THE 'FEAR OF CRIME-MEDIA FEEDBACK' CYCLE

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Abstract

The fear of crime phenomenon is widely documented and studied in criminology; from the tools that formulate and amplify it to the effects it has on the individual. It is unusual, then, that prior to the last couple of years, few have commented on the positive effects of the fear of crime. More confounding still is the fact that, despite many studies being conducted on the effect of the media on fear of crime, scholars have thus far failed to acknowledge the media's role in the possibly positive, crime reducing effects of the fear of crime. This paper attempts to make a small step in redeeming this failing in criminology, and proposes a 'Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model', whereby the media influences levels of fear in its audience and affects their routine activity, thereby affecting their exposure to potentially victimising situations by encouraging avoidance behaviour; influencing people to remain in their home as opposed to venturing onto the streets.

While the model is currently hypothetical, further research into its plausibility as a crime reducing tool is proposed, potentially providing a method of reducing victimisation risk in the public with use of crime media.

Key words: Fear of crime • Mass media • Avoidance behaviour • Functional fear • Crime control

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Fear of crime is a widely recognised criminological phenomenon. As Warr (2000:452) explicates, 'criminal events, at their most elemental level, are *frightening*[2]'. While this is almost undeniable, would it be possible to suggest that this may be positive, rather than simply detrimental, to public safety? Jackson and Gray (2010:16) explain that 'previous research on the fear of crime has focused almost exclusively on the negative, on the damaging face of public anxieties, on the corrosive impact of public perceptions of risk on health and well-being'. While psychological studies have speculated upon and researched possibly positive effects of fear (e.g. Tallis et al., 1994; Gladstone and Parker, 2003; Holoway et al., 2006), only recently has criminological research begun to explore fear's potential benefits (e.g. Warr, 2000; Jackson and Gray, 2010; Gray et al., 2011). These more recent studies suggest that behavioural reactions to fear (DuBow et al., 1979; Garofalo, 1981) may be useful in promoting 'functional fear', which 'encourages vigilance and stimulates precautionary activity' (Jackson and Gray, 2010:2). As is stated by Skogan (1987:152), 'in other contexts, the ability to change to alter one's behaviour in light of experience is called "learning"'. While recent research observes the possibility of functional fear, a failing thus far is that none appear to study the possible role of media influences in maintaining a functional amount of fear, despite often being cited as one of the most influential amplifiers of public fear of crime (Doob and Macdonald, 1979; Jewkes, 2011). Conversely, Cashmore (2012) proposes that not only do the media have a strong effect on levels of fear and, therefore, levels of avoidance behaviour, but also that the Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model may potentially contribute to falling levels of victimisation experienced internationally since the mid-1990s.

Some scholars comment on the semantic ambiguity of 'fear' when applied to people's attitudes towards crime and its likelihood. Gunter (1987), for instance, claims that there is a distinction to be made between the conceptual judgement of fear of crime and people's perceptions of their likelihood of being victimised, as some may perceive themselves to be at high risk of criminal incidents, yet remaining unafraid. There is also a distinction to be made between concepts of 'fear' or 'worry' and of 'concern' or 'anxiety' (Warr, 2000; Gray et al., 2011). Fear is said to concern immediate danger to the person, in such a situation as traversing alleyways at night, when fear of immediate threat is present. Concern, on the other hand, are concepts used to describe anxiety and fearing high risk of future events, and are far more thoroughly documented in literature on fear of crime. Gray *et al*. (2011) add that fear and worry refer to prior victimisation of an event, rather than the possibility and perceptions (from indirect sources of information) of the likelihood of future criminal victimisation. Despite semantic debate, questions surrounding 'potential danger to self and/or other, fear, risk, concern, worry, anxiety or behaviour are at times considered to be about "fear"' (DuBow *et al*., 1979:1). It is important to note, then, that this paper's use of the word 'fear' concerning crime refers to people's anxieties towards the possibility of future victimisation.

Firstly, this paper supports the argument that the media, being the primary source of information for many, has a profound effect on public fear of crime. It then introduces the hypothetical 'Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model' and its potential for positively influencing problem solving action by individuals affected by fear of crime to reduce their risk of victimisation. The paper also critiques the traditional scholarly perceptions that fear of crime is a solely negative concept that requires reduction, rather than balance. Despite its potential benefits when considering on-street offending, the Fear of Crime-Media Feedback cycle may have a detrimental effect on inter-personal violence and domestic abuse; effects

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[2] Emphasis present in original text

that are explained and discussed. Finally, some of the other possible shortcomings of the model are offered in order to encourage critical scholarly discussion about the plausibility of the model, its potential for encouraging positive, problem solving action, and whether it should be acted upon in attempts to further reduce criminal victimisation, potentially contributing to the continuation of the international crime drop.

