

summer in the city

Crime rates increase in warm weather and decrease when it is cold. Why? John R. Hipp and his colleagues (*Social Forces*, June 2004) examine two hypotheses. The first is the “temperature-aggression” theory, which claims that hot weather exacerbates frustration and contributes to unruly behavior. The other theory is “routine activities.” In warm weather people go out more, which makes them more likely to commit or become the victims of crimes, and they leave their homes unguarded, which makes their property vulnerable. In cold weather, they stay safely at home. The researchers tested these two explanations by gathering monthly crime and weather data (as well as standard social data) for about 8,500 American police jurisdictions from 1990 through 1992.

Hipp and his co-authors find, as others have before them, that both violent and property crime follow a seasonal cycle, with the highest levels in July and the lowest in January. Then, they looked to see where in the United States these cycles were most and least exaggerated. For example, if raised temperatures really mattered, then the seasonal variation in crime should be most exaggerated in regions of the country with sizzling summers. But if what matters is getting out of the house, then the seasonal cycles of crime should be greatest in colder regions where people are housebound for much of the winter. The researchers find that the weight of the evidence—certainly for property crimes and probably for violent crimes,



Photo by Julian Barron

The Coney Island Boardwalk. Crime rates tend to increase in the summer because warmer weather entices people out of their homes.

too—supports the “routine activities” theory. They even find that, other things being equal, communities that have more restaurants and recreational places, such as amusement parks, have both more crime and wider seasonal variation in crime. Hipp and his colleagues conclude that risking crime is part of the cost of getting out of the house.

men in crisis

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, men in Russia have been drinking more, dying earlier and committing suicide at higher rates. Unemployment and falling wages are commonly cited as the primary reasons for this social malady. Drawing on repeated interviews with 120 men and 120 women over three years, Sarah Ashwin and Tatyana Lytkina (*Gender and Society*, April 2004) maintain that men’s increasingly superfluous role in the family is also a key reason.

Although most Soviet women worked, the government never challenged the belief that women were in charge of the home. In fact, women were glorified as mother-workers and traditional male authority was subverted. The Soviet government actively sought to undermine the power of men in the home, restricting their accomplishments to the workplace. The authors argue that Soviet norms regarding work and family are still widely accepted today.

Now, when mass unemployment prevents many men from having status as breadwinners, they adopt two strategies. They may stay at home but refuse to do “feminine” tasks. Finding themselves superfluous to their families, such men become demoralized. Others may take on household tasks, especially repairs and other work that is considered “masculine.” However, these men find that their wives view this new role as “unnatural,” they want “breadwinner husbands,” not “househusbands.” Thus, women—accustomed to being the household managers—may inadvertently sideline men at home and contribute to their demoralization.

celebrity sightings

How should you act if you encounter a movie star in a public place? There is an established etiquette—a set of unwritten social rules—that governs such encounters. To discover what