Crime, News and Fear of Crime: Toward an Identification of Audience Effects*

TED CHIRICOS, *Florida State University*

SARAH ESCHHOLZ, *Florida State University*

MARC GERTZ, *Florida State University*

Communication studies increasingly recognize the audience's critical role in receiving and interpreting media messages. Research into audience attributes that distinguish "media effects," on the fear of crime (FEAR) has been limited—particularly as it relates to the reception of news. This study is based on a survey of 2,092 adults in Tallahassee, Florida at the height of a media driven "panic" about violent crime. Controlling for age, gender, race, victim experience and other perceptions of crime, the frequency of watching television news and listening to news on the radio is significantly related to FEAR. Reading newspapers and newsmagazines and recall of detail concerning specific highly publicized violent crimes are unrelated to FEAR. When audiences are disaggregated by gender, race, and a series of third attributes, television news consumption is significantly related to FEAR only *for white females between the ages of thirty and fifty-four. This finding holds regardless of victim experience, income or perceived safety. Several explanations derived from previous research are applied to this finding. Both "resonance" and "substitution" have possible explanatory relevance, but the "affinity" of audience members with victims most often seen on television news may best account for the concentration of "media effects" among white women.*

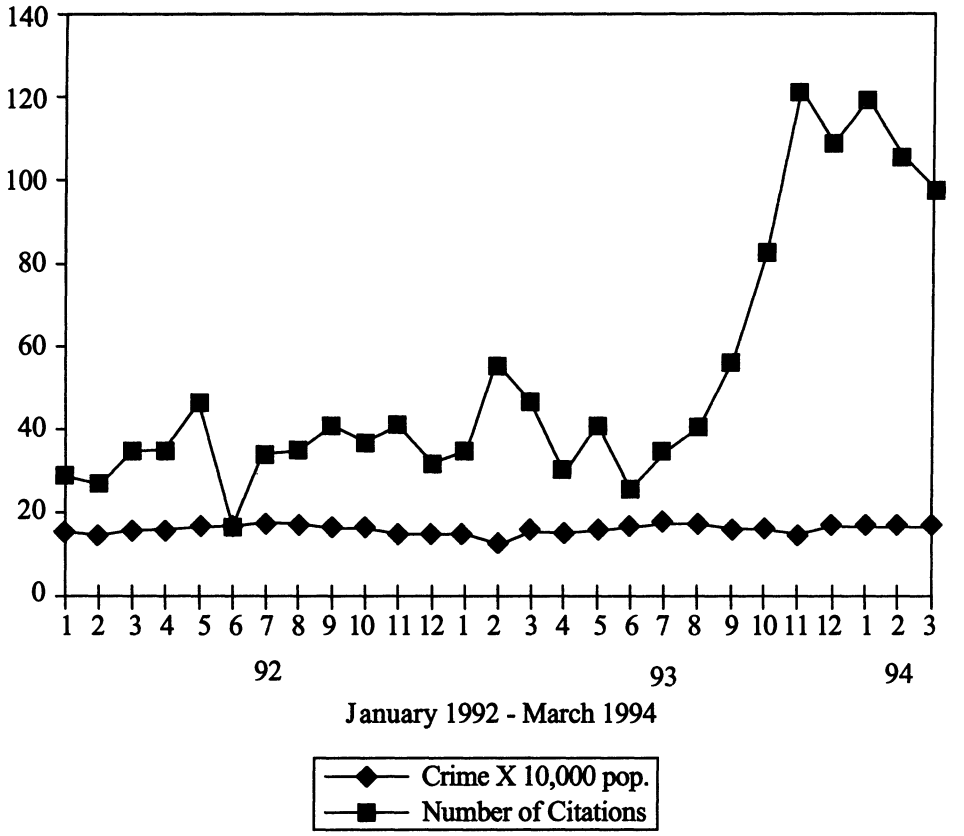
In July, 1993 two teenaged girls in Houston took a shortcut home through a wooded area, crossed paths with six gang members to whom "life means nothing," and were raped and brutally murdered (*Newsweek* 1993a). Two weeks later, the national newsmagazines ran cover stories on violent crime, and a media feeding frenzy was underway. Typical stories included: "Teen Violence: Wild in the Streets" (*Newsweek,* 1993b); "Danger in the Safety Zone" (*Time,* 1993a); "In a State of Terror" (*Newsweek,* 1993c); "Taming the Killers" (*Time,* 1993b), and "Florida: State of Rage" (*U.S. News,* 1993a).

The explosion of attention to this issue extended to other news outlets as well. Television and newspaper stories about violent crime and juvenile violence increased more than 400 percent between June and November of 1993 (Figure 1). In the wake of this extraordinary burst of media coverage, public concern about crime rose dramatically. Americans ranking crime or violence as the nation's foremost problem jumped from 9 percent to 49 percent between January 1993 and January 1994 (Gallup 1994:6). Politicians at every level rose to the "challenge" of keeping up with public opinion. Proposals to stem the seeming "epidemic" of violence included everything from castration to caning, from fingerprinting school children to incorporating military technology in the latest "war on crime." That levels of violent crime actually were declining was apparently irrelevant.

In this paper, we examine relationships between fear of crime (FEAR) and the news consumption reported by 2,092 persons living in a state capital who were randomly sampled at the peak of the media frenzy about violent crime. We consider four sources of news:

* A revised version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Society of Criminology. Boston, November 15, 1995. The authors would like to thank Lorie Fridell, Sally Gertz, Leroy Gould, Gary Kleck, Tony Pate, Will Persons, Glenda Rabby, and Jeff Snipes for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

Figure 1 • *Violent Crime and Media Coverage of Violent Crime*



Sources: U.S. Department of Justice (1993,1994,1995) for Violent Crime. Dialog Information Service (1994) for coverage of 26 major newspapers. Burelle's Transcripts (1994) for coverage of CBS, NBC, and FOX networks.

The values on the vertical axis show the combined total of newspaper and television stories involving violent crime or juvenile violence and the rate of UCR violent crime per *10,000* of the population.

television, radio, newspapers, and weekly newsmagazines. We examine the relationship between news consumption and FEAR, controlling for age, gender, race, victim experience, and other crime perceptions, including the perception of risk. That perception is often misinterpreted as fear itself (Ferraro 1995).

