

## Race and Neighborhood Codes of Violence

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Research on violence suggests that disadvantaged inner-city neighborhoods spawn violent subcultures, in which social status—denied in the conventional realm of schools and jobs—is attained through acts of violence and intimidation, shows of nerve and courage, and displays of manhood and honor. Such social systems are governed by codes of violence—rules or norms that help define social status on the streets, bring order, predictability, and structure to violent acts, and thereby allow members to use the system for their own instrumental needs—whether to acquire respect on the streets, gain protection from violence, or avoid humiliating situations of status degradation.

Codes of violence are norms with sanctions that regulate violent acts. Classic criminological studies have identified criminal codes in a variety of realms. Thrasher, for example, found that a gang code exerted group control over members: “we are not allowed to fight among ourselves,” “if you get caught, don’t squeal on the other guys,” “be loyal to the officers,” “defend ladies and girls in trouble,” “do not lie to each other.”<sup>1</sup> Sutherland found that professional thieves adhered to occupational rules such as “profits are shared equally,” “fall dough is used for anyone who is pinched,” “thieves deal honestly with one another,” and “show class and high status,” which functioned to reduce conflict, increase cooperation, and decrease risk of punishment.<sup>2</sup> Cressey identified a Mafia code—consisting of the tenets “be loyal to the organization,” “don’t squeal,” “be rational,” “be a man of honor,” “respect women and elders,” “don’t sell out,” “be a stand-up guy by showing courage and heart”—which functioned to control the behavior of members of organized crime families.<sup>3</sup> Such codes foreshadow, in form and function, contemporary neighborhood codes of violence.

In this chapter, we examine the concept of neighborhood codes of violence. We proceed in four steps. First, we provide a brief historical review of the criminological literature on structural opportunities, violent subcultures, and codes of violence. We emphasize the most influential of this work, Elijah Anderson's "code of the streets." Second, we develop key theoretical implications from this work with an eye toward applying it systematically, using social-scientific methods. Third, using recent data collected on Seattle neighborhoods, we explore whether such codes can be measured accurately with survey instruments. Fourth, we test a model in which neighborhood codes of violence vary by structural characteristics of neighborhoods, such as race and concentrated poverty.

### *Structure, Culture, and Neighborhood Codes of Violence*

#### Classic Criminological Studies of Structure and Culture

A long history of criminological theory and ethnographic research has discussed the interplay between social structure and culture in producing violence.<sup>4</sup> A prominent role is played by the spatial organization of culture and structure across neighborhoods, which can be traced to work by Shaw and McKay.<sup>5</sup> They argued that high rates of delinquency in inner-city neighborhoods are explained by social disorganization (weak local institutions, such as families and schools, undermine control over youth who congregate on the street) and cultural transmission (a tradition of delinquent values and pressures transmitted across generations of gangs).

Sutherland combined the two processes in his concept of differential social organization: weak organization against crime included social disorganization, whereas strong organization in favor of crime included cultural transmission, and the crime rate was determined by the relative strength of the conflicting processes.<sup>6</sup> Applied to the neighborhood, Sutherland's theory predicts that violence will be high when conventional organization against violence is weak, including the dissemination of definitions or codes against violence, and organization in favor of violence is strong, including the dissemination of definitions or codes favoring violence.<sup>7</sup>

Later, Cohen and Cloward and Ohlin developed structural theories of delinquent subcultures, and identified their content.<sup>8</sup> Each argued that illicit subcultures were an adaptation to barriers to attaining success,

respect, and self-esteem in conventional society. For Cohen, lower-class boys, unlikely to measure up to middle-class standards in school, face failure and status anxiety.<sup>9</sup> In response, they collectively innovate an oppositional subculture, which turns middle-class values on its head: malicious, seemingly irrational acts of theft and vandalism, which flout capitalist values of rationality and the sanctity of private property, become normative within the subculture. Miller argued that lower-class culture consists of focal concerns (trouble, toughness, smartness, fate, and autonomy) causing lower-class males to be preoccupied with displaying toughness and physical prowess, getting into trouble with drugs, alcohol, and sex, seeking thrills, demanding autonomy, showing street smarts, and being fatalistic.<sup>10</sup>

Cloward and Ohlin argued that structural barriers to conventional success cause lower-class males to experience frustration and alienation.<sup>11</sup> When such youth attribute the source of their failure to the illegitimacy of the system, they tend to withdraw their allegiance to society and innovate an alternate system of gaining status. While theft subcultures—comprised of pecuniary illicit acts that lead to success as conventionally defined—arise in organized slums consisting of stable organization between older and younger criminals, and between criminals and conventional elements (the fence, fix, and bail bondsman), violent subcultures arise in disorganized neighborhoods. Lacking tangible resources, youth in disorganized communities resort to their own physical prowess to attain status and success. Here, turf gangs dominate the neighborhood. Status is attained through acts of violence:

The principal prerequisites for success are “guts” and the capacity to endure pain. One doesn’t need “connections,” “pull,” or elaborate technical skills in order to achieve “rep.” The essence of the warrior adjustment is an expressed feeling-state: “heart.” The acquisition of status is not simply a consequence of skill in the use of violence or of physical strength but depends, rather, on one’s willingness to risk injury or death in the search for “rep.”<sup>12</sup>

Short and Strodbeck extended this thesis to show that, within gangs, leaders attained status through shows of heart, toughness, and daring.<sup>13</sup> In deciding to join a gang fight, they often weigh their subjective expectation of a definite loss of immediate group status against the distant and unlikely event of being punished.

