Risk of crime and fear of crime: a realist critique of survey-based assumptions

Jock Young

Criminologists work in a terrain fraught with difficulties. On the first and most immediate level the crime rate seems unconducive to human intervention. Nothing seems to work: each prized innovation, from community service to neighbourhood watch, seems to have little effect. Indeed, the only countries, outside of Japan, which can boast a declining crime rate would seem to owe their good fortune to demography not criminology: as the proportion of young males in their population temporarily declines. The second is that we write, as it were, in the middle of moral panic. The mass media portrayal of crime is extraordinary in its level of exaggeration: muggers fill the inner cities of the TV sets, rampant child abuse and serial murders headline our newspapers. Lastly, we have, until recently, been bereft of decent statistics: the ‘dark figure’ of crime unknown to the police is variously estimated. To base criminological theory, or social policy for that matter, on the majority of official figures is an exercise in ‘guesstimates’, and tealeaf gazing. Meanwhile, various groups with special pleadings regularly, and understandably, parade their ‘statistics’ to show that their section of the community needs resources or that their agency has had such and such a success rate.

Criminal victimization studies are a useful research instrument to deal with the problem of inadequate statistics and to pinpoint more accurately problems within society. Commencing on a large scale in the United States in the 1960s they reached Britain by the late seventies and have resulted in a series of British Crime Surveys (BCS). For a while it seemed that the problem of the dark figure of crime would be tackled. Indeed, Richard Sparks and his associates, in the introduction to their pioneering British victimization study, summarized the decade of American research prior to their own with a note of jubilation: ‘Within a decade . . . some of the oldest problems of criminology have come at last within reach of a solution’ (Sparks et al. 1977: 1).

As I will make clear in this article, I have little doubt that victimization research
represents a major advance in the techniques available to both criminology and the policy sciences. But there remain many problems which are only too easily skated over. Some of these stem from the nature of the mass survey per se, some from an over-eagerness to move from raw data to the computer keyboard, and some from a very weak analysis of precisely what questions such studies are asking.

Risk and fear: the BCS 'package'

A common and understandable reaction amongst criminologists, police officers, and other practitioners to the widespread fear of crime and the regular panics of the mass media is what we might term 'putting crime in perspective.' Thus it is often suggested that crime, although frequent, is a relatively minor irritant, given the range of problems with which the city dweller has to contend. The public, it is argued, suffer from a hysteria about crime fanned up by the newspapers and television. Moral panic abounds – particularly about mugging, sexual assault and violence – which is out of touch with reality. People lock themselves in their homes because of their own irrational fears and the fear of crime becomes more of a problem than crime itself. Such an argument is backed up by evidence from sources such as the British Crime Survey, which shows that the 'average' person can expect:

a robbery once every five centuries, an assault resulting in injury (even if slight) once every century, ... a burglary every 40 years ... and a very low rate for rape and other sexual offences.

(Hough and Mayhew 1983: 15)

The 'irrationality' of the public is demonstrated by tabulating real risks of crime against fears. Thus the first BCS report included a table (reproduced in Ch. 16, Table 5) in which two groups, the elderly and women, were seen to be particularly disproportionately worried. This kind of table, which is very akin to those produced earlier in the US National Crime Survey, stands at the centre of the fear of crime debate. Furthermore, the BCS portrays most crime as petty and the increase in crime as more of an epiphenomenon of decreased tolerance of the public than anything else. Thus the authors of the BCS continue:

the real message of the BCS is that it calls into question assumptions about crime upon which people's concern is founded. It emphasises the petty nature of most law-breaking – a point which also emerges from Criminal Statistics, but which is often overlooked. In showing that many crimes go unreported to the police or unrecorded by them, the survey also demonstrates the extensive scope for error when drawing conclusions about crime trends from statistics of recorded offences. Thus, the survey lends credibility to explanations of rising crime which have been dismissed in the past – that, for example, people's tolerance of petty crime may have declined, leading to increased reporting to the police: or that additional police resources and greater efficiency in recording practice have led to increased recording of crime.

Those incidents which go unreported usually do so for a very good reason:
victims judge them too trivial to justify calling in the police. Of the offences uncovered by the BCS only a tiny proportion were crimes of serious violence, and very few were serious property crimes such as burglary or car theft. The vast majority were, for example, petty thefts, acts of vandalism, and minor assaults. A corollary of this is that the risks which people face of being victims of serious crime are remarkably small.