Most importantly, we explore the possibility that relationships between fear of crime and news consumption vary in ways that reflect socially patterned differences among respondents. In the manner of "reception research" (Dahlgren 1988) we assume that meaning does not reside entirely in media messages; rather, it is variably received and interpreted by audiences in distinctive social situations. Young African-American women likely bring a different set of experiences and interests to the construction of media meaning about crime than, for example, older white men. We assume that diverse categories of social existence frame orientations to media messages, and as Fiske (1986:405) noted, "contradictions in society reproduce themselves in subjectivities" (1986:405).

When patterned "subjectivities" coalesce around issues like crime and fear, they may form what some have termed "interpretive communities" (Jensen 1990; Lindlof 1988). The latter affirms "the complexity and variability of audience responses to media messages" and

situates the "individual reader or viewer within broader social and cultural contexts" (Carragee 1990:86). In contrast with more structural interpretations of media effects (Gitlin 1979), this approach posits an active audience and, if not polysemic media messages (Fiske 1986), then at least polyvalent (Condit 1989) interpretations of them.

It has yet to be established that shared experiences of gender, race, age, income, and fear are sufficient to constitute "interpretive communities." Even so, if the relationship between fear and news consumption is patterned by gender, race, age, etc., we may begin to understand how news consumers "actively produce meaning from. . .within the context of their everyday lives" (Dahlgren 1988:289-90). In this paper we examine whether "fear" is differentially produced by consumers of news who are distinguished by gender, race, age, income, and victim experience.

Prior Research: Media, Audiences and Fear of Crime

A recent review of "mass media and fear of crime" research by Heath and Gilbert concludes that the relationship is contingent on "characteristics of the message, of the audience, and of the dependent measure" (1996:384). Relevant message characteristics include the proportion of a newspaper devoted to crime (Gordon and Heath 1981), whether the crime is local versus distant (Heath 1984), whether the crime is random or is the subject of sensational crime reports (Heath 1984; Liska and Baccaglini 1990; Williams and Dickinson 1993) and whether there is "just" closure of a crime on television drama (Wakshlag 1983). Concerning dependent measures, Heath and Gilbert (1996:380-384) report stronger links between media and fear when the issue is "societal concern" as opposed to personal fear (Tyler and Cook 1984) for apprehension about "the world out there" versus the immediate neighborhood (Heath and Petraitis 1987) and for urban as opposed to rural settings (Zillman and Wakshlag 1985).

Audience characteristics are the focus of this study. On this issue, Heath and Gilbert conclude that: ". . .belief in the reality of television drama (Potter 1986) and viewer apprehension about crime victimization (Tamborini et al. 1984; Wakshlag 1983; Zillman and Wakshlag 1985) affect the relationship with fear of crime" (1996:384). These are the only audience traits discussed by Heath and Gilbert. The remainder of this review examines other audience attributes that appear relevant in prior assessments of media relationships to FEAR. It should be noted that several of the best studies of crime news and fear (Heath 1984; O'Keefe 1984; O'Keefe and Reid-Nash 1987; Williams and Dickinson 1993) are not concerned with audience characteristics *per se*, while several studies of TV drama do raise issues of variable audience reception that warrant attention.

One potentially salient factor in the reception of media crime messages is whether audience members have direct victim experience or share characteristics making them more likely crime victims. Gunter argues that indirect sources of information, such as media accounts, will be more consequential "when direct experience is lacking" (1987:61). Though limited to 108 university students, Weaver and Wakshlag's (1985) study of crime-related television watching and "crime-related anxiety" demonstrated precisely that point.

Similarly, Liska and Baccaglini hypothesized that newspaper crime stories will have their strongest fear effects for those "least likely to experience victimization" such as "whites, the elderly and females" (1990:363). Their content analysis of newspapers and 1974-75 NCVS fear measures (perceived safety) for twenty-six cities, showed FEAR related only to local homicide stories in the first part of the paper. While this finding held for diverse demographic groups, the media influence was "weakest for those statuses [non-whites, young, males] most likely to experience victimization" (Liska and Baccaglini 1990:372).

Doob and Macdonald's (1979) frequently cited research comes to a different conclusion about the relationship between victim likelihood and media influence. Their interviews with 300 Toronto residents established the number and type of television programs watched in the previous week, as well as perceived chances of victimization (called fear). Overall, when age, sex, and neighborhood type were controlled, there was no relationship between television watching and "fear." However, in urban "high crime" neighborhoods, "fear" was significantly higher for those who watched the most television and significantly lower for those who read newspapers. No such relationships were found in "low crime" neighborhoods; people outside high crime urban neighborhoods "do not feel that the violence on television has any relevance for them. . ." (1979:177).

This is what Gerbner et al. (1980) termed "resonance" in their studies of television's ability to "cultivate" a violent and threatening view of the world. Much of their early work (e.g. Gerbner et al. 1978) argued for "across the board" consequences—with "heavy" television viewers more likely to describe a violent and fearsome world. Later, apparently in response to Doob and Macdonald (1979), Gerbner et al. hypothesized that when a particular television audience receives messages "congruent with everyday reality (or even perceived reality), the combination may result in a. . .powerful 'double dose' of the television message. . ." (1980:15). In short, media effects should be stronger when they "resonate" real life experience.

Gerbner et al. (1980) used their findings from a national survey (N = 3903) to illustrate the "resonance" hypothesis. They noted that "city dwellers. . .show the strongest association" between amount of television viewing and FEAR. However, their data also showed that watching television makes a bigger difference for women and whites (who have low victim risk) than it does for men and non-whites. In fact, for non-whites and those with the lowest incomes (and higher victim risk) the relationship between FEAR and total television watching was actually *negative*, though not significant (Gerbner et al. 1980:21).

Another possibility raised by Gerbner and his associates could be described as audience "affinity." This approach posits that "we may be especially receptive to seeing how characters like ourselves. . .fare in the world of television" (1978:186). Since Gerbner's (1978) analyses of programs in the 1970s showed women, older women, and blacks (men and women) to be most victimized in television drama, Hirsch (1980) hypothesized that heavy television viewing should cultivate the greatest fear among these groups. Yet, his analysis of 1502 respondents to a national survey in 1977 revealed that "none of the expected. . .effects obtains in any of these groups" (12).

