

# **“I Ain’t Gonna Let No One Disrespect Me”**

## **Does the Code of the Street Reduce or Increase Violent Victimization among African American Adolescents?**

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The authors extended Elijah Anderson’s “code of the street” thesis to explain victimization among a longitudinal sample of 720 African American adolescents from 259 neighborhoods. Specifically, the authors assessed whether the street code promotes greater safety or aggravates the risk for victimization. Anderson portrayed the code of the street, which encourages individuals to appear aggressive and tough, as an adaptation necessary for safely functioning in a disadvantaged, high-crime community. He theorized that adopting the street code promotes respect among one’s peers and would-be attackers, thereby increasing one’s safety against victimization. The authors found no support for the idea that adopting the street code reduces victimization. Instead, their findings suggest that individuals who adopt the street code have higher levels of victimization. Furthermore, adopting the street code exacerbates the risk for victimization beyond what would be the case from living in a dangerous and disorganized neighborhood.

**Keywords:** *code of the street; neighborhood context; victimization*

Findings from numerous sources have documented that violent victimization is concentrated disproportionately among African American youth, particularly those residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2003; Chaiken 2000; Hawkins et al. 2000; Lauritsen

2003). Concern about the high rates of violence among African American adolescents has made the identification of contributing factors a research priority (Gibbs 1988; Hawkins et al. 2000; Lauritsen 2003; Reiss and Roth 1993). Elijah Anderson's (1999) recently published ethnographic account of violence in disadvantaged neighborhoods and the oppositional subculture known as "the code of the street" offers a new and compelling account for understanding violence and victimization among African American youth. To date, however, scholars have barely begun to explore whether the street code is useful for understanding victimization among young African Americans living in disadvantaged and violent communities.

Given the close correspondence known to exist between correlates of crime and victimization (e.g., Lauritsen, Sampson, and Laub 1991), the extension of Anderson's (1999) work toward the study of victimization seems appropriate and potentially highly informative about the causes of violence among African American youth.

According to Anderson (1999), the code of the street is an informal system governing the use of violence, especially among young male African Americans. The code of the street emphasizes that one must maintain the respect of others through a violent and tough identity, and a willingness to exact retribution in the event of disrespect, or risk being "rolled on" or physically assaulted (p. 73). As Anderson noted, "an important part of the code is not to allow others to chump you, to let them know that you are 'about serious business' and not to be trifled with" (p. 130). Implicit in Anderson's work is the notion that adopting the street code ought to increase one's safety during a potential confrontation. In some disadvantaged contexts, simply going outside of one's home requires that one "adopt the code—a kind of shield—to prevent others from messing with him" (p. 92). The toughness and aggressiveness, as prescribed by the street culture,

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should communicate to others that one is dangerous and best left alone. In addition, displaying a violent demeanor not only commands respect but also serves to discourage others from “testing” or “challenging” those exhibiting the street-code style. Anderson pointed out that “for those who are invested in the code, the clear object of their demeanor is to discourage strangers from even thinking about testing their manhood” (p. 92). And if the street code demeanor is properly displayed, it should “check others who would violate one’s person, and it also helps build a reputation that works to prevent future challenges” (p. 92). Thus, on the street, the message must be that you are not a pushover, and there are penalties for disrespect (p. 130).

On the other hand, those who fail to adopt the street code (i.e., who appear passive and submissive) may be more vulnerable, resulting in diminished respect and, consequently, a higher level of victimization. According to Anderson’s (1999) description, for example, on the streets, an individual who is seen as a chump or not streetwise “gets little or no respect, and those who resemble him are the ones who most often get picked on, tried or tested, and become victims of robbery and gratuitous violence” (p. 131). In short, Anderson suggested that the street code provides some degree of protection against victimization for those living in the high-crime conditions of disorganized and disintegrating neighborhoods. Furthermore, according to Anderson, the desire to protect oneself from victimization is one of the primary reasons for the emergence of the street code, which leads to “rough justice” in the streets if one is disrespected or experiences a perceived injustice (Baron, Kennedy, and Forde 2001).

Although researchers have used the code of the street to explain violent offending in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Baumer et al. 2003), relatively little is known about the role that the street code itself plays with respect to violent victimization. As already noted, the correlates of crime and victimization often are the same, suggesting that deviant subcultural attitudes ought to increase victimization risk. However, the little scientific evidence that exists appears to support Anderson’s (1999) claims, suggesting that areas where the code of the streets exists are a unique context in which, perhaps, the antecedents of victimization would not work as expected (e.g., Baron et al. 2001; Jacobs 2004; Kubrin and Weitzer 2003). Using cross-sectional data from a small sample of homeless and runaway youth, Baron et al. (2001) found that street-culture behaviors (e.g., toughness, aggression, and retribution) were negatively related to victimization. The authors speculated that adherence to the street code may serve a protective function against victimization. In another study, Jacobs (2004) interviewed 33 street offenders

who followed the street code. He found that these hard-core individuals used the threat of retaliation to reduce their risk of victimization and to earn respect, maintain respect, or enhance respect. As Jacobs pointed out, "word on the street travels fast and reputational damage can be severe and long-lasting" (p. 297). As such, those individuals following the street code must be ready to use violence for protection and let others on the street know that there are consequences for transgressions (Tedeschi and Felson 1994). To let transgressions go unchallenged, even small ones, demonstrates that one is soft and weak; therefore, all transgression must be avenged (Anderson 1999; Courtwright 1996; Horowitz 1983; Jacobs 2004; Rich and Grey 2005). Similarly, Kubrin and Weitzer (2003) studied homicide victimization in disadvantaged St. Louis neighborhoods and observed that a disproportionate number of homicides were retaliatory, based in part on street-code values. Further narratives from individuals involved in the homicides suggested that disputes and disrespect had to be settled violently as a way to achieve status and protect against future transgressions because they deemed local law enforcement as unresponsive.

The results of these studies are consistent with Anderson's (1999) argument and highlight the importance of investigating the role that the street code plays in victimization. However, none of the studies measured Anderson's arguments explicitly in a longitudinal framework. In the current study, we explored whether adopting the street code affects incidences of violent victimization. Specifically, we investigated whether the street code reduces victimization risk, as hypothesized by Anderson. In addition, we examined whether the street code interacts with harsh neighborhood conditions to buffer victimization risk. These questions were addressed with data from a longitudinal sample of 720 African American adolescents from 259 neighborhoods.

Our focus on the adolescent life course is important because Anderson's (1999:9) thesis was in part intended to address the problem of youth violence. As Anderson (1999:72) pointed out, the street code is typically learned in childhood, and by the time they are teenagers, youths have internalized the street culture and understand the status, respect, and violence that accompany the street code, which can have fatal consequences. Furthermore, because African American youth are rarely studied developmentally or longitudinally, we know little about the processes linking neighborhood characteristics and street-code values to victimization among this population over time. Thus, identifying risk factors for violence early in the life course is critical with regard to understanding violence and developing interventions for reducing violence.