The impact of the media on fear of crime

Skogan (1987) stated that a high level of fear of crime often appears not only in those who are more likely to be victimised, such as the poor and those living in inner city areas, but also those who enjoy comparatively low levels of recorded victimisation, such as women and the elderly. If there is a high level of fear in those who are unlikely to be a victim or even a witness to a crime, information about crime must originate largely from indirect sources (Williams and Dickinson, 1993). Graber (1980) found that 95% of the American public cite the mass media as their primary source for information about crime, and 75% of his respondents believed that the media's depiction of crime was accurate. Skogan and Maxfield (1981) also found that 75% of respondents read or watched a crime story on any given day, claiming that direct experience only accounts for a minute portion of the fear of crime, people instead relying on the media for their information. This view is widely supported by scholars, for example Warr (1994) arguing that people are far more likely to see violence via the media than to be directly victimised.

Crime, however, receives a large amount of coverage in newspapers and television broadcasts as serious and rare crimes have a high amount of newsworthiness (Warr, 1994), bringing to mind the anecdote that 'crime sells'. As such, serious, violent crime types (e.g. homicide; assault), are over-represented in news cycles. Indeed, Warr (2000) argues that the general rule of crime broadcasting is that the more serious a crime is, the less frequently it happens and the more frequently it is reported, meaning that images of crime seen in the mass media do not accurately reflect the realities of crime in general society (Doob and Macdonald, 1979). Thus media reporting of crime should be described as a prism, 'subtly bending and distorting the view of the world it projects' (Jewkes, 2011:41). Williams and Dickinson (1993), for instance, found that 65% of newspaper crime reporting involved violent crime, despite these types of crime making up only 6% of recorded crime, and the development of media technologies has led to even higher public awareness of their risks of victimisation (Walklate and Mythen, 2008). Glassner explained on Michael Moore's documentary film 'Bowling for Columbine' (2002) that, in his research, at the same time that homicide rates fell by 20%, the news coverage of murder rose by 600%. Herein lies an issue that some commentators have discussed: that even when people are misinformed, they remain adamant that their information is correct and that they are aware of their risk (Warr, 2000). As a result of this, compounded with the often non-specific nature of the media's representation of crime, people tend to generalise information that they gain from news sources (Doob and Macdonald, 1979), over-sensitising them to their risk of victimisation (Jewkes, 2011). Indeed, the over-representation of crime in the media has been said to escalate fear of crime in the public, made worse by the disproportionately high coverage of serious direct victimisation crimes such as violent assault and homicide as opposed to robbery, burglary or theft (Graber, 1980). This may not be entirely true, as an American study showed that, while 86% of Americans believed crime to be increasing, only 47% believed it to be rising in their area, perhaps leading to the assumption that the lack of context specificity in much of the media's crime information allows people to disassociate themselves from the danger (Skogan, 1986). It

would be equally sensible to suggest that, while they may not believe crime to be increasing in their area, people may still fear victimisation.

Because of its over-representation of frightening, serious but rare crime types, many of those who commentate on fear of crime claim the media as a major culprit of its amplification (Jewkes, 2011). Warr (1994:1), for example, states that most people will 'never experience violent victimisation directly but will instead learn of such events…through news and other depictions of violence in the mass media'. Gunter (1987:5) also states that 'distorted beliefs about crime, which generally mean overestimates about the incidence of criminal activity in society, are hypothesised to give rise also to exaggerated anxieties about falling victim to crime'. This is especially problematic when considering Graber's (1980) findings that 75% of the public believe that the media's representation of crime is an accurate reflection of its real life prevalence. Chiricos *et al.* (2000) claimed that 'the frequency of…news consumption is significantly related to fear of crime', which may be supported by Warr's (2000) argument that a positive correlation between levels of fear of crime and number of television hours consumed exists. This is supported by Gerbner *et al.*'s (1976) claim that heavy viewers of television overestimated the prevalence of violent crimes.

It is difficult to argue, then, that the media has no effect on public levels of fear. And while traditionally scholars have argued the fear amplifying effect of the media to be a negative and damaging issue, this paper would argue that fear has the potential to inspire positive action by individuals and communities to reduce their risk of victimisation.
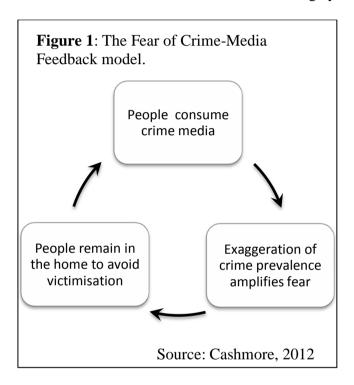
The effect of the fear of crime

The five behavioural responses to fear of crime, first outlined by DuBow *et al*. (1979), are widely accepted as standard precautions taken by individuals (and communities) to reduce their likelihood of victimisation. This paper observes individual avoidance behaviour, with specific focus on increased household activity and withdrawal from public life. Box *et al*. (1988:341) explain that 'for those fearing victimisation, each excursion beyond the relative safety of home is like walking through a minefield − at any moment, a purse may be snatched, a body assaulted, a sense of dignity affronted'. As such, people often avoid leaving the home as it is where they generally feel safest (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981), minimising their exposure to possible on-street victimisation from such serious, rare crimes as muggings or murders that are often over-sensationalised by the media (Goodstein and Shotland, 1982). Dubow *et al*. (1979) observed that the effect was even more apparent at night, when people would be more afraid to traverse even their own neighbourhood through fear of victimisation. As Warr (1994:1) astutely asserts, 'the mere prospect of becoming a victim will be sufficient to produce voluntary or involuntary changes in behaviour or lifestyle'. These behavioural restrictions, while traditionally being perceived through a 'singular lens' of negativity (Jackson and Gray, 2010:4), have recently come under criminological revision.

