

Declaration of Aimee Cox

I, Aimee Cox, do hereby declare:

I am the Community Development Manager for the City of Colorado Springs. I have a Master's Degree in Sociology from the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. In 2002, I completed a research project using systematic social observation to study disorder and public use along the Pikes Peak Greenway in Colorado Springs. In addition, I have many years of experience managing public spaces professionally and setting public space policy as an elected official. If called upon to testify in this matter, I would do so in accordance with this Declaration.

Cognitive Components of Fear: Considerations for Public Space Management

Introduction

Crime and the fear of crime are important issues for users and managers of public spaces. Park users perceive security as the top priority in park and recreation management, and fear of crime in public spaces decreases usage, particularly among women and the elderly. Fear of crime and use of public space have become more important to communities seeking to revitalize their urban environments. Public space managers must understand the cognitive components of fear in order to create urban environments that are welcoming to a variety of users.

Fear and Disorder

Fear of crime is far out of proportion to the objective probability of being victimized. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics National Crime Victimization Survey (NVCS), serious violent crime levels have declined since 1993 (U.S. Department of Justice 2015). In 2014, 1.1 percent of all persons age 12 or older in the United States experienced one or more violent victimizations (U.S. Department of Justice 2015). Despite significant and consistent reductions in crime, studies of safety in public spaces reflect an underlying sense of fear by the public. Security has been identified as the most important investment communities can make in parks and recreation management, and unaccompanied women report not feeling safe in parks (Glaser 1994 and Westover 1985). This general finding was corroborated by the City of Colorado

Springs Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department during the citizen engagement process for the development of the City of Colorado Springs Park System Master Plan (2014); “safety concerns and the need for park rule enforcement” was identified as a top priority. In addition, an online survey of 1,147 downtown Colorado Springs stakeholders conducted in 2014 by the Downtown Partnership of Colorado Springs found that 72% of respondents identified “clean and safe” as a very important factor in improving downtown Colorado Springs over the previous five years, and identified reducing loitering by transient populations as the second most important action to achieve the future vision of downtown (2014).

Most fear of crime is linked to personal safety. Females are less likely than males to be victims of crime, but they have greater fear (Westover 1985, Clemente and Kleiman 1977, Day 2000, and Glaser 1994). Women's fear of crime is attributed to heightened vulnerability and fear for their children (Day 2000). The elderly also are fearful for their personal safety, but their sense of fear wanes over time as physical mobility decreases and their activities become more predictable. In general, men demonstrate increases in fear as their physical vigor fades with age. Minorities report higher fear because of higher victimization, especially among young adult males (Clemente and Kleiman 1977 and Glaser 1994).

Fear is two-dimensional, manifesting as either a response to direct threat of violent crime or a nonspecific anxiety or sense of unease (Research and Forecasts, Inc. 1983). The cognitive component of fear constrains individual social behavior and results in avoidance of situations that accentuate the fear (Liska, Sanchirico and Reed 1988). According to Sampson and Raudenbush, “Visual signs of physical and social disorder in public spaces reflect powerfully on our inferences about urban communities” (1999, p. 603). Social disorder refers to behavior, usually involving strangers, that is considered threatening such as verbal harassment on the street, public intoxication and groups of rowdy young males in public. Physical disorder refers to the deterioration of urban landscapes and the presence of graffiti and litter. (Sampson and Raudenbush 1999).

Understanding the cognitive component of fear is important to abating fear. Urbanites navigate a world of strangers and must make environments predictable through appearance and spatial segregation and use “coding behavior” to attribute meaning to appearances, locations and behaviors. Visible disorder is a central

consideration for individuals negotiating public encounters with strangers. Through coding behavior, individuals identify threats and opportunities and modify their perceptions and behaviors for self-protection (Lofland 1973). Erving Goffman uses the term "civil inattention" to describe the decorum of public life (1971). Unacquainted people that come into contact with each other without any intentions to converse give visual notice recognizing each other's presence and in the next moment withdraw their attention to express that each is not a target of special curiosity or design (Goffman 1971). In this brief moment, individuals, in order to mitigate fear and unease, require some information about the intent, purpose and the course of action of those in their presence. Behaviors are mentally placed in broad classes of actions that are safe or unsafe, based on the perceiver's familiarity with observed behaviors (Goffman 1971). "Even if we wish it were not so, disorder triggers attributions and predictions in the minds of insiders and outsiders alike. It changes the calculus of prospective home buyers, real estate agents, insurance agents, and investors and shapes the perceptions of residents..." (Sampson and Raudenbush 1999, p. 604).

Mitigating Fear in Public Space Management

Over time, places become recognized as types whether or not one has personal experience in the place, and users internalize these types and alter their use of space without ever specifically defining their fear (Lofland 1973). Hindelang, Gottfredson and Garofalo conducted extensive research on victimization and fear of crime in developing a theory of personal victimization and found that less than half of the respondents in eighty metropolitan areas said that they had changed or limited their activities because of crime or fear of crime (1978). The researchers concluded that the behavioral effects of fear appear as subtle lifestyle adjustments such as taking a taxi instead of walking or installing a second dead bolt on the door.

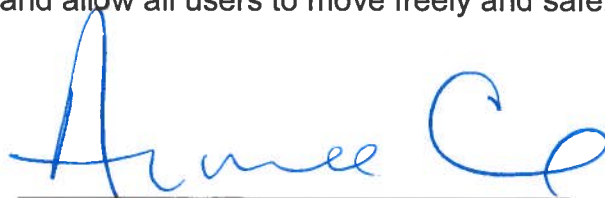
While people may not define fear as the basis for their choices, constrained behavior increases fear (Hindelang et al. 1978). For instance, women's fear of crime in public spaces is heightened by actions intended to protect women such as escorting or warning them not to go out at night. Women prefer public spaces that accommodate interaction with friends and strangers (Clark and Uzell 2002 and Day 2000). Similarly, increased security can increase distrust and paranoia (Research and Forecasts, Inc.

1983, Ellin 2001, Whyte 1980, Day 2000). Low-income people assign a high priority to security in parks, but they prefer lighting and design over police patrols because of a distrust of police tactics. This is especially true for minorities because of perceived vulnerability to police mistreatment (Glaser 1994). For these groups, increased security presents a barrier to their use of public spaces (Glaser 1994).

Some security measures actually increase the criminal element in a public space (Whyte 1980). Whyte asserted that places designed with distrust are the places you'll likely find undesirables (1980). Removing benches and adding steel bars reduces the number of ordinary folks that use an area and allows undesirable people to proliferate (Whyte 1980). Many effective public space management strategies in New York City have encouraged public use through comfortable seating, economic activity, art and the elimination of dense landscaping that conceals public areas (Project for Public Spaces 2000). Particular to energizing downtown Colorado Springs, the Urban Land Institute recommended more programming in Acacia Park, providing public Wi-Fi access, outreaching to businesses to learn about needs, creating a plan to end homelessness, developing a sidewalk management ordinance to ensure the comfort of all the pedestrians who use the downtown streets and sidewalks for work, shopping or general enjoyment, and limiting excessive noise (2012).

Conclusion

Understanding the relationship between social disorder and fear is important to developing effective strategies for revitalizing public spaces. Successful public spaces have a "sense of place" – they are accessible, comfortable, sociable, active and accommodate a variety of users. Decisions regarding public space management should focus less on physical security measures intended to curtail use because they also send the message an area is unsafe and focus more on encouraging behaviors that conform to the intended use of the public space and allow all users to move freely and safely between energized nodes of activity.



Aimee Cox

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