## The Code of the Street and Victimization

Anderson (1999) argued that the high rates of poverty, joblessness, violence, racial discrimination, alienation, mistrust of police, and hopelessness that characterize disadvantaged neighborhoods instill in residents a culture that rejects mainstream values (also see Bruce, Roscigno, and McCall 1998; Miller 1958; Oliver 1994; Sampson and Wilson 1995; Wilkinson 2003; Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967). Anderson referred to this oppositional culture as the code of the street. At the heart of the street code is an emphasis on respect, toughness, and retribution. The code regulates the use of violence and supplies a rationale allowing those who are aggressive to precipitate violent encounters in approved ways. Furthermore, the street code outlines the proper way to present oneself in a manner that demands respect and deters acts of victimization from others and how to negotiate respect on the street (Anderson 1999:10).

Moreover, Anderson (1999) and others have noted that violence characterizes disadvantaged neighborhoods (e.g., Sampson and Lauritsen 1994), and violence is thought to be one of the most important resources for gaining status, respect, and street credibility among those who subscribe to the street culture (Wilkinson 2003). Anderson (1999:131) observed that youth often created altercations with the primary focus of building respect on the "set," or the streets, to let others know that they were not chumps. Similarly, Wilkinson (2001) found that young men committed robberies in an effort to impress their peers and build or maintain their social status on the street. Youngsters residing in socially disorganized neighborhoods are likely to see violence as a way of life. This way of life includes the teaching of violence, witnessing violent acts, and having violent and aggressive role models (Prothrow-Stith 1991). As a consequence, these youngsters take pride in being tough (which usually involves owning a firearm), presenting a violent self-image, and protecting themselves. Anderson (1999:72) noted that many young people following the street code attempt to build reputations for being violent by creating presentations of themselves based on "juice," or respect. The image one projects on the streets in disadvantaged neighborhoods is paramount with respect to one's safety and must send a message that one is capable of violence when necessary. The more violent one's social identity is, the more respect and street credibility he or she has among peers following the street code (Kubrin 2005). Such belligerent posturing is the essence of the street code. Furthermore, the street code is so entrenched among hard-core, street-oriented youth that they are willing to risk dying violently rather than allow themselves to be "dissed" or victimized (Anderson

1999:92). Those fully invested in the street culture view violent death as an “acceptable risk” when defending or trying maintain their respect or street capital (Rich and Grey 2005).

Although violent death is a possible outcome of following the street code, Anderson (1999) made it clear that adherence to the code is grounded in the belief that victimization would be worse otherwise (Cohen and Nisbett 1994; Kubrin and Weitzer 2003). The street code maintains that a violent response when someone initiates disrespect is necessary to elicit respect from others who follow the street code. When challenges arise or transgressions occur, violence is viewed as acceptable, appropriate, and even obligatory (Anderson 1999; Rich and Grey 2005). Although most families living in these disadvantaged neighborhoods are not hard core and do not thoroughly indoctrinate their children into following the code, Anderson argued that everyone in the neighborhood learns that violating the rules of the street code (e.g., showing vulnerability or allowing disrespect to go unpunished) leads to penalties. Thus, knowledge of the code appears necessary for maximizing personal safety and dignity in a dangerous environment (Anderson 1999; Black 1983).

Furthermore, in distressed areas where violence is common, some residents’ mistrust of and lack of faith in the criminal justice system lead them to take personal responsibility for their safety (Anderson 1999; Black 1983; Sampson and Bartusch 1998; Vélez 2001; Weitzer 1999). Although residents in disadvantaged, high-crime neighborhoods are those most in need of police protection, residents are often reluctant to contact the police because of negative police-citizen interactions. Indeed, several studies have reported that residents in disadvantaged neighborhoods often complain of dissatisfaction with the police, inadequate police protection, and police abuse, with the consequence being strained relationships between residents and legal authorities (Kennedy 1997; Sampson and Bartusch 1998; Weitzer 1999). The concerns on the part of residents lead them to avoid police (Anderson 1999; Kubrin and Weitzer 2003). Thus, the code of the street emerges where the influence of the police ends and personal responsibility for one’s safety begins (Anderson 1999). As Anderson (1999) pointed out, the code maintains that “a man goes for himself, takes up for himself, and calls on no one else to fight his battles” (p. 307). Consequently, disputes must be settled informally, violently, and without the intervention of responsible authorities such as parents, police, or teachers. The code of the street suggests that respect, and hence safety, is earned only through one’s own agency, not from the institutions normally associated with promoting an orderly society—schools, police, and the family—which have retreated or

failed. Reliance on others for protection appears craven and invites ridicule and victimization.

According to Anderson (1999), residents of disadvantaged and violent communities, out of self-preservation, must develop a range of social identities and use or appear ready to use violence to defend their lives, property, and honor. In this sense, those following the street code are likely to use violence or the threat of violence as a form of social control or "self-help" (Black 1983). According to Black (1983), violence as a means of social control is most likely to occur where the availability (and effectiveness) of authoritative agents of dispute resolution is less, as is the case in some poor, minority, disadvantaged neighborhoods, where public interactions are dominated by the street code (Kubrin and Weitzer 2003). Thus, residents frequently bypass the police and resolve disputes on their own and adopt street-code behaviors as a form of protection against victimization. As more people adopt defensive and threatening postures and behaviors, such as carrying weapons, the level of violence escalates, and the number of people who rely on violence for defensive purposes increases (Anderson 1999; Kubrin and Weitzer 2003; Luckenbill and Doyle 1989). Thus, an interesting paradox arises: The street code is in part responsible for the high levels of violence in a disadvantaged community, but at the same time, its underlying purpose is to enhance the personal safety of individual residents.

In sum, Anderson's (1999) work suggests that the tough, violent persona called for by the code of the street is required to increase safety in high-crime settings for several reasons. First, a failure to appear tough and ready to fight for one's honor effectively serves as an invitation for those following the street-code script to attack and harass (Rich and Grey 2005). This victimization is beyond what one would experience by simply residing in a disadvantaged and dangerous community in close proximity to high-rate offenders. Second, residents of disadvantaged and violent neighborhoods cannot depend on the authorities to offer protection, and those who do are treated with the contempt reserved for those who violate the code of the streets (i.e., reliance on others suggests cowardice). In this respect, individual residents are required to assume sole responsibility for their safety to conform to the street code. Although one might expect that people living in disorganized and violent neighborhoods to experience more victimization, those who abide by the street code should have less victimization than those who fail to do so.

Third, Anderson (1999) argued that residing in a disadvantaged and violent neighborhood makes it difficult for residents to look out for one another and develop strong community ties and work collectively to inhibit

victimization (Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Lee 2000; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997; Wilcox, Land, and Hunt 2003). Furthermore, residents are less likely to invest in others or to intervene in situations that may result in the common good of the community (Bellair 1997). The above issues are further complicated by a lack of faith in law enforcement to adequately protect citizens (Anderson 1999; Sampson and Bartusch 1998; Vélez 2001; Weitzer 1999). Thus, the weakening of neighborhood ties coupled with a lack of faith in police individualizes social life and violence so that residents in the most disadvantaged and violent neighborhoods are forced to protect themselves (Rich and Grey 2005). Anderson (1999:323) pointed out that as an adaptation to alienation from mainstream institutions and neighborhood social ties, many residents of disadvantaged, high-crime neighborhoods embrace the street code, which encourages and rewards taking personal responsibility for one's security. These neighborhood contexts provide a fertile backdrop against which street-code values and violence can flourish. Specifically, Anderson suggested that the street code has its origins in disadvantaged and violent neighborhood contexts, in which individuals are more likely to adopt the code as a means of survival and protection against victimization. Those who adopt the street code in such environments should be less likely to be victimized, because the street code acts as a form of guardianship that buffers or reduces their risk for victimization. In this sense, Anderson's argument suggests an interaction between the street code and neighborhood violence and disadvantage, such that the street code should buffer the influence of harsh neighborhood conditions on victimization. These research questions were tested in the current study.