Jackson and Gray (2010) use the term 'functional fear' to explain that a certain level of fear of crime is desirable in order to inspire problem solving action and encourage the fearful to take measures in minimising their own risk. Despite many psychological studies having already explored this (e.g. Tallis *et al.*, 1994; Gladstone and Parker, 2003; Holoway *et al*., 2006), relatively few observations have been made in criminological study (e.g. Warr, 2000; Jackson and Gray, 2010; Gray *et al.*, 2011). Gray *et al.* also describe the problem solving attitudes that fear may inspire; 'prompting vigilance and routine precaution' (2011:77). Jackson and Gray (2010) even comment on the fact that many of those they interviewed felt

safer as a result of precautions they had taken to avoid victimisation. While these recent attempts are the first in criminology to focus to developing discussion concerning the positive aspects of fear, Garofalo explained in the 1980s that 'avoidance can result in decreasing the amount of crime that the person is exposed to and, therefore, his or her risk of being victimised' (1981:850).

As previously mentioned, however, the media's role in positively affecting fear of crime is thus far relatively unconsidered by these scholars. Liska *et al*. (1988:832) explained that 'fear increases constrained behaviour which in turn increases fear. They are part of an escalating loop'. If this is so, and if it is true that the media has an effect on fear of crime (Jewkes, 2011), it would surely suggest that the media plays an important part in this loop. Cashmore (2012) first introduced the revised 'Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model'[3] proposed in this paper, which explains the function of the media within the escalating cycle of avoidance.

Figure 1: The Fear of Crime-Media Feedback model.

People consume crime media

Exaggeration of crime prevalence amplifies fear

People remain in the home to avoid victimisation

Source: Cashmore, 2012

To explain, the Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model assumes that people consume information about crime through television shows (e.g. Crimewatch UK), news programmes, newspapers and via numerous other media sources. These sources over-represent serious, rare crime types, which over-sensitises people to their risk of victimisation (Jewkes, 2011), and this insecurity leads to fear amplification in those who consume such crime media (*ibid*.). As a result, people restrict their activity to a greater degree to minimise risk of on-street victimisation, preferring the relative safety and familiarity of their home to the potential dangers of public places and establishments (Garofalo, 1979; Goodstein and Shotland, 1982; Box *et al*., 1988). By spending more time in the home, it could be speculated that people then consume more crime media through watching television, reading newspapers and other forms of indoor entertainment in the home, which reinforces the feedback cycle.

Looking at this model from a Routine Activity Theory (RAT) perspective, the fear of crime does have crime-reducing potential. Since RAT asserts that the three fundamental

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[3] Originally called the 'Fear of Crime Cycle'

components necessary for a crime to occur are (1) a motivated offender, (2) a vulnerable target and (3) the absence of a guardian capable of preventing the offence (Felson and Boba, 2010), the removal of one of these factors would surely result in changes in offending behaviour. And since changes in routine affect changes in crime (*ibid.*), restrictions in activity as a result of fear of crime are likely to affect crime.

Garofalo (1981:850) stated that 'avoidance can result in decreasing the amount of crime that the person is exposed to and, therefore, his or her risk of being victimized'. This prospect would appear sound from a RAT perspective. If the Fear of Crime-Media Feedback is plausible, it would suggest that more people remain in the home for more time when crime media has been consumed and has increased fear of victimisation. If this is true, it would be logical to assume there to be a deficiency of potential offenders and, more likely, potential victims for on-street victimisation crimes, such as assault (Fattah, 1993). If there are fewer targets for victimisation, fewer potential perpetrators to victimise, or a deficiency of both of these, this would likely reduce the convergence of these two RAT crime components, thus minimising the opportunity for direct contact offences to occur (Cashmore, 2012).

A similar absence of RAT components of crime opportunity may also be applied to property crimes such as burglary. While there may be a reduction in the on-street availability of capable and motivated perpetrators for these offences, the increased presence of guardians within the home is possibly the more effective crime preventing variable in property crimes. Since it is widely accepted that burglary is most likely to occur when there is no-one in the home (Scarr *et al.*, 1973; Maguire, 1982; Wright and Decker, 1994), it would be safe to assume that if people remain in the home more as a result of attempting to avoid on-street victimisation, an unintended benefit of their actions may be a reduction of burglary (Cashmore, 2012). As Felson and Boba (2010:28) explain, 'a guardian is not usually someone who brandishes a gun or threatens an offender with quick punishment, but rather someone whose mere presence serves as a gentle reminder that someone is looking', meaning that the mere presence of someone within the home because of avoidance behaviour will probably have an effect on the likelihood of falling victim to burglary.

