

A PSYCHO-GEOGRAPHY OF CRIME AREAS: VARIATIONS IN THE AFFECTIVE DOMAIN

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Abstract

Ten dimensions from the affective domain are proposed as characterizing the major attitudes and feelings found in areas of high crime in cities. These dimensions are related to a previously proposed model of community differentiation by the author, that tried to summarize the range of features that cause community or residential areas to differ from one another. It is suggested that these crime area dimensions are variations of the previously proposed dimensions rather than unique sources of differentiation.

Key words: crime areas, psycho geography, social groups.

INTRODUCTION

This study is derived from two issues. First, it represents an extension of previous work on the dimensions or elements of variation of community differentiation presented to the I.G.U. Urban Commission during the last decade. Second, it can be related to two recent studies on problems associated with the geography of crime presented to the 2001 Calgary meeting of this commission by Jean-Bernard Racine and David Herbert and published in the proceedings of the meeting (Davies and Townshend, 2002). This paper was particularly stimulated by Racine's observation (2002) that geographers and other students of crime patterns have spent too much time in attempts to find spatial correlates of crime, such as low unemployment, ethnicity, social disorganization etc. This is especially true in relation to the study of crime areas – places with persistent levels of high rates of crime. Racine maintained that there is a need to focus more upon perceptual issues, not only about how we think about these areas, but also about *how people who live in crime areas feel and think*. "We need to integrate analysis of the problems and causes of violence with our own perceptual systems...This would allow the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods – along with those of the other inhabitants of the city – to engage in what amounts to a new interpretation of their own reality....the perceptual systems in question invest the city with sym-

bolic meanings....” (Racine, 2002; 587. Italics added). Racine also suggested that such issues are as important as the social or demographic variations, such as those derived from census variables, urban environmental character, or the specific behaviours of people. This means that he is suggesting that more attention should be paid to what is described as the affective domain in a previously proposed model of community differentiation. But Racine also argued that such approaches are not enough to provide solutions to high crime. He suggested that there is a need for prescriptive, as well as descriptive approaches: “we should search for ways of integrating people into society by providing ways of improving their self-worth.....which seems to be associated with what amounts to *territories of respect* and *territories of recognition*” (ibid; 589. Italics added). These extracts suggest that we should be as concerned with how people think and feel in these crime areas, as much as with more tangible variables, such as those from the census. They take investigations into the concept of the ‘affective domain’, namely the different sources of variation that exist in people’s feelings and attitudes in crime areas, namely those associated with crimes of violence against people and property, not white collar crime. Hence this study seeks to answer two basic questions. Can distinctive dimensions of variation in the affective domain be proposed for areas of high crime rates? How do these relate to the previously proposed model (Davies, 1995; Davies and Herbert, 1994; Davies and Townshend, 1999; Davies, Chan and Townshend, 1999; Townshend, 2001) of the dimensions of community differentiation in the affective domain?

HYPOTHESISED CRIME AREA DIMENSIONS IN THE AFFECTIVE DOMAIN

a) Community Dimensions. Three different sets or domains of dimensions of variation were proposed for residential or community areas at the IGU Urban Commission Detroit meeting and discussed in the following Vaasa meeting Davies (1995), and in a related book (Davies and Herbert, 1994). These were defined as broad categories or domains of variation associated with: Area Content, Behaviour, and the Conceptual Identity (Cognitive–Affective) Domain, as well as those associated with time and scale. The dimensions in the Area Content domain are well known, for many have been identified from factorial ecology studies of census variables (Davies, 1984, Townshend, 2002). These are dimensions such as: Socio-economic Status, Impoverishment, Family and Age, Non Family, Early–Late Family, Young Adult, Migrant and Ethnic dimensions etc. In the Behavioural Domain the key sources of variation seems to be dimensions that vary with: Local Facility Use (retail etc), Informal Interaction, Mutual Informal Co-operation, Local Organization Use, Political Participation, Supportive Milieu. In the Cognitive Domain the major dimensions seem to be: Area Identity or Cognitive Mapping, People Identity, Symbolic Communication. In the Affective Domain the major dimensions are Symbolism, Sentiment and Attachment, Evaluation, Nuisances and Externalities, Safety and Security, Empowerment, Place Appearance, Latent Involvement, Aesthetics and Beauty, Common Values and Empathy-Belonging. All the dimensions of variation that were identified may be more or less present in various

areas and may be more or less strong. Hence there can be innumerable combinations of these hypothesized dimensions to create very different types of area. Ideally, studies of community should try to investigate as many of these dimensions or sources of variation as possible if we are to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the social geography of areas. Most studies by geographers, however, still focus on a few of these dimensions, which means that they can only be partial glimpses of the complexity of our residential areas.

