questioned recently (Harper and Laws, 1995), images of older people as irrationally fearful of crime have been deconstructed (Ferraro, 1995), and the status of older people as the group most fearful of crime is now in doubt. Again, the flaws of crime surveys have been highlighted, this time for overestimating fear (LaGrange and Ferraro, 1987), while the risks to which older people are exposed, particularly in domestic space, may be greater than has been recognized (Pain, 1995a). Meanwhile, the biographical context of victimization and fear, and issues of multiple identity have again tended to be ignored when researchers have drawn conclusions; fear of crime in old age is profoundly affected by earlier experiences over the life course, as well as class, gender, race and sexuality (Pain, 1997a). Unlike the other bodies of literature outlined in this section, most discussions of older people's fear have side-stepped the possibility that they might be at risk from age-specific forms of violence. However there are place-specific risks, most importantly the routine harassment of older people in certain high

crime communities, the severity of which Biggs (1996) has likened to racial abuse; and 'elder abuse' in domestic settings (Pain, 1995a; 1999). Both have implications for fear among older people that have not really been explored.

A recent shift is to consider the life course in its entirety, focusing upon intergenerational relations to look beyond the common construction of crime as 'an age war, with young offenders preying on innocent elderly victims' (Mawby, 1988: 101). For many middle-aged and older people, insecurity is bound up with concerns about social change, economic decline and decreasing quality of life (Pain, 1995b), and youth is used frequently as a symbol of all that creates fear in these accounts. Yet in their ethnographic research Brown (1995) and Loader *et al.* (1998) have uncovered more complexity in adults' attitudes, with considerable sympathy for the poor opportunities facing local young people coexisting with concern about their activities. Both studies highlight, too, the very different perspective of young people on adults' disapproval of their use of public space and the vilification of all young people as dangerous.

3 Race and ethnicity

Studies have shown significantly higher rates of victimization for ethnic minority groups (Mayhew, 1989), some of which is inflated by other social or demographic factors, but much of which is experienced because of racial or ethnic background (Commission for Racial Equality, 1987). At the same time, owing to powerful stereotypes existing around race and crime (Lea and Young, 1984), white people's fears often focus on 'other' ethnic groups (Merry, 1981; Taub *et al.*, 1984; Smith, 1986; Chiricos *et al.*, 1997). As Smith (1984) has documented, this is one way of managing and negotiating danger: labelling criminals with certain social identifiers increases personal feelings of power and security. In some localities where public racism is prominent, it provides another dimension of fear that consolidates spatial boundaries and control. Higher levels of fear amongst nonwhite populations result (Walker, 1994; Hough, 1995), and black people living in predominantly white neighbourhoods may be afraid to go out, travel to work or school or carry out other everyday activities (Commission for Racial Equality, 1987; Cooper and Pomeyie, 1988; Bowes *et al.*, 1990). As findings from the Keighley Crime Survey have shown (Webster, 1994), fear of racist attack and harassment defines 'safe' and 'dangerous' territories and provides the main reason for the avoidance of certain areas by both black and white young people. Again, crime and fear are key mechanisms by which space is appropriated and contested (Smith, 1986).

4 Other forms of social exclusion

Most crime surveys have taken little account of disability as a potentially relevant factor in victimization, but it may heighten fear of victimization in ostensibly safe spaces as well as those commonly labelled as dangerous. One London survey found that disabled people were twice as likely to have been attacked or assaulted on the streets as the general population, and three times more likely to have been victimized in private space (Galey and Pugh, 1995). In Pain's (1997b) study of women's fear of sexual violence, those with a physical disability felt more vulnerable to attack and less able to respond to it. They were more likely to employ avoidance behaviour than women

without disabilities, bypassing certain places, people and situations altogether in response to their fear of attack. This focusing of fear of crime reflects and reinforces the discrimination experienced by many people with disabilities using urban space (Imrie, 1996).