While this may be true, the presence of someone in the home would not likely be a deterrent to home invasion offences. Although these may be less common than empty-home burglaries, the Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model is unlikely to have a positive impact on this offence type. In fact, there may be an increase in this form of offending resulting from less opportunity for potential perpetrators of burglary to enter an unoccupied home, having instead to resort to burgling a home while there are occupants present. This is especially problematic when considering the fears of a respondent in Gilchrist *et al.*'s research (1998:287), who stated that 'it's the thought of them coming into your house while you're in the house that worries me more'. This would limit the effectiveness of the presented model and would certainly present the need for additional measures to be taken by individuals. Having said this, the presence of numerous occupants may act as a deterrent, giving potential offenders the impression of more capable guardianship of a property. Also, compounded with other such reactions to fear of crime, such as tight knit communities and security systems, potential offenders may be deterred from attempting home invasion as it increases the risk of being caught.

The media's fear-amplifying effect is said to bear most influence over and inspire the most constrained behaviour in those who are least likely to be victimised, such as women (Skogan, 1987). A substantial amount of scholarship has concentrated on discrepancies in fear of crime

between genders (see Rader *et al.*'s literature review, 2009). Schafer *et al.*'s study (2006:29), for example, found that 'female respondents were significantly more fearful [of personal victimisation] than males'.

Rader *et al.*'s (2009) research into the differences in behavioural alterations exhibited by males and females as a result of fear of crime may provide a base for a more gendered development of the Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model proposed in this paper. They discuss (among other behavioural effects), the differences in levels of constrained behaviour seen between the sexes, observing that 'women have significantly higher levels of most constrained behaviours than men' (Rader *et al.*, 2009:288). This paper would recommend developing an in depth study to centre specifically on this aspect of Rader *et al.*'s gendered research, paying particular attention to questions of:

- Whether the suggested differences in levels of constrained behaviour taken are a realistic depiction or if males are simply less likely to report constrained behaviour than females,
- Why (if the differences found are a realistic depiction) there is such a discrepancy between the behaviours of men and women in response to fear of crime,
- Whether there is a correlation between perceived risk, constrained behaviour and amount of time spent watching television (and the differences in these results between genders),
- What genres of television (and other forms of media) are consumed most frequently by each gender and whether there is a compelling link between this and amount of constrained behaviour exhibited by males and females.

As females are seen to report more constrained in-home behaviour than males, it is reasonable to suggest that, if the model presented is true, they will watch more crime television. If this is the case, it would be fair to say that this model may affect females more than males and therefore potentially reduces their likelihood of victimisation. This would be supportive of Skogan's (1987) statement that those less likely to be victimised experience more fear of crime. As this paper is to explain the premise of a new Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model, the differences in its effect on men and women will not be explored in great depth, though the paper would encourage further developments into using the model in a manner that would explore the differences in its effect on each gender.

Elderly people also exhibit higher amounts of fear while experiencing lower levels of victimisation (Skogan, 1987). This is arguably due to the fact that there are fewer social obligations for the elderly to fulfil; meaning in-home activity may be increased, reducing their likelihood of victimisation (DuBow *et al.*, 1979). Liska *et al.* (1988) found that, in people over 70, there is little constrained behaviour as a result of fear but much fear as a result of constrained behaviour, perhaps supporting the Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model, as the elderly are likely to watch more television when constraining their behaviour.

Much like the elderly, there are potentially fewer social obligations on students or the unemployed in daylight hours, without having to go to work (where they would be unlikely to be personally or violently victimised). The model may therefore have a more noticeable and recordable impact on these individuals during the day than on someone in full time employment. While this may be perceived as constraining to the everyday activity of these individuals, it would potentially be crime-reducing for these groups, being able to protect themselves and their property through reduced outdoor activity. Having said this, students and the unemployed do have some social requirements during the daytime. Students, for example, must attend university as a part of their education, while the unemployed must

attend job centres in order both to find work and to receive benefits. While they will not spend all of their daylight hours in the home due to these requirements, if the Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model is plausible, it could be speculated that they would remain in the home for substantially more hours in the day than full time workers (rather than leaving the home unattended and exposing themselves to the possibility of on-street victimisation). A similar case could be made for the increased amount of indoor activity at night, with perhaps fewer social obligations than during the day time, as well as a heightened sense of fear when considering traversing neighbourhoods due to crime information consumption (Dubow *et al*., 1979).

It may be more difficult to apply the Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model to young people (children and teenagers). Since young people are often less receptive to crime media messages (possibly not being permitted by parents to consume mature television and video games and children not wishing to watch news programmes), there is potentially less of a role for the Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model to play on them directly. Instead, it is possible to suggest that young people, many of whom being brought up with easy access to entertainment media technologies and the internet, spend much of their time indoors as the internet provides a more effective and networked form of communication and subculture (Cashmore, 2012). It is perhaps more logical, therefore, to explore the explanation that young people have become accustomed to using high-quality entertainment and communication technologies and not relying solely on outdoor entertainment sources.

