

***Social Order and Fear of Crime in Contemporary Times*, Stephen Farrall,
Jonathan Jackson and Emily Gray, Clarendon Studies in Criminology
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In their new book *Social Order and the Fear of Crime in Contemporary Times*, Stephen Farrall, Jonathan Jackson and Emily Gray have taken on a monumental task. Aggregating, as they do, data from a range of qualitative and quantitative research projects over a number of years, data from the British Crime Survey and a local crime survey, and a gamut of theoretical approaches, their book attempts to bring the field of fear of crime research up to date and to articulate a new conceptual framework for our comprehension of the issue. Central to their conceptual task is the attempt to distinguish between *experiential* and *expressive* fear.

The book's eight chapters are separated into three parts. The first part introduces the concept and history of fear of crime, and discusses most of the ways it has been understood, setting out the context of what could be described as the 'fear of crime debates'. On page 4, the authors set out their key argument simply and clearly: '...that the fear of crime is, at once, a more diverse experience and a more expressive phenomenon than has so far been empirically demonstrated'. They suggest fear of crime is not one 'thing': rather it is 'relational' and 'public emotions register as both a diffuse anxiety and a tangible worry over victimisation' (p4). Indeed, they go on to note that fear of crime is a 'lay seismograph or barometer of social cohesions and moral consensus' (p6). This first section is also concerned to rehearse and reiterate the political economy of crime fear, and critically, some of the theoretical impasses with which the field is beset. In all, this section pays due regard to what I have referred to in a genealogy of crime fear as 'the fear of crime feedback loop' (Lee 2001; 2007). That is, the fear of crime is not somehow a natural organising principle for understanding citizen concern about crime. Rather, the concept itself has a specific developmental history that has seen it naturalised and popularised. In many senses, the book from this point on is an attempt to broaden the notion of the concept, and to show that fear of crime, is, well, much *more* than fear of crime.

To this end, the book is a synthesis. This is not a bad thing. Indeed, it is very useful to find almost the spectrum of fear of crime research discussed and condensed in the one volume. Very little in the history of fear of crime research is actually rejected; rather it is drawn into Farrall et al's experiential/expressive framework. But it is not just a synthesis of the field of fear of crime research: it is also a synthesis of the work the authors—particularly Jackson and Farrall—who have been engaged in for 30 or so years between them. The familiarity of the authors with their topic is indeed a great strength of this book. In this sense it is a rich resource compiled by experienced researchers.

The second part of the book deals largely with the authors' empirical contribution to fear of crime research. Here they assess both qualitative and quantitative data—their own data and data of larger surveys such as the British Crime survey, on which the authors have had an impact by having some new questions introduced. The qualitative section draws quite strongly (and correctly in my opinion) on the work of Girling, Loader, and Sparks (2000). This framework gives due regard to the fact that talk about crime is 'dense and digressive' and thus draws in and expresses broader social and individual anxieties about life in contemporary times. To my mind, this work again illustrates just what a fraud the concept of

fear of crime had perpetrated on this field of research—that is, fear of crime is only minimally about crime *per se*.

This issue is explored further in the following chapter where the authors show that by asking new survey questions the levels of ‘fear’ as measured can drop significantly. For example, worry about robbery drops from around 40 per cent of those sampled to around 8 per cent of those sampled once the researchers ‘filter’ the respondents using questions about how frequently respondents have actually experienced worry in the previous year. Such findings are significant. They indicate that experiential fear only contributes minimally to what surveys have counted as fear or worry about crime. Where, then, does all this other fear come from? The authors account for this by connecting experiential (often local) fears to more *expressive* local, social, cultural, national and global concerns (p209). This argument is perhaps best summed where the authors argue that concerns about crime have:

...become intertwined in the public mind with the less dramatic but more everyday matter of social cohesion, consensus and relations. Concerns about crime would consequently be driven not just by aspects of risk perception and circulating mass-media images of frightening and unsettling events, but also by signs of social stability and moral order. Such concerns may be just as much about moral outrage as they are about explicit threat perceptions. (p220)

In summary, Farrall et al’s new survey measures begin to tap into what many of us working in this field have always known, but hitherto have not been able to measure particularly well. That is: that fear of crime is a composite of experiences, beliefs and expressions. Crudely put, their research indicates that for many people living in areas of higher levels of disorder and crime, fear of crime as measured is often a reflection of these experiences. On the other hand, for the middle classes in particular, fear of crime as measured is an expression of broader social and moral concerns. In this sense what we have is a continuum of fear of crime between expressive and experiential fears: worried citizens will almost inevitably express a combination of both.

While this model is extremely useful, and a monumental step forward in many respects, I have some concerns which largely come back once again to the usefulness of fear of crime as an organising principle. First, the authors usefully separate expressive and experiential fears through their use of both the old and new fear of crime measures. However, I am unconvinced that expressive fear is actually fear of crime at all. That is: why not try to dispense with the idea of expressive fear altogether? This would be completely consistent with Farrall and Gadd’s (2004) argument about the conservatism of the way surveys measure fear, and whether we, as researchers, should believe the numbers we produce. To my mind, language is important and we should call this expressive fear what it is in order to remove it from the fear of crime feedback loop altogether. Otherwise, governments and policy makers will still treat and address this as a crime fear when it is not—particularly when political advantage in law and order debates can be gained from it.

Second, I am not sure that the model as articulated moves us away from the fact that most fear of crime research which uses a quantitative survey model focuses on fear of street crime. The result may be that little regard is paid to what Stanko (1990) has referred to women’s ‘everyday fears’ which are both expressive and experiential but draw on everyday expressions of very real routine harassment and even experiences of domestic and sexual violence. The reality is that when we talk about fear of crime we’re largely taking about fear of crime by strangers when the reality is that most serious crime is perpetrated by those known to victims.

Part 3 of the book (re)places these key findings back in a broader socio-political context, demonstrating how fear of crime is connected with social and economic transition and change which has alienated a range of communities. The authors are, for example, critical of neo-liberal regimes on both sides of the Atlantic which, during the 1980s, talked up the problem of crime for political purposes. This is useful, for it also reminds us that this book is about more than fear of crime; it is fundamentally an attempt to understand some of the dynamics of contemporary social order and disorder.

Overall this book is a great achievement and an excellent resource for anybody even vaguely interested in public expressions of concern about crime. It will remain so for years to come. It contains numerous insights into the field of fear of crime research which any new researcher should engage with before miring themselves in this vexed and complicated topic.

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