## Methods

### Sample

This study was based on two waves of data from the Family and Community Health Study, a multisite investigation of neighborhood and family effects on health and development. Two waves of data were collected in Georgia and Iowa using similar research procedures. The first wave was collected in 1997 and the second in 1999. In wave 1, the participants were 867 African American adolescents (400 boys and 467 girls; 462 in Iowa and 405 in Georgia) aged 10 to 13 years and their primary caregivers. In wave 2, 738 of the children (aged 12 to 15 years) and their caregivers were interviewed again (a retention rate of 85 percent). Analyses indicated that the



families that did not participate in wave 2 did not differ significantly from those that participated with regard to caregivers' income and education, or targets' ages, genders, school performance, or delinquency. Complete data for the variables used in the present study were available for 720 families.

## **Sampling Strategy**

A central goal of the larger study was to investigate the effects of neighborhood characteristics on the functioning of children and families. Families were recruited from neighborhoods that varied on demographic characteristics, specifically racial composition (i.e., percentage African American) and economic level (i.e., percentage of families with children living below the poverty line). In selecting neighborhoods from which to draw the sample, neighborhood characteristics at the level of block group areas (BGAs) were used. Using 1990 census data, BGAs were identified for both Iowa and Georgia in which the percentages of African American families were high enough to make recruitment economically practical (20 percent or higher) and the percentages of families with children living below the poverty line ranged from 20 to 100 percent. As a result of this sampling strategy, the final sample of families and neighborhoods recruited involved participants who ranged from extremely poor to middle class. Past research on community effects has shown that the most powerful contrasts are between poor and middle-income communities (Jencks and Mayer 1990). We believe that our sampling strategy yielded a relatively representative set of communities, with sufficient variability on economic status to allow detection of significant relations between community characteristics and outcome variables.

In Georgia, families were selected from BGAs that varied in terms of economic status and ethnic composition. Families were recruited from Atlanta metropolitan areas, such as South Atlanta, East Atlanta, Southeast Atlanta, and Athens. Within each BGA, African American community members were hired to serve as liaisons between the University of Georgia researchers and the communities. The liaisons compiled rosters of children from school districts within each BGA who met the sampling criteria. In Iowa, all BGAs that met the study criteria were located in two metropolitan urban communities: Waterloo and Des Moines. Families with African American children within the age criterion were identified through the Waterloo and Des Moines public school districts. In both Georgia and Iowa, families were drawn randomly from rosters and contacted to determine their interest in participation. Of the families that could be located, interviews were completed with 72 percent of eligible Iowa families and just over 60 percent of

eligible Georgia families. These recruitment rates are comparable with those obtained in earlier community studies of families using intensive measurement procedures (Capaldi and Patterson 1987; Conger and Elder 1994). Respondents were reimbursed for participating in the study. Primary caregivers received \$100, and target children received \$70. The reimbursement levels reflected the different amounts of time required of each family member for participation. Furthermore, information was collected from participants via surveys and interviews.

## Dependent Variable

To take advantage of the longitudinal design, we measured the dependent variable, violent victimization, at wave 2, while controlling for wave 1 victimization.<sup>1</sup> Target adolescents were asked to indicate the number of times they were physically attacked in their neighborhoods to the point that they had bruises, cuts, or broken bones during the past year. The range for the measure was between 0 and 7 ( $M = .19$ ,  $SD = .81$ ; see Table 1). At wave 2, 19 percent of the adolescents reported that they had experienced at least one personal victimization during the past year, while 17 percent reported at least one personal victimization at wave 1.

## Independent Variables

### *Neighborhood Characteristics*

*Neighborhood violence.* Respondents completed a seven-item neighborhood violence scale at wave 1. The items asked the extent to which various violent acts (e.g., fights, gang violence, drug violence, robbery, homicide, aggravated assaults) were a problem within respondents' neighborhoods. The response format ranged from one (*not at all a problem*) to three (a big problem). The seven items were summed to form a construct of neighborhood violence. The range for the measure was 7 to 21. The  $\alpha$  coefficient was .76.<sup>2</sup>

*Neighborhood disadvantage.* Five census variables were used to form this construct at wave 1: the proportion of households that were female-headed, the proportion of persons on public assistance, the proportion of households below the poverty level, the proportion of persons unemployed, and the proportion of persons who were African American. Previous studies have used some combination of these variables to assess community socioeconomic status (SES; Baumer et al. 2003; Sampson et al. 1997), and

factor analysis indicated that these variables loaded on a single factor for the BGAs in our sample and ranged from .89 to .97. The items were standardized and combined to form a measure of neighborhood disadvantage. The range for the measure was  $-1.77$  to  $4.81$ . The  $\alpha$  coefficient was .89.

The neighborhoods showed substantial variability with regard to indicators of disadvantage. Across neighborhoods, the average number of persons living below the poverty line was 25 percent. Wilson (1987, 1996) identified a neighborhood as a high-poverty area if 30 percent or more of the families live in poverty. Using this criterion, 33 percent of the neighborhoods were high-poverty areas. Three communities had poverty rates of over 50 percent. Conversely, several of the study communities exhibited low levels of poverty. In 20 percent of the communities, the percentage of poor families was less than 10 percent. The community unemployment rate ranged from 30 to 76 percent, with an average of 32 percent. And the percentage of single parents residing in the neighborhood ranged from 2.9 to 57 percent, with a mean of 19 percent. The average percentage of African American residents was 46 percent. However, approximately a quarter of the communities had a percentage of over 70 percent, while another quarter had less than 30 percent. Also of interest, the average per capita income in the study neighborhoods was \$13,190, with a range of \$7,332 to \$70,147.

*Adopting the street code.* According to Anderson (1999), the code of the street emphasizes maintaining the respect of others through a violent identity, toughness, and exacting retribution when one is disrespected. The code also regulates the use of violence and prescribes violent retaliation in response to transgressions against the self to deter possible victimization and loss of street status. To our knowledge, few prior studies have attempted to test the street code with prospective longitudinal, quantitative survey data (for an exception, see Brezina et al. 2004). We measured the street code by constructing a seven-item, self-report scale at waves 1 and 2. Adolescents were asked to indicate the extent to which it was justifiable or advantageous to use violence (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*). The questions included the following: "When someone disrespects you, it is important that you use physical force or aggression to teach him or her not to disrespect you"; "If someone uses violence against you, it is important that you use violence against him or her to get even"; "People will take advantage of you if you don't let them know how tough you are"; "People do not respect a person who is afraid to fight physically for his/her rights"; "Sometimes you need to threaten people in order to get them to treat you fairly"; "It is important to show others that you cannot be intimidated"; and

"People tend to respect a person who is tough and aggressive." The responses were summed to obtain a total score concerning the extent to which a respondent held beliefs that were consistent with adopting a street code. This measure ranged from 7 to 28. The  $\alpha$  coefficient was .78 at wave 1 and .80 at wave 2.