It is far harder to convey these points convincingly than it is to talk in generalities about soaring crime rates, a breakdown in law and order, and the like. Serious crimes are cause for legitimate concern, however, rare they might be. But these crimes – rape, serious wounding and robbery, for example – are a small minority of the total. The public should have a balanced picture of crime – especially in view of the likely consequences of sensational presentation: excessive anxiety about crime not only impoverishes people’s lives, but also makes it difficult to secure rational discussion of criminal policy.

(Ibid: 33–4)

Thus we have a related notion of crime as an exaggerated problem, of the rareness of serious crime, and of the irrationality of the fears of a sizeable section of the population. This is related to very definite policing conclusions:

The revelation of so much more crime than is recorded in Criminal Statistics might suggest the need for further increases in police manpower. But it is doubtful whether the police could do much in respect of crime that is not reported to them; and while people might be encouraged to report more crime, it is debatable whether the police should be called in over each and every breach of the criminal law. Moreover, a substantial body of research indicates that it is difficult to enhance the police effect on crime. In particular, it is becoming clear that the effectiveness of the ‘core’ of policing – preventive patrol and criminal investigation – cannot be significantly improved by increased manning levels. For many sorts of crimes, people themselves might take more effective preventive action, either acting individually or together with others. The police could do more to promote preventive action of this kind, while the trend towards putting more officers on the beat may have the desirable effect of reducing fear of crime.

(Ibid: 34)

And this completes a package: which maintains that much crime – as the last Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis took constant pains to remind us – is ‘opportunistic’ (Newman 1984, 1985, 1986), police action could scarcely deal with it, serious crime is rare – and has a high clear up rate anyway – and, finally, the role of the public is seen as central to crime control, whether it is in more locks and bolts, neighbourhood watch or VSS. (See Kinsey et al. 1986, Ch. 4).

A realist critique

I would like to criticize the above ‘package’, not from a position which is dismissive of victimization research or, indeed, of the very real achievements of the BCS, but one which attempts to point to new directions. I do this on the basis
of the empirical findings and the problems thrown up by a series of local victimization studies conducted in Britain in the last few years (Kinsey 1984; Hanmer and Saunders 1984; Hall 1985; Jones et al. 1986; Kinsey et al. 1986; Jones et al. 1987), drawing particularly upon the Islington Crime Survey (ICS) and the Broadwater Farm Survey (BWFS).

THE DARK FIGURE

The size of the dark figure of crime in the ICS was about 50 per cent of the total—that is only one half of crimes were ever reported to police.

Table 6 Major reasons for victim non-reporting to police: results from two surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for not reporting</th>
<th>Percentage giving reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police unable to anything</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too trivial</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a matter for police</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of police</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reprisals from offender</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: British Crime Survey (Hough and Mayhew 1983); Islington Crime Survey (Jones et al. 1986)

If we look at Table 6 we can see how the dark figure was constituted, both nationally (BCS) and in the local survey (ICS). Quite correctly, Hough and Mayhew have pointed to a large part of the dark figure, not only as being objectively trivial crime, but as being seen by the victims as such. But we must note that half of the unknown figure is not seen as trivial, and that this rises to three quarters in an inner city area such as the London borough of Islington. A substantial section of the population view their victimization as non-trivial, yet—perhaps realistically, given the clear up rates in the inner city—see the police as unable to do anything. A large number of victimizations, therefore, genuinely belong to the dark figure as defined by the victims and are seen as a matter for the police.

But let us not leave the ‘trivial’ offences at this stage. There are many instances of anti-social behaviour which, by and large, are not within the scope of the criminal law: they are too trivial for any courtroom. Petty vandalism is one example, and much sexual and racial harassment another. But the accumulation of such ‘incivilities’ can make people’s lives a misery—more so than the reported instance of a ‘true crime’ such as a solitary burglary. In Islington 61 per cent of white women, and 72 per cent of black women, under the age of 24 had been upset by harassment in the last twelve months. And, as we shall see, this undertow
of incivilities can greatly show up in general fear of crime (cf Lea and Young 1984 : 54–8).

We should note also the often overlooked fact that victimization statistics, like police figures, have dark figures. A proportion of questions will not be answered truthfully by respondents out of fear or embarrassment. Hough and Mayhew clearly acknowledge this when they comment on the extremely low figure of offences against women discovered by the BCS: only one rape – an attempt – was reported to the 1982 survey of England and Wales, and only 10 per cent of assaults were classified as domestic (Ibid: 21). More attempted rapes were found in Islington alone and 22 per cent of assaults were domestic, but there is no doubt that even these figures are underestimates. It is especially significant that a series of feminist studies such as Stanko (1985, see Ch. 4) and Radford (1987) and Hall (1985) have found widespread sexual assault. Undoubtedly, a large part of the greater accuracy of these figures derives from the use of sympathetic women interviewers, although the wording of the questions can make for different findings. There is a world of difference between simply asking the interviewee if she has been raped (as do most conventional surveys), and defining rape in the question as ‘sexual intercourse without consent’ (as do Hanmer and Saunders 1984). There are, in short, different dark figures for different questions, and to relate the findings to say, fear of crime, depends on how one evaluates the causal relevance of the question asked.

A further characteristic of many conventional victimization studies (including the BCS and ICS) is to ask questions about victimization over the period of the last 12 months. This is done mainly to allow comparison with the police statistics. But of course, people’s attitudes to crime are built up during their life, and without ‘have ever’ questions – like those used by Ruth Hall in her 1985 study – this aspect is lost. Many victimization studies, therefore, have a dark figure, not only partially in terms of the present, but also totally in terms of the past.

Up until now I have talked about the dark figure simply in terms of crimes not revealed by the interviewees. But there is a much more simple sense in which victimization surveys have dark figures: namely, in terms of non-response.

### Table 7  Comparative response rates:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BCS 1982</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCS 1982, GLC area</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCS 1982 in North</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCS 1982 Inner city areas</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCS 1984</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICS</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICS Black</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICS Asians</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merseyside Crime Survey</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BWFS</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newham Crime Survey</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The non-response rates in all these surveys are considerable, and in most cases there is a fifth to one quarter of respondents whose victimization is unknown. It goes without saying that such a large unknown population could easily skew every finding that we victimologists present. At the most obvious level, it probably includes a disproportionate number of transients, of lower working class people hostile to officials with clipboards attempting to ask them about their lives, and of those who are most frightened to answer their door because of fear of crime.

Finally, it has been frequently noted that police statistics not only have a dark figure in terms of quantity, they are also a skewed measure qualitatively, because certain sorts of crimes against certain sorts of persons are disproportionately represented. In general, property crimes are more likely to be reported than crimes of violence, crimes against high status groups more than those against less powerful groups (e.g. blacks, women, the lower working class, youth), and crimes committed by strangers more than those committed within the family (see Kinsey et al. 1986). To give a potted contrast: a crime committed by a professional robber against a jeweller’s shop is more likely to enter the statistics than is domestic violence against a woman who is poverty stricken. We have seen how victimization studies, like police statistics, have a quantitative dark figure. I would suggest that the qualitative skew is also present. Moreover, domestic crimes are not only less likely to be reported to interviewers, but have in all probability a greater frequency amongst those who refuse interview.

In sum, much of the crime exposed by victimization studies — and of that which would be revealed if we moved further into the dark area — is of a serious nature. It cannot be swept under the carpet as merely less serious offences to be added to the official statistics. Nor can it be represented, as Alphonse Quetelet hazarded in the first part of the nineteenth century, as a simple fixed proportion of the official statistics — so that victimization statistics are merely much of the muchness of official statistics. What victimization surveys do is begin to shift the focus of crime away from what are traditionally police priorities, to those which are the priorities of the wider public. As is well documented on both sides of the Atlantic, police priorities tend to create the dark figure with regards to certain offences and certain victims, which we have already indicated. Thus Smith and Gray (1983) in their important study of the London police note the difference made between ‘ordinary people’ and ‘slags’ and between ‘real crimes’ and ‘rubbish’ offences. The victimization study, in the sense that it attempts to encompass all the victims in the community, is more democratic in its brief, however imperfect it may be in its accomplishment.

**THE FOCUS OF CRIME**

Crime is focused both geographically in certain areas and socially in certain social groups. Crime figures which add together low and high crime areas are useful in assessing large scale service provision, but tend to obscure the pinpointing of crime within the population. Local crime surveys help to deal with the problem of defining areas of high crime, whilst high sampling, often with
boosters, allows one to break the population down into the major social
categories: age, class, race and gender, and what is most important, their
combination.

