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Influence of Viewing Dramatic Television and Perceived Risk of Victimization on Crime-Specific Fear

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INFLUENCE OF VIEWING DRAMATIC TELEVISION AND PERCEIVED
RISK OF VICTIMIZATION ON CRIME-SPECIFIC FEAR

A Thesis

Presented To

The Faculty of the Department of Sociology

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

Of The Requirement For The Degree

Master of Arts

By

Eric D. Barth

August 1998

INFLUENCE OF VIEWING DRAMATIC TELEVISION AND PERCEIVED RISK OF
VICTIMIZATION ON CRIME-SPECIFIC FEAR

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INFLUENCE OF VIEWING DRAMATIC TELEVISION AND PERCEIVED RISK OF
VICTIMIZATION ON CRIME-SPECIFIC FEAR

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53 pages

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The purpose of this study is to examine the predictability of the fear of property and personal crime in relation to viewing dramatic or violent television. The study was carried out using the viewpoint that the viewing of violence, which is symbolically communicated through the medium of television, does affect the fear of crime. A questionnaire was administered in the spring of 1998 to students of a mid-South regional university. The sample consisted of 619 undergraduate students. Descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations, and multiple regression were used to analyze the data. The results of this study suggest that watching violent television content influences the fear of personal crime. However, viewing this type of television seems to have a smaller impact on the fear of property crime.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The mass media's ability to affect people in society has reached its pinnacle with the introduction and subsequent proliferation of television. Due, in part, to its ability to stimulate via the combination of visual imagery and auditory effects, television has brought with it a heightened efficiency to affect the masses. While certainly a controversial topic, television does appear to shape part of the world in which we live.

Reactions of individuals to viewing television range from cognitive judgments to affective responses. These types of perception include knowledge-based understanding (i.e., judgments based on intellectual reasoning) and emotionally based, subjective impressions. Two common applications of these perception types are perceived risk of and fear of crime.

The study of fear reactions is one topic that is related to television viewing and has received much attention in the research in criminology and communications. The fear of crime is a well-established social phenomenon that results from a wide variety of social and psychological factors, which include among others the objective traits of age and the subjective experiences of television viewing (e.g., perceived realism of programs). The operationalization of the fear of crime has varied from relatively simple single measures to more complex indicators. More recent studies suggest that fear of crime is a complex, multidimensional concept (e.g., using distinct, multiple measures of

crime-fear).

With the augmented capability and interest to cover such violent events as crimes, it seems only logical that the fear of crime is increasing. If, for example, one considers the popularity of more recent violent programs (e.g., “real video” and talk shows), the use of cable television, video players, and direct satellites, it seems difficult not to realize a relationship between violent television and fear. In fact, however, it is difficult to find such clear, causal relationship.

To be sure, television is not the only source of information. Indeed interpersonal communication and other mass-mediated bases of knowledge (e.g., newspapers) exist, but some researchers (e.g., Gerbner and Gross 1976) argue that none is as ubiquitous or as powerful as television. The influence of dramatic television on individuals seems to vary according to a number of factors. One factor that is commonly cited as a source of television effects is the quantity of television viewed. The assertion is that those who watch a great deal of television are most affected by its content and thereby report more fear than do those who watch less television. Another influential factor appears to be the amount of realism found in television programs.

The research question of this particular study involves television and fear. The major question I posit is whether the viewing of dramatic television is related to the fear of crime. If such a relationship exists, then a need to uncover the characteristics present appropriately follows. Another pertinent point of inquiry is the possible reasons for the relationship to exist. In order to accomplish these tasks I examine the influences of sociodemographic, victimization experience, risk perception, and television-viewing experience variables on the fear of crime.

In studying the effects of viewing television violence on the fear of crime and

following the advise of Heath and Gilbert (1996), I pay considerable attention to the attributes upon which the relationship is contingent: viewer and dependent variable traits. First, mindful of the potential problems in measuring the fear of crime, I measure fear as it relates to two types of crime: property and personal crime.

Second, I examine variables that relate to viewer characteristics. These traits include sociodemographic variables (e.g., gender) and television viewing experiences (e.g., perceived realism of television programs). I use the variables to account for the variation in the fear of crime. In doing so I hope to enhance prediction and/or explanation of the fear-of-crime phenomenon.

Through the use of symbolic interaction theory an answer to this question is sought. This theory enables the researcher to better understand the nature of the television drama by taking into account the symbols, definitions, acts, and agents involved with it. Symbolic interaction considers both objective as well as subjective reality; that is, from this viewpoint reality is not simply the physical (objective) world but a world that is contingent on the interpretations of the individuals that comprise it. The world is defined by the interaction of those individuals through symbolic communication. Violence as disseminated by television is one such example of symbolically communicated interaction. For these reasons symbolic interactionism is well suited for a study of physical and psychological subjects.

With symbolic interaction as the theoretical framework of this study, a survey research design is employed to uncover the various physical and social-psychological aspects of fear. Accomplishing this endeavor involves discussions of the theoretical perspective followed by a review of the pertinent literature. Next is an explanation of the methods that are used to conduct my research. Fourth follows an

elaboration of the research results. The final section of my study involves a detailed discussion and ends with some concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Since its invention television has permeated the fabric of society. The role of television in society has become one of ever-increasing importance. Aided by technological advancements, television possesses vast capabilities for the presentation of information. In addition to these advances in technology are the improvements in methods of information dissemination, which also help to link television with society. Similar to other forms of social interaction, television has the ability to reflect and create reality simultaneously.

Drama has long been used to characterize interactive social events within societies. Primarily focusing on the actor or action, dramatic representations of social life have been used by some of the world's preeminent thinkers.

However, because it is not interaction in the true face-to-face sense (Manning 1996), the television drama seeks to reproduce a common social event. Work is done by the producers to convey a certain amount of credibility in an effort to elicit particular responses from the viewers. This endeavor is accomplished by and through the use of symbols that constitute social reality.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is the major sociological perspective that views society as made up of social interactions characterized by the use and interpretation of symbols in

the communication process (Johnson 1995). The individuals of society are seen as active interpreters of meaning and not merely passive recipients of information. The actors use and interpret the meaning of symbols that, in turn, make society uniquely human. During the interaction process individuals communicate through the use of a system of symbols or language. Individual behavior is the product of communication (Hewitt 1997). Communication through the use of language is what makes this ability possible.

Central to the perspective of symbolic interaction is the “definition of the situation.” W. I. Thomas first proposed this concept, which represents the moment of interpretation. The assertion is that if what one views is perceived to be real then, it is treated as if it were real (Thomas 1972). It is the continual process of the definition of the situation that makes society possible. When an actor takes the role of the other, the definition of the situation is both a product of and contingent on the self (Hewitt 1997).

Among interactions and key to symbolic interactionism is the concept of the self. The self is a continual process characterized by the idea that individuals are thoughtful and reflective creatures whose identities and actions arise as a result of their interaction with others (Mead 1993). The sociological conception of the self was put forward by the pragmatist philosopher George Herbert Mead. Mead, often considered the father of symbolic interactionism, arrived at this more social concept of self by modifying the behaviorist conception of stimulus/response behavior of humans to allow for interpretation. The use of symbols by humans represents a stimulus given in advance. Through the use of rehearsal one can imagine what responses certain acts will produce. In addition, Mead modified the “looking glass self” of C. H. Cooley (1972) and conceived it as possible only through taking the role of the other. Mead envisioned the

self in three distinct phases: the “me,” “I,” and “generalized other.”

The “I” in Mead's conception of the self is the subject or the active part of the self. The “I” is self-reflective; that is, it is separate from the world yet capable of looking upon it (Mead 1993). This phase is influenced by the “me.” The “me” is the object or that part of the self as seen from the point of view of the others. The “me” can be seen as the role(s) one takes. The third phase of the self is the “generalized other.” This portion of the self represents society and enables the individual to take the viewpoint of the audience. These phases of the self are possible only because of interaction. By individuals taking the role of the other, collective human action is possible (Mead 1993). The definition of the situation, social interaction, and the self are inextricably linked through symbolic communication.