We recognize that our measure of Anderson's (1999) code of the street may not capture all of the complexities he identified. For example, according to Anderson's thesis, the street code also encompasses various dimensions of street life that we were unable to capture, such as having an appreciation for expensive jewelry, the latest clothing fashions, rap music, and nice cars (see Kubrin 2005). Nonetheless, we believe that our construct tapped the critical attitudinal components of the street code.<sup>3</sup>

## Controls

We controlled for a number of factors at wave 1 that have been linked with the outcomes considered in our research (Baumer et al. 2003; Elliott 1994; Haynie 2001; Heimer 1997; Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo 1978; Lauritsen, 2001, 2003; Mustaine and Tewksbury 1998). Family SES was measured by primary caregiver's education level and family income. These two items were standardized and summed to form a composite measure of family SES. Single caregiver was a dichotomous variable denoting households in which there was one caregiver in the home, in comparison with two-caregiver homes (1 = single caregiver family, 0 = two caregiver family). Male was a dichotomous variable with female respondents as the reference group. Parental violence was measured using 15 questions that asked primary caregivers whether during the preceding year they had engaged in various violent acts, such as physical assault, threatening others, and using a weapon. The Kuder-Richardson coefficient ( $KR_{20}$ ) was .78.<sup>4</sup> Parental supervision was measured by five questions (answered by the primary caregiver) that focused on child monitoring (e.g., "How often do you know who your child is with when he/she is away from home?"). The  $\alpha$  coefficient was .81.

School attachment was measured by a 12-item scale that indicated the extent to which a respondent cared about school and had positive feelings for school. The items were summed to create an index of school attachment. The  $\alpha$  coefficient was .79. Violent peers was measured by three items adapted from the National Youth Survey (Elliott, Huizinga, Menard 1989), which asked respondents how many of their close friends had engaged in violent acts. We summed the responses to the items to obtain a total score regarding the extent to which the respondents' friends engaged in violent behavior. The

$\alpha$  coefficient for the scale was .68. Violent delinquency was measured using 15 questions that asked respondents whether during the preceding year they had engaged in various violent acts, such as physical assault, threatening or bullying people, and using a weapon. About 28 percent of the sample reported engaging in violent delinquency. The  $KR_{20}$  coefficient was .83. Urban was a dichotomous variable indicating neighborhoods located in urban areas, with nonurban neighborhoods as the reference group. South was a dichotomous variable indicating neighborhoods located in the southern United States, with midwestern neighborhoods as the reference group.

### **Analytic Strategy**

The 720 families in our sample were nested within 259 neighborhoods. Because individuals were nested within the same neighborhood, they may have been more similar to one another than individuals in other neighborhoods and therefore may not have provided independent observations. To produce correct estimates of standard errors and accurately test hypotheses, standard ordinary least squares regression techniques were inappropriate, because they assume that error terms are uncorrelated across observations. This assumption is violated in nested data and may result in underestimated standard errors when classical statistical techniques (e.g., ordinary least squares) are used. To address this problem, we used regression-based techniques with robust standard error estimates available in Stata version 6.0. Stata uses the Huber-White correction for standard errors, which adjusts for correlated errors within nested data and yields unbiased estimates of coefficients and standard errors (StataCorp 1999).

In addition, our dependent variable, violent victimization, had a highly skewed distribution and showed evidence of overdispersion (see Table 1). Thus, it was appropriate to treat victimization as event-count data. One approach to modeling such data is to estimate a negative binomial model. A negative binomial model can be viewed as an extension of the Poisson regression that relaxes the assumption that the variance is equal to the mean. To account for overdispersion, the negative binomial introduces an additional parameter that estimates the extent of overdispersion in the model (Long 1997).<sup>5</sup>

## **Results**

Table 1 presents the correlations, means, and standard deviations for the study variables. Adopting the street code at both waves was significantly and

**Table 1**  
**Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for the Study**  
**Variables ( $n = 720$ )**

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Violent Victimization <sub>T2</sub>
Controls			
Age	11.00	.57	.04
Family socioeconomic status	12.57	4.14	-.02
Single caregiver (1 = single)	.48	.50	-.04
Male (1 = male)	.46	.50	.14**
Parental violence	3.43	3.59	.09*
Parental supervision	17.08	4.28	-.16**
School attachment	27.39	5.48	-.14**
Violent victimization <sub>T1</sub>	.17	.78	.46**
Violent peers	4.21	1.72	.19**
Violent delinquency	1.46	1.91	.31**
Urban (1 = urban)	.52	.48	.09*
South (1 = South)	.49	.46	.08*
Code of the street			
Street code <sub>T1</sub>	16.53	3.64	.20**
Street code <sub>T2</sub>	17.22	3.61	.28**
Neighborhood level			
Neighborhood violence	11.56	4.37	.17**
Neighborhood disadvantage	-.03	1.00	-.04
Dependent variable			
Violent victimization <sub>T2</sub>	.19	.81	—

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

positively associated with violent victimization (wave 1  $r = .20$ , wave 2  $r = .28$ ). This correlation is inconsistent with Anderson's (1999) hypothesis. Moreover and as expected, prior victimization, associating with violent friends, engaging in violent delinquency, living in an urban neighborhood, living in the southern United States, and living in a neighborhood characterized by violence were significantly and positively associated with violent victimization. On the other hand, adolescents who were attached to school and had parents who monitored their activities and friends appeared less likely to be victimized.<sup>6</sup>

## Multivariate Results

We first examined a baseline model that included only control variables.<sup>7</sup> In Table 2, model 1 displays the negative binomial regression coefficients

**Table 2**  
**Negative Binomial Regression Coefficients of Violent Victimization Regressed on Control, Street Code, and Neighborhood Variables (*n* = 720)**