b) *Hypothesizing Affective Dimensions of Crime Areas* It is suggested that crime areas can also be characterised by a set of basic dimensions or elements of differentiation. In the past, geographers and urban ecologists have emphasised what would be called, following the argument above, the Area Content and Behavioural dimensions, such as social deprivation and social disorganization respectively. Also in the cognitive domain crime areas are 'no-go', or unknown areas for outsiders, because of the fear of crime. This means the interior of the areas have low levels of cognitive understanding, and have threatening 'people identity' and usually lots of symbolic communication seen in 'area or turf defence' markers. This leaves the question of the affective domain. Can a set of distinctive attitudes be identified for the residents in these areas? In other words what type of dimensions in the affective domain can be found in crime areas?

Obviously there are many ethnographic studies of crime areas (e.g Anderson, 1978) that describe the individual features of these areas, and the attitudes 'on the street'. But these studies focus mainly on the local features. It is not clear whether the characteristics found in one area are also found in others, whilst the descriptions are rarely organized into identifiable concepts. By generalising from these and other studies of crime areas, including the older social deprivation and social disorganization literature, it proved possible to hypothesise a series of ten dimensions which are proposed as proving at least an initial classification of the range of attitudes found in crime areas, organised as affective dimensions. A more complete description of these proposed dimension linked to many of the theoretical explanations for crime behaviour is provided elsewhere (Davies, 2004). Moreover, since this is an *initial integration* of the empirical and theoretical information about attitudes and feelings in crime areas, it must be stressed that the degree of separation and cohesion of these dimensions is still provisional. Indeed, some of these dimensions may, on empirical testing, be shown to be composed of sub-dimensions, whilst there may be others that need to be isolated. The term 'terrain', a variation of the word for 'land or distinctive area', is used as a label before each dimension so as to strengthen the identification of these dimensions with characteristics of the affective domain. The relative strength of these dimensions could obviously be measured in each crime area by techniques such as semantic differential scales, which would monitor the variations that are present.

c) *The Ten Dimensions of Variation*

1. Terrains of Social Inadequacy (T1). Most people in crime areas have *low levels of personal esteem and self worth*, often combined with high self-denigration. This is a result of their lack of skills, education and previous success in life to be successful in the rest of society. These features can be measured through concepts such as social de-

- privation. However, it is the attitudinal characteristics associated with these features that is the focus here. Moreover, individuals have *few and usually limited goals for the future* or purposes in life, and very *fragile coping mechanisms or support systems* when problems inevitably emerge, often leading to drug or alcohol abuse. Participation in such behaviours often makes their situation worse, since this often leads to medical self-abuse, criminal activity to pay for drugs and conflicts with the law. Comparing this dimension with the community affective domain described above led to the conclusion that this is similar to conditions characterised by *low levels of satisfaction and evaluation* of life in this area. There are exceptions to this generalisation, namely those individuals who are successful in crime. But if they are caught and sent to prison their success is obviously temporary.
2. Terrains of Despair and Limited Goals (T2). Most people in these crime areas are not able to fulfil their goals through legitimate activity, given their lack of skills and limited resources, both in terms of social and financial capital. So a condition of *despair and hopelessness* frequently characterises most people in the area, meaning that life in these areas is a 'struggle against the odds'. This is what Dubet (1987) called a condition of *la galère*, of barely surviving, leaving residents marginalized in the host society. In addition, people have very low expectations of their ability to either alter their current situation, or the area in which they live, either by themselves or with others. This means the majority of residents have low feelings of empowerment, of being able to change the environment in which they live, with few opportunities of moving elsewhere and an acceptance of the existing conditions. As a result, the dimension can be equated with a *low level of the degree of empowerment* dimension in the community affective domain.
 3. Terrains of Exclusion-Discrimination (T3). These areas are perceived as having high levels of incivility and crime. Combined with the conditions of social deprivation it means that individuals in these areas are frequently stigmatised and labelled by outsiders—especially if they also contain visible ethnic minorities. These conditions frequently lead to low levels of contact with outsiders and even *adverse treatment* by members of the mainstream society who do not want to mix or associate with the people from these areas. The result is a feeling of exclusion from the rest of society. The inhabitants have few jobs or social contacts with outsiders, and a feeling of being discriminated against, of alienation from and often resentment against the host society. The frequent stream of negative media reports about these areas adds to the negative symbolization of these areas, which reinforce the feelings of exclusion. The contrast between the conditions experienced within these areas, compared to conditions outside, lead many insiders to *envy* the situation of others – whether the wealth or opportunities of individuals outside the area, or the prosperity of surrounding regions – which leads some to seek ways of gaining access, however illegally, to these rewards. This frequently involves activity that the host society has constructed as being criminal. There may be a perverse feeling among many that this is their 'turf or homeland' – so there is a local identity. But most people have *low levels of sentimental attachment* to the area, which