The self is intimately and reflexively tied to the definition of the situation. In other words, the definition of the situation develops the self while the definition is predicated on the sense of self. The self and the definition of the situation are always changing in unending processes. These processes are initiated with the introduction of language through the use of symbols.

The focus of symbolic interactionism is on individuals or actors and their perception of symbols. The concept of subjective reality takes into account these various individual interpretations. The view of symbolic interactionism recognizes these multiple interpretations of reality and denies the presence of objective reality (Hewitt 1997).

Television and Symbolic Interaction

As an agent of socialization, television is a part of the ongoing social process of interaction and is partially responsible for the symbolic construction of reality. As a

source of communication through the use of symbols, television is capable of transforming social interaction. The reflexive nature of television describes social reality as it creates reality (Altheide 1985). Television also possesses the capability of altering the selves of those who interact with it and define its presentation of information as real.

Television is part of the day-to-day scenes that make up the social world through interaction. Television is also capable of changing the nature of interaction in which it participates (Manning 1996). Due to the symbolic aspects of everyday life (e.g., drama), symbolic interaction is especially adept at uncovering the relations between television and those who interact with it (Manning 1996).

The Emotion of Fear

Fear is an emotion that originates from the social world. Fear is established through symbolic communication in the process of socialization.

Emotions arise in communication. At birth we do not know shame, envy, pride, disgust, remorse, and the thousand and one emotional nuances we “feel” as we act together. We learn these “social feelings” in communication with others whose response teaches us what our acts mean to them, and thus to ourselves, as we play out roles in the community. (Duncan 1976, p. 31)

Beyond this conception of fear it is asserted that fear is first a physiological sensation and second is labeled (i.e., symbolically communicated) as such (Hewitt 1997). For an individual to have fear he or she must take the role of the other to know the appropriate response (Hewitt 1997). Fear is one attribute of symbolically communicated interaction.

Drama and Television

As part of a society made up of symbols, television is an agent of socialization capable of influencing the thoughts and perceptions of those who interact with it (Gordon

1976). Drama is a mode of symbolic communication that is “transmitted by means of mediums” (Gordon 1976, pp. 19-20). Television functions as one medium through which drama symbolically communicates fear to individual viewers. Therefore, the emotion of fear is socialized via television.

Television has the ability to elicit specific emotional reactions in individuals due to its delivery of a purposively constructed reality. By the use of drama television constructs the reality of fear. As an emotion which is socially constructed via communication (Duncan 1976), the reaction of fear is deliberately sought as the definition of the situation. These reactions influence the meanings an individual makes of his or her reality. These reactions are both physiological and social (Hewitt 1997).

Symbolic interaction theory will be used to illustrate these effects. At this point a detailed discussion of the relevant research on this topic is needed.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The constitution of social life by the use and interpretation of symbols in the communication process comprises the major theoretical perspective of symbolic interaction (Johnson 1995). As a medium through which communication is carried, television is a vehicle for such use and interpretation of symbols. Television is one of many components that make up society, which includes actors, institutions, and processes of interaction. As a part of society, television shares in influencing it. Symbolic interaction allows for the consideration of both "micro" procedures and the "macro" organizations of society that are impacted by television (Altheide 1985). While obviously not the only source of communication, television, in its use of visual imagery and auditory effects to convey symbols and meaning, has an influence on society. Researchers of television effects, however, question the amount and under which circumstances these conditions exist.

Due to the ever-increasing salience of television in society, constant work must be done by the producers of the programming to portray "reality" to the viewers (Manning 1996). This reality work can affect the perceptions of individuals. A variety of formats exists to convey certain realities, which can shape any number of perceptions. It has been suggested that use of drama in the popular formats of television news, fictional programs, and "reality" television programs is an effective method of prompting one particular

perception—fear of crime. It is unfortunate that the fear of crime is a concept established with great difficulty. In fact, inconsistently conceptualized and measured past research on the topic has resulted in a wide range of explanations.

Previous Measures of Fear

The majority of research on fear of crime has employed a single item to ascertain a respondent's "fear." An individual's fear is measured by this single question: "Is there an area right around here—that is, within a mile—where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?" Studies not using this single measure of fear typically use some variation of the question, which like the standard measure attempts to account for the amount of safety relative to the individual respondent's neighborhood.

The use of a single item measure of fear suffers from a number of conceptual and operational difficulties (Ferraro and LaGrange, 1987). One major conceptual problem found in past measures of fear is the failure to distinguish it from perceived likelihood of crime victimization (Miethe and Lee, 1984). Ferraro and LaGrange (1987) expound on this point in their classification of crime-related perceptions, which establishes the presence of six perceptual categories. According to them risk perception resides in the cognitive region of both general and personal judgments while fear is situated in the affective region of emotions. Their argument is that, by not distinguishing between the two concepts, past research has actually measured peoples' risks of being victimized instead of their fears of such victimization. Fear of crime is therefore rendered invalid.

Ferraro and LaGrange (1987) expound on this conceptual distinction by classifying a total of six crime perceptions. In addition to these attempts at conceptual clarification Rountree and Land (1996) offer empirical evidence that supports the existence of these conceptually distinct reactions. In their study they found significant

evidence to differentiate between neighborhood-level risk perception and fear of burglary. Discrepancies in the results of the past studies and the need for further understanding regarding the relations between television and fear necessitate greater attention to the characteristics of the message as well as the audience.

Television Effects

Research in the area of television effects began with the advent of television in the 1940s and continues to this day. Dramatic television programs vary in their impact on the individual. There are three factors commonly associated with the variation in the effects of television: type of programming, the amount of television watched, and the level of believability.

The work of George Gerbner represents a large portion of the literature supporting the proposition that the amount of television affects peoples' fears. The research of Gerbner and his associates indicates that television dramas are capable of eliciting fear among viewers (Bryant, Carveth, and Brown 1981; Cantor 1994; Gerbner and Gross 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli 1981). Much of this research is referred to as the "cultivation hypothesis." This body of work suggests that viewing dramatic or violent television content leads to an increase in viewer fear. Those individuals who engage in "heavy viewing" have significantly higher fear than those engaged in "light viewing." Heavy viewers also have a greater tendency to overestimate the amount of violence in the world than light viewers have (Gerbner, Gross, Eleey, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, and Signorielli 1977).

Another effect frequently associated with television viewing is the perception of risk (Cavender and Bond-Maupin 1993; Coleman 1993; Heath and Gilbert 1996; Miethe 1995). Previous research makes a distinction between two domains of perceived risk:

personal-level risk judgment and societal-level risk judgment (Coleman 1993). The amount of television one watches is correlated with perceived societal risk. The viewing of dramatic television programs can also alter an individual's perceived risk of becoming a victim of violence (Bryant, et al. 1981; Gerbner et al. 1977). On the other hand, Tyler and Cook (1984) lend support to the argument that viewing television violence exerts a larger impact on perceived societal-level risk than on individual-level risk.

The type of programming an individual watches has also been found to affect the amount of influence television viewing has on risk perception. O'Keefe and Reid-Nash (1987) found that dramatic crime news can lead to an increase in fear and concern for crime among viewers. In a similar study Chiricos, Eschholz, and Gertz (1997) found that higher levels of fear were linked to watching television news.

Among those most affected by watching television news were women; however, these results were somewhat inconsistent. In explaining the relationship between women and news viewing, for example, Chiricos et al. (1997) found some evidence partially upholding both "substitution" and "resonance" interpretations. They concluded that white women with high-income and no previous victimization experience substituted their media experiences for their lack of victim experience and subsequently were fearful. On the other hand, resonance was used to explain fear among white women with low income and some victim experience. The argument in this case is that media experiences add to the already present victim experience.

Another aspect of television that has been shown to impact the fear of crime is the amount of believability held by the viewer towards the program (Potter 1986). This credulity pertains primarily to the viewing of a television drama. This study also indicates that perceived realism of television programs imposes a much greater influence

on fear than does amount of television exposure. The more the viewer believes in the truth of the drama he or she is watching, the more likely the program will influence his or her perceived risk. Likewise, the less the viewer believes in the veracity of the program, the less likely that program will influence his or her level of fear. Potter (1986) also concluded that individual viewers have different degrees of belief in television programs.

Explaining the Fear of Crime

While numerous studies exist supporting the contention that television viewing is related to fear, there is an equal amount of literature opposing it. In reanalysis of the work of Gerbner and his associates, Hirsh (1980) and Hughes (1980) failed to make such strong conclusions that television contributed to fear. In some studies the relation between television and the fear of crime disappeared when controls were placed on the demographic variables of education, income, and age (Doob and MacDonald 1979; Hughes 1980). Still other research has found evidence of a causal relation between television viewing and fear of crime but in the opposite direction (Wakshlag, Bart, Dudley, Groth, McCutcheon, and Rolla 1983); that is, apprehension towards crime affects the viewing of dramatic television.

As other research has shown, these demographic variables are inadequate for a more complete measure of fear including the psychological or subjective aspects of fear (Bryant et al. 1981; Clemente and Kleiman 1977; Miethe 1995). They recognized the need for an assessment of the individual's subjective interpretation of the factors leading to an "irrational fear." This fear has to do with the "victimization paradox," which occurs when using demographic variables. The paradox is that women and the elderly report the highest levels of fear; yet, their respective risks of victimization are the lowest (Clemente and Kleiman 1977; Miethe 1995). Bryant et al. (1981) support this explanation by

suggesting that the “irrational fear” is due to an overrepresentation in the media of violence against these minorities.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not there is a link between viewing dramatic television and affective responses of fear as they pertain to crime. The pervasiveness and importance of television in society, as a form of communication and an agent of socialization, necessitates an adequate examination and comprehension of the possible consequences viewing can have on individuals. Through the consideration of the appropriate variables such an investigation should indicate the impact television has on fear of crime among viewers. In an effort to facilitate empirical verification of television effects, several hypotheses are considered. These hypotheses are consistent with previous fear of crime and television-effects research.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses that I consider for this analysis focus on fear of two types of crime—personal and property. These hypotheses relate to sociodemographic, victimization experience and risk perception variables, and they focus on television viewing experience variables. There are two major reasons why crime is conceptualized in this manner. First, looking at the two types of crime allows me to cover most of the typical crimes. In order to improve the chances of obtaining more reliable and valid crime measures, I refer to specific crimes in my instrument (Ferraro and LaGrange 1987).

Second, I subsequently condense these specific crimes into two types of crime in

an attempt to determine whether or not there are differences between violent and nonviolent crimes. Ferraro and LaGrange (1987) and Warr (1983) suggest that differences between these two types exist. Therefore, such measurements allow me to consider various suggestions from previous research.

Because the two measures of fear of crime are at the personal level of reference, all of the antecedents of such fear involve individual personal characteristics. These traits are commonly examined in fear of crime research. Consequently, the hypotheses refer to these types of personal traits. First, fear of crime is related to gender; that is, women report higher levels of fear of both types of crime than men do. Second, and in a similar manner, non whites are more fearful of crime than are whites.

In addition to the social characteristics there are variables to measure individual experiences with crime. In general, direct victimization experience is positively related to fear of crime. When elaborated further to include both personal and property crimes the two more specific hypotheses are 1) direct, personal, crime-victimization experience is positively related to fear of personal crime, and 2) direct, property, crime-victimization experience is positively related to fear of property crime. Hypotheses for indirect victimization experience are stated similarly. Indirect crime-victimization experience is positively related to fear of crime. This statement can be specified to include the following: 1) indirect, personal, crime-victimization experience correlates positively with fear of personal crime, and 2) indirect, property, crime-victimization experience is positively related to fear of property crime. Therefore, for each of these four variables the levels of fear are expected to increase with the presence of victimization experience.

The perceived risk of being a victim of crime is hypothesized to influence positively the fear of crime. First, perceived risk of personal, crime-victimization is

positively related to fear of personal crime. Second, it is also hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between perceived risk of property, crime-victimization and fear of property crime. In other words, as the perceived likelihood of either personal or property crime victimization increases, fear for that type of crime increases.

The fourth and final set of hypotheses constitutes the primary focus of the study--namely, respondents' television viewing experiences. One variable that is thought to affect fear is the total amount of television viewing. . This variable is used to gain a general sense of how much total television one watches. The variable includes ten types of programs. I hypothesize that the total amount of television one watches is positively related to the fear of crime. Therefore, an increase in the amount of television watched yields an increase in the fear of crime. In a similar fashion I hypothesize that there is a positive relationship between the amount of television news one watches and fear of crime. This measure is used to indicate how much of one particular type of television one watches and, therefore, is different from total television viewed.

In addition to these television-viewing variables I consider a measure of fright reaction to viewing violent television. This variable is used to tap the relatively immediate effect that results from watching violence on television. I include this measure to determine whether or not respondents are negatively affected (frightened) when watching violence. Because I attempt to situate this relatively short-term variable with television, the measure is distinct from fear of crime. I hypothesize that concern for safety when watching television violence is positively related to fear of crime. For this variable the hypothesis differs with respect to the type of crime. For example, those who report being frightened when they watch television violence are expected to have higher levels of personal-crime fear. In contrast, a relationship between fright reaction to

violence and fear of property crime is not expected.

Another hypothesis that is supported by previous research is that perceived realism of television programs is positively related to fear of crime. Put another way, as the perceived realism of television programs increases, the level of fear increases. The last hypothesis for this set of variables is that degree of violence of television programs is positively related to fear of violent, personal crime; that is, those who indicate a higher degree of violence for the three television types are more likely to have a higher level of fear for personal crime than those who do not indicate violence.

Sample Design

The data for this research come from a 1998 survey of students from a mid-South regional university. The survey was conducted in two steps. In the first step 39 classes were randomly selected from a population of 1,988 classes listed in the university's course offerings (Dyrsen 1998). To ensure that each sampling unit (student) had an equal probability of being selected, simple random sampling was used to select each of the classes. Each class was identified by its five-digit call number that ranges from 00001 to 11655 and subsequently was chosen with a random digits table from Nachmias and Nachmias (1996). For convenience, classes that were made up exclusively of graduate students and/or that were conducted at any one of the extended campus locations were excluded from the sample population. These types of classes are usually exceedingly small and/or located a great distance from campus. Classes whose instructors refused to participate in the survey were substituted with other randomly selected classes.

A total of 33 classes was used in this study. There were six classes that did not participate; the respective instructors refused participation permission. Those classes that were not permitted to participate were substituted with randomly selected replacements.

Among the individuals, 619 of the 793 enrolled students participated in the study, rendering a response rate of 78.1 percent. Therefore, the sample size for this analysis is 619.

Questionnaire

The source of the data for analysis was a survey instrument in the form of a self-administered questionnaire, which included a total of 86 items in three sections. A majority of the questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions. The first portion of the questionnaire contained items pertaining to the respondent's social and demographic characteristics. Background characteristics such as specific behaviors and attitudes were also solicited. The second section of the questionnaire inquiring about certain specific experiences was followed by the third, and final, section on respondent perceptions. A complete copy of the "Television Viewing Questionnaire" may be seen in Appendix A.

To minimize the impact of potentially confusing questions, a facilitator was present to administer the survey and clarify any problems with survey items. Also, in an effort to eliminate questionnaire duplication, previous survey participants were dissuaded from repeated participation. In addition to these accommodations and printed on each questionnaire was an introductory statement explaining the purpose of the study, which is followed by an informed consent statement. Confidentiality was assured to each of the participants, and results of the study were offered to the instructor of each class.

Measurement of Variables

As mentioned earlier, the measurement and interpretation of variables in past research has proven especially problematic. As a result of this conclusion great care is taken to conceptualize and operationalize the analysis variables.