Skogan and Maxfield suggested that "vulnerability" to attack — as opposed to victim risk *per se* — could make some audiences "more sensitive to messages" that others discount. They hypothesized that "women and the elderly. . .would be more responsive to personal or media messages about crime." Their 1977 telephone survey (N=1389) of San Francisco, Chicago, and Philadelphia residents "failed to find any support for this notion" since the relationship between fear and ability to recall a recent crime story (television or newspaper) "was constant among more vulnerable and less vulnerable groups" (1981:179).

Finally, Heath and Petraitis (1987) conducted telephone interviews with 372 respondents in twenty-six medium sized U.S. cities. They found that total TV viewing increased respondents' fear of distant, urban settings — but only among *males*. Viewing crime drama increased the perceived likelihood of victimization in New York City and in one's own neighborhood — again, only for *males* (105-109). They suggested that the absence of a media relationship for women could be due to their consistently high fear levels and a kind of "ceiling effect" that mitigates additional influences. They also raise the prospect that "affinity" is a plausible interpretation for their findings (121).

From the foregoing, five audience circumstances can be identified with potential to influence the media/FEAR relationship. They are listed here with examples of the kinds of people who were (or could be) expected to experience those circumstances.

Substitution: Lacks victim experience or has reduced victim likelihood:
(Women, elderly, whites, non-victims)

Resonance: Has victim experience or higher victim likelihood:
(Urban, high-crime neighborhood residents, males, young, blacks)

Vulnerability: Less able to defend against attack:
(Women, elderly)

Affinity: Shares characteristics of more likely media victims:
(Women, older women, black women, victims)

Ceiling Effect: Has such high fear that media can have little influence:
(Women, blacks)

Depending on the rationale employed, one could *expect* stronger media/FOC relationships for women, men, young, old, victims, non-victims, blacks, or whites. As we have seen, the *evidence*, though limited, is only slightly less equivocal than theoretical expectations.

More surprising than the inconsistency of theory and evidence on this issue, is the paucity of research dealing directly with audience traits, *news* consumption, and fear of crime. Only Doob and Macdonald (1979) and Liska and Baccaglini (1990) are relevant in this regard. Both use data from the 1970s. But, only Doob and Macdonald connect the specific news consumption of individuals to *their* fear. Liska and Baccaglini linked NCVS rates of "fear" (perceived safety) in twenty-six cities to newspaper content in those communities. While useful, such data cannot tell us whether those most fearful even read newspapers. In short, only one study relating *news* consumption by *individuals* to *their* fear uses audience characteristics to specify that relationship. That study was done in Canada almost twenty years ago (Doob and Macdonald, 1979). The audience trait at issue was living in an "urban high crime neighborhood" (N=83) or not.

Methods

Between January and March, 1994, we surveyed 2,092 adults in Tallahassee, the state capital of Florida — a state featured prominently in the frenzy of news accounts of violent crime noted above. Respondents were randomly chosen from adults (18 years or older) having the most recent birthday in households accessed by random digit dialing.[1] The sampling frame — the county where the city is located (1994 population: 212,107) — was stratified by telephone trunk numbers to insure proportional representation from all community areas. The demographics of the sample and sampling frame (in parentheses) are: female 55 percent (52%); African-American 18 percent (24%); median age: 37 (29) years; median household income $30,000 ($30,512) per year. The slight over-representation of women, white, and older respondents is not unusual in telephone surveys (Lavrakas 1987).

1. The survey was conducted by The Research Network, Inc., in Tallahassee, using a two-stage Mitofsky-Waksberg sampling design. Business, fax and disconnected numbers were eliminated and a response rate of 80 percent for those beginning the survey was realized.

Dependent Variable: Fear of Crime

As recommended by Ferraro (1995), Ferraro and LaGrange (1987), Warr (1990) and others, we operationalize FEAR in a manner that is direct and crime specific. Respondents were asked:

> On a scale of one to ten, with ten representing the most fear and one representing the least fear, how much do you fear being robbed by someone who has a gun or knife. . . (someone breaking into your house to steal things; someone stealing your car; someone attacking you physically?)

Responses for auto theft did not correlate well with the other offenses and so the remaining crimes (robbery, assault, and burglary) were combined into a FEAR index with an alpha of .81 which is employed as our measure of crime fear.

Independent Variables

There are six measures of news consumption employed here. The first three use "a typical week" as a frame of reference: PAPER indicates the number of days a respondent reads a newspaper in a typical week. TVNEWS is the number of days that news is watched on television; and RADIO is the number of days the respondent listened to radio news. A fourth news variable, MAGAZINE, asks how often in a "typical month" a respondent reads a "national newsmagazine like *Time, Newsweek* or *U.S. News and World Report?*" Responses of "weekly," "a couple times a month," "less frequently" and "never" were coded from three to zero.

A fifth news measure, DETAIL, addresses how much information could be recalled about three highly publicized, seemingly random, *inter*racial crimes. The questions asked were: Have you read, seen or heard anything about. . . (1) "the attack on the truck driver in Los Angeles?" (2) ". . . the murder of tourists in Florida?" (3)" . . . people being shot on a train?" The first referenced the assault on Reginald Denny during the riot following the acquittal of policemen accused of beating Rodney King.[2] The second could have referred to the murder of a German tourist in Fort Lauderdale or the murder of a British tourist at a rest stop on I-10 in northern Florida. The third referenced the so-called "Massacre on the Long Island Railroad" (*Newsweek* 1993d) in which a gunman killed five people and wounded eighteen. For each incident, if respondents indicated awareness, they were asked what details they remembered. Up to six details were recorded for each incident and scores on this variable ranged from zero to 18.

The final news variable, LOCALTV, is dichotomous and reflects persons who say they *only* watch local television news (score = 1) and those who *only* watch national television news (score = 0). There are only 397 of these "exclusive" T.V. news watchers, since most (N=1573) say they watch both and are treated as missing cases. While the (N) limits the use of this variable in specifying audience subsamples, its relevance is well established and warrants attention (Heath 1994; Liska and Baccaglini 1990).

Other independent variables initially used to model FEAR in this study include FEMALE (male = 0), AGE, BLACK (white = 0), INCOME, and whether a member of the respondent's household has been a crime VICTIM in the past six months (yes = 1). FEMALE is the individual trait most consistently related to fear of crime in existing research (Bankston and Thompson 1989; Ferraro and LaGrange 1992). Regarding AGE, older persons *had* been reported most fearful (Clemente and Kleiman 1976; Jaycox 1978) but recent assessments question that understanding (Bankston and Thompson 1989; Ferarro 1995).

2. The attack took place in 1992, but the trial of alleged assailants was underway in the summer of 1993. Helicopter video of the attack was replayed almost nightly for several weeks.

It is often found that FEAR is greater for blacks than for whites (Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Parker and Ray 1990). This is attributed either to victimization risk (actual or perceived) or the presence of "incivilities" in predominantly black or poor neighborhoods (Covington and Taylor 1991; LaGrange et al. 1992). For similar reasons, we include INCOME (self-reported for household) in our models.

On the premise that *cognitive* judgments relating to risk (Ferraro 1995; Ferraro and LaGrange 1987) could influence the *affective* state of fear, we include several judgments in our models. The first, SAFE, is operationalized with two questions: "How safe would you say you feel being out alone in your neighborhood at night? . . . (home alone at night?)" Responses from these two questions ranging from "very safe" to "not at all safe" were combined in an index (alpha = .70). Values on SAFE ranged from 2 (most safe) to 6 (least safe). Ferraro (1995) among others, argues that assessments of safety or risk are distinct from the *affect* of fear, but play an important role in predicting fear. Other judgments include estimates of whether crime in the neighborhood (CRIMEN) and in the county (CRIMEC) has increased (yes = 1) in the past year.

Research Findings

Ordinary least squares regression is used to estimate the net relationship between news consumption and fear of crime. Residual plots indicate no violations of the assumption of homoskedasticity. Bi-variate correlations among independent variables show none in the full model higher than .27 and, with tolerance levels in excess of .86, there is no apparent problem of multicollinearity. Except for media variables, only those predictors with significant coefficients are included in these equations. It is particularly notable that INCOME and VICTIM dropped out of almost all estimates of FEAR. In Tables 1-3, unstandardized (b) and standardized (Beta) coefficients are shown, with corresponding levels of significance.

Table 1 reports seven estimates of FEAR.[3] The first six introduce individual news measures separately, and for each equation the distinctive media variable is listed at the top of the relevant column. The seventh estimate combines RADIO and TVNEWS and that model (FINAL) is used in subsequent efforts to identity "media effects" for diversely constituted audiences.

Looking first at non-media control variables, AGE has a significant *negative* relationship with FEAR in every equation. The fact that older respondents report lower fear is consistent with recent findings questioning the presumption that older people fear crime most (Bankston and Thompson 1989; Ferraro 1995). Women and African Americans are significantly more fearful than men and whites respectively and FEAR is consistently elevated for those who feel less SAFE or perceive crime to be increasing in their neighborhood (CRIMEN) or in the county (CRIMEC).

More importantly, Table 1 shows that when AGE, FEMALE, BLACK, and several cognitive perceptions of crime are controlled, both RADIO and TVNEWS have a significant independent effect on crime fear. That is, people who more often listen to radio news or watch television news express significantly higher levels of FEAR. The same effect appears for LOCALTV. The fact that people who *only* watch local television news have higher fear lends support to patterns established in the work of Heath (1984) and Liska and Baccaglini (1990).

In contrast, the frequency of *reading* newspapers or newsmagazines has no apparent relationship to FEAR. This is consistent with Doob and Macdonald's (1979) finding that reading newspapers lowered crime fear for residents of high crime areas but was not significant when age and gender were controlled. Finally, Table 1 shows that attention to DETAIL in

3. An eighth estimate combined five of the news variables (excluding LOCALTV). In this presumably misspecified model, none of the news variables achieved significance at $p<.05$.

Table 1 • *Regression of Crime Fear on News Media Variables and Other Controls*

Variable	(1) *Paper* b (Beta)	(2) *Radio* b (Beta)	(3) *TV News* b (Beta)	(4) *Magazine* b (Beta)	(5) *Detail* b (Beta)	(6) *Local TV* b (Beta)	(7) *Final* b (Beta)
Age	−.064** (−.147)	−.064** (−.146)	−.066** (−.150)	−.061** (−.139)	−.060** (.138)	−.106** (−.202)	−.069** (−.158)
Female	2.12** (.145)	2.10** (.144)	2.14** (.146)	2.07** (.141)	2.08** (.142)		2.17** (.149)
Black	1.19** (.064)	1.48** (.079)	1.16** (.063)	1.26** (.068)	1.27** (.068)		1.37** (.074)
Crimen	1.54** (.086)	1.60** (.089)	1.57** (.087)	1.58** (.088)	1.59** (.089)		1.58** (.088)
Crimec	1.81** (.106)	1.89** (.111)	1.76** (.103)	1.83** (.107)	1.84** (.107)	1.56** (.100)	1.82** (.106)
Safe	2.35** (.375)	2.31** (.368)	2.32* (.371)	2.34** (.373)	2.34** (.373)	2.29** (.375)	2.29** (.366)
Paper	.077 (.028)						
Radio		.115* (.045)					.102* (.040)
TV News			.138* (.042)				.135+ (.041)
Magazine				.089 (.014)			
Detail					.008 (.003)		
Local TV						1.47* (.103)	
R^2	.265	.267	.266	.262	.263	.233	.270
(N)	1914	1897	1919	1932	1935	382	1881

Note:
* p < .05 ** p < .01 +p = .052

relation to several highly publicized, non-local, "random" violent crimes has no bearing on crime fear.

Disaggregating Audiences

In the following sections, we examine a variety of contexts to assess whether there are discernible social patterns to the news/FEAR relationship. These analyses seek to determine whether audiences of disparate social composition find meaning in news media reports about crime. Equation (7) had the highest R^2 value in Table 1 and it is used in estimates for the disaggregated subsamples in the remaining tables. In Table 2, estimates are done separately for women and men, blacks and whites, and respondents from three age groups. Despite its theoretical relevance and significance in Table 1, LOCALTV had too many missing values to be useful in these analyses. To provide comparability across audience subsamples, variables are included in estimates for a particular category (e.g. gender) only if they are significant for one of its subsamples (e.g. male or female).