again means that the dimension parallels one of the most obvious of the community affective dimensions.

4. Terrains of Decay-Destruction Acceptance (T4). A neglected and vandalized environment, full of the physical signs of decay, litter, graffiti and vandalised buildings usually define these crime areas. This physical appearance is combined with the feeling of most people that it is *impossible to rectify* these conditions. Since many people feel they have nothing left to lose, some may well be persuaded to turn upon the area, destroying existing property and services, especially those owned by outsiders, as a response to the frustrations of their life. Yet the number of people vandalizing the area may be small; the normal condition is one of simply accepting the conditions that are found, rather than trying to improve the area. Attempts by outsiders, whether government or private owners, to improve the conditions usually fail. Few residents are prepared to stand-up to the anti-social minority who take pleasure in vandalising the area, which often produces a cycle of increasing dereliction. Obviously the *place appearance dimension* in home ownership community areas, in which people take pride in their area is not present here. But it means that the dimension is still present, although with negative values
5. Terrains of Anxiety and Fear (T5). By definition, these are areas in which there are high crime levels so it is not surprising to find that most residents have high levels of anxiety about crime and fear for their safety. In addition, these areas are often characterised by high levels of incivility to others and this represents the highest real levels of anxiety. These are acts such as: being jostled, verbally abused through swearing or ridiculed, or being exposed to behaviours, such as littering, that cause discomfort for the observer. These acts are often perceived as the early stages of more aggressive behaviours that cause real harm to either persons or property, even though this might not always be the case. The elderly and women in particular try to avoid such situations by staying indoors, especially at night, reducing the extent of surveillance, which can be crucial in identifying the perpetrators of crime. These conditions seem to parallel the dimension of *safety and security* within the list of community area affective domains
6. Terrains of Spontaneity of Actions/Emotions (T6). One of the fundamental features of growing up is the ability to exercise control over emotions and basic human urges, as well as appreciating the consequences of various actions, especially the use of violence on others. However some individuals do not learn such behaviour, and are more prone to react quickly without thought, which may often lead to violence against others and impulsive decisions to commit crime. Cohen (1955) argued that one of the key characteristics of middle class socialisation was the ability to postpone gratification and to think about the consequences of impulsive actions. This means that spontaneity of harmful actions, or emotions that hurts others, is controlled. This type of feature parallels the way that skill cultivation for children through the educational system was encouraged by middle class and ambitious working class parents as a passport to future success. Areas of high crime rates do seem to have this attitudinal characteristic of high spontaneity of action, which means that an apparently unthreatening and passive individual or group can suddenly turn violent. *No equivalent dimension in the affective*

domain was identified in the affective domain model of community areas, perhaps because the emphasis was upon areas of home-owners that are relatively prosperous. This may point to the need for an addition to the original dimensional structure proposed