The Islington Crime Survey was conducted by the Middlesex Polytechnic
Centre for Criminology in an inner city area of London. Our study showed the
substantial impact of crime on the lives of people in the Borough. A full third of all
households had been touched by serious crime (e.g. burglary, serious robbery or
sexual assault) in the last twelve months, and crime was rated as a major problem
second only to unemployment. Crime shaped people’s lives to a remarkable
degree. A quarter of all respondents always avoided going out after dark,
specifically because of fear of crime, and 28 per cent felt unsafe in their own
homes. There was a virtual curfew of a substantial section of the female
population – with over one half of women often or always not going out at dark
because of fear of crime. Such a survey puts fear of crime in perspective. It is
scarcely odd, for example, that 46 per cent of people should admit to worrying ‘a
lot’ about mugging, given that over 40 per cent of the population actually know
someone who has been mugged in the last twelve months. Nor is it unrealistic to
worry about burglary when its incidence runs at five times the national average
and on some estates four out of five houses have been burgled in the last year.

The advocates of crime as moral panic point to the ‘paradox’ that women are
more fearful about crime than men, although most studies show they have a far
lower chance of being victimized. Our survey suggests that their fears are
perfectly rational. For women are, in fact, more likely to be victims of crime than
men. As Stanko has suggested above (Ch. 4), the reason for the shortfall in past
findings is the nature of many of the crimes committed against women and their
reluctance to admit them to a stranger engaged in a social survey. By the use of
carefully trained researchers who were able to conduct interviews sympa-
thetically we found a considerably higher rate of female victimization. Obviously,
sexual assaults are almost exclusively a female ‘prerogative’, as is domestic
violence, but we also found street robbery against women to be greater than it is
against men. Indeed, in terms of non-sexual assault alone, women were 40 per
cent more likely to be attacked than men. Sexual assault in Islington was fourteen
times the BCS average. Twenty per cent of women interviewed knew someone
who had been sexually assaulted or molested in the previous twelve months, and
over 50 per cent had experienced sexual harassment of a non-criminal kind. And
all of this occurred in a situation where the women concerned took considerably
greater precautions against crime than men. They were, for example, five times
more likely than men to say they ‘never go out after dark’, three times more likely
to ‘always avoid certain types of people or streets’, and, very significantly, six
times more likely to ‘always go out with someone else’. Is it surprising that women
fear crime?

Like other survey researchers we found a lower crime rate against older than
younger people. However, we found that when assaults did occur against people
over 45, the attack was more likely to involve severe violence (kicking or use of a
weapon), they were more likely to be injured (as are women compared to men,
incidentally) and more likely to lose time off work, and the attack was more likely
to have a greater effect on their lives. None of this supports the paradox of irrationality, often argued about older people and crime.

CRIME BY SUBGROUP

Our analysis, by focusing in upon subgroups, was able to illustrate quite precisely the extraordinary differences in the experiences of crime. For example, if we look at the assault rates in Table 8, we see that whites over 45 live in what amounts to a totally different universe from younger people where crime is concerned. Young, white females, for example, are twenty nine times more likely to be assaulted than those over 45, and thirty times more likely to be sexually attacked. Note also how the most dangerous period for women differs by ethnic group: it is the youngest age group for whites, the 25–44 age group for blacks, and the over 45 group for Asians.

Table 8  Assault rates by age, by race, by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Rates per 1,000 householders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White: Males</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females:</td>
<td>588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro-caribbeans: Males</td>
<td>438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females:</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asians: Males</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females:</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Islington Crime Survey

Table 8 illustrates the fallacy of talking of the problem of women as a whole, or of men, blacks, whites, youths, etc. A realist criminology must start from the actual subgroups in which people live their lives, rather than from broad categories which conceal wide variations within them. For example, within the category 'white' the rate of assault is 20 times higher in the most than in the least victimized subgroup. The equivalent variation among blacks is 11 times, among men nine times, among women 29 times, among youth seven times, and within the older age groups, 13 times.

THE FEAR OF CRIME

The problem of the fear of crime is usually formulated as the relationship between high crime rate (an objective fact) and fear of crime (a subjective attitude). Thus women - or the elderly - are seen to have objectively a comparatively low rate of victimization and subjectively a high fear of crime.
Young men, in contrast, have a very high risk rate and a lower fear. We have seen how, in inner city London at least, these ‘facts’ could be disputed, but the data from the U.S. National Crime Survey and the BCS on a natural level point to this distinction. But let us for the sake of argument accept these findings and attempt to interpret them. First of all, what is a rational level of fear? Instead of ascribing irrationality to women would it not be more appropriate to ascribe irrationality to young men? Are their low fears of crime not merely a function of machismo culture, which actively encourages fearlessness with regards to violence—and, even where fear exists, inhibits them from admitting so to an interviewer? Is not their high death rate from motor car and motor bike accidents another instance of this irrationality? And lastly, would it not be more advisable to attempt to raise the fear of crime of young men rather than to lower that of other parts of the public? We could, for example, point to the very real dangers of knife wounds and grossly underestimated morbidity from blows to the head, kicking etc.