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	Coefficient	SE	z	Coefficient	SE	z	Coefficient	SE	z	Coefficient	SE	z
<b>Controls</b>												
Age	.035	.027	1.296	.035	.027	1.296	.035	.027	1.296	.029	.027	1.074
Family socioeconomic status	-.007	.011	-.636	-.007	.011	-.636	-.007	.011	-.636	-.006	.011	-.545
Single caregiver (1 = single)	-.038	.027	-1.407	-.037	.027	-1.370	-.037	.027	-1.370	-.035	.042	-1.296
Male (1 = male)	.164	.036	4.555**	.163	.036	4.528**	.163	.036	4.528**	.161	.036	4.472**
Parental violence	.038	.027	1.407	.034	.027	1.259	.031	.027	1.148	.026	.027	.963
Parental supervision	-.148	.036	-4.111**	-.148	.036	-4.111**	-.148	.036	-4.111**	-.146	.036	-4.055**
School attachment	-.134	.037	-3.622**	-.134	.037	-3.622**	-.134	.037	-3.622**	-.133	.037	-3.595**
Violent victimization <sub>11</sub>	.391	.037	10.567**	.386	.037	10.432**	.383	.037	10.351**	.381	.037	10.297**
Violent peers	.145	.037	3.919**	.139	.037	3.757**	.139	.037	3.757**	.136	.037	3.676**
Violent delinquency	.161	.036	4.472**	.153	.036	4.135**	.152	.037	4.108**	.154	.037	4.162**
Urban (1 = urban)	.034	.027	1.259	.031	.027	1.148	.030	.027	1.111	.028	.027	1.037
South (1 = South)	.032	.027	1.185	.029	.027	1.074	.029	.027	1.074	.026	.027	.963
Code of the street												
Street code <sub>11</sub>	—	—	—	.154	.037	4.162**	—	—	—	.151	.037	4.081**
Neighborhood level												
Neighborhood violence	—	—	—	—	—	—	.124	.039	3.179**	.121	.039	3.102**
Neighborhood disadvantage	—	—	—	—	—	—	.009	.011	.818	.003	.011	.273
Overdispersion parameter	-.635	.142	-4.472**	-.663	.147	-4.510**	-.678	.145	-4.676**	-.712	.151	-4.715**
Model $\chi^2$ (df)	248.43	(12)		278.12	(13)		281.02	(14)		358.54	(15)	

Note: Standardized coefficient weights are presented.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01.

of violent victimization on control variables. We found that male adolescents who had been the victims of prior violence, associated with violent friends, and engaged in violence were most likely to be victimized. Adolescents whose parents supervised their activities and friends and who felt attachment to school were less likely to be victimized.

In model 2, adopting the street code<sub>T1</sub> was added to the equation. Inconsistent with Anderson's (1999) hypothesis, individuals who adopted the street code had a higher probability of personal victimization, net of control variables.<sup>8</sup> Exponentiation of the coefficient for this variable revealed that a unit increase in adopting the street code was associated with a 17 percent increase in victimization.<sup>9</sup>

Model 3 assessed the relative influence of neighborhood characteristics in predicting victimization, net of control variables. The results suggested that although living in a disadvantaged neighborhood may not necessarily be associated with victimization, living in a violent neighborhood significantly increased one's risk of victimization, by 13 percent, which is consistent with prior research (Hoyt et al. 1999; Lauritsen et al. 1991; Lauritsen and White 2001; Miethe and Meier 1994; Sampson and Lauritsen 1990; Wilcox et al. 2003).

In model 4, we examined the combined effects of adopting the street code and neighborhood conditions on violent victimization. The results showed that after controlling for a number of influences, including neighborhood conditions, prior victimization, associations with violent friends, and engaging in violent offending, adopting the street code continued to have a significant direct effect on violent victimization.<sup>10</sup> Exponentiation of the coefficient for street code suggests that a one unit increase in street code increases the risk of violent victimization by 16 percent.

## Interaction Analyses

As noted earlier, Anderson's (1999) account of the code of the street suggests that adoption of the code may buffer harsh neighborhood conditions against victimization. Anderson (1999, 2002) went on to argue that the street code has a distinctive origin in disadvantaged and violent neighborhoods and that the code is more likely to be adopted as a means of survival and protection. This leads to the prediction that adopting the street code should serve as a buffer against victimization in disadvantaged and violent neighborhoods.

To further examine the relationship between adopting the code of the street and neighborhood conditions (i.e., violence and disadvantage) on personal victimization, we analyzed models that accounted for interaction effects between the street code and neighborhood violence, as well as the street code



and neighborhood disadvantage (see Table 3). The independent variables were centered prior to forming the interaction terms to reduce multicollinearity (Aiken and West 1991). The interaction for one of the two interactions was significant: neighborhood violence and street code. The interaction indicated that adolescents who adopted the street code and lived in high-crime neighborhoods had an increased risk for victimization.<sup>11</sup>

Graphing this relationship (Figure 1) revealed that high levels of neighborhood violence in combination with high levels of street-code adoption translated into higher probabilities of victimization.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, the regression line for victimization risk for adolescents who lived in high-violence neighborhoods and were high on adopting the street code was well above that for adolescents who were medium or low on the street code. The differences in the slope of the lines for the three levels become apparent after the 25th percentile on neighborhood violence. In short, neighborhood violence was associated with a higher probability of victimization for adolescents who fully embraced the street code, whereas neighborhood violence showed virtually no relationship to victimization for adolescents who were low on or did not embrace the street code. Generally speaking, the results indicated that the code of the street operates less as a protective factor, as hypothesized by Anderson (1999), and more as a risk factor for victimization.<sup>13</sup>

## Additional Analyses

To examine the possibility of bidirectional influences between adopting the street code and victimization, we estimated a series of structural equation reciprocal and cross-lagged effect models between street code and victimization. As Anderson (1999:70) pointed out, one's personal experiences with violence, including victimization, can increase one's appreciation of the importance placed on the street code. This suggests that there may be a reciprocal relationship between victimization and adopting the street code, whereby victimization may increase one's attachment to the street code and the street code may reduce one's experiences with victimization (also see Brezina et al. 2004).

We tested two models that posited a reciprocal relationship between street code<sub>T<sub>2</sub></sub> and victimization<sub>T<sub>2</sub></sub>. The results for these models are presented in Appendices B and C. The effects of street code<sub>T<sub>1</sub></sub> and victimization were controlled so that the model estimates changed in adoption of the street code and victimization from time 1 to time 2. In Appendix B, the model shows the contemporaneous effects from street code<sub>T<sub>2</sub></sub> to victimization<sub>T<sub>2</sub></sub> and vice versa. The standardized path coefficient ( $\beta = .17$ ) from street code<sub>T<sub>2</sub></sub> to victimization<sub>T<sub>2</sub></sub> is significant and positive. The path ( $\beta = .05$ ) from victimization<sub>T<sub>2</sub></sub> to street code<sub>T<sub>2</sub></sub> was smaller than the reverse and not significant. Moreover, in

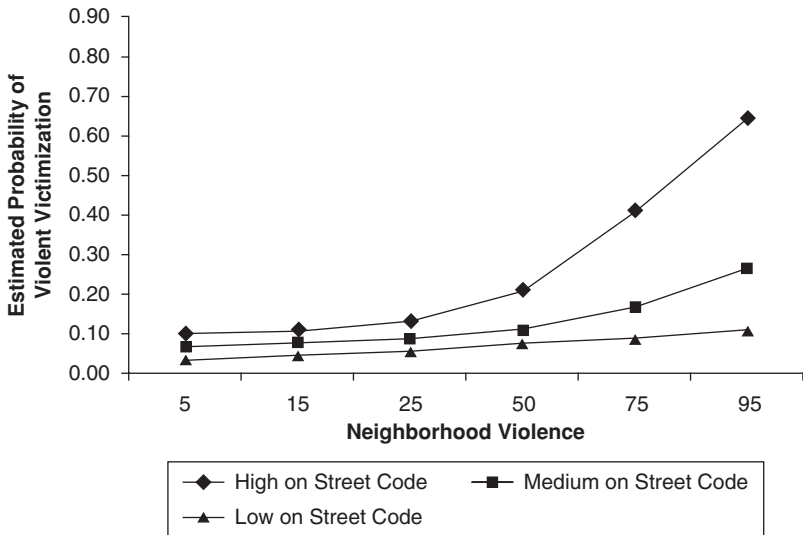
**Table 3**  
**Negative Binomial Interaction Models for Violent Victimization, Street Code, and Neighborhood Variables (*n* = 720)**