Despite caveats about unsafety within the home at the beginning of this section, homeless people are perhaps the most vulnerable group of all, lacking basic physical shelter or private safe space. Studies have found they are more likely to witness or experience violence than the general population, and have identified high levels of fear of further victimization, especially amongst women (Coston, 1995; Kipke *et al.*, 1997). Ironically, homeless people are often vilified as likely to engage in criminal or subcriminal behaviour, and have been amongst those groups targeted by 'safe space' initiatives, their removal designed to make other groups feel more secure (Davis, 1992). A similar lack of physical, social or legal protection from crime available to other groups marginalized from mainstream activities in urban or rural areas, such as sex workers, means that risk and fear may have quite different meanings than for the social groups that are generally the subject of academic attention. Aside from the general observations made by the local crime surveys (Kinsey, 1984; Crawford *et al.*, 1990), there has been relatively little work exploring fear and the variables of class, employment and income. Young men above school age have also featured little in in-depth research, despite surveys showing that they have the highest risk of experiencing violence and a number of other crimes (Mirrlees-Black *et al.*, 1998).

To summarize, the impact of fear of crime is not just upon individual freedoms and activities, but is also sharply focused on particular social groups in particular places, frequently following (and reinforcing) divisions of social exclusion. Yet discourses of fear in common currency construct the problem differently; as one for the middle classes, the aged, the mainstream, who are represented as drawing up social and physical defences against the disorderly, the young, the different and the dispossessed. Such constructions of fear and danger have important roles in invoking support for particular criminal justice strategies (Douglas, 1992); in particular, 'the criminology invoked by the punitive strategy is one of essentialized difference. It is a criminology of the alien other which represents criminals as dangerous members of distinct racial and social groups who bear little resemblance to "us" ' (Garland, 1996: 461). I return to some of these policy implications in the conclusion to this review.

V The situatedness of fear of crime: local ethnographies of fear

Many apparent anomalies in generalizations about the social distribution of fear occur because *where* people live is often more important than *who* they are in determining the extent of anxiety (Smith, 1987b: 6, emphasis in original).

This assertion, made before much of the work on social identity and fear discussed above had been carried out, reflects a strong interest in earlier studies on the 'neighbourhood effect'. Since this time, a number of researchers have continued to investigate the relationship between fear of crime and factors relating to the immediate locality, in particular signs of community disorder. These include the social mix and cohesion of the population, the presence or otherwise of community spirit, mechanisms of local

rumour, the nature of police–community relations, and the presence of visible incivilities referred to earlier in this review (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981; Lewis and Salem, 1986; Smith, 1987b; Taylor and Covington, 1993; Perkins and Taylor, 1996). Rather than detail this research here, my focus in this final section is on one direction taken by recent research at the neighbourhood level, examining what I term the ‘situatedness’ of fear. The review ends with the assertion that this work is amongst the most promising theoretically, as it attempts to wed ideas around social identity and social exclusion with the identity of particular places. The examples described below have employed qualitative and ethnographic methods to examine fear in different localities in the UK.

In this context situatedness refers to the ways in which place, as a site where historical and contemporary economic changes interplay with social identities and relations, has an influence upon the fear of crime of people living locally. In other words, as well as relating to the immediate details of environment and neighbourhood, fear of crime is historically and socially specific. Aside from early work by Merry (1981) and Smith (1986), there have been relatively few intensive community studies focusing on fear of crime which aim to bring these themes together. The endeavour of the studies reported here relates to a growing criminological discourse of ‘crime as everyday life’ (Brown, 1995; Garland, 1996); in other words, not an unusual event but an ordinary experience of western societies, embedded in and shaping routine experience and expectation. As Hollway and Jefferson (1997) have argued from qualitative interviews, fear is situated both in the detail of individuals’ biographies and daily lives, and broader anxieties in a ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992). These recent ethnographic studies in different parts of the UK are beginning to forge understanding of the ways in which fear of crime is embedded in changing local social geographies. They tend to emphasize one or more sets of social relations (generally class, age or race), and several highlight the central importance of labelling crime and criminals as outsiders to people’s sense of security and community.

Events in the history of communities and earlier in individuals’ life courses are given prominence in some studies. Brown (1995) situates adult fears of young people’s behaviour in the declining economic situation of Middlesbrough’s council estates, invoking both the concept of life course and distinct experience of place: ‘a sixty year old East Middlesbrough resident is likely to have known an early adult life of relative economic and spatial stability, followed by a move to out of town estates and the accompanying disruption of social networks, followed immediately by the disappearance of job and income’ (Brown, 1995: 43). In a study of older people in northeast England, Pain (1995b; 1997a) seeks to show that ‘fear of crime is not simply a product of elderliness, but rather is shaped by the particular relationships which elderly people have with differing local communities and cultures’ (Pain, 1995b: 98). Older residents of an affluent commuter estate, an ex-mining town and a deprived area of public housing were all concerned about rising crime rates, but the impact varied according to their ability to distance criminals as ‘different’ from the local community and immediate neighbours. Further, risk was perceived as gendered and responses to crime were conditioned by existing household gender relations.