Of course, on a strict level of rationality, it is not up to the social scientist to suggest the ‘proper’ level of fear of crime for the public. The ‘rationality’ of fear of crime cannot be deduced from the risk rates. To take the base line argument, fear of death is a religious and philosophical matter, it is not the province of social scientists to instruct the public as to their proper level of fear. However, rationality can be, so to speak, ‘improved’ by the social scientist if a given subgroup’s level of fear of violent injury is accepted as that group’s own desmesne. Thus the scientist might point out that the group’s fear of criminal violence is incommensurate with its fear of, say, car accidents or air travel. Lay people are often unclear as to the relative risk rates and dangers of different forms of violence and social encounters.

Let us turn to the other of the equation, the supposedly ‘objective’ risks of crime which the mass victimization studies expose. Most surveys ask interviewees whether they have had a certain action committed against them and then subsequently ascribe or do not ascribe criminal status to the account given. They do not ask the interviewees themselves to define whether the act is criminal (see the useful discussion in Hough and Mayhew 1985 : 4–5). This, as Hough and Mayhew correctly note, is less of a problem with regard to crimes such as burglary, where there is little public controversy, but is ‘much muddier for offences such as assault.’

If one takes subgroups with very different definitions of assault, there is a sharp contrast between young men and almost everyone else. I want to suggest that to ask seemingly objective questions on such matters as assault will generate a large number of positive answers, even though the young men themselves attach no importance to many of these ‘assaults’. A large number of incidents will merely be horseplay—of no significance whatever, either to the young men themselves or to anyone else for that matter. This is not to suggest that serious violence is not focused amongst, say, lower working class young men. Rather it is to suggest that their violence figures are greatly inflated by crimes of little social significance. Furthermore, that this is a result of attempting to produce objective figures about a phenomenon, crime, which of necessity involves a subjective dimension.
The exercise, then, in relating an objective crime rate to a subjective level of fear is, from a realist perspective, flawed, because it assumes:

- that rationality would involve each subgroup of society having a fear of crime rate proportional to their risk rate;
- that there is an objective crime rate irrespective of the subjective assessment of various subgroups.

What I want to suggest is that by attempting to set up an objective/legalistic definition of crime independent of the subjective definitions of the various subgroups within society, victimization research commonly trivializes that which is important and makes important that which is trivial. As we have seen, any meaningful concept of crime rate must include the notion of human evaluation. What seems trivial to some would be serious to others, what might be serious to some is trivial to others. Men and women, in particular, may have different evaluations of what is serious and what is trivial. This is not to suggest that there is not a consensus over serious crime. There is, but the existence of disagreements at the margins must incline us to re-interpret; in particular, to avoid reading off risks rates as simply a reflection of raw data. Further, I believe that this approach helps us understand other anomalies which have arisen within the literature of victimization. For example, the education effect: where rates increase with years of education (Sparks 1981).

Up till now we have referred to the way in which both police statistics and victimization studies tend to conceal certain sorts of crimes against certain sorts of people. We have seen how global figures occlude the geographical and social focus of crime and we have noted the probability of a systematic value bias in the statistics. But none of this has gone beyond the notion of risk rates as acting upon equal victims. It is, however, only when we place victims in their material context that we find the patterning of worries about crime becoming more understandable, just as is true of the different levels of tolerance of crime and violence.

THE MYTH OF THE EQUAL VICTIM

In What is to be done about Law and Order (1984), John Lea and I discussed the myth of the equal victim. Namely, that by discussing the notion of the impact of crime in terms of risk rates abstracted from the general material predicament of the victim we come to a totally false assessment of impact. Important here are the processes of:

- compounding: people who are victims of one crime tend to be victims of others; people who are victims of one social problem tend to have other social problems laid on their doorsteps. (Hazel Genn above quite correctly identifies the process of multiple victimization);
- differential vulnerability: people differ greatly in their ability to withstand crime. The yuppie may experience ‘the positive burglary’ which involves a creative insurance claim and a new stereo, a poor isolated elderly woman will suffer much more grievous harm (see Maguire 1980). And, of course, the service
provision by police, local council, victims support schemes, and so on, varies similarly.