### Contemporary Ethnographic Studies of Cultural Codes

More recently, Ruth Horowitz examined culture and identity in a Latino neighborhood and posited two cultural codes that structure an inner-city neighborhood.<sup>14</sup> The instrumental code of the American Dream, organized around economic success, is espoused by community members, but conflicts with the reality of negative experiences in lower-class schools and available jobs, each of which fail to link residents to the broader culture. The code of honor, organized around respect, manhood, and deference, is espoused by young men on the streets; violations of the code can lead to violence.

In an honor-bound subculture that emphasizes manhood and defines violations of interpersonal etiquette in an adversarial manner, any action that challenges a person's right to deferential treatment in *public*—whether derogating a person, offering a favor that may be difficult to return, or demonstrating lack of respect for a female relative's sexual purity—can be interpreted as an insult and a potential threat to manhood. Honor demands that a man be able physically to back his claim to dominance and independence.<sup>15</sup>

The street identities of young men are shaped by their responses to insult, negotiations of threats to manhood, and ability to maintain honor. For Horowitz, Latino youth must balance the instrumental code of the American Dream, which requires being "decent" from the standpoint of the larger community, against the honor code of the streets.

In his ethnography of an inner-city African American neighborhood in Philadelphia, Elijah Anderson provided perhaps the most vivid description of codes of violence.<sup>16</sup> Anderson argues that the code of the streets is rooted in the local circumstances of ghetto poverty as described by Wilson's underclass thesis.<sup>17</sup> Structural conditions of concentrated poverty, joblessness, racial stigma, and drug use lead to alienation and a sense of hopelessness in the inner city, which, in turn, spawn an oppositional culture consisting of norms "often consciously opposed to those of mainstream society."<sup>18</sup>

But what explains the content of such oppositional norms? We can identify three intersecting processes. First, Anderson argues that structural disadvantage hampers inner-city impoverished African American youth from gaining respect and esteem from school and work, which puts them at risk of embracing street culture. Second, he suggests that alienated African—American youth come to distrust conventional institutions—

particularly the police and legal system—for resolving their local disputes and problems, which puts them at risk of pursuing illicit dispute resolution. Third, Anderson observes that structural disadvantage disproportionately affects males, which leads to an emphasis on “manhood” for resolving disputes and gaining status.

The conjunction of these processes produces the “code of the streets.” Distrustful of police, inner-city youth must rely on their own resources for addressing interpersonal problems. Lacking material resources, they have little recourse other than resorting to violence and aggression to resolve disputes.<sup>19</sup> Violence becomes institutionalized within this social system on the streets, which serves the twin functions of resolving disputes and allocating status outside of conventional society. This system is governed by specific norms about violence, which comprise the street code, the content of which echoes that described by earlier subcultural theorists. The multiplicity of underlying norms gives the code multiple dimensions or domains of meaning.

The most fundamental norm is “never back down from a fight.” Backing down will not only result in a loss of street credibility and status but also increase the likelihood of being preyed upon in the future:

To run away would likely leave one's self esteem in tatters, while inviting further disrespect. Therefore, people often feel constrained not only to stand up and at least attempt to resist during an assault but also to “pay back”—to seek revenge—after a successful assault on their person. Revenge may include going to get a weapon or even getting relatives and friends involved. Their very identity, their self-respect, and their honor are often intricately tied up with the way they perform on the street during and after such encounters. And it is this identity, including credible reputation for payback, or vengeance, which is strongly believed to deter future assaults.<sup>20</sup>

This quotation illustrates an underlying norm of reciprocity, in which one is expected to respond in kind when disrespected by name calling, challenges, assaults, etc. This is consistent with Luckenbill's classic study showing that homicide is often a dynamic “character contest,” in which victim and offender, while trying to save face by responding in kind to insults and threats, commit—sometimes unwittingly—to a murderous definition of the situation.<sup>21</sup> The norms of reciprocity and never backing down apply to peers, gangs, and family members. When a peer is threatened or assaulted, other group members must never run or “punk out.” The phrase “I got

your back” illustrates this norm of peers standing up for each other, which frees members to aggress against others with impunity.

Status on the street is achieved by developing a reputation as a “man,” or “badass.” Manhood is associated with having “nerve”: a willingness to express disrespect for other males—for example, by getting in their face, throwing the first punch, pulling the trigger, messