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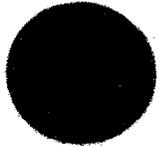
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Fear of Crime in Urban Neighborhoods

REACTIONS TO CRIME PROJECT

CENTER FOR URBAN AFFAIRS

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FEAR OF CRIME IN URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS

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Introduction

The problem of social order has been central within sociology in general, and disorder in cities a continuing research focus of urban sociology in particular. The linkages among urbanization, social change, and personal and social disorganization were a continuing concern of the Chicago School and numerous studies and theories continue to operate within this broad perspective. Although a number of revisions of this perspective have emerged, both theoretical (Fischer, 1975) and empirical (Hunter, 1974), this paper should be seen to follow directly from this tradition.

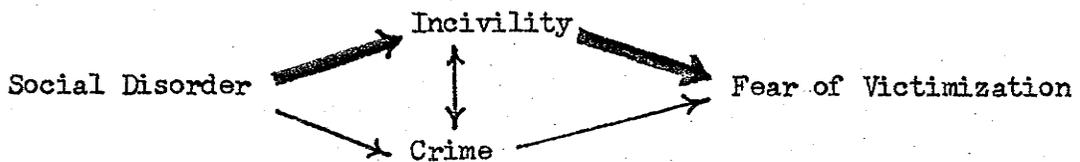
In this paper we will address the central issue of social disorder in urban neighborhoods and more explicitly look at its relationship to residents' fear of crime.

For the most part this is a "grounded" theoretical presentation. It's grounding comes from the Reactions to Crime Project of the Center for Urban Affairs at Northwestern University. This large-scale, multi-method research included (among other data sets) year long field observations by field workers in four neighborhoods in each of three cities -- Philadelphia, Chicago, and San Francisco. The observations presented in this paper come from a preliminary perusal of these field data and the approach is theory generating rather than a systematic grounded comparative theory testing as proposed by Glazer and Strauss().

I begin with the simple observation that fear of criminal victimization in urban areas is more pervasive than victimization itself.

Couple this with more sophisticated analyses that find that victimization only partially and inconsistently explains variations in fear (DuBow, 1978), and one is faced with an anomaly -- a question -- what are people afraid of? In searching for an answer to this question I am taking the approach of looking at situated factors, that is, external phenomena in an individual's experiential environment as producing variations in fear; rather than a more psychological perspective that might attempt to account for such variations within the varying personalities of individuals.

The outline of my argument may be summarized briefly in the following diagram:



In short, I am arguing that incivility and crime are both correlated manifestations of more general social disorder; and furthermore, that incivility has a greater impact upon fear than does crime itself.

I am lumping under the broad concept of "fear" finer distinctions made by some among "concern", "risk", and "fear" (DuBow, 1978). A more complete and refined exposition might explore possible variations in this model for its hypothesized consequences upon these three aspects of reactions to crime. By crime I mean major felonies such as assault, robbery, burglary, murder, and rape. The crux of the argument that follows centers upon the concept of "incivility" and its mediating link

between social disorder and fear.

The Concept of Civility

There are two general theoretical traditions that I will use in addressing the issue of "civility." The first is perhaps best exemplified in the works of Howard Becker and Erving Goffman which utilize a symbolic interactionist perspective in describing the negotiation of social order. In describing a "culture of civility" in San Francisco, Becker (1967) emphasizes the definition of the situation by residents of this City who, it seems, have a higher tolerance for diversity of behavior than one might find in numerous other cities. It is not that behaviors are different in public places, but they are responded to differently. Furthermore, this is not idiosyncratic, but rather sufficiently structured and pervasive that one may define it as a "culture." He implies that various cities develop different cultures about behavior in public places which gives to cities their variations in "image" or "feeling" (Strauss, 1964). From this view of civility as involving the nature of public encounters, social order, or at least this part of it, is qualitatively variable from city to city. The recent work of Claude Fischer (1975) on a "subcultural theory of urbanism" has direct parallels. In attempting to account for the increasing "tolerance" and "diversity of behavior" that one finds in cities, and attempting to link it to other than "disorganization" and "disorder", as Louis Wirth (1938) did, Fischer maintains that residentially segregated subcultures maintain an internal solidarity that buffers and shields more public encounters.

Erving Goffman in Behavior in Public Places defines in greater detail the processes by which individuals negotiate an emergent public order. The continuing movement between personal and collective rights and obligations, the delicate balance between private and public claims is seen to be routinely problematic. The forms and stages of this process are most clearly highlighted by their breach, when expectations are not met, claims and counter-claims come into conflict, and the public order must be renegotiated. Throughout this discussion there is little reference to "culture" as Becker sees it, but rather a more general and universalistic set of rules that relate to such abstract notions as "the sacredness of the self". Therefore, in spite of the diversity of behaviors and contexts which Goffman analyzes, one emerges with a picture of public "civility" itself as a uniform, overarching desideratum.

It is the second theoretical tradition that addresses "civility" which more clearly locates its institutionalized source ... in the concepts of "citizenship" and "the state." Drawing on the works of Shils (1957), Geertz (1963), and Marshall (1958), among others, the idea of citizen is a modern development linked to the rise of modern nation-states with their rational-legal systems of authority. The characteristic of modern citizenship, according to Shils, is the development of "civil ties". Civil ties are both horizontal in defining relationships among individuals (fellow citizens), and vertical in defining relationships between the individual and the collective whole (defined legally by the state). In contrast, then, to the symbolic interactionist perspective

this perspective views interpersonal encounters, civility in public places, as being embedded within, and inseparable from, the third party link to the state. For it is the latter which is viewed as the final arbitrator of public encounters ...the keeper of "domestic tranquility" legally responsible for "public order." The claims and counter-claims of individuals in public places are not seen to rest upon some general culture, to be totally emergent and always negotiated, nor to be derivative from universalistic expectations about the self, but rather, to rest upon a set of legally defined rights and duties as citizens. From this perspective, incivilities are not simply personal violations, because they may be experienced with all the "moral outrage" that attends a violation of the moral and legal order, they may call into question the very basic idea that as a citizen one is living within the protection and security of an ordered "civil society."

In summary, these two aspects of "civility" may be thought of as informal versus more formal definitions, with the micro level processes of the former and the more macro implications of the latter mutually informing one another. (We will now turn, briefly, to a discussion of why incivilities in urban neighborhoods have the implications which they do for residents' feelings of security and fear.

Neighborhood Change and Social Disorder

Much urban sociology has been explicitly concerned with documenting the change of cities and spelling out its implications for local neighborhoods and the routine daily activities of residents (Burgess, 1925; Hunter, 1975). Much research recently has attempted to demonstrate

that what were previously seen to be disorganizing consequences of such changes, are in fact simply different types of social order. For example, Whyte in Street Corner Society (1943) showed the degree to which this slum community with its street corner groups was in fact organized around a system of personal loyalties in peer groups and families. Similarly, Gans in The Urban Villagers showed how a pervasive "peer group culture" coupled with family and ethnicity formed the basis of solidarity in Boston's West End. (1962). Suttles' Social Order of the Slum (1968) uses the concept of "segmented social order" to show how personal ties and the territorial separation of potentially conflicting racial and ethnic groups maintained order within this West Side neighborhood of Chicago. The social changes which people experience in their local neighborhoods should not, therefore, be routinely seen to cause a loss of social order. However, I would suggest this type of social order which these researchers have documented is qualitatively distinct from a "civil social order." The difference lies in the fact that the "primordial social order", although not containing crime and violence to the degree expected, still retains a greater density of personal incivilities and encounters in public places. It is these which are pervasive at the "margins", the points of intersection, where people and groups who have defined selective enclaves of security and safety, feel fearful and experience incivility in the public domain. Group claims to turf, unless coupled with a "civil tie", one that does not destroy the former, but is laid upon it, in addition to it, will perpetuate

if not heighten incivilities and fear. (I am suggesting, therefore, that neighborhood change, though not necessarily leading to disorder, may often be experienced as incivilities that result in personal fear because of the absence of a civil public order.)

Physical Signs of Incivility

* The above discussion focuses primarily upon face-to-face encounters in public places. However, there is much more within the daily routines of individuals that they experience as incivilities. The physical environment of cities presents individuals with numerous signs which, to borrow from Webb, et. al. (1967) may be considered physical "residues" of the actions of others. The "erosions" and "accretions" within the physical environment, the burned-out buildings or the litter and garbage in the streets, lead people to make inferences about an area, and more specifically the type of people who inhabit it, or use it. With no personal encounters these signs adequately communicate an image of "disorder" and specifically the loss of a civil society. Well kept neighborhoods, to a degree independent of social class, communicate a semblance of order, and I would suggest, result in less fear.

This is not to say that physical signs of disorder are not correlated with variations in actual crimes, this remains an empirical question. I am suggesting that these "physical incivilities", like their inter-personal counterparts, are more frequently experienced, more ubiquitous in daily routines than crime, and therefore are more experientially significant in generating fear and insecurity among urban residents.

The State and the Maintenance of Order

It has become a well recognized tenet within contemporary sociology that one cannot look to the state, and its formal authority, as the sole source for the maintenance of social order. Whether one takes a symbolic interactionist perspective which views social order arising out of the daily encounters of individuals, or whether one takes the more classical perspective of Weber and Durkheim which sees the state as an outcome of "beliefs of legitimacy" or residing within the "collective conscience" of the society as a whole, the role of the state is partial and limited. At a more concrete level this same issue has been addressed by James Q. Wilson and other observers of police (Wilson, 1968; Bordua, ; Niederhoffer,) when they distinguish among the purposes of policing: the catching of criminals, enforcing the law, or maintaining a semblance of public order. It is the latter which more aptly defines the routine functioning of police and which directly links to our previous discussion.

The sense of disorder and insecurity and fear which urban residents experience as a result of incivilities are frequently what police are asked to deal with, not crimes and catching criminals. However, it is this type of "nuisance" and incivility that police deal with reluctantly because of its ubiquity and the scarce allocation of resources. Also, as Wilson has observed, which function is paramount is likely to vary from community to community depending upon what is perceived to be the prevailing social order within a community.

There is, however, a more general set of implications for the state and the maintenance of social order which extends far beyond policing. The physical symbols and signs of incivility which I previously mentioned are also indicators of the degree to which other agencies of the state are operating to preserve a semblance of social order. Fire departments, streets and sanitation, housing authorities and others all have responsibilities here, in the vertical link between citizen and state, of maintaining order within a civil society. Therefore, it is not simply with the citizen's view of the police and the criminal justice system as a whole that people may come to question the effectiveness of the state in preserving order, but with the effective operation of numerous agencies of government that produce or fail to correct incivilities of either a physical or interpersonal type. This is particularly significant in the attempt to develop the horizontal civil tie among fellow citizens, for this civil tie, as we have noted, is related to and embedded in the vertical civil tie of the citizen to the state.

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, I am suggesting that fear in the urban environment is above all a fear of social disorder that may come to threaten the individual. I suggest that this fear results more from experiencing incivility than from direct experience with crime itself. Within areas of a city incivility and crime may in fact be empirically correlated. As such, incivility would then be a symbolic cue to the heightened possibility for more serious criminal victimization. Independent of this empirical question, incivility may still produce greater variation in fear than does crime because of its relative frequency in daily experience of urban

residents. In addition, I am suggesting that incivility may be profitably viewed from two perspectives, that of the symbolic interactionists that focuses upon micro-level interpersonal encounters, and that which discusses civility as an aspect of relationships among "citizens" and of citizens to the state. The resulting conclusion is that incivility not only leads to fear of personal encounters, but has implications for citizen's beliefs about the legitimacy and effectiveness of the state in maintaining a semblance of social order.

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