Others have focused upon contemporary social and economic conditions. Evans *et al.* (1996) examine how residents manage fear of crime in two high crime, inner-city areas of Salford, which are geographically and socially isolated but which have strong local identities and where ‘being local’ matters. These are precisely the sort of communities

that do not usually feature in or benefit from government-sponsored crime prevention or community safety initiatives, but the authors identify different levels of community here, and a competing definition: 'in Oldtown your *place* in relation to crime *places* you in a community of belonging and exclusion' (Evans *et al.*, 1996: 379, emphasis in original). It is not the police or local authority that is seen to protect residents but other residents, local families and, for some, the 'Salford Firm', an influential local gang; 'moreover, it is the absence of confidence in the formal agencies which creates the space for these other forces to come into play' (p. 379).

In contrast, Taylor (1995) focuses upon the meaning of crime to middle-class residents and the ways in which they manage fear in Hale, Manchester, exploring this through residents' everyday talk about crime and representations of crime such as those in local press reports. He concludes that while middle-class Victorian suburbs are not usually considered areas of high fear of crime in the UK, they have become far more so during the 1990s, the lives of people who inhabit them becoming more privatized and protected from outsiders as a result. Fears tended to focus on strangers on the streets, encouraged by crime prevention literature and the local media. While analysis of new social movements has tended to represent these as radical and progressive, the fear of crime is creating or sustaining reactionary, defensive movements in many places (Taylor, 1996). Yarwood and Edwards (1995) have made a related point with regard to fear of crime and voluntary action in rural areas.

Loader *et al.* (1998) also examine fear in 'middle England' in the shape of Macclesfield, historically a silk-weaving town which has more recently transformed into the home of multinational corporations and commuter town prosperity, with a resultant mix of residents. Their conclusions are based on a range of ethnographic methods including analysis of documentary sources and representations of crime, observation, participation, biographical interviews and focus groups. The authors argue that, while places are not separate from processes in the wider world, a distinct sense of place and the way in which this changes with local economic and cultural fortunes, and varies for different sets of people, underlies the meaning of crime in people's lives (Girling *et al.*, 1998). So, for example, the 'youth problem' frequently cited by respondents in this and other studies is here seen as symbolic of the concerns of some over Macclesfield's changing economy and their own place within it, as well as concerns over the decline of the 'national community' (Loader *et al.*, 1998). Likewise crime is increasingly important amongst the factors that shapes one's sense of place. Such studies support geographers' assertion of the continuing importance of the local in a changing global context in shaping people's everyday spatial and social lives, as well as situating previous locality studies of crime in a wider theoretical context.

VI Conclusion and agenda

This article has sought to update Smith's (1987b) review of fear of crime and my own review of women's fear of sexual violence (Pain, 1991) by summarizing some of the most interesting developments in the field during the period that has elapsed. A widespread critique of work on built environments is that, in the early years of research on fear of crime, it diverted attention from the social and political causes of fear. However, while much of the burgeoning literature on social identities of gender,

sexuality, age and race invokes concepts of spatial and social exclusion, the importance of *place* and *community* have often been bypassed. I have suggested that the most successful recent accounts of fear of crime are those that have begun to consider these influences together, emphasizing the situatedness of fear in its broadest sense. Most of these have not involved human geographers. With the help of more sensitive methodologies, researchers are beginning to forge more holistic accounts of the fear of crime: as a phenomenon which varies between individuals; which has geographical, economic, social, cultural and psychological dimensions; which is influenced by a whole range of processes and relations scaled from the global, national and local to the household and the body; and which is rooted in place and variable between places. In the remainder of this conclusion I suggest that such accounts might form the basis for future investigation in human geography, as well as providing a basis for contributing to current policy debates.