7. Terrains of Indifference to Others (T7). Many of the inhabitants in crime areas have high levels of indifference to others or fail to respond to the needs of others due to fear and intimidation. This is not simply the lack of social connections that contribute to 'anomie'. Rather it is a personal indifference to others that comes from the fact that many individuals have been brought up with '*no sense of the other*', meaning an interest in, or concern for, other people's rights. This is an important part of our ability to live together in harmony and safety. This leads to restraints on personal behaviour as part of the general 'social contract'. Those who have little 'sense of the other' are indifferent if neighbours or others are robbed or violated and may be a crucial element in the increase of 'violence without content' (Racine, 2002), which may be attributed to the same indifference for the fate of others. Fonagy's (2003) recent developmental theory of aggression may well provide the main justification for the presence of this type of affective dimension in crime areas, for he suggests that violence is 'socialised out' during early childhood, rather than the more usual explanation that it is acquired through socialisation with criminal others. The only real equivalent of this dimension seems to be the *dimension of latent participation*, which implies that people feel they are able to receive help from their neighbours if it is desired. In crime areas the indifference means that there is no or little 'expectation' of help, let alone 'actual' help that could be measured in the behavioural domain.
8. Terrains of Low Restraint or Self-Control. (T8). Low levels of self-control are also found among a significant proportion of people in the area, especially those who may be able to dominate others through their aggressive behaviour. The rationale behind the presence of low levels of self-control can be attributed to neutralisation and self-control/crime opportunity theories proposed by criminologists such as Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) and measured in recent multivariate studies by Grasmick et al. (1993) and Vazsony et al (2001). The big research question here is whether 'self control' is a single scale or composed of a series of related traits. Most studies of delinquency and aggression have looked for ways in which some people acquire these traits. But Fonagy's (2003) new developmental theory of aggression argued that aggression is part of the innate human condition that is socialized out in most children through various control mechanisms, especially those provided by mothers, as people grow up. What seems especially important in accounting for different attitudes towards crime is the feeling among many young adults that they are somehow immune from being caught; after all, there are often few people in an area willing to admonish anti-social behaviour as role models may have moved elsewhere, or are threatened into silence. This assumption of immunity often proves to be false as most perpetrators of major crime are caught. But the revolving door of the criminal system in some countries means that even if criminals are apprehended they may not be punished, adding to the feeling of immunity from their actions. At first sight this seems another unique dimension but it does seem to parallel the dimension of *nuisances or irritants to others* found in community area

studies. This can be linked to the inability to control behaviour, by taking into account the feelings of other residents, which leads to feelings or attitudes of concern that other people in the area will influence residents negatively, even if this does not actually occur.

9. Terrains of Anti-Social or Subversive Attitudes Approval (T9). Areas of crime do not only display high crime rates they have high levels of criminality, a propensity to commit crime, that are linked to the fact that the residents contain large numbers of people with values different from the rest of society, or they possess dissident values that they are prepared to express and act upon in the area, not simply to repress because of pressures from the host society. As such the dimension seems another version of the *common-similar values dimension* found in community areas. However, in crime areas many of these values may be labelled as criminal by the forces of law and order. This shows the way that crime is not a simple empirical act but is socially constructed and variable between societies and even areas. But these are not necessarily viewed in this way by those residents who may derive an income or even status from such behaviours, at least until they are caught by the forces of law and order. A constant source of tension against existing mores comes from the development of unrestrained and often anti-social behaviours of some young adults, especially males, which produce generational sequences of unsettling behaviour. In addition, of course, some may adopt the general anti-social, and often violent attitudes of the criminals in the local population because of admiration for their activities, or they emulate these behaviours to gain acceptance and recognition among their peers. In most areas a process of socialization through family, friends, adult role models and school leads to the eradication of such attitudes. But there are always individuals who have rejected the opportunity to take this path. They engage in criminal behaviour, often in search of thrills and excitement. In areas of high crime rates and social deprivation there are few incentives for young residents of crime areas to develop in this way, since they have few expectations of such progress. Hence they may be socialized into adult criminality, since this seems to be the only path for material success.
10. Terrains of Peer Group (Gang) Allegiance and Respect (T10). Crime areas are frequently dominated by gangs, or unsupervised peer groupings, that account for a large amount of the crime. Adherence to the gangs or acceptance of their dominance seems to be an important common attitude in these areas. Again this seems to be a variation of the *empathy or belonging dimension* hypothesized in studies of community variation for it focuses upon the way that people in distinctive areas can create high levels of attachment to one another, whatever form this may take. People in these crime areas have few achievements, and limited social connections through family or organizations such as schools. The missing support system is often provided by these unsupervised informal peer groupings, which lie outside the formal or accepted structures of the host society and may be opposed to it because of the types of subversive values discussed above. Membership of these gangs provides feelings of attachment or belonging to other members of the group; they also provide the frisson of excitement through gang activity, especially robbery and often violence as shown in Anderson's (1978, 1998)