Despite this hypothesis being viable, the Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model could have an indirect role to play within the activities of children and young people. Whereas they themselves may not be particularly receptive to negative media messages, it is possible, with media overrepresentation of serious, rare crime types such as child abduction, that parents watching more television indoors may be inclined to place stricter constraints on their children's behaviour. This may include earlier curfews and ensuring that children do not stray too far from the home (without supervision or at least accompanied by a friend, thereby increasing perceived capable guardianship). This could mean that, while young people are being kept safer from external victimisation sources as a result of constrained behaviour imposed by fearful guardians, their 'quality of life' is not damaged as they themselves do not have high amounts of fear. The Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model could therefore be argued to have a positive indirect effect on young people.

This paper does not suggest that people should spend all of their time within the home. On the contrary, even with the vast improvements to communication technologies making remaining in the home arguably less socially isolationist, the differences between socialising in online communities vastly differ from offline communities. Instead, this paper would suggest that, with a multitude of digital communication and entertainment technologies, people may remain within the home for more hours – especially during night hours when there are fewer social and professional obligations (DuBow *et al.*, 1979) – instead of engaging in alternative, outdoor entertainment that may prove hazardous without becoming bored or feeling overly isolated (Cashmore, 2012).

Gunter (1987) suggested that it may not be the representation of crime on the television that make people fearful, rather that fearful people watch more television. While this is a valid concept, the cyclic model presented in Figure 1 would imply that the two effects are not mutually exclusive. It may be, as the cycle shows, that television increases fear of crime and,

in turn, that fear leads people to stay in the home and watch more television. The two may therefore be closely interlinked.

There is a perhaps intriguing irony in the model presented here. It may be gathered from the model that, if the media portrays crime as more serious and frequent, crime will in fact decrease. Warr (2000) explains that those most affected by fear are least likely to experience victimisation due to the measures they have taken to reduce their own victimisation. These most fearful often live in the most secure neighbourhoods (Skogan, 1986), perhaps because many have similar amounts of fear and similar levels of precautionary behaviour, as well as access to televisions that amplify this fear. Warr (2000) alluded to a model similar to the one presented in this paper, claiming that fear of crime results in high numbers of people spending more time withdrawn in the home, which he claims to be supported by such terms as 'couch potato' in reference to the increased sales of modern household media technologies (e.g. television).

Critique of traditional perceptions of Fear of Crime

As already mentioned, traditional perceptions of fear of crime and its resulting reactions have been predominantly negative, usually falling under the view that fear lowers 'quality of life'. While few explicitly explain the meaning behind this term, scholars appear to accept the general definition as fear inhibiting people's ability to enjoy such facilities as using parks, public transportation and other public facilities due to restricting activity (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981; Garofalo, 1979). O'Gorman (2009) found that 15% of respondents' quality of life was lowered due to their high fearfulness of crime, showing consistency with earlier findings that some consider their lives less satisfying as a result of fear of crime (Rubin *et al.*, 1988). Jackson and Gray (2010), despite their primary focus regarding functional fear, also speak of dysfunctional fear, whereby people are excessively fearful, leading to pessimism, emotional discomfort, depression, and problem exaggeration. While an increase in the negative psychological reactions to fear of crime would be nigh-indefensible, the idea of 'problem exaggeration' is perhaps flawed. It could be argued that, if this problem exaggeration leads to even more extreme avoidance behaviour, there is no such thing as too safe, making it arguably more crime-preventing for people to remain in their home for more time (Sutton *et al.*, forthcoming).

This action of remaining in the home has, however, been described negatively by numerous scholars, with such soundbites as 'prisoners of fear' (Skogan, 1986:177) and 'self imposed incarceration' (Goldsmith and Thomas, 1974:10) being used to illustrate avoidance behaviours adopted by the fearful. This is also said to restrict communitarianism, Goodstein and Shotland (1982) arguing that reduced social interaction – a result of avoidance behaviour taken (Baker *et al.*, 1983) – in neighbourhoods may lead to breakdowns in communities. Warr (2000:461) explains that 'at the extreme is a "fortress society" in which citizens withdraw from public life altogether'. Goldsmith and Thomas (1974) claim that an increase in vulnerability to crime may result from this social isolation. Conversely, this paper postulates that alterations in routine resulting from heightened fear of crime (primarily home-based avoidance behaviours) may well have a positive effect; potentially reducing the convergence between would be targets and offenders, thereby reducing the possibility of a crime occurring.

There is another criticism to be made of this concern. While some believe withdrawal from public life is socially isolationist, this is arguably no longer the case. With recent works

emphasising the potential of communication technologies, especially the internet, in forming online communities and social networks, the need for physical community is perhaps reduced (Bennett, 2004; Haenfler, 2010), though, as mentioned previously in this paper, still required. Indeed, it is possible, with use of social networking online, as well as improvements to indoor entertainment technologies (e.g. television and video gaming), that avoidance behaviour restricting people to their homes is not as much a negative prospect as it may have been prior to the widespread availability to such accessible communication and entertainment (Cashmore, 2012). This is especially true during evening and night hours. Also, since the avoidance behaviour taken as a result of media's amplification of the fear of crime would, if plausible, have a widespread effect, it could be speculated that many people would be using these forms of social media and entertainment, allowing for a wider community of participants and a potentially less isolationist feeling.

