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**WITHOUT CAMOUFLAGE: 'GENDERED FEAR OF VIOLENCE'**

**EXPOSED**

**Are Women more Fearful than Men?**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts in Psychology**

At Massey University, Albany  
New Zealand

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**2006**

## ABSTRACT

There have been various theoretical and practical research attempts to explain the most interesting yet puzzling finding in 'fear of crime' literature, known as the 'gendered fear of crime paradox' which refers to the observation that although men are more likely to be the victims of violent assaults, they are the least likely to report feeling 'afraid', whereas women, who are the least likely victims, report higher levels of 'fears' across all types of crimes. Sutton and Farrall (2005) found evidence that men discount their 'fears' in order to provide socially desirable responses. The present study continues this area of research by employing a new paradigm using Point Light Display Video (PLD) in which participants will not be aware of research's topic and therefore allowing for responses that are not influenced by gendered social roles, expectations and socially desirable responding. Participants in this study were 40 University students (20 males and 20 females) who were firstly exposed to the experimental task (PLD video as an implicit measure of 'fear of violence') and once finished, were administered with a traditional 'fear of crime' questionnaire (an explicit measure of 'fear of violent crime'). The results showed that there was no gender difference in 'fear of violence' when participants were implicitly measured (despite both genders being sensitive to the velocity of movement). However when asked to report their 'fears' through a questionnaire, parallel to previous research, there was an observed 'gender paradox'. The present study's findings lend empirical support to previous theoretical speculations that 'gendered fear of crime paradox' might be fictitious after all, due to the unstable methodologies employed to investigate this phenomenon. Implications of these findings are discussed with some recommendations for future research into the fear of crime.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge and thank my incredible supervisor, Dr. John Buttle. If I could, I would be able to write a book about your endless enthusiasm for this topic, your genuine and ongoing support, advice, encouragement and motivation that you have given me throughout this project. Your intellectual and professional guidance was invaluable, and your energy and laughs kept me hanging in there. I am so glad that you were the 'chosen one' as the guide light through my 'thesis journey', and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all that you have done. I would also like to thank my second supervisor, Mei Williams, for her assistance and support in completing this project. Thank you for your fine tuning abilities, statistical support and most importantly ethical expertise that made this process more enjoyable.

Secondly, I would also like to thank the following, very important people, who individually, made this project come together and eventually complete. My sincere appreciation goes to Dr. Volkan Topalli who gave me the permission to use the Point Light Display (PLD) video and who had kindly transferred it to me. I am very grateful for your mastermind creation and contribution. A big thank you to Heather Buttle for your advice and guidance throughout this research and especially with statistics! I would also like to acknowledge and thank the two independent content coders, Kylee Adams and Sarah McKedney for your outmost valuable and outstanding work. A big thank you also goes to a very special girl, Joanna Wolfram, for being my personal librarian and 'partner in crime' through this project. I am very thankful for your assistance and mammoth patience!

I would also like to acknowledge all the participants who agreed to take part in this research, without even knowing what they were getting themselves in to! This thesis would not have been possible without your enthusiasm and contribution, so I thank you for that.

And now finally, to my family; I would like to take this opportunity to show appreciation for one and only true 'fearless women', a one of a kind mum, my amazing Gordana. Your beauty, your love, your virtue continue to inspire me. Your endless support, your belief in me, your continued guidance is the 'wind beneath my wings' that allows me to keep going and take on the life's challenges with excitement and readiness. I am so proud of you and I am so grateful that you are my 'mama'. You are the BEST! To the rest of the team; my father Budimir, I love you and thank you for being there for all of us! My brother Jovan, your words of encouragement that only you know how to give mean more to me than you can ever imagine – thank you for your unconditional belief in me and your big warm

heart! To my sister Stefana, my 'Snorts', thank you for always being there, for all your love and care – I am so proud of you!

As they say, 'save the best for last' - my two special boys, soon to be three! To my incredible Simon, thank you for your all; your love, your belief in me, kindness, patience, encouragement, understanding, and of course your great looks, but most of all, for being the best 'tata in the whole wide world'! I love you always... To my son, my Luka, my everything! Your eyes brighten up my every day; your smile brings so much laughter, your eyes so much joy, and your hands so much love and happiness. You are my existence; you are what keeps me flying high!

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The problem of crime is a global phenomenon that can be said to afflict every nation. Like any social problem, the problem of crime is multidimensional, and affects various aspects of a society. Likewise, 'fear of crime' represents only one of the many facets and aftermaths of crime that bear a direct impact on quality of life. In New Zealand, crime is generally viewed as a serious social problem. It is interesting that it is perceived to be on the increase, even when it is actually declining. Some of the responsibility for this can be attributed to the media, where crime becomes a 'good story' creating 'excellent headlines' and fuelling political competition. However, despite the often negative impact that the fear of crime has upon people's quality of life, there has been little independent research conducted on this topic in New Zealand, compared with the extensive literature found in many other countries.

The 'fear of crime' became a 'blue print' of a social problem in the mid 1960s due to the alarming findings from a first survey of 'Crime Victims' in the United States of America, in which it was revealed that forty to fifty percent of respondents were fearful and constrained in their activity (Clemente & Kleinman, 1976). In turn, these findings had stimulated parallel research internationally (New Zealand National Survey of Crime Victims, 1996 & 2001; For Australia see Borooah & Carcach, 1997; England and Wales see Kershaw, Chivite-Matthews, Thomas & Aust, 2001; Comparison between Slovenian, Scottish and Dutch Crime Surveys see Mesko & Farrall, 2000) in an attempt to explain the 'fear of crime' phenomenon.

One of the most common findings in research, including that of the New Zealand's National Survey of Crime Victims (NZNSCV, 2001), lies in the 'paradoxical' finding, that while males are more at risk of being assaulted than females, they tend to express less concern about victimization, whereas females report higher levels of fear while the risk of victimization is less (Block, 1993; Borooah & Carcach, 1997; Clemente & Kleinman, 1976; Hale, 1996; Killias & Clerici, 2000; Mesko & Farrall, 2000; Morris, Reilly, Berry & Ransom, 2003; Stanko, 1995).

The literature to date suggests that gender is the most salient factor influencing how ones perceives violence and aggression (Archer & Haigh, 1997; 1999; Bettancourt & Miller, 1996; Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Harris & Knight-Bohnhoff, 1996; Miller & Harris, 2000) and fear of crime (Box, Hale & Andrews, 1988; Braungart, Braungart & Hoyer, 1980; Ferraro, 1996; Hale, 1996; Harris & Miller, 2000; Reid & Konrad, 2004; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; Warr, 1984). While some scholarly explanations labelled this 'gendered fear of crime gap' as 'irrational' and 'unjustified' (Braungart et al. 1980; Moeller, 1989; Sparks, 1992; Warr, 1984), others sought alternative explanations.

Efforts to explore why women's fear might be different to that of men's are vast and usually contested. Proposals have been made that the 'central paradox' might be due to; the unknown 'true' figure of women's victimization rates (Hale, 1996; Junger, 1987; Pain, 1995; Painter, 1992); women's lesser physical strength (Hines & Fry, 1994; Smith & Tortensson, 1997; Stets & Straus, 1990; Thompson, Bankston & LaPierre, 1992); biological predispositions for women to be less likely to engage in an aggressive and violent manner (Campbell, 1999; Hines & Fry, 1994); women's vulnerability to physical, psychological and economic losses (Garofalo, 1981; Junger, 1987; Keane, 1995; Killias, 1990; Mooney, 2000; Parker & Ray,

1990; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981); and the possibility that any criminal act could escalate to rape (Ferraro, 1996; Hinderlang, Gottfredson & Garafalo, 1978; Painter, 1992; Warr, 1984).