In particular, the ideas contained in this review centring on social exclusion, 'otherness' and community reflect recent themes in social and cultural geography. While it is appropriate to situate research in particular neighbourhoods and environments, it is also necessary to integrate developing understanding of social and political identity. Further research is needed on systemic violence, particularly where this tends to be hidden, and on implications for risk, fear and identity among certain social groups and communities.¹ Social groups currently excluded from research require particular attention in future theorization of fear of personal and property crimes. For example, there remains little on the experiences of disabled people, the mentally ill, homeless people or sex workers, and young men, who are perhaps most at risk from crime, are commonly excluded from research. There is also potential for examining fear in settings other than the high-profile, high-crime urban areas that have tended to be the focus of research to date. Little of the relatively sparse literature on the nature of rural fear has dwelt on diversity and difference between or within rural communities (Bankston *et al.*, 1987), nor examines the significance of 'rurality' in the context of crime, sense of place and the ways in which these affect residents' perceptions of safety. Much might be revealed by employment of the ethnographic methods now being used in urban areas. As Yarwood and Edwards (1995) note, much social research in rural areas bypasses the experiences of rural 'others' (Cloke and Little, 1997), largely giving a male, middle-class view – one which, based on urban evidence, is unlikely to uncover significant issues of fear of crime.

Further research in human geography should retain a critical awareness of policy issues. Geographical concepts are widely employed in the critical literature on the development of policy in the area of crime, fear and community safety. Expanding policy debates in North America and western Europe centre on the problems of social and spatial exclusion, as well as employing contested concepts such as 'neighbourhood' and 'community'. There has been a tendency in social policy to spatialize the problems of crime, disorder and fear, locating them within the fabric of the city centre, for example in the widespread use of the situational approach to crime prevention which was critiqued earlier in this article. While fear of crime has furthered the exclusion of certain groups from the shared spaces of social life, strategies which have aimed to draw them back in have sometimes persecuted or excluded other marginalized groups (Davis, 1992; Gilling, 1997; Oc and Tiesdell, 1997); the mechanisms stemming from fear of crime which exclude people from public spaces are created by both powerful groups

and the dispossessed (Young, 1998). For example, reassuring female evening leisure-seekers in town centres can mean restrictions on access for homeless people or those who drink alcohol – exclusion that may put some of those who are routinely objects of fear in greater personal danger elsewhere. Ultimately, this labelling may not serve to reduce crime significantly, partly because much crime is committed not by outsiders but in the home and, partly, as Young (1998: 79) identifies, because ‘the policing of the core areas . . . aimed at removing uncertainties, of sweeping the streets clean of alcoholics, beggars, the mentally ill and those who congregate in groups . . . is an actuarial police . . . moving on the inappropriate rather than arresting the criminal’. For Young, this ‘cordon sanitaire’ approach is doomed to failure.

Recently, the concept of ‘community safety’ has replaced ‘crime prevention’. ‘Community safety’ can be defined as broader threats to the security and safety of the public which arise from criminal activity and related problems, and must be tackled in a sustainable and holistic manner that empowers local communities (Hirschfield and Bowers, 1998). In theory such approaches now encompass a broader range of problems, are appropriate for high-crime localities and involve consultation with people about their own concerns and neighbourhoods. However, as yet it is not a perspective that has reached maturity, and in many of its manifestations continuity with earlier approaches can be found (Gilling, 1997). The shift continues the long-term trend of devolution of responsibility for crime and fear reduction from the police on to communities which, as some have noted, may itself increase fearfulness (Gilling, 1997). Yet little thought has been given to what ‘community’ means or who it stands for (Evans, 1995). ‘Community’ assumes common interests while, as this review has shown, different groups with divergent concerns about crime frequently inhabit the same geographical area. As evaluations of Neighbourhood Watch in the UK and similar community-orientated schemes elsewhere have shown, such notions of community may benefit stable white middle-class localities (Donnison *et al.*, 1986; Walklate, 1989; Bennett, 1990), but this represents successful fear reduction for the least fearful and least at risk from crime. Similarly, in more heterogeneous high-crime areas those who populate community panels and whose views are represented in other local organizations and initiatives are frequently white, older and/or middle-class, so that ‘young people in local – communities? – become successfully defined as the “criminal other”’ (Brown, 1995: 47), to the detriment of young people’s safety and ultimately the cohesion of the community itself.

The geographical perspectives of much of the research reviewed here, then, will continue to have relevance to efforts to conceptualize and resolve the fear of crime and the broader problems of which it is part. Different forms of social exclusion, reflected and perpetuated in constructions of space, are central to these problems. Inclusive safety planning is a key challenge for the early years of this new century, and one to which it is hoped that human geographers will contribute.

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Note

1. Several important contributions in this field were aired at a session on 'Geographies of fear/violence' at the RGS-IBG conference in January 2000.

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