The frequency of watching television news is significantly related to *higher* FEAR levels for women, whites, and respondents between the ages of 30-54. Though not significant, television news is associated with *lower* FEAR levels among men, blacks, and those under 30 and

Table 2 • *Regression of Crime Fear on Radio and TV News For Audience Subgroups*

Variable	*Male* b (Beta)	*Female* b (Beta)	*Black* b (Beta)	*White* b (Beta)	*Under 30* b (Beta)	*30 to 54* b (Beta)	*55+* b (Beta)
Age	−.053** (−.129)	−.081** (−.187)	−.054* (−.111)	−.071** (−.165)			
Female			2.15** (.140)	2.11** (.147)	2.23** (.162)	1.98** (.135)	2.21** (.139)
Black	1.17* (.066)	1.51** (.083)			.847 (.055)	1.36* (.067)	2.49* (.107)
Crimen	1.78** (.105)	1.51** (.086)	.110 (.006)	1.92** (.110)	.862 (.053)	1.84** (.098)	2.29* (.121)
Crimec	1.03* (.070)	2.45** (.135)	1.21 (.069)	1.89** (.113)	.661 (.043)	2.60** (.153)	1.58 (.069)
Safe	2.40** (.385)	2.21** (.349)	2.71** (.420)	2.22** (.357)	2.29** (.373)	2.52** (.395)	1.97** (.320)
Radio	.043 (.018)	.159* (.063)					
TV News	−.099 (−.032)	.305** (.093)	−.139 (−.036)	−.185* (.058)	−.057 (−.018)	.246** (.076)	−.063 (−.013)
P Level Slope Difference	.002		.057		.017	.111	
R^2	.224	.227	.218	.264	.223	.300	.204
(N)	819	1062	360	1559	684	879	356

Note:
* p < .05 ** p < .01

over 55. Tests of significance for the difference between subsample slopes[4] show that TVNEWS effects[5] are significantly different (p<.01) for men and women and for middle-aged (as opposed to younger) respondents. The difference between black and white respondents fails to achieve statistical significance — even though the TVNEWS and FEAR relationship is positive and significant for whites and negative and non-significant for blacks. The only significant relationship between FEAR and listening to RADIO news is reported for women.

Table 3 examines the relationship of television and radio news to fear of crime for audiences with disparate household incomes, crime victim experience, and neighborhood racial composition. Incomes are divided into less than $30,000; $30-50,000, and above $50,000. Victim experience refers to anyone in the respondent's household being victimized in the past six months. Neighborhood racial composition — which has been variably linked to FEAR (Covington and Taylor 1991; Liska et al. 1982) — is a *perceptual* measure that asks respondents to estimate the percentage of blacks among those living within a mile of their home.[6] Because blacks comprise 24 percent of the population in the community studied,

4. The conventional formula for assessing differences in regression coefficients across sub-groups takes into account the sample sizes of each of the sub-groups (Kleinbaum et al. 1988:266). With large samples this formula is shown to asymptotically converge to: (b1−b2) / (se $(b1)^2$ + se $(b2)^2)^{1/2}$ (Kleinbaum & Kupper, 1978:101). Given the magnitude of our sample sizes, it is appropriate to use this latter formula, and we have done so.

5. It is possible that what we are calling TVNEWS effects are the *consequence* of FEAR, rather than its antecedent (Gunter, 1987; Sparks, 1992). That is, people who are more fearful (e.g. women) may watch more television. In the absence of panel data (O'Keefe and Reid-Nash 1987) this possibility cannot be tested.

6. The rationale for including percent black is given by the extent to which popular rhetoric has typified the crime problem in racial terms (Anderson 1995). In 1992, for example, Senator Bill Bradley observed that "fear of black crime covers the streets like a sheet of ice" (Skogan, 1995: 60).

Table 3 • *Regression of Crime Fear on Radio and TV News For Audience Subgroups*

Variable	*Victim* b (Beta)	*Non Victim* b (Beta)	*Black Low Pct* b (Beta)	*Black High Pct* b (Beta)	*Under $30,000* b (Beta)	*$30,000 to $50,000* b (Beta)	*Over $50,000* b (Beta)
Age	−.045	−.065**	−.065**	−.077**	−.071**	−.053**	−.081
	(−.092)	(−.149)	(−.154)	(−.162)	(−.173)	(−.113)	(−.147)
Female	1.93*	2.15**	2.21**	2.16**	1.85**	2.48**	2.22**
	(.132)	(.147)	(.156)	(.147)	(.126)	(.176)	(.156)
Black	−1.49	1.58**	1.99*	1.01*	1.39**	1.84*	−.205
	(−.074)	(.086)	(.071)	(.063)	(.088)	(.083)	(−.007)
Crimen	1.32	1.54**	1.90**	1.48**	1.60**	2.41**	1.02
	(.088)	(.082)	(.107)	(.084)	(.093)	(.135)	(.055)
Crimec	2.24*	1.68**	1.66**	1.92**	1.50**	2.11**	2.35**
	(.134)	(.098)	(.097)	(.113)	(.090)	(.125)	(.135)
Safe	2.83**	2.26**	2.26**	2.19**	2.23**	2.56**	2.70**
	(.443)	(.360)	(.363)	(.346)	(.357)	(.340)	(.416)
Radio			.053	.169*	.067	.292*	.008
			(.021)	(.068)	(.027)	(.111)	(.003)
TV News	.454*	.077	−.002	.271**	.201*	.039	.148
	(.146)	(.023)	(−.000)	(.081)	(.061)	(.012)	(.045)
P Level Slope Difference	.023		.018		.171	.375	
R^2	.337	.258	.272	.250	.237	.285	.309
(N)	246	1653	899	932	902	449	463

Note:
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

audience members are divided into those living in neighborhoods perceived to be above or below this criterion.