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	Coefficient	SE	z	Coefficient	SE	z
<b>Controls</b>						
Age	.024	.027	.889	.024	.027	.889
Family socioeconomic status	-.098	.046	-2.130*	-.099	.046	-2.152*
Single caregiver (1 = single)	-.025	.031	-.806	-.027	.031	-.871
Male (1 = male)	.149	.036	5.528**	.149	.036	5.528**
Parental violence	.047	.029	1.621	.048	.029	1.655
Parental supervision	-.127	.036	-3.528**	-.127	.036	-3.528**
School attachment	-.119	.036	-3.305**	-.119	.036	-3.305**
Violent victimization <sub>T1</sub>	.334	.037	9.027**	.339	.037	9.162**
Violent peers	.126	.037	3.405**	.126	.037	3.405**
Violent delinquency	.138	.035	3.943**	.139	.035	3.971**
Urban (1 = urban)	.041	.029	1.414	.039	.029	1.345
South (1 = South)	.044	.029	1.517	.042	.029	1.448
Code of the street						
Street code <sub>T1</sub>	.129	.041	3.146**	.133	.041	3.244**
Neighborhood level						
Neighborhood violence	.105	.039	2.692**	.101	.039	2.590**
Neighborhood disadvantage	-.022	.017	-1.294	-.025	.018	-1.389
<b>Interaction effects</b>						
Neighborhood Violence × Street Code	.197	.043	4.581**			
Neighborhood Disadvantage × Street Code				-.017	.013	-1.308
Overdispersion parameter	-.899	.165	-5.448**	-.894	.165	-5.418**
Model $\chi^2$ (df)		372.17 (16)			376.45 (16)	

Note: Standardized coefficient weights are presented.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01.

**Figure 1**  
**Association between Violent Victimization and**  
**Neighborhood Violence for Individuals High, Medium,**  
**or Low on the Street Code**



Appendix C, the model presents the cross-lagged effects from street code<sub>T1</sub> to victimization<sub>T2</sub> and from victimization<sub>T1</sub> to street code<sub>T2</sub>. Similar to the above model, the standardized regression coefficient ( $\beta = .15$ ) from street code<sub>T1</sub> to victimization<sub>T2</sub> was positive and significant across time, whereas the reverse relationship was not significant. Overall, the results across the two models suggest that adopting the street code increases one's risk of victimization. On the other hand, experiencing victimization does not increase the chances that one will adopt the street code.

## Discussion

Anderson's (1999) code-of-the-street thesis offers a compelling explanation for the high rates of violence among African American adolescents. In short,

Anderson argued that as a result of many social ills observed in disadvantaged and violent communities, as well as a lack of trust in the criminal justice system, residents adopt the street code to protect themselves and their property against victimization. In this respect, Anderson's argument implies that those adolescents who adopt the street code are less likely to be victimized.

In the current study, we assessed whether adopting the street code reduces victimization risk. Furthermore, we also explored whether adopting the street code buffers the effects of harsh neighborhood conditions on victimization risk. The results of this study point to conclusions that differ from those reached by Anderson (1999) in his work on the code of the street. We found that those adolescents who adopted the street code showed a higher chance of being victimized. Even after controlling for neighborhood characteristics, demographic correlates of victimization, and prior victimization, adopting the street code remained a significant predictor of victimization. This suggests that adopting the street code and living the lifestyle it advocates directly increase victimization risk. For example, the street culture requires that one not subordinate oneself to others and allow disrespect to go unchallenged; however, it does allow those following the street code to be disrespectful, belligerent, and confrontational toward others to gain or maintain respect (Anderson 1999:92). In other words, the street code calls for individuals to engage in precisely the kind of behaviors that one should not be prepared to tolerate from others. Thus, a disrespected party is likely to feel that he or she must retaliate with greater force to save face, which increases the levels of violence. As the investment in the street culture increases, so too does the risk of violence and victimization, because it places adolescents in social groups in which violence is highly valued. Our results are consistent with such a process.

In addition to the street code's direct effect on victimization, adopting the street code in a neighborhood characterized by violence also increases one's victimization risk far above those adolescents who are at the mean or below the mean on adopting the street code. It may be possible that in high-crime neighborhoods, where the street code is more prevalent, adolescents who fully invest in the code are making themselves attractive targets for other individuals following the street culture (Miethe and Meier 1994; Sampson and Lauritsen 1990; Singer 1981, 1986). For example, adolescents may adopt the street code as a conflict management strategy to avoid victimization in neighborhoods characterized by violence and danger. However, our results suggest that adopting the street code to reduce victimization risk in such a context only increases one's risk of victimization. Indeed, the youths who reported the highest levels of victimization risk also reported the highest levels of support for adopting the street code. It is possible that those adolescents who adopt the street code and reside in violent and dangerous communities

increase their "victimogenic potential" by following lifestyles whereby they associate with or come into contact with groups that contain a disproportionate number of potential offenders, who are themselves following the street code, and few mechanisms available for protection. This finding suggests that living in a violent context has a more deleterious impact for adolescents who are more supportive of the street code (Sampson and Lauritsen 1990). This pattern of results adds to the growing literature that describes how neighborhood structural characteristics combined with deviant cultural and situational codes lead to the perpetuation of violence within African American communities (Bruce et al. 1998; Kubrin and Weitzer 2003; Sampson and Wilson 1995). This appears to be the case for the subset of adolescents in our sample who fully embraced the street culture in violent neighborhoods. Their risk of violence increases over time furthering the cycle of violence.

Consequently, the findings of this study were not consistent with Anderson's (1999) ethnographic research on the code of the street and victimization. Our results point to an amplifying effect, whereby adopting the street code increases victimization risk, especially in violent neighborhoods. Although we were unable to test these ideas, there are several possible reasons for the null findings regarding Anderson's hypotheses. First, it is possible that individuals adopt the street code for protection in dangerous communities because it serves as a highly prized form of social capital that prevents victimization. Yet because of the social capital and respect that accompany the street code, there are always people in the neighborhood "campaigning for respect" or looking for physical confrontations to increase their street status and respect (Anderson 1999:73). Those physical confrontations, if the attackers are successful, are mechanisms to promote images or reputations on the basis of toughness and aggression (Fagan and Wilkinson 1997; Majors and Billson 1992; Markowitz and Felson 1998; Wilkinson 2003). As a result, those individuals who are highly supportive of the street code are on constant guard because rivals are always looking to challenge the toughest person in the neighborhood to gain or to increase their street reputation (Anderson 1999; Canada 1995; Majors and Billson 1992; Oliver 1994; Sullivan 1989).