What a realist method must do is move from abstract crime rates to the concrete predicaments which people actually face. But let us take one more step forward and talk about the relationship of crime.

**THE MEANING OF A PUNCH**

If we take an objective approach to assault we can imagine a punch delivered with a given velocity and causing a certain level of bruising. We could then draw up tables which would show how such assaults were differently distributed across the population, and relate this, perhaps, to fear of crime. Of course, something of this sort already occurs in present victimization studies, although the level of objectivity is scarcely as exacting. The problem with this approach is that the 'same' punch can mean totally different things in different circumstances: it can be the punch between two adolescent boys – of absolutely no significance on the level of victimization. It can be the punch of a policeman on a picket line or the punch of the picket against the police. It can be the drawn-out aggression of a violent man towards his wife. It can be the sickening violence of a parent against a small child.

Violence, like all forms of crime, is a social relationship. It is rarely random: it inevitably involves particular social meanings and occurs in particular hierarchies of power. Its impact, likewise, is predicated on the relationship within which it occurs. We should continue to create our tables of victimization, but we would be wrong to believe that we can have a science of victimology which ignores the offender. For the very impact of the offence depends on the relationship between victim and offender.

**WOMEN AND THE FEAR OF CRIME**

Let us bring all the factors we have discussed together using the victimization of women as an example. I have argued that the figures conceal crime risk rates and that the impact of crime is a function of risk, compounding, vulnerability and relationship. Let me expand briefly on this:

*Concealment: the invisible victim*

Domestic crisis and sexual crimes are less likely to enter the statistics than property crimes, which leads to the systematic underestimation of crimes against women. The particular focus of crime on certain categories of women is concealed by global figures. The actual impact of known crime on women is underplayed by designating much of their victimization as trivial.
Compounding

Women do not only suffer crime \textit{per se} but also an undertow of incivilities and harassment which men do not experience. The impact of crime on women cannot be assessed without taking into account these incivilities.

Vulnerability

The relatively powerless situation of women — economically, socially and physically — makes them more unequal victims than men.

Relationships

Crime is a relationship. And as fifteen years of feminist research has indicated, crime against women is about patriarchy. Crime in the home occurs within a relationship of economic dependency: the woman — particularly if she has children — cannot walk away. It occurs also within an emotional bond, which gives it all the more hurtful poignancy. Crime and incivilities against women in the streets reflect the overbearing nature of particular values. What a dramatic indictment of our civilization it is that, in the inner cities of Europe, men can quite happily walk the streets at night, yet a huge section of women are curfewed because of fear of crime.

It is easy to see then how crime has a greater impact on women as well as, at the same time, women are more sensitive to violence. For in the last analysis many women react to the adversity of the world by creating a female culture which is opposed to violence, whilst men frequently react to adversity by creating a culture of \textit{machismo} which is insensitive to violence and, indeed, in some groups glorifies it.

Conclusion

I have attempted a critique of a particular tendency within criminology which tends to underestimate the problem of crime and to view fear of crime as more or less irrationally detached from risk rates. To do this I have applied a realist method which seeks to place crime and victimization in its specific material circumstances and which underlines that crime involves both action and censure, behaviour and values (Young 1988). I have not had space to examine the policing implications of this position, except insofar as to comment that this analysis suggests that present policing is woefully inadequate in dealing with crime, both in the public and the private arena.

Note

1 In an excellent recent article by Mike Hough (1986) there is a clear recognition of the problem of the levels of disagreement with regard to definitions of violence, between different parts of the population. Hough makes the distinction between crimes such as burglary, where the figures are "hard data", and crimes of violence, which have a highly \textit{variable} subjective component. He is extremely sceptical about the use of violence
statistics as epidemiological yardsticks, seeing 'at root . . . an insurmountable problem' and noting, quite correctly, the need for very careful interpretation. This discovery of the subjective component of victimization rates is, of course, a replay of the long standing debate on social statistics, for example, over suicide rates. A realist perspective would be less pessimistic in that:

(i) it would point to there being a wide consensus about serious violence;
(ii) the subjective component is a real part of the crime rate: it is the privilege of various publics to make their own appraisals;
(iii) seemingly objective indices like burglary rates have subjective components (witness the distribution between 'true' burglary and criminal damage);
(iv) it should be possible to measure people's different scales of violence as part of a victimization questionnaire.