In Table 3, TVNEWS is significantly related to FEAR for those *with* recent victim experience, a *low* household income, or living in neighborhoods perceived to be disproportionately *black*. Subsample slope differences in TVNEWS effects are significant for the victim, non-victim comparison ($p<.05$) and for the racial composition of neighborhood comparison ($p<.02$). Apparent differences for income subsamples are not significant. RADIO is also a predictor of FEAR in neighborhoods perceived to be disproportionately black and for audiences above the median income.[7]

To this point, significant TVNEWS effects are found for female, white, and middle age audiences and for those with recent victim experience, low income, and living in disproportionately black neighborhoods. But these audience traits are not mutually exclusive and audiences are not one-dimensional. To pursue a more complete identification of those for whom news/FEAR relationships may be significant, we next consider audience composition in multi-dimensional terms.

Table 4 displays the results of estimating the FEAR and TVNEWS relationship for gender/race specific groups, with a series of other characteristics taken one at a time. To illustrate: for black females, FEAR equations were estimated with subsamples further specified sequentially by categories of age, victim experience, perceived safety, income, and neighborhood racial composition. This was also done for white females, black males, and white males.

7. The remaining discussion is limited to TVNEWS because its meaning is less ambiguous than RADIO. The latter may be a very different input, for example, to someone listening to NPR and someone listening to music with news briefings at the top of every hour.

Table 4 • *Significant Relationships: Fear and TV News for Specified Audience Subgroups

Variable	*Black Females*	*White Females*	*Black Males*	*White Males*
Under 30	YES (99)	no (263)	no (78)	no (227)
30 to 54	no (81)	YES (412)	no (50)	no (324)
55 and over	no (31)	no (176)	no (13)	no (127)
Victim	no (20)	YES (127)	no (15)	no (79)
Non-Victim	no (189)	YES (715)	no (123)	no (593)
Low Safety Perception	no (57)	YES (348)	no (77)	no (451)
High Safety Perception	no (154)	YES (503)	no (64)	no (227)
Less than $30,000	no (158)	YES (366)	no (106)	no (272)
$30,000 to $50,000	no (29)	no (213)	no (22)	no (185)
More than $50,000	no (15)	YES (237)	no (10)	no (201)
Low Percentage Black	no (39)	no (474)	no (21)	no (365)
High Percentage Black	no (164)	YES (359)	no (114)	no (295)

Note:
* YES indicates positive and significant ($p < .05$) TVNEWS effect.
( ) N size.

Table 4 lists forty-eight audience subsamples and for each, indicates whether TVNEWS has a significant relationship with FEAR after controlling for other variables (using Equation 7 from Table 1). Because so many estimates are involved, we show only whether the FEAR coefficient is significant at $p<.05$ (YES) for each subsample. Full equations are available on request.

The first thing apparent in Table 4 is that *all* television "news effects" are limited to *women*. There are no audience traits associated with males — black or white — for which TVNEWS has a significant relationship to FEAR. Moreover, almost all TVNEWS effects are limited to *white women*. (The only contrary instance — with a relatively small N (99) — involves *young* (<30) black women). In fact, among white women a significant link between FEAR and TVNEWS is sustained whether or not they have recent victim experience, whether or not they perceive their neighborhoods to be safe or have high or low incomes. The news/FEAR relationship is concentrated, among *middle-aged* white women (30-54) and those living in disproportionately black neighborhoods.

Table 2 indicates that a positive relationship between TVNEWS and FEAR exists for whites, women, and middle-aged audiences. Table 4 shows that it exists specifically and *only* for white middle-aged women — and for no one else among whites and almost no one else among women. While Table 3 indicates that the news/FEAR relationship is significant for those with victim experience, low income, and those living in disproportionately black neighborhoods; Table 4 shows that it is *only* white women in those groups who manifest a "news effect."

These data clearly indicate that the relationship between television news and fear of crime is exclusive to women and almost entirely exclusive to white women. The question we address in the remainder of this paper is: what explains this concentration of media effects?[8]

Discussion

Several ways that audience traits could inform construction of the media/FEAR relationship were discussed above. These included: (1) the *"resonance"* of personal experience with

8. One explanation could be that men admit fear less often, which would truncate the distribution of their responses relative to women, thereby reducing the likelihood of significant relationships. Because differences in standard deviations on FEAR, however, range from 6.4 (white males) to 7.2 (white females), this is not a likely explanation for the observed pattern.

media messages which increases their salience (Doob and Macdonald 1979; Gerbner et al. 1980); (2) the lack of experience with crime or its immediate threat, which allows media messages to *"substitute"* as a prime information source (Gunter 1987; Liska and Baccaglini 1990; Weaver and Wakshlag 1986); (3) the *"affinity"* that may exist between audience members and the characteristics of victims portrayed by media (Gerbner 1978; Hirsch 1980); (4) the differential *"vulnerability"* to crime of some audience members which makes them "more sensitive" to media crime messages (Skogan and Maxfield 1981), and (5) a *"ceiling effect"* which leaves little room for media influence among audience types with already high levels of fear (Heath and Petraitis 1987).

At first glance, the pattern of current findings appears to rule out the relevance of "ceiling effects" (Heath and Petraitis 1987). Women in our sample have levels of FEAR (17.6) that are 25 percent higher than men (13.9) and still, all "news effects" involve women. Looking closer, it happens that white, middle-aged women — who manifest virtually all of the TVNEWS effects in this sample — have FEAR levels (16.5) lower than black women (19.6) and substantially lower than middle-aged black women (20.3). If "ceiling effects" are real, they may apply here to black women and may help to explain the lack of a news/FEAR relationship for that group.

The issue of "vulnerability" has had a prominent place in discussions of FEAR (Baumer 1985; Garofalo 1981). A presumption that women and the elderly can less well defend against attack is sometimes used to explain the "seeming paradox" of higher fear levels despite lower risk and experience of crime. It has also prompted the hypothesis that the most "vulnerable" will be most responsive to media messages (Skogan and Maxfield 1981). Even if the elderly and women are less able to ward off attacks — not altogether certain with increased gun ownership and "advances" in self-defense technology — this issue seems not to explain the pattern of TVNEWS effects reported here. White middle-aged women should be no *more* "vulnerable" than black middle-aged women or *older* women of either race. In fact, in terms of the ability to resist victimization, it is not certain that a thirty-five year old white woman would be more vulnerable than, for example, a seventy year old man of either race. In our sample, there are no TVNEWS effects for older females who presumably would feel the most vulnerable.