Another explanation for the null findings is that individuals who were victimized were unable to convince potential attackers that they were fully invested in the street code, thus violating norms and inviting confrontation (Tedeschi and Felson 1994). Anderson (1999:36) described a process of "code switching," which involves a person adjusting his or her behaviors to various situations. Adolescents from "decent" families are more likely to code-switch to navigate neighborhood perils. These individuals go back and forth between embracing middle-class values and street-code values (Anderson 1999). However, it is possible that regardless of the effort these

adolescents put into trying to embrace the code, their hardcore, street-oriented peers (who embrace the code wholeheartedly) are likely to see through this poor impression management. So, although projecting a violent social identity is important for those following the street script, backing up the projection with violent behavior is expected (Anderson, 1999). As a result, code switchers may be more likely to be victimized because potential attackers are likely to see them as contemptible poseurs who are unable to protect themselves.<sup>14</sup> Thus, those individuals who code-switch are unable to construct presentations of self that are conducive with street expectations, making them extremely vulnerable to attack (Anderson 1999). Although these possibilities are plausible, we were not able to test them in our analyses.

Furthermore, our findings are analogous to the gang research literature on victimization. Gang members often follow the street code that Anderson (1999) described (Esbensen and Huizinga 1993). In their study of St. Louis gangs, Decker and Van Winkle (1996) observed that a number of the gang members reported joining gangs for protection and social status on the street. Indeed, they found that 86 percent of the gang members they interviewed joined for protection. However, joining gangs increased their probability of victimization instead of offering protection. Furthermore, Decker and Van Winkle found that of the 101 gang members interviewed, 11 were dead before the end of the study, and 24 were dead two years after the conclusion of the study. In another study of young male African Americans, Rich and Grey (2005) observed similar findings. They found that young male African Americans who experienced personal victimization (e.g., stabbing, gunshot, or assault) were more likely to adopt street-code behaviors to reduce the likelihood of being labeled a "sucker" as well as reduce their chances of being revictimized. Rich and Grey found that adopting street-code behaviors as a response to prior victimization increased the risk for revictimization, which created a cycle of violence for the men involved. Thereby, the "disconnect" between adopting the street code (and joining a gang) for protection and ending up a victim seem to run parallel for multiple settings.

Our study represents one of the few attempts to extend Anderson's (1999) code-of-the-street thesis to victimization among African American adolescents and offer some insight into the relationship between victimization and the street code. In particular, the results suggest that the code of the street encourages individuals to associate with, or come into contact with, groups that contain disproportionate numbers of potential offenders (Baron et al. 2001; Bruce et al. 1998; Jacobs 2004). As such, adopting the street code seems to aggravate the risk of victimization because most of the potential offenders are themselves operating by the street code (Jensen and Brownfield 1986; Kennedy and

Baron 1993; Lauritsen, Laub, and Sampson 1992; Sampson and Lauritsen 1990). As a consequence, the potential for relatively minor infractions to escalate into major violent encounters (e.g., lethal violence) increases, thereby leading to a cycle of violence in African American communities (Anderson 1999; Jacobs 2004; Kubrin and Weitzer 2003; Oliver 1994; Wilkinson 2003).

Although we are confident in our results, our study has some limitations. First, it is difficult for us to definitively prove that the relationship between the street code and victimization is not in part capturing the influence of some omitted variable. However, we included an extensive set of control and antecedent variables, which bolsters our confidence in the results. Second, given the difficulty in operationalizing some of the concepts, we cannot dismiss the possibility that better measures might yield more supportive results. For example, we were unable to measure the code-switching process. Furthermore, our street-code measure was limited to attitudinal items. Third, a stronger test of the hypothesized relationships might have been helpful to compare individuals in the same neighborhood who had and had not adopted the code. Despite the limitations, we believe that it is plausible that individuals following the street culture increase their risk for victimization.

Moreover, this research also adds to the growing literature reporting that the correlates of crime and victimization are the same and that the theoretical constructs used to explain crime also explain victimization (e.g., Haynie and Piquero 2006; Lauritsen et al. 1992; Piquero and Hickman 2003; Schreck 1999). The findings reported here conform in this respect with those in the literature on routine activities and lifestyles, giving added confidence that the origins of criminal offending and victimization are indeed linked. More specifically, it does not follow that the appearance of a street-code subculture automatically implies a unique context in which the usual predictors of victimization operate differently than would be the case in other contexts.

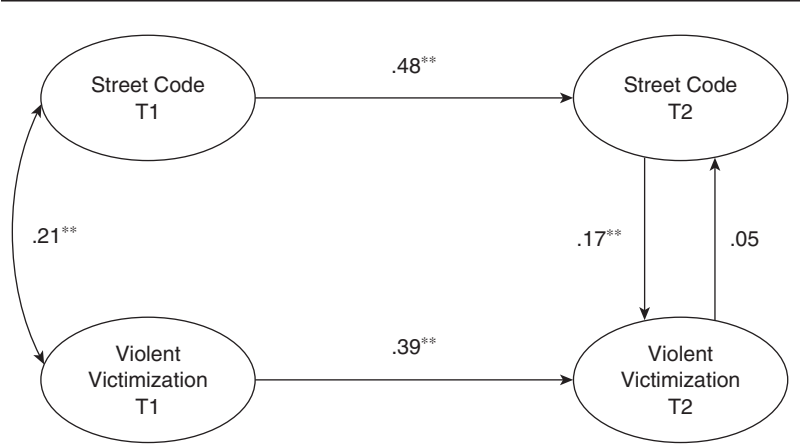
We should note that the routine activities and lifestyles perspectives inform much of the victimization literature (see Miethe and Meier 1994), but the measures we had available did not permit us to develop these theories as possible alternative accounts for the effect of street-code attitudes on victimization (Cohen and Felson 1979; Hindelang et al. 1978). Using these well-established perspectives to explain why street codes have an opposite effect to what Anderson (1999) suggested might further enrich our understanding about victimization and how it happens. Nevertheless, Anderson's code-of-the-street thesis is an important work that has bettered our knowledge of victimization. We hope that our findings will encourage future studies to investigate the various ways that Anderson's code-of-the-street thesis is related to high rates of violence.

**Appendix A**  
**Mean Difference Statistics for Victims and Nonvictims**  
**on Street Code, Neighborhood Violence, and**  
**Neighborhood Disadvantage**

Variable	Victims ( <i>n</i> = 137)		Nonvictims ( <i>n</i> = 583)		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Street code <sub>T1</sub>	20.24	3.52	13.69	2.98	19.85**
Street code <sub>T2</sub>	21.39	4.04	13.55	3.85	20.10**
Neighborhood violence	13.18	3.41	9.39	3.27	11.48**
Neighborhood disadvantage	.06	.98	-.02	.99	.42

\*\**p* < .01.