studies of street gangs. He showed how a significant minority of hard-core street youths maintain the 'code of crime and violence' in order to establish their reputation, because they feel they have few other ways to assert themselves. Within a context of anti-social behaviour and few constraints, it is hardly surprising that some of these groups are prone to crime, violence, or at least anti-social behaviours, which provide the element of risk as well as achievement that may be absent in the rest of the lives of these members, and which may also provide access to possessions, through robbery etc, that they could not otherwise obtain. This provides the component of 'respect or recognition by others' that was identified by Racine (2002). Others are socialized to accept these attitudes by throwing off the guilt produced by adherence to other attitudes. These gangs are frequently very territorial with their own defined 'turfs' that others only violate at the risk of violence and which may be marked with gang signs or markers. Their 'homeland', however impoverished and vandalized, provides them with a safe haven and an identity among their peers that many would otherwise not have.

Crime is difficult to understand because it has so many causes. This makes it important to adopt a more comprehensive approach by dealing with the range of dimensions that may be linked to crime in a multivariate framework. However this study just sets the scene. It must be emphasized that these dimensions have yet to be confirmed through empirical study, but comparison with related attitudes derived from summaries of class socialization and self-actualization measures have shown many parallels with these proposed axes (Davies, 2004), although they are not identical. So it does seem that these proposed crime area axes are not a set of unique elements that characterize crime areas but are merely modifications of the affective domain axes proposed for community areas in previous meetings of this commission. However these dimensions seem to fall into two quite distinct types. One set are essentially *passive* attitudes, namely the dimensions which index *social or individual inadequacy, despair, exclusion-discrimination, decay-destruction acceptance, and anxiety-fear*. These conditions result in an unwillingness, or perhaps even an inability, of most residents of such areas to initiate opportunities to create change in such areas. This produces negative attitudes towards their situation, although some may have the fortitude and resources to escape the deprived, often socially disorganized conditions that dominate these areas. In contrast, the dimensions that are associated with *spontaneity of actions-emotions, indifference to others, low and limited restraint or self-control on behaviour, approval of anti-social or subversive values, and peer group-gang allegiance and respect*, represent attitudes that are clearly in opposition to the general norms found in the rest of society in most western cities. These provide the active conditions that lead some to commit anti-social and even criminal behaviour. These ignore or downplay the rights of others, possess few constraints on their own behaviour and often act impulsively, without rationalizing the long-term consequences of their actions. People with these attitudes may be in a minority in these crime areas, but are more likely to dominate and victimize their neighbours, who possess the passive attitudes described above; the latter do not have the personal resources, or beliefs and support systems to counteract the attitudes that can lead to potentially disruptive behaviours or to crime.

CONCLUSIONS

Relatively few geographers have contributed to the crime literature, even though the spatial variations in the incidence of crime represents one of the most important aspects of the social geography of cities. If we are to be effective in monitoring our cities then it could be argued that more attention should be paid to the geography of crime and especially the character of crime areas in cities, following pioneering books by individuals such as Georges-Abeyie and Harris (1980) or Herbert (1982). Hence this study has tried to extend the field by developing some of Racine's (2002) ideas about the importance of studying people's attitudes and feelings. It has hypothesised a series of dimensions in the affective domain that point the way towards the development of what can be called the *psycho-geography of crime areas*. It has been also been suggested that these sources of variation show close parallels with the affective dimensions of variation proposed for residential areas. However they either represent low values of these dimensions, or specific variations of these dimensions, such as when the common values are those of accepting anti-social behaviour rather than supporting people's property and personal rights. Although the utility of these dimensions must wait for empirical testing, it is suggested that these attitudes, among the people who commit or see lots of crime, that accounts for the persistence of crime areas. Until these attitudes can be altered, crime areas are likely to continue to be found in our cities. Focusing attention for explanations and solutions for crime on the traditional features, such as social deprivation or social disorganization, may not be enough. People's attitudes are also important. Hence the study of these affective dimensions should be seen as providing a rationale for a more comprehensive study of the psycho-geography of areas, one that is quantitatively based rather than the more descriptive and subjective studies of the past.

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