A concentration of TVNEWS effects among white middle-aged women is not entirely consistent with a "resonance" interpretation (Doob and Macdonald 1979; Gerbner et al. 1980). In general, white, middle-aged women have consistently low victim risk (U.S. Department of Justice 1996) and for most, media messages would not resonate their experience. Of course, there are some white middle-aged women with experience as victims. In this sample, TVNEWS is significantly related to FEAR among white women *with* recent victim experience, and for those with *low* income or living in disproportionately black neighborhoods — a pattern consistent with "resonance." This interpretation would have greater relevance if males and blacks with those same characteristics also had significant TVNEWS effects. They do not.

Since white women *without* recent victim experience and living in *high* income circumstances also show significant TVNEWS effects, it seems likely that for them, something other than resonance is at work. A possibility to explain news/FEAR relationships among these white women (high-income or no victim experience) is that media messages "substitute" for lived experience in the genesis of fear (Gunter 1987; Liska and Baccaglini 1990).

It may be plausible that "substitution" explains the news/FEAR relationship for some white women (high-income, no victim experience) and "resonance" explains it for other white women (low-income, victim experience). However, neither of these explanations account for the more basic fact that, except for white women, virtually no TVNEWS effects are found.

A final interpretation of these findings could be that an *affinity* exists between the audience for whom TVNEWS effects are found (white women) and the content of televised news

messages. The rationale, as Gerbner et al. (1978:186) note in their discussion of the "cultivation" of fear, is that "we may be especially receptive to seeing how characters *like ourselves* . . . fare in the world of television" (original emphasis). Hirsch hypothesized that television "viewers from subgroups whose members are most often victimized or killed should appear more afraid" than others (1980:10).

We have additional data that may be relevant to this hypothesis. Eighteen months *after* the FEAR survey discussed here, we did a content analysis of televised evening news programs in Tallahassee. For nine weeks, three teams of three judges (graduate students) recorded various features of crime incidents reported on local and network news. A detailed study of those incidents in relation to a FEAR survey taken at the same time is underway. Assuming the demographics of TV news victims changed little in eighteen months, what we learned about their race and gender may help to explain the present findings. When both race and gender could be identified, the profile of TV news victims was: 32 percent — white female; 26 percent — white male; 12 percent — Hispanic female; 11 percent — black male; 6 percent — black female; 3 percent — Hispanic male; 10 percent — other.

The distribution of TVNEWS victims is consistent with an *affinity* interpretation of the relationship found in this study between TVNEWS and FEAR. The audience most likely to see itself victimized in the news — white women — is the only audience for which significant TVNEWS effects are found. This suggests that regardless of actual victim experience (Table 4), seeing people like themselves victimized frequently in televised news may have substantially contributed to the fear of crime among white women.

The purpose of the present analysis has been to underscore the importance of attending to specific "audience effects." Without doing so, we may ask the wrong questions. The issue is not whether media accounts of crime increase fear, but which audiences, with which experiences and interests, construct which meanings from the messages received. We have found that the construction of fear from the messages of television news is limited to middle-aged white women. Since white women are most often shown as victims on the news in this television market, an "affinity" explanation for the relationship of media consumption to fear is supported. In their early studies of television and the "cultivation" of fear, Gerbner and his associates noted that "it is important who scares whom and who is 'trained' to be the victim" (1980:715). They further observed that televised violence in particular, demonstrates "the realities of social power. . .generates fear, insecurity and dependence and thus serves as an instrument of social control" (1980:715). In the present study, white women see victims "like themselves" on TVNEWS and are more fearful. It is for them that "the realities of social power"—implicit in crime—have the most salience. It is in them that "fear, insecurity and dependence" are cultivated, and it may be for them that TVNEWS serves as an instrument of social control (Gerbner et al. 1980:715).

References

Anderson, David C.
1995 Crime and the Politics of Hysteria. New York City: Random House.

Bankston, William B., and Carol Y. Thompson
1989 "Carrying firearms for protection: A causal model." Sociological Inquiry 59:75-87.

Baumer, Terry L
1985 "Testing a general model of fear of crime: Data from a national sample." Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency 22:239-255.

Burrelle's Transcripts
1994 Burrelle's Index of Broadcast Transcripts, Annual Edition. Livingston, NJ: Burrelle's Information Services.
Carragee, Kevin M.
1990 "Interpretive media study and interpretive social science." Critical Studies in Mass Communication 7:81-95.
Chiricos, Ted
1995 "Moral panic as ideology: Drugs, violence, race and punishment in America." In Justice with Prejudice: Race and Criminal Justice in America, Michael J. Lynch and E. Britt Patterson, (eds.), 19-48. New York: Harrow & Heston.
Clemente, Frank, and Michael Kleiman
1976 "Fear of crime among the aged." Gerontologist 16:207-210.
Comstock, George, Steven Chaffee, Nathan Katzman, Maxwell McCombs, and Donald Roberts
1978 Television and Human Behavior. New York: Columbia University Press.
Condit, Celeste M.
1989 "The rhetorical limits of polysemy." Critical Studies in Mass Communication 6:103-122.
Covington, Jeanette, and Ralph B. Taylor
1991 "Fear of crime in urban residential neighborhoods: Implications of between- and within-neighborhood sources for current models." The Sociological Quarterly 32:231-249.
Dahlgren, Peter
1988 "What's the meaning of this?: Viewers plural sense-making of TV news." Media, Culture & Society. 10:285-301.
Dialog Information Service
1994 Newspaper and Periodical Abstracts. [Online], January 1992 - June 1994. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI. Available: DIALOG File: Newspaper and Periodical Abstracts (484).
Doob, Anthony N., and Glenn E. Macdonald
1979 "Television viewing and fear of victimization: Is the relationship causal?" Journal of Personality & Social Psychology 37:170-179.
Ferraro, Kenneth A.
1995 "Fear of Crime: Interpreting Victimization Risk." Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
Ferraro, Kenneth A., and Randy LaGrange
1987 "The measurement of fear of crime." Sociological Inquiry 57:70-101.
1992 "Are older people afraid of crime?: Reconsidering age differences in fear of victimization." Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences 47:233-244.
Fiske, John
1986 "Television, polysemy and popularity." Critical Studies in Mass Communication 3:391-408.
Gallup, George Jr.
1994 The Gallup Poll, No. 341 (February). Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources.
Garofalo, James
1979 "Victimization and the fear of crime." Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency 16:80-97.
1981 "The fear of crime: Causes & consequences." Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology 72:839-857.
Gerbner, George, Larry Gross, Marilyn Jackson-Beeck, Suzanne Jeffries-Fox, and Nancy Signorielli
1978 "Cultural indicators: Violence profile No. 9." Journal of Communication 28:176-207.
Gerbner, George, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan, and Nancy Signorielli
1980 "The 'mainstreaming' of America: Violence profile No. 11." Journal of Communication 30:10-29.
Gitlin, Todd
1979 "Prime time ideology: The hegemonic process in television entertainment." Social Problems 26:251-266.
Gordon, Margaret, and Linda Heath
1981 "The news business, crime and fear." In Reactions to Crime, Dan Lewis, ed., 227-250. Beverly Hills: Sage.
Gunter, Barrie
1987 Television and the Fear of Crime. London: John Libbey.