Dependent Variables

In this analysis two dependent variables were investigated. Fear of crime was measured according to two types of crime—personal crime and property crime. Following the suggestion of Ferraro and LaGrange (1987) specific types of crimes were provided to maximize the validity and reliability of the fear-of-crime measure. The first fear measure was used to establish how afraid the respondents are of personal crime. Respondents were asked to indicate how afraid they are of four different violent crimes: murder, rape, robbery, and assault. Respondents selected an answer that appeared on a five-point scale. Responses were dummy-coded 0 for “not afraid” and 1 for “afraid.” The fear-scores were then combined to form an index for violent, personal crime fear. Index scores ranged from a low of 0 to a high of 4.

The second fear measure was used to figure how afraid the respondent is of property crime. Respondents were asked to indicate how afraid they are of four different nonviolent crimes: auto theft, burglary, fraud, and vandalism. Responses for this fear were also coded 0 and 1 meaning “not afraid” and “afraid,” respectively. Similar to the scores for violent crime, the sum of the four property offenses was used to form an index for nonviolent, property crime. Index scores of this combined measure ranged from 0, lowest fear, to 4, highest fear.

Independent Variables

The independent variables in this study are of four types: sociodemographic characteristics, victimization experience, perceived likelihood of victimization, and television viewing experience. Demographic variables were used largely as control variables. Gender is one variable that has been reported to exhibit considerable influence on fear of crime. For example, extant research on the fear of crime shows that women

tend to have higher fear of crime as compared to men (Chiricos et al. 1997; Warr and Stafford 1983). For this reason gender was included in the study. “Males” were coded as 0, and “females” were coded as 1.

Race is another control variable in this study and was measured as a dummy-variable and reverse-coded to indicate the presence of color. Therefore, “white” was coded as 0; and nonwhite, which included Black, Hispanic, and Asian, was coded as 1. In past research Blacks are reported to have a higher fear of crime (personal crime in particular) than are whites. One explanation for such findings is that African Americans occupy different situations (e.g., higher risk of victimization) than their white counterparts (Kanan 1992).

Perhaps one of the most important controls in the study of television viewing and fear of crime is age. Much of the early research on this topic is convincing in its assertion that age is positively related to fear of crime; however, recent studies indicate that the relationship is negative (Chiricos et al. 1997). Due to the nearly homogeneous composition of age in the university population (80.5 % ages 29 and younger), however, the influence of age on specific fear could not be considered appropriately in this study.

While according to past research the inclusion of these demographic variables is necessary, the focus of this study is on the respondents’ subjective experiences and perceptions and whether or not they significantly contribute to the fear of crime. The first of these subjective experiences, as it relates to the fear of crime, is the respondent’s victimization experience. Two distinct types of victimization were sought for this study—direct and indirect victimization. Multiple items, each inquiring about a different crime, were used to construct both the direct victimization and the indirect victimization measures. Direct victimization was conceptualized as the respondent’s first hand

experience with specific crimes. To operationalize direct victimization the respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they have been the victims of eight different crimes: rape, sexual assault, robbery, assault, burglary, fraud, auto theft, and vandalism. Responses were coded as 0 for “no” and 1 for “yes.” Of the nine victimization items rape, robbery, and assault were combined to form a direct victimization experience measure for personal crime. Due to high correlation with rape victimization the measure for direct sexual assault victimization was left out of the overall measure. These two variables displayed considerable empirical overlap, which resulted in the indication that the two measures were assessing extremely similar phenomena. The four remaining items of burglary, fraud, auto theft, and vandalism were used to construct the overall direct victimization experience measure for nonviolent, property crime. Responses for both measures of direct experience (i.e., personal and property) were coded to determine either “no overall victimization experience” (0) or “some overall victimization experience” (1).

With the exception of adding the experience with murder to the overall violent, personal victimization measure, indirect victimization experience was measured in the same way as direct experience. These two variables were represented by the respondent’s indication of whether or not a friend, relative, or neighbor has been the victim of specific crimes in the last five years. Each set of variables was combined into a measure of indirect victimization.

Another important variable in the explanation of fear of crime is perceived risk of victimization. As with the fear of crime measures, each of the perceived risk measures was represented by an index for two specific types of crime. The perceived risk of personal crime was used to establish the respondent’s perceived likelihood of becoming a

victim of four violent crimes. The responses were then dummy-coded 0 for “not likely” and 1 for “likely.” The perceived likelihood of the crimes assault, murder, rape, and robbery were used in a simple additive index for perceived risk of personal crime. The new index indicated risk on a scale from “lowest risk” (0) to “highest risk” (4). The second perceived risk measure was used to indicate the perceived likelihood of property crime. The combination of the four crimes--auto theft, burglary, fraud, and vandalism--was used to create the index for perceived risk of property crime. “Lowest risk” for this type of crime was the response 0, and “highest risk” was 4.

The main independent variables in this analysis relate to dramatic television: frequency of viewing, concern when viewing violence, perceived realism, and degree of violence of television programs. The variable “television exposure” was measured by adding the respective viewing totals of ten types of television programs: dramatic series, situation comedies, television movies, cartoons, network news, local news, newsmagazines, documentaries, “real video” shows, and talk shows. To counteract the skewness of the original coding scheme this variable was categorized along the mean response. The measure was then coded 0, meaning less than 18 hours per week or “light” and 1, meaning more than 18 hours per week or “heavy.”

The measure of hours of news watched was the sum of the number of hours subjects said they watch local and network news. As with the television exposure this variable was split along the mean. The variable was then coded as “light” (0) for less than three hours and “heavy” (1) for more than three hours.

The measure fright reaction was used to determine whether or not respondents become frightened while watching violence on television. Responses were dummy-coded 0 and 1, which represent “never” and “at least sometimes,” respectively.

The measures of perceived realism of television programs were used to assess the amount of realism for each of ten types of programs: dramatic series, situation comedies, television movies, cartoons, network news, local news, newsmagazines, documentaries, “real video” shows, and talk shows. For each type of program, the respondent was asked to answer the question “Do you think the program is realistic in the way people behave and the way events occur?” and to indicate the amount of realism. A three-point scale represents the response to each question with 0 meaning “not realistic,” 1 meaning “somewhat realistic,” and 2 meaning “very realistic.”

The variables for degree of violence of television programs were used to establish the degree of violence (perceived by the respondent) for each of ten types of programs: dramatic series, situation comedies, television movies, cartoons, network news, local news, newsmagazines, documentaries, “real video” shows, and talk shows. On a scale of 0 to 4 respondents were asked to rate the violence of each program type. The responses to each of the ten items indicate the following: 0 for “not violent,” 1 for “somewhat violent,” 2 for “violent,” 3 for “very violent,” and 4 for “extremely violent.”

Analytic Procedures

The data were entered into a statistical package program, where a number of statistical analyses were performed. The first step involved factor analysis to determine whether or not the measures for perceived realism and degree of violence of television programs fell into multiple dimensions. In addition to its ability to ascertain the dimensionality of a set of variables, factor analysis is an effective way to condense into subsets larger amounts of data from the initial measures (Anderson, Hair, Jr., and Tatham 1987). The factors that result from the factor loading were subsequently named according to the highest loading variable for each factor. The factor analysis was carried

out by means of the Alpha Factoring Extraction Method. In order to demonstrate the presence of more than one factor orthogonal rotation was performed on the ten perceived realism variables. This procedure renders three separate factors. The initial solution, with factor eigenvalues greater than .9, accounted for 67.43 percent of the total variance. While the criterion for the eigenvalue is usually 1.0, Anderson et al. (1987) recommend a slight decreasing adjustment for fewer than 20 variables. Among the ten original perceived realism variables only six were satisfactorily loaded on the three factors. The six variables that significantly loaded on the three factors were appropriately named. The first, "Realism of Concise Reporting," is composed of the perceived realism of local news and network news. The second set includes perceived realism of newsmagazines and documentaries and was named "Realism of In-Depth Examination."

The last set of measures was the "Realism of Stories" and is made up of perceived realism of dramatic series and television movies. These three sets of remaining realism of television types were then tested for interitem consistency. Examination of the alpha reliability coefficient for each of the sets necessitated their exclusion from the analysis of the two later mentioned sets. The coefficients for these two groups were not acceptable for grouping. On the other hand, "Realism of Concise Reporting" had an alpha of .7745 and remained in the analysis as an index.

Factor analysis was also used to test the dimensionality of violence of program types. After orthogonal varimax rotation using the Alpha Factor Extraction Method, degree of violence was found to significantly vary along three factors. The newly constructed sets are 1) "Violence Via Journalism" (the combined degrees of violence for local and network news), 2) "Violence Via Personal Accounts" (the combined degrees of violence for "real video" shows and talk shows), and 3) "Violence Via Stories" (the

combined degrees of violence for dramatic series and television movies). With respective alpha scores of .8781, .6437, and .5903 subsequent reliability analysis indicated the appropriate grouping of variables.

Cronbach's alpha was also employed to test for inter-item reliability of the indices for fear of crime and perceived risk. These reliability analyses were used to evaluate the appropriateness of grouping the single items. Alpha scores indicated that both indices for the fear and perceived risk of personal and property crime were satisfactory.

Bivariate correlations were used to rule out the possibility of excessive similarity among variables or multicollinearity. Among those variables that were exceedingly correlated one was excluded from the analysis. Examination of this matrix showed that there was no such problem with multicollinearity.

The last stage of the analysis consisted of using standard multiple regression to ascertain the effects of the independent variables on the two measures for fear of crime. By controlling for all other variables, multiple regression is an effective technique for determining the independent and combined effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables. The dependent variables, fear of personal crime and fear of property crime are treated as scores indicating amount of fear. Such treatment of the dependent variables is in accordance with the standard regression assumption requiring interval-level measures

By using multiple regression variables were entered into the prediction equation. In this regression analysis backward elimination was used. This procedure considers all of the variables and selects the variable most significantly correlated with the dependent measure (Anderson et al. 1987). Variables that do not contribute significantly to the equation are thereby removed. The steps were repeated or recomputed until no other

variables could be eliminated from the equation. The variables that were not removed represent the most adequate (i.e., explain the most variance) in predicting the fear of both types of crime. Now that an explanation has been made of how this study was conducted, it is time to examine what the study found.

CHAPTER V

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The results of this analysis affirm a number of the previously stated hypotheses, especially the ones regarding perceived risk of victimization, victimization experience, and television viewing experiences. In unexpected ways, however, several other hypotheses fail to gain support.

Descriptive Analyses

Both fear of crime variables, in addition to their antecedents, are summarized by the means and standard deviations presented in Table 1. In general, a relatively low number indicates less of something while a relatively high number corresponds with more of something.

Perceived Risk and Fear of Crime

Because the measures for fear and risk are additive indices, it is important to think of them as scores that indicate levels of either fear or risk. The means for fear and perceived risk of personal crime are reported in Table 1 as the average scores from 0 to 4. The average score for personal-crime fear among respondents is 1.80. The scores for fear of property also range from 0 to 4, but the average score for this type of crime fear is higher (2.45). This disparity between the average fear scores indicates that, on average, respondents have higher fear for property crime than for personal crime. This finding suggests that respondents are more fearful of property crime than of personal crime.

Similar to those for fear, the mean scores for perceived risk of personal and property crimes differ. These scores also range from 0 to 4. The mean score for perceived risk of personal crime is 1.45 compared to an average of 2.45 for perceived risk of property crime. Respondents seem to indicate that there is a higher likelihood of their becoming the victims of property crime rather than personal crime. In other words, students view their chances of property-crime victimization higher than their chances of personal or violent-crime victimization.

Victimization Experience

Due to their extremely skewed distributions the variables race, direct personal victimization experience, indirect property victimization experience, and perceived realism of the news are excluded from the analysis in this study. That is, the occurrences within each of these variables fall exceedingly towards one response, which result in an abnormal curve. This skewness violates a basic assumption of regression analysis.

Despite the elimination of two of the victimization-experience variables, there are two other indicators of victim experience included in this study: direct, property-crime victimization experience and indirect, personal-crime victimization experience. Of these two types of experience indirect victim experience with personal crime appears to be more probable. Respondents have about a three-in-four chance (74 %) of being indirect victims (knowing someone that has been the victim of at least one violent crime). On the other hand respondents themselves have about a one-in-two chance (53 %) of being the victim of property crime. The high proportion of indirect victims is perhaps due to the greater number of potential victims (e.g., friends, family, and neighbors) than for potential direct victims (respondents only).

Television Experience

The variables that refer to the television viewing habits of respondents yield some interesting findings. First, just under half of the respondents (48 %) report fright reactions to viewing television violence; that is, 48 percent of respondents admit to being frightened (being concerned for their safety) when they watch violence on television. A slight majority of respondents (52 %) do not recognize such a reaction when they watch television violence. As conceptualized as a contributor to the fear of crime, this measure taps a more immediate reaction to viewing violence.

Because they are highly skewed in their original form the variables for weekly television exposure, weekly television news exposure, and frequency of watching television alone are dichotomized according to the mean. As a result 50 percent of respondents are considered “heavy” viewers of television, and the other 50 percent are “light” viewers. The respondents’ weekly exposure to television news is divided in a similar way. Fifty-five percent of respondents are “heavy” news viewers. Less than four-out-of-ten respondents (38 %) report frequently watching television alone. Put another way, 62 percent of respondents report ordinarily watching television in the company of others.

The final set of television-experience variables relates to rating the degree of violence among three types of television programs: violence via personal accounts, violence via journalism or news, and violence via a story line or plot. These ratings involve the use of a scale of 0 to 4. According to respondents violence portrayed through the telling of personal accounts (e.g., talk shows and “real video” shows) has the highest average degree of violence or 3.87. On the other end of the spectrum subjects rate the violence displayed in the news as the lowest or 2.69.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Variables

Variables	Metrics	Descriptive Statistics		
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Response Range
<i>Dependent Variables</i>				
Fear of crime				
<input type="checkbox"/> Personal crime	(0=low, 4=high)	1.80	1.47	0-4
<input type="checkbox"/> Property crime	(0=low, 4=high)	2.45	1.46	0-4
<i>Predictor Variables</i>				
Perceived risk of victimization				
<input type="checkbox"/> Personal crime	(0=low, 4=high)	1.45	1.40	0-4
<input type="checkbox"/> Property crime	(0=low, 4=high)	2.45	1.48	0-4
Direct victimization experience				
<input type="checkbox"/> Property crime	(0=no, 1=yes)	.53	.50	0-1
Indirect victimization experience				
<input type="checkbox"/> Personal crime	(0=no, 1=yes)	.67	.47	0-1
Gender	(0=male, 1=female)	.53	.50	0-1
Fright reaction to television violence	(0=no, 1=yes)	.48	.50	0-1
Television exposure	(0=light, 1=heavy)	.50	.50	0-1
Watching television alone	(0=infrequently, 1=frequently)	.38	.49	0-1
Hours of news watched per week	(0=light, 1=heavy)	.55	.50	0-1
Degree of violence				
<input type="checkbox"/> Via personal accounts	(0=low, 4=high)	3.87	1.96	0-4
<input type="checkbox"/> Via journalism	(0=low, 4=high)	2.69	1.79	0-4
<input type="checkbox"/> Via story or plot	(0=low, 4=high)	3.23	1.42	0-4

Examination of Fear of Crime

Standard multiple regression is used to calculate the unique relationship between television experience and the fear of property and personal crime. First, in order to rule out multicollinearity among the independent variables, bivariate correlations are presented in Table 2. This table shows the matrix of bivariate correlations among the independent variables. These matrices are effective in spotting any excessive strength in

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations among Independent Variables

Variables	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8	X9	X10	X11	X12
Gender	-----											
Direct Experience	-.200***	-----										
Indirect Experience	-.031	.230***	-----									
Risk Personal	.209***	.093*	.090*	-----								
Risk Property	.057	.231***	.092*	.660***	-----							
Safety	.344***	-.015	.019	.179***	.082*	-----						
TV Exposure	-.137***	.046	.059	-.001	.083*	.034	-----					
Hours of News	.042	-.048	-.021	.023	.085*	.041	.466***	-----				
TV Alone	-.077*	.081*	.007	.064	.093*	-.029	.070*	-.016	-----			
Violence Accounts	-.118**	.083*	.131**	.027	.107**	-.038	.001	-.021	.063	-----		
Violence News	.147***	.047	.086*	.100**	.084*	.139***	.056	.005	-.013	.346***	-----	
Violence Story	-.088*	.088*	.071*	-.027	.064	.091*	-.041	-.056	.058	.382***	.345***	-----
	* p < .05	** p < .01	*** p < .001									

correlation among the variables. Because none of the independent variables are only moderately correlated with one another (ranging from .070 between television exposure and watching television alone to .660 between perceived risk of personal crime victimization and perceived risk of property crime victimization) the threat of multicollinearity is eliminated.

Another interesting point that is indicated by the bivariate correlations in this study relates to the appropriateness of considering two fear-of-crime types. The moderate correlation strength between the fear of personal and property crime (.521) seems to justify a distinction between the two types of fear. By indicating a higher fear

of property crime relative to personal crime, the differential average fear-scores of respondents further support this finding.

Fear of Crime Models

Because there were two measures for fear of crime, a separate model for each type of crime is used. The final step of the analysis involves the use of multiple regression. By using this analytic tool one can ascertain the importance of the television viewing experience measures relative to the sociodemographic, victim-experience, risk-perception variables, in predicting fear of crime. Because fear of personal crime and fear of property crime are measured separately, two different equations result.

Fear of Property Crime

The model predicting fear of property crime is shown in Table 3. The full model includes all of the predictor variables regardless of significance while the reduced model displays only those predictors that are statistically significant. When using backward regression the only television-experience variable to be included in the model is fright reaction to watching violence on television. While this variable has the smallest standardized beta coefficient relative to the other antecedents, the contribution to the model is still significant. Because this variable was thought not to exercise an effect on the fear of property crime, this finding fails to confirm a previously mentioned hypothesis. Respondents who report that they sometimes become frightened while watching violence on television are more likely to report higher levels of fear for property crime.

The resulting model is constructed primarily from perceived risk. As the standardized beta coefficient indicates perceived risk of property crime victimization is by far the most powerful predictor of fear of property crime. This finding is consistent

with previous research, which has stated that as perceived risk increases, so does fear of crime. This finding means that those who perceive themselves to be at a high risk of property crime have accompanying high levels of fear.

The last variable that is included in the model is direct, property-crime victimization experience. Direct experience with property crime is positively related to fear of crime. Therefore, those individuals who have had some direct experience with property crime victimization are more likely to have higher fear of property crime than are those not having the experience.

With these variables taken together the model explains 29.3 percent of the variance in fear of nonviolent, property crime; that is, the three variables perceived risk of property victimization, direct experience with property crime, and concern for safety when watching television violence explain 29.3 percent of the variance in the dependent variable. The resulting prediction equation is stated formally as

$$y' = 1.016 + .488(X_R) + .274(X_D) + .255(X_S).$$

Fear of Personal Crime

In contrast to predicting the fear of property crime, the television experience variables are quite influential in explaining the fear of personal crime. Supporting evidence for this assertion is offered by the inclusion in the fear of personal crime equation of three such variables. Among the television variables fright reaction to television violence is the strongest predictor of fear. According to the standardized beta coefficient, this variable exercises the second most independent effect on the fear of personal crime model. This variable is hypothesized to influence positively the fear of

Table 3. Regression of Fear of Property Crime on Sociodemographic, Victimization Experience, Perceived Risk, and Television-Experience Predictors

Predictors	Full Model		Reduced Model	
	b	Beta	b	Beta
Gender	-.144	-.050		
Direct Property Crime Experience	.270*	.093	.274*	.095
Perceived Risk of Victimization	.488***	.499	.488***	.499
Fright Reaction to Television Violence	.275*	.095	.255*	.088
Weekly Television Exposure	.081	.028		
Weekly TV News Exposure	.097	.034		
Watching TV Alone	-.097	-.033		
Violence Via Personal Accounts	-.039	-.055		
Violence Via News	.029	.036		
Violence Via Stories	-.019	-.019		
Constant	1.165		1.016	
R ²	.302		.293	
Adjusted R ²	.285		.288	
(N)	435		435	

* p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001

personal crime, and the findings of this study support such an assertion; that is, those who indicate that they are sometimes concerned for their safety when they watch violence on television are more likely to report higher levels of fear than are those who do not report concern.

Another significant variable in the fear-of-personal-crime model is the number of hours spent watching news per week. There is a positive relationship between news watching and fear of crime. Those individuals that are “heavy” viewers are more likely to have higher levels of fear. This finding is consistent with past research.

The last variable added to the model is frequency of watching television alone. Unlike all of the other variables mentioned, this variable is negatively related to the fear of personal crime. Those respondents who infrequently watch television alone are more likely to report higher levels of fear than are those who frequently watch television alone. In other words those who usually watch television with other individuals are more likely to express higher fear of personal crime than are those who watch television alone. As shown in Table 4 the overall variance explained by the variables in the equation was 40.3 percent. With the addition of television viewing variables a significantly larger percentage of the variance is explained.

As with the model for fear of property crime, perceived risk is the most influential variable. In fact, by looking at the standardized beta coefficient one recognizes that the perceived risk of personal-crime victimization has the strongest independent effect on the fear of personal crime. Past research shows that risk is positively related to fear. Put another way, as one's perceived risk increases, so does one's fear.

The sociodemographic variable gender is the last measure added to the model. Past studies have long reported a link between gender and fear of crime. This study finds support for this hypothesis. Women in this study are more likely to report higher levels of fear. From this analysis the final prediction equation is as follows:

$$y' = .420 + .482 (X_R) + .589 (X_S) + .563 (X_G) + .279 (X_H) - .246 (X_A).$$

In the next chapter I discuss how these findings relate to the hypotheses. I also discuss these findings in light of symbolic interactionism. I conclude the discussion by

Table 4. Regression of Fear of Personal Crime on Sociodemographic, Victimization Experience, Perceived Risk, and Television-Experience Predictors

Predictors	Full Model		Reduced Model	
	b	Beta	b	Beta
Gender	.563***	.189	.525***	.176
Indirect Personal Crime Experience	.162	.051		
Perceived Risk of Victimization	.482***	.458	.491***	.467
Fright Reaction to Television Violence	.589***	.198	.578***	.194
Weekly Television Exposure	.043	.014		
Weekly TV News Exposure	.279*	.093	.300**	.101
Watching TV Alone	-.246*	-.081	-.246**	-.081
Violence Via Personal Accounts	.030	.040		
Violence Via News	-.015	-.018		
Violence Via Stories	-.025	-.024		
Constant	.420		.547	
R ²	.407		.402	
Adjusted R ²	.393		.395	
(N)	434		434	

* p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001

offering some possible considerations for future research and alternative explanations for the findings of this study.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study support as well as complement the conclusions of previous fear of crime and television-effects research. However, some well-established conclusions were not confirmed and may warrant further scrutiny.

Establishing Fear

As expressed earlier the fear of crime literature has suffered from a number of conceptual and operational difficulties. In order to ascertain fear a majority of the fear of crime research has relied on some form of a unidimensional measure. One form that the single-item “fear” measure takes is the amount of safety respondents feel when walking in their respective neighborhoods at night. As Ferraro and LaGrange (1987) and Warr and Stafford (1983) point out, this item measures a judgment of risk rather than an emotion of fear. By failing to recognize the categories of crime perceptions, this measure confuses personal risk with personal fear. Therefore, this conceptual shortcoming leads to an ambiguous measure of fear. The other, and perhaps most common, form of the single-item measure suffers from similar conceptual problems. This single question attempts to measure fear by establishing how fearful respondents are of walking alone in their neighborhoods. This indicator, while touching more closely on fear, has three related flaws: 1) lacks specificity in identifying the object of the fear, 2) fails to precisely name a frame of reference, and 3) neglects tapping into everyday circumstances (Ferraro

and LaGrange 1987). Again, the resulting measure of fear is invalid.

The problems of the single-item fear indicator imply the complexity of the phenomenon. Moreover, as Ferraro and LaGrange (1987) and Warr and Stafford (1983) contend, these measurement difficulties necessitate the use of a multidimensional conception of fear that is crime-specific and refers to everyday life. My research analyzes fear according to ten specific crimes: murder, rape, sexual assault, robbery, assault, burglary, fraud, auto theft, and vandalism. All of these fear measures, with the exception of the fear of sexual assault, exhibit empirical distinction from one another and thereby indicate different fears. The combining of these crimes into two distinct groups is done to establish two measures of fear that relate to two specific types of crime—personal crime and property crime.

Past research states the complexity of fear and suggests that its multidimensional conceptualization and operationalization warrant further attention. The results heretofore mentioned testify to the appropriateness of the expanded conceptualization of fear. Such considerations of these variables, however, fail to integrate the definition of fear according to the individual involved, which results in the respondent complying to the terms of the researcher. This forced response may incorrectly suggest a greater degree of agreement among subjects when in fact more divergence is present. While these measures attempt to eliminate past mistakes by tapping fear along the personal affective region of perception, caution is still warranted.

Television-effects research has also been confronted with its share of methodological problems. One such issue is the use of experiments to ascertain television's effects. While often hailed for their ability to control all necessary variables, these pseudo-situations are questioned on the basis of finding only short-term effects.

Moreover, the use of such “laboratory” experiments may have a detrimental impact on the use of symbolic interaction theory in explaining the fear-of-crime phenomenon. By failing to fully appreciate the contextual aspect of symbolic communication, experiments necessarily assume all social settings as equal. Thus, data are treated as if they were gained in an everyday social setting and the fluctuating nature of situationally negotiated behavior is lost. As a result this symbolic interaction among television, social context, and the viewer is over looked. The study of television effects may benefit from future research in the use of alternative methods and statistical techniques. The results of this study seem to indicate the applicability and efficacy of regression techniques to the study of television effects.

Explaining Fear of Crime

The four groups of variables appear beneficial in the prediction of the fear of crime. The amount of predictability, however, varies according to the type of fear. In addition, variables chosen in the final prediction equations are contingent on the type of fear.

Sociodemographic Variables

The hypothesis, which states that gender affects fear of crime, is supported by my research. This assertion, however, is true for fear of personal crime only; that is, gender has an effect on fear of violent crime but not on fear of nonviolent crime. Women are more likely to report higher fear levels of personal crime than are men. The same relationship does not hold for nonviolent property crime. Both of these results offer support to the physical vulnerability hypothesis. This hypothesis asserts that those who are physically more vulnerable are more likely to report higher levels of fear. First, women are, on average, smaller in stature than men. This objective reality may give way

to the subjective sense of women that they are more susceptible to physical crime. Second, the failure of women to report higher fear of property crime than do men also indicates support for physical vulnerability. Because physical violence is not a salient threat in the committing of property crime, women do not fear this type of crime any more than do men. Therefore, the presence of violence in crime may be the key component to the increase of vulnerability among women. Perhaps, it is a lack of such violence in property crime that decreases the influence of physical vulnerability on fear of crime. The differing perceptions of violence between women and men are perhaps due to their different social positions. The existence of these alternative explanations warrants further investigation.

Victimization Experience

The hypotheses that direct and indirect experience with violent crime-victimization influence fear of crime are not supported by these research results. When predicting fear of personal crime and considering all other factors, the evidence from this study does not support the hypotheses that victimization experience influences fear. First, due to the lack of affirmative responses for direct victimization, the influence of direct violent crime experience on fear of personal crime cannot be explored. This variable is left out of the examination because of its extreme skewness. In other words, an excess of “no” responses and a shortage of “yes” answers results in an abnormal distribution, which violates an assumption of regression. Second, there is no evidence in this study that indirect violent crime victimization experience affects fear of violent crime. While indirect personal crime experience has adequate variation, the variable failed to illustrate influence on fear of personal crime. The failure to find a relationship between the influence of these two variables may be the result of controlling for other

more important variables (e.g., perceived risk of personal crime victimization); that is, when all other variables are held constant, no relationship appears. As a form of secondary information about crime, indirect personal crime experience does not appear particularly salient to respondents.

On the other hand, the results do confirm that direct victimization experience with property crime does influence fear of nonviolent property crime and, therefore, justifies its inclusion in a fear-of-property-crime explanation. Unlike vicarious victimization experience, first hand exposure to this type of crime seems important enough to explain at least some fear. The disparity in these research results for victimization experience makes future study necessary.

Perceived Risk of Victimization

Upon examination of the variables for perceived risk of victimization, the results affirm both hypotheses stating their respective influence of fear of crime. As with the fear of crime measures perceived risk is conceptualized according to violent crime and nonviolent crime. Assessment of risk for personal crime demonstrates considerable influence on the fear of that type of crime. Likewise, perceived risk of property crime induces fear of property crime. These findings are consistent with past studies (Ortega and Myles 1987; Warr and Stafford 1983). In addition, my research seems to support the contention that risk and fear are conceptually and empirically distinct from one another. Moreover, these results are in line with previous research (Rountree and Land 1996).

Each of these two risk/fear relationships implies that higher risk brings with it a more “realistic” possibility of becoming a victim of that type of crime and an accompanying higher level of fear. Although this heightened reality of victimization presides chiefly in the subjective realm, it is real enough. Here the definition of the

situation facilitates explanation. In a conceptual sense risk perception is a cognitive judgment, which is by definition based on experiences. In other words, one's knowledge of something is based on his or her experiences. Such experiences are subjective in nature and differ among individuals. Therefore, a judgment is based on what is known through that individual's subjective reality. Because what one sees as real is treated and acted upon as that individual's reality, the estimation of threat or the likelihood of victimization as perceived by the individual can result in varied consequences. An emotional reaction of fear is one such consequence. If, for example, one perceives a risk of victimization, then he or she necessarily defines that risk as real. This "real" situation is also real in its outcome—fear. Therefore, the affective perception of fear follows the real, cognitive judgment of risk. While my study does not employ such a model, path analysis might shed further light on related future research topics. This type of data analysis may then consider television-experience variables and how they first influence perceived risk and then how this relationship impacts fear.

Television Experience

With regard to the television variables used in the study, the results appear to suggest a connection between viewing dramatic television programs and fear of crime. This statement appears especially true for fear of personal crime. My research finding that respondents' fright reactions when watching television is related to fear of crime suggests that crime is among one of those concerns. Put another way, those respondents who report that they are frequently concerned for their safety while watching violence on television are more likely to report higher levels of personal and property crime fear than do those who report being only infrequently concerned. The results of this study further indicate that women are more likely to report concern for their safety when watching

television violence than men were. This finding may be the result of higher vulnerability combined with a higher sensitivity to violent television content among women. In other words perhaps the different subjective realities among women, due to a secondary status in the patriarchal society, encourage them to take violence more seriously than men do.

My research fails to confirm the presence of a relationship between total television exposure and fear of crime. This finding is incongruous with the cultivation hypothesis. By looking only at the number of hours one watches television, research treats all program types as the same. Again using such a conceptualization ignores television content that is symbolically conveyed. Another possible explanation of this result might be what Heath and Petraitis (1987) refer to as the “ceiling effect,” which states that those with high fear are unable to be affected by further media messages.

Another explanation could be that the total amount of television one watches is not as important as the type of television one watches. One finding of this study that possibly strengthens this previous point affirms that television news is related to fear of violent personal crime. Perhaps then it is not how much television one watches but what one watches that is the important factor in television viewing. These findings suggest that a more detailed treatment of this possibility should be explored in future research.

One general claim that appears to be indicated by this study is that there is a relationship between watching television violence and the fear of crime. This assertion is especially true for the fear of personal crime. Respondents expressing concern for their safety when watching television violence and heavy viewers of television news are more likely to have higher levels of violent crime fear; that is, those who view television violence in such a way as to be frightened by its portrayal experience a greater sensitivity to violence in their “real world.” Even when controlling for important sociodemographic

and victimization variables these relations remain. My research findings also seem to bear support for the assertion that one's cognitive judgment of personal victimization (i.e., perceived risk) is linked to one's fear of crime. This statement is appropriate for both types of crime.

Appendix A

Television Viewing Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
_____ years
2. What is your sex?
 Male Female
3. What is your race?
 Black White Hispanic
 Asian Other
4. What is your student classification?
 Freshman Sophomore Junior
 Senior Graduate
5. While you attend school where do you live?
 On campus Off-campus in town Off campus out-of-town
6. During the majority of your childhood (before the age of 18), who was present in your family situation?
 Father only Mother only Father and mother
 Stepfather and mother Stepmother and father Grandfather and grandmother
 Grandfather only Grandmother only Other family relatives only
 Foster parents
7. In the average week, approximately how many hours do you personally watch television?
 0 hours 1-5 hours 6-10 hours 11-15 hours 16-20 hours
 21-25 hours 26-30 hours 31-35 hours 36-40hours 41-45 hours
 46-50 hours 51-55 hours 56-60 hours 61-65 hours 65 hours+
8. When do you most frequently watch television?
 5:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (noon) 12:00 p.m. (noon) to 5:00 p.m.
 5:00 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. 10:30 p.m. to 5:00 a.m.
9. As a young child (ages 3-12) how often were you allowed to watch violence (of any kind) on television?
 Never
 Sometimes
 Frequently
 Always
10. As a teen-ager (ages 13-18) how often were you allowed to watch violent television programs?
 Never
 Sometimes
 Frequently
 Always
11. When you watch television how often do you watch alone?
 Never
 Sometimes
 Frequently
 Always
12. How often do you watch violence, of any kind, on television?
 Never
 Sometimes
 Frequently
 Always
13. When you watch violence on television programs, how often do you become concerned for your safety?
 Never
 Sometimes
 Frequently
 Always

Questions 14, 15, 16, and 17 ask for your opinion. For questions 14 and 15 please provide your agreement or disagreement. For questions 16 and 17 please estimate the likelihood of you or someone you know becoming a victim of any violent act.

14. In general, non-fictional television programs (include news, newsmagazines, documentaries, "real video" shows, and talk shows) have too much physical violence.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

15. In general, fictional television programs (include dramatic series, situation comedies, movies, and cartoons) have too much physical violence.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

18. For each offense listed below indicate whether or not you have ever been a victim. Circle the number 1=Yes or 2=No to indicate past experience with crime.

In the past five years have you been victimized by...?	Yes	No
Being raped (Rape is defined as forced sexual intercourse by means of either psychological coercion or physical force.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being sexually assaulted (Sexual assault is unwanted sexual contact that does not involve sexual intercourse)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having something taken from you by force	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being beaten up by someone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being hit by a drunken driver while driving a car	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having someone break into your home while you are away	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being cheated out of your money	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having your car stolen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having someone damage and/or destroy your personal property	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. What do you think is the likelihood that you will become a victim, in the next year, of any kind of violent act?

- Very low
- Slightly low
- Neither low nor high
- Slightly high
- Very high

17. What do you think is the likelihood that someone you know (include friends, relatives, and neighbors) will become a victim, in the next year, of any kind of violent act?

- Very low
- Slightly low
- Neither low nor high
- Slightly high
- Very high

19. For each offense listed below indicate whether or not someone you know (include friends, relatives, and neighbors) has been a victim. Circle the number 1=Yes or 2=No to indicate past experience with crime.

In the past five years has someone you know been victimized by...?	Yes	No
Being murdered	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being raped (Use definition from question 18)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being sexually assaulted (Use definition from question 18)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having something taken from them by force	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being beaten up by someone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being hit by a drunken driver while driving a car	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having someone break into their home while they are away	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being cheated out of their money	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having their car stolen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having someone damage and/or destroy their personal property	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The following questions are in four parts and apply to two types of television programs. It is important that you answer them in the order that they appear. First, answer part A, followed by part B, part C, and then part D.

20. Please answer the following four-part question.

- A. Column A has four types of **fictional television programs**. These programs include dramatic series, situation comedies (sitcoms), movies, and cartoons.
- B. How many hours per week do you watch each type of show? In the space provided in column B please indicate (write in) the approximate number of hours that you watch each type of program.
- C. In general, do you consider each type of television program to be realistic? That is, do you think the program is realistic in the way people behave and the way events occur? Provide responses in column C by circling the number that best describes how realistic you think each type of program is.
- D. How violent do you think each type of these shows is? Provide responses in column D by circling the number corresponding with the amount of violence for each television program.

A Types of Fictional Programs	B Number of Hours Watched per Week	C Perceived Realism of Each Type of Television Program			D Degree of Violence (Rate how violent you think each type of TV show is on average by circling the corresponding number)				
		Not realistic	Some- what realistic	Very realistic	Not violent	Some- what violent	Violent	Very violent	Extremely violent
		1. Dramatic series	_____	1	2	3	1	2	3
2. Situation comedies	_____	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5
3. Movies	_____	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5
4. Cartoons	_____	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5

21. Please answer the following four-part question.

- A. Column A has six types of **non-fictional television programs**. These programs include network or national news, local news, newsmagazines, documentaries, "real video" shows, and talk shows.
- B. How many hours per week do you watch each type of show? In the space provided in column B please indicate (write in) the approximate number of hours that you watch each type of program.
- C. In general, do you consider each type of television program to be realistic? That is, do you think the program is realistic in the way people behave and the way events occur? Provide responses in column C by circling the number that best describes how realistic you think each type of program is.
- D. How violent do you think each type of these shows is? Provide responses in column D by circling the number corresponding with the amount of violence for each television program.

A Types of Nonfictional Programs	B Number of Hours Watched per Week	C Perceived Realism of Each Type of Television Program			D Degree of Violence (Rate how violent you think each TV show is on average by circling the corresponding number)				
		Not realistic	Some- what realistic	Very realistic	Not violent	Some- what violent	Violent	Very violent	Extremely violent
		1. Network news	_____	1	2	3	1	2	3
2. Local news	_____	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5
3. Newsmagazines	_____	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5
4. Documentaries	_____	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5
5. "Real Video" shows	_____	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5
6. Talk shows	_____	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5

22. For each crime listed below indicate your level of fear. Circle the number between 1=Not Afraid and 5=Very Afraid that best describes your level of fear.

In your everyday life how fearful are you of...	Not Afraid	Somewhat Likely	Likely	Very Afraid	Extremely Likely
Being murdered?	1	2	3	4	5
Being raped? (Rape is defined as forced sexual intercourse by means of either psychological coercion or physical force)	1	2	3	4	5
Being sexually assaulted? (Sexual assault is unwanted sexual contact that does not involve sexual intercourse)	1	2	3	4	5
Having something taken from you by force?	1	2	3	4	5
Being beaten up by someone?	1	2	3	4	5
Being hit by a drunken driver while driving your car?	1	2	3	4	5
Having someone break into your home while you are away?	1	2	3	4	5
Being cheated out of your money?	1	2	3	4	5
Having your car stolen?	1	2	3	4	5
Having someone damage and/or destroy your personal property?	1	2	3	4	5

23. For each crime listed below indicate the likelihood of you becoming a victim within the next year. Circle the number between 1=Not Likely and 5=Very Likely that best describes your likelihood.

In your everyday life how likely are you of...	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Likely	Very Likely	Extremely Likely
Being murdered?	1	2	3	4	5
Being raped? (Rape is defined as forced sexual intercourse by means of either psychological coercion or physical force)	1	2	3	4	5
Being sexually assaulted? (Sexual assault is unwanted sexual contact that does not involve sexual intercourse)	1	2	3	4	5
Having something taken from you by force?	1	2	3	4	5
Being beaten up by someone?	1	2	3	4	5
Being hit by a drunken driver while driving your car?	1	2	3	4	5
Having someone break into your home while you are away?	1	2	3	4	5
Being cheated out of your money?	1	2	3	4	5
Having your car stolen?	1	2	3	4	5
Having someone damage and/or destroy your personal property?	1	2	3	4	5

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