From a different perspective, others have suggested that the 'paradox' (between the risk of victimization and gendered perceptions of fear of violent crime) might be the product of; women's position in the society (Madriz, 1997; Stanko, 1995); the influence of gender roles and schemas (Bettancourt & Miller, 1996; Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Goodey, 1994; Hollander, 2001; Lober, 1994; Risman, 1998; Stanko & Hobdell, 1993; Valentine, 1997); men discounting their reported risk and fear (Bem, 1981; Goodey, 1997; Smith & Tortensson, 1997; Sutton & Farrall, 2005); and that they 'neutralize' their fear, since maleness is associated with the assumption that 'boys don't cry' (Agnew, 1985; Goodey, 1997; Haywood & Mac an Ghail, 2003; Kaufman, 1997; Newburn & Stanko, 1995; Sparks, 1996; Stanko & Hobdell, 1993).

The past three decades have seen various theoretical and practical research attempts to determine the origins of fear of crime (see Hale, 1996 for an overview), questioning its conceptual basis and definitions (Baumer, 1978; Clark, 2003; Dolan & Peasgood, 2007; Garofalo, 1981; Gray, 1987; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Rachman, 1990; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; Warr, 1984; Williams, McShane & Akers, 2000), and its methodologies (Clemente & Kleiman, 1976; Davies, Francis & Juppi, 2003; Dubow, McCabe & Kaplan, 1979; Farrall et al., 1997; Farrall & Ditton, 1999; Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987; Hartnagel, 1979; Sutton & Farrall, 2005), all with the intention to understand this 'problematic' concept. While little has been done to resolve the 'paradox', it is now becoming more accepted that the slow progress might be due to the manner in which this topic has been researched.

The almost exclusive methodology used in the 'fear of crime' research relies on 'self-reported questionnaires' that are open to the possibility that respondents will provide answers that they believe to be socially appropriate (Madriz, 1997; Stanko & Hobdell, 1993; Robson, 1993). It has been suggested by Goody (1997) that the denial of fear is part of the male masculine identity, and consequently males may feel the need to play down their fear levels when filling out questionnaires. Conversely, it is also possible that females exaggerate their feelings of fear, as it is socially acceptable to do so, and seen to be more feminine (Bem, 1981; Hale, 1996; Madriz, 1997; Sutton & Farrall, 2005).

When using the self-reported questionnaires to measure gendered 'fear of crime', it quickly becomes apparent to participants that they are being asked questions to do with their levels of 'fear'. While generated 'fear of crime' literature has broadened our understanding, it fails to objectively capture the 'gendered fear of crime paradox'. With this in mind, it would be wise to employ a measure that does not involve questions that are obviously linked to the concept of 'fear'. The present research advocates the use of an implicit measurement of 'fear of crime', in order to produce data that is not so heavily influenced by gendered roles, stereotypes and socially desirable responding.

The study aims to further address the methodological 'gaps' found across academic literature, by employing a paradigm that has yet to be used in the study of people's 'fear of crime'. The implicit measurement in the present research utilizes the Point Light Display (PLD) video technology, as a methodology (Topalli, 2005). The construction of a PLD video involves the filming of two actors wearing dark, tight fitting clothing with reflective patches that are fixed to their body joints (Topalli & O'Neal, 1995). The final product of this construction shows a brief interaction between two 'featureless human figures' (see Appendix

A for a static image of these displays) in three velocities; slow, medium and fast (Topalli, 2005). It has been found that the PLD video methodology can provide both quantitative and qualitative data that serves to measure group differences on how they perceive and attribute meaning to the PLD videos (Topalli, 2005; Topalli & O'Neal, 1995). According to Topalli (2005), the PLD video measures the participant's level of vigilance towards violence. It would be reasonable to assume that those most afraid of becoming victims of violence, will be the most vigilant, and will therefore be more ready to attribute violent motivations across the three PLD video velocities.

Therefore, the present study proposes that the 'violence focused vigilance' may act as an implicit measure of 'fear of violent crimes', between two experimental groups in question, males and females. Since participants will not be aware of what the video measures, it will allow for responses that are not influenced by gendered social roles, stereotypes and socially desirable responding. For comparison purposes, the present study will also employ a traditional 'fear of crime' questionnaire, in order to obtain information on the participants' subjective emotional responses to violence.