Gunter, Barrie, and J. Wakshlag
1986 "Television viewing and perceptions of crime among London residents." Paper presented at the International Television Studies Conference, Institute of Education, London, July.
Hall, Stuart
1981 "Notes on deconstructing the popular." In People's History and Socialist Theory, R. Samuel, (ed.), 227-239. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
Hall, Stuart, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts
1978 Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order. London: MacMillan.
Heath, Linda
1984 "Impact of newspaper crime reports on fear of crime: Multi methodological investigation." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 47:263-276.
Heath, Linda, and John Petraitis
1987 "Television viewing and fear of crime: Where is the mean world?" Basic and Applied Social Psychology 8:97-123.
Heath, Linda, and Kevin Gilbert
1996 "Mass media and fear of crime." American Behavioral Scientist 39:379-386.
Hirsch, Paul M.
1980 "The 'scary world' of the nonviewer and other anomalies: A reanalysis of Gerbner et al.'s findings on cultivation analysis, part 1." Communication Research 7:403-456.
Hughes, Michael
1980 "The fruits of cultivation analysis: A reexamination of some effects of television watching." Public Opinion Quarterly 44:287-302.
Jaycox, Victoria
1978 "The elderly's fear of crime: Rational or irrational?" Victimology 3:329-334.
Jensen, Klaus B.
1990 "Television futures: A social action methodology for studying interpretive communities." Critical Studies in Mass Communication 7:129-146.
Kleinbaum, David G., and Lawrence L. Kupper
1978 Applied Regression Analysis and Other Multivariate Methods. North Scituate, MA: Duxbury Press.
Kleinbaum, David G., Lawrence L. Kupper, and Keith E. Muller
1988 Applied Regression Analysis and Other Multivariate Methods, second edition. Boston: PWS-KENT Publishing Company.
Lindlof, Thomas R.
1988 "Media audiences as interpretive communities." In Communication Yearbook, Jay Anderson, (ed.), 2:81-107. Newbury Park, CA.: Sage.
LaGrange, Randy, Kenneth F. Ferraro, and Michael Supanic
1992 "Perceived risk and fear of crime: Role of social and physical incivilities." Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency 29:311-334.
Lavrakas, Paul J.
1987 Telephone Survey Methods. Newbury Park CA: Sage.
Liska, Allen E., Joseph J. Lawrence, and Andrew Sanchirico
1982 "Fear of crime as a social fact." Social Forces 60:761-770.
Liska, Allen E., and William Baccaglini
1990 "Feeling safe by comparison: Crime in the newspapers." Social Problems 37:360-374.
O'Keefe, Garrett J.
1984 "Public views on crime: Television exposure and media credibility." In Communication Yearbook, R. Bostrom, (ed.), 8:514-35. Beverly Hills: Sage.
O'Keefe, Garrett J., and Kathaleen Reid-Nash
1987 "Crime news and real-world blues: The effects of the media on social reality." Communication Research 14:147-163.
Newsweek
1993a "Life means nothing." (July 19):16-17.
1993b "Wild in the streets." (August 2): 40.47.
1993c "In a state of terror." (September 27): 40-41.
1993d "Death ride: Massacre on the LIRR." (December 20): 26-31.

Parker, Kenneth D., and Melvin C. Ray
1990 "Fear of crime: An assessment of related factors." Sociological Spectrum 10:29-40.
Potter, W. James
1986 "Perceived reality and the cultivation hypothesis." Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media 30:159-174.
Skogan, Wesley
1995 "Crime and the racial fears of white Americans." The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 539:59-71.
Skogan, Wesley G., and Michael G. Maxfield
1981 Coping With Crime. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
Sparks
1992 Television and the Drama of Crime. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.
Tamborini, Ron, Dolf Zillman, and Jennings Bryant
1984 "Fear and victimization: Exposure to television and perceptions of crime and fear." In Communications Yearbook, R. Bostrum. (ed.), 8:492-513. Beverly Hills: Sage.
Time
1993a "Danger in the safety zone." (August 23): 29-32.
1993b "Taming the killers." (October 11): 58-59.
Tyler, Tom R., and Fay L. Cook
1984 "The mass media and judgments of risk: Distinguishing impact on personal and societal level judgements." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 47:693-708.
U.S. Department of Justice
1993 Crime in the United States — 1992. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
1994 Crime in the United States — 1993. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
1995 Crime in the United States — 1994. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
1996 Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1993. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
U.S. News and World Report
1993 "Florida: The state of rage." (October 11): 40-44.
Wakshlag, Jacob
1983 "Viewer apprehension about victimization and crime drama programs." Communications Research, 10:195-217.
Warr, Mark
1990 "Dangerous situations: Social context and fear of victimization." Social Forces 68:891-907.
Weaver, James, and Jacob Wakshlag
1986 "Perceived vulnerability to crime, criminal experience and television viewing." Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media 30:141-158.
Williams, Paul, and Julie Dickinson
1993 "Fear of crime: Read all about it?" British Journal of Criminology 33:33-56.
Zillman, Dolf, and Jacob Wakshlag
1985 "Fear of victimization and the appeal of crime drama." In Selective Exposure to Communication, Dolf Zillman and Jennings Bryant (eds.), 141-156. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.