Goodstein and Shotland (1982) argue that the behavioural reactions to fear of crime are strong and widespread enough to effect a decrease in the number of potential witnesses and a lower amount of human surveillance, thus presenting more criminal opportunity. While this is likely to be the case, Goodstein and Shotland fail to recognise the potential reduction in RAT's two other necessary factors for a criminal offence – potential offenders and targets. Since fewer of these are likely to be on the street proportionally, it is logical to deduce that on-street victimisation should decrease. Furthermore, Goodstein and Shotland (1982) argue that burglars are deterred by the presence of neighbours and other possible witnesses, supported by Scarr *et al.'s* (1973) conclusions that 'professional' burglars are careful to avoid being caught by witnesses, as burglars are often unwilling to commit further, more directly victimising offences (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1993). If this is so, it would indeed be sensible to suggest that a decrease in human surveillance may lead to increases in burglary. Goodstein and Shotland (1982) did, however, fail to account for the fact that perpetrators of burglary ordinarily prefer to target houses that are empty, which would lead to the assertion that the presence of someone in the home as a result of avoidance behaviours would likely act as a deterrent and reduce the likelihood of burglary.

Inter-personal violence: The overlooked exception?

The majority, if not all, of the literature concerning the media's effect on the fear of crime, including the original proposal of this model (Cashmore, 2012), fails to consider fear of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. As has already been discussed, the mass media over-represents serious but rare crime types in their news cycles, as these are often deemed the most 'newsworthy' (Warr, 1994; 2000). While inter-personal violence – defined by Walby and Allen (2004) to include domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking – is serious, it is not as rare as one may assume from the lack of media coverage. In fact, Walby and Allen (2004) suggest that approximately a quarter of male and almost half of female respondents to the British Crime Survey have been victimised by inter-personal violence, yet despite increases in convictions and prosecutions for domestic abuse, the charity 'Refuge' continues to insist that what we know of inter-personal violence is only the 'tip of the iceberg', with increases in conviction rates not being satisfactory when considering that the vast majority of domestic abuse cases are not even reported to the police (Laville, 2012; Kelly, 2012). Despite these shocking claims, as stated by Abdela (2008), 'violence within the household is not treated with high priority by...the Media'.

The fact that the media do not prioritise inter-personal violence may be for numerous reasons. As it is such a common occurrence, with 45% of women and 26% of men being reported to

have experienced some form of domestic abuse (Walby and Allen, 2004), it may be that the media is reluctant to report on such a sensitive issue, as it is potentially psychologically disturbing to much of their audience because supposedly more people fall victim to it than, for example, fall victim to violent crime or burglary, potentially making it more relatable than these other crime types. Alternatively, since it is an issue that affects many people, it may be that those who have been abused (being a relatively common crime type, especially for women) would be experientially desensitised to the images of domestic violence as they have already endured and survived such violence, and are normalised to the forms of abuse shown, making it less newsworthy. Another possible reason for the media's lack of coverage of inter-personal violence is that it is difficult to give domestic violence a face. A Home Office study found that 55% of female respondents to the British Crime Survey who experienced rape did so within their own home, and 45% were sexually assaulted by their partner at the time (Myhill and Allen, 2002). Since this is true, perpetrators of inter-personal violence do not have a distinctive typology, and it would therefore be problematic to categorise them using a stereotypical and identifiable image, given that domestic abuse is very often covert, and it is difficult to spot signs that it is occurring.

This paper has been careful not to claim that the model presented has the potential to reduce all victimisation types. Inter-personal violence is an exception to the model's crime-reducing potential. Skogan (1987), as stated above, argued that groups with comparatively low levels of recorded victimisation, such as women, have high levels of fear. In terms of unrecorded domestic abuse, however, females have a significantly higher likelihood of victimisation than males. The Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model presented in this paper may, in theory, increase the danger of victimisation from inter-personal domestic abuse, as it assumes more people are remaining in the home for more hours in the day. From a RAT perspective, this would increase the convergence of (1) capable and motivated offenders and (2) suitable and vulnerable targets of domestic abuse in the home. Since an increased number of people would be replacing their outdoor activity for indoor activity through avoidance behaviour, it may be possible to deduce that more potential perpetrators of on-street offending would remain indoors, for example, at night. If they were then to displace on-street offending to home-based, domestic offending, this would make the model presented problematic.

Displacement may not occur in all types of offenders. Potential perpetrators of burglary, robbery, or offences perpetrated for excitement (from a Cultural Criminological perspective), who would be unwilling to commit more violent and directly victimising offences (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1993), or who commit avoidance behaviour out of fear concerning their own risk of victimisation, may not displace their offending to violence against family members in the home. While this would likely not apply to all those who would victimise on-street, it could potentially result in a decrease in overall victimisation offending. The increase in displaced inter-personal violence that the Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model may cause, however, means that it should be developed in conjunction with improvements to detection and prevention of domestic abuse.