**Appendix B**  
**Structural Equation Model Showing the Reciprocal**  
**Relationship between Street Code and Violent**  
**Victimization**

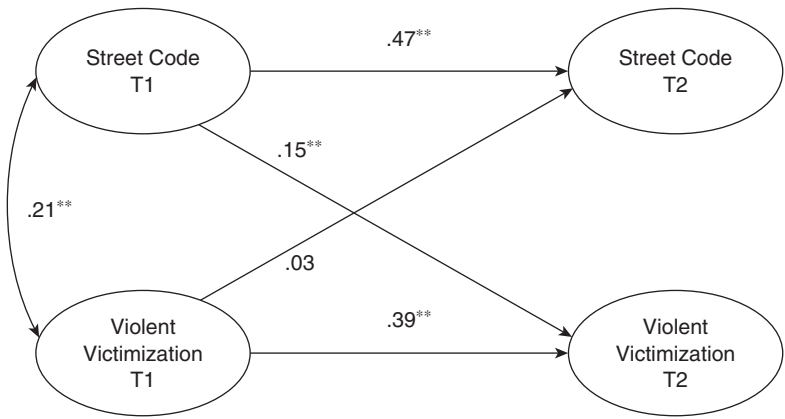


Note: *N* = 720,  $\chi^2 = 2.65$ , *p* = .449, goodness-of-fit index = .99, adjusted goodness-of-fit index = .99, root mean square error of approximation = .002. Coefficients were standardized. Delinquent peer associations, violent offending, school attachment, parental violence, parental supervision, demographics, and measurement error correlations were controlled but are not shown for ease of presentation. The squared multiple correlation for street code<sub>T2</sub> was .35 and for violent victimization<sub>T2</sub> was .28.

\*\**p* < .01.



# **Appendix C** **Structural Equation Model Showing the Cross-Lagged Relationship between Street Code and Violent Victimization**



Note:  $N = 720$ ,  $\chi^2 = 4.21$ ,  $p = .122$ , goodness-of-fit index = .99, adjusted goodness-of-fit index = .99, root mean square error of approximation = .039. Coefficients were standardized. Delinquent peer associations, violent offending, school attachment, parental violence, parental supervision, demographics, and measurement error correlations were controlled but are not shown for ease of presentation. The squared multiple correlation for street code<sub>T2</sub> was .31 and violent victimization<sub>T2</sub> was .25.

$^{**}p < .01$ .

Appendix D  
Correlations for Theoretical Variables

Variable	Violent Victimization <sub>T2</sub>	Violent Victimization <sub>T1</sub>	Street Code <sub>T1</sub>	Street Code <sub>T2</sub>	Neighborhood Violence	Neighborhood Disadvantage
Violent victimization <sub>T2</sub>	—					
Violent victimization <sub>T1</sub>	.46**	—				
Street code <sub>T1</sub>	.20**	.23**	—			
Street code <sub>T2</sub>	.28**	.19**	.54**	—		
Neighborhood violence	.17**	.21**	.25**	.17**	—	
Neighborhood disadvantage	-.04	.02	.16**	.11*	.23**	—

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

## Notes

1. Using a longitudinal design allowed us to model the possible antecedents of victimization while controlling for prior levels of the dependent variable, victimization, which provided a strong test of the causal priorities asserted in the hypothesized relationships.

2. To assess the validity of our construct of neighborhood violence, we correlated our measure of neighborhood violence with police records of neighborhood violence. The correlation between the police reports and our construct of neighborhood violence was moderately high (.58). Furthermore, we reestimated all models using the police reports of neighborhood violence. The results followed a similar trend to the construct formed by residents' reports, yielding the same pattern of results and conclusions. We chose to use residents' reports over police reports because residents' reports are theoretically more central to Anderson's (1999) thesis. In Anderson's work, the respondents actually provided their perceptions about neighborhood dynamics and violence.

3. We thank Eli Anderson and Bob Bursik for this clarification.

4. Because  $KR_{20}$  (Kuder and Richardson 1937) is a special case of Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , it is interpreted in the same manner.  $KR_{20}$  was introduced to estimate the reliability of scales composed of dichotomously scored items. The following formula is used to assess the  $KR_{20}$ :  $KR_{20} = N/(N-1)[1 - \sum p_i q_i / \sigma_x^2]$ , where  $N$  is the number of dichotomous items;  $p_i$  is the proportion responding "positively" to the  $i$ th item;  $q_i$  is equal to  $1 - p_i$ ; and  $\sigma_x^2$  is equal to the variance of the total composite.

5. The likelihood ratio test for the Poisson model revealed that the data were overdispersed and that the negative binomial model was the appropriate modeling technique.

6. The correlations for the theoretical variables are provided in Appendix D.

7. The models were first estimated separately for boys and girls. However, because subgroup comparisons showed a similar pattern of results, only the results obtained for the combined sample are presented.

8. We first estimated models 2 and 4 in Table 2 by including both street code<sub>T1</sub> and street code<sub>T2</sub>. However, multicollinearity between the two variables was a problem. We decided to remove street code<sub>T2</sub>, which reduced the multicollinearity to nonproblematic levels. Furthermore, to assess whether there was a difference in the effect of street code on victimization whether we used street code<sub>T1</sub> or street code<sub>T2</sub>, we estimated models by alternating the two. Regardless of which measure was used, the results yielded virtually identical results. As such, we used street code<sub>T1</sub> to take advantage of the longitudinal data design and bolster confidence in the temporal ordering.

9. According to Long (1997), one way to interpret the results of a negative binomial model is by exponentiating the coefficients, subtracting one, and multiplying the result by 100 or  $\{100 \times [\exp(\beta) - 1]\}$ . This provides the estimated percentage change in victimization associated with a one-unit change in a given independent variable.

10. We also included a quadratic term for street code in the model to assess whether the relationship between adopting the street code and victimization was polynomial in form. The quadratic term was not significant (coefficient = -.001,  $SE = .003$ , resulting in a  $z$  value of -.333).

11. We also estimated models in which we took the top 25 percent of cases and the bottom 25 percent of cases on neighborhood violence and estimated the effect of street code on victimization. This procedure allowed us to directly compare coefficient differences across models using the following equation:  $t = b_1 - \frac{1}{N} b_2 / \sqrt{(SEb_1)^2 + (SEb_2)^2}$  (Paternoster et al. 1998). In the model with the top 25 percent of cases on neighborhood violence, the effect of

street code on victimization was .349 ( $SE = .094$ ). For the cases in the bottom 25 percent on neighborhood violence, the effect was .108 ( $SE = .053$ ). Although adopting the street code was a significant predictor of victimization in neighborhoods characterized by both high and low levels of violence, a closer look at the coefficients revealed that street code had a stronger positive effect on victimization in neighborhoods with higher levels of violence (.349 versus .108;  $t = 2.231$ ,  $p < .05$ ). We also followed the same procedures for neighborhood disadvantage, but the street code coefficients did not reach significance.

12. High on street code was defined as one standard deviation above the mean. Medium on street code was defined as the mean. Low on street code is defined as one standard deviation below the mean.

13. To assess whether there were differences between victims and nonvictims on our theoretical variables, we compared the means for the two groups. Appendix A shows the mean difference statistics for the adoption of the street code, neighborhood violence, and neighborhood disadvantage for victims and nonvictims. In every case, except for neighborhood disadvantage, victims reported significantly higher levels of street-code investment and resided in neighborhoods perceived to be higher in violence. For example, adolescent victims displayed higher levels of commitment to the street code and lived in neighborhoods with higher levels of violence than nonvictims.

14. We thank Eli Anderson for pointing out this possibility to us.

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