Refuting the model

The Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model does have numerous drawbacks, not least of which being that it is built upon uncertain premises and untested theoretical relationships. The Model assumes, for instance, that the media has a strong effect on people's perceptions and fears of crime, despite doubts concerning the veracity of this connection. Ditton *et al.* (2004), for instance, suggested that the media may have little effect on crime. Sparks

(1992:3) stated that 'fear is so plainly a product of the real conditions of existence…as to leave no space for the role of the mass media in accounting for it'. According to Rubin *et al.*'s findings (1988:126), 'heavy television exposure was not linked to negative effects'. With Graber's (1980) findings that around 52% of people claim to pay little to no attention to the media's message, it would be possible to suggest that, for many, fear is not related to the media's portrayal of crime – an ongoing debate that still requires further research.

Another premise that the model relies upon is the reaction people have to fear of crime. While scholars rarely challenge the idea that fear causes people to commit behaviours that would reduce the likelihood of their victimisation and reduce the potential loss if victimisation were to occur, there is difficulty in 'ascertaining exactly what people are *not* doing (or are doing) out of fear, and convincingly linking it back to fear' (Warr, 2000:459). That is to say, research cannot tell us with any certainty whether or not the avoidance behaviour committed by people is a result of fear, or whether these behaviours would have been committed regardless. While it is logical to make the link, and positive relationships can be seen between the two variables (DuBow *et al.*, 1979), certainty of causality is difficult to establish. In addition to this issue, while avoidance by remaining indoors would appear to be one of the more obvious responses to fear of crime, there is little way of knowing whether it is common in comparison to DuBow *et al.*'s (1979) other four responses: protective behaviour, insurance behaviour, communication behaviour and participation behaviour. While this paper assumes avoidance to be the most common (as it is arguably the easiest to perform by those who are fearful), there is a possibility that people prioritise other responses, meaning that they may continue to venture beyond the home, instead substituting avoidance for other kinds of response, for example, higher quality security devices.

Developing this critique, it is possible that the fear amplification effect generated by believable crime media has expanded a crime control industry, with an increase in the market for personal and property security devices. While Christie's 'Crime Control as Industry' (1993) focuses chiefly on rises in prison populations being a natural process whereby undesirable individuals are removed from the general community, the term 'Crime Control Industry' lends itself as a descriptor of the rising demand and use of security devices by people who are fearful of being victimised by criminal activity. Van Dijk (2006:18) suggests that 'better security against crime by mainstream society seems increasingly to have discouraged potential offenders from committing volume crimes such as burglary or theft and thereby driven rates of volume crime down'. As a supplement to this, van Dijk *et al.* (2007) found a substantial increase in the ownership of anti-burglary devices in most EU countries between pre-2000 and 2005, suggesting an increase in the crime control and victimisation minimising industry. Jackson and Gray (2010) also speak of people taking responsibility for personal crime prevention leading to the increase of sales in security devices for property and for personal safety. Marilyn Manson even suggested that the media have developed a 'campaign of fear and consumption…keep everyone afraid, and they'll consume' (in Moore's Bowling for Columbine, 2002). In this regard, the fear amplifying effect of media's representation of crime could be seen as somewhat deliberate (as well as potentially crime reducing). It is possible, then, that security has become one of the, if not *the*, primary forms of avoidance and victimisation mitigating behaviours resulting from fear of crime, perhaps leaving less of a role for avoidance behaviour in the home.

If avoidance is not the primary reaction to fear of crime, people may still remain in the home in order to use entertainment media and communication technologies, a possible unintended benefits of which is a potential reduction in crime (Cashmore, 2012). This may no longer be

necessary with massive improvements to portable technologies, as well as their affordability and availability. With massive ownership of Smartphones, laptops and tablet devices alongside the widespread connectivity of 3G and public Wi-Fi networks, people are able to receive the communication and entertainment on their portable devices that they would have previously relied on indoor technologies for. At the E3 2013 Sony press Conference, it was even revealed that Sony's next generation gaming console games could be played using their portable handheld device, the Playstation Vita (IGN, 2013); another advancement in an apparent push toward portable connectivity. Even if fear of crime does increase constrained behaviour, those who must commute to work and other social obligations would still have to venture out of the home, receiving media through use of these portable devices. The danger of these devices is potentially twofold. Firstly, people have more freedom to be outdoors while still receiving media, therefore being increasing the number of potential victims and offenders on the street, and secondly they now carry valuable devices that are an attractive target for motivated offenders. This would likely be especially apparent in young people and students, who are most likely to experience victimisation and who Haenfler (2010) states would find it difficult to remember a time without televisions, video games and personal computers, having become accustomed to unlimited access to advanced technologies.

The Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model builds upon the idea that increases in fear should lead to decreases in crime, with avoidance meaning fewer potential targets and perpetrators would be on the street. According to British Crime Survey (BCS) statistics (Home Office, 2011), however, during the period of the crime drop, fear has also fallen. While this would, on the surface, appear to effectively refute the plausibility of the proposed model, a critical approach to the BCS itself may alleviate this concern. Sutton and Tseloni (2011) explain that pseudo-neighbourhoods used in BCS sampling bear little resemblance to real neighbourhoods, therefore failing to give high quality neighbourhood readings, especially in fear of crime. As already mentioned, fear of crime occurs highest in those unlikely to become victims of certain types of crime, meaning that the failure of the BCS to give more realistic readings of neighbourhoods may result in discrepancies in the representativeness of fear of crime levels and victimisation levels, leading one to question the extent of the usefulness of the BCS in determining fear of crime.

While it is entirely possible that the sampling of the BCS depicts false readings of fear declines, it is equally possible that the BCS depiction *is* reflective of public levels of fear. This may be due to a potentially desensitising and normalising effect resulting from the over-representation of serious crime (especially violence) in the media, with the presentation of unbelievable levels of crime, thus leading people to distrust the media's representation of crime and reducing its fear amplifying effect. Warr (2000) discusses the necessity for fear of crime to be proportional to the reality of crime. That is, people should not be made to overestimate their risk of victimisation by poorly communicated information. If, for instance, the mass media over-sensitises people to their risk and amplifies fear too much, Warr speaks of the danger of a 'fortress society'. His did not, however, present the potential for desensitisation, where people may no longer regard the mass media an accurate or reliable depiction of the prevalence of crime. Some scholars comment on violent media's desensitising effects of lack of compassion and reaction to real life violence (e.g. Carnagey *et al.*, 2007), which may also apply to a reduction in perceived danger of violence or, indeed, other serious crime types. If this were to happen, and people were to feel complacent in their safety beyond the home, it would likely result in a higher convergence between potential offenders and victims, theoretically increasing crime. It is therefore important to encourage responsible mass media broadcasting habits, such as displaying crime in a more

representative manner rather than over-representing serious, rare crime types (Warr, 2000). The amount of crime covered in the media should not, however, be reduced. Rather broadcasters should take pains to make its coverage more representative. This way, the news and programming time dedicated to crime would still encourage people to fear victimisation and take precautions to avoid being subject to criminal activity, while giving the public a more accurate and believable perception of the prevalence of different victimisation types.

Desensitisation is not the only reason people may become complacent. As already seen, people feel safer due to the measures they take to reduce their risk of victimisation (Jackson and Gray, 2010). If this feeling of safety were to reduce the fear of crime, 'we would concomitantly increase the chances that individuals would fail to take necessary precautions to protect their own safety…and thereby increase their risk of victimisation' (Warr, 2000:461). If people were to become complacent regarding their safety as a result, and reduce their time in the home (perhaps placing more faith in security devices), they would possibly raise their own risk of victimisation. Having said this, it is probable that the safety people feel as a result of their risk minimisation would only be felt so long as they remain within the parameters of their precautions, meaning they may be unlikely to take unnecessary risks.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model illustrates potentially crime reducing effects that the media (and its amplification of fear of crime) has on the routine activities of individuals. Despite possible flaws with the model suggested by the findings and theories of researchers outlined in this paper, clearly defined compelling disproof cannot be determined from existing study. Indeed, the model does seem, at least to a certain extent, plausible, and logic would likely support (though may also challenge) some of the conclusions that can be drawn from the model.

'From a purely scientific standpoint, research on the fear of crime can continue indefinitely. There is no critical experiment that will answer all the questions, so there will always be hypotheses to test and new paths of inquiry to follow' (Garofalo, 1981:839). The Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model is based very much on speculation and conjecture, with further development needed to establish its integrity. This paper proposes further study with the purpose of improving our knowledge of how useful this model may be in explaining at least a portion of public fear of crime, and whether or not people's voluntary restrictions on their behaviour may be seen as a theoretically positive, crime reducing prospect. The model therefore requires development in order to establish whether it may be applicable in practice, and whether it would be a realistic crime reducing initiative. An effective method of carrying out this research might be to extend the BCS's questioning concerning fear of crime, or formulating a separate survey to supplement the BCS. This could assist in determining (1) the primary source of people's crime information, (2) how afraid they are of crime and (3) if, how and to what extent fear of crime affects their behaviour.

This paper recommends, in addition, using the model to influence media depictions of crime with the intention of balancing the fear of crime with the reality of crime to encourage individuals and communities to take measures to reduce their risk of victimisation (especially in terms of remaining in the home, which is likely to increase their television consumption, thus allowing for further consumption of representative media messages and crime images), thereby potentially contributing to reductions in victimisation. Whether this is ethically sound, however, is a very real concern, as using media as a tool for social control, even with

positive intentions, leads to a problematic area that would almost certainly generate debate as to whether fear of crime is necessary to keep us safe, and whether the media's contribution to amplifying fears to provoke positive action is an appropriate tool to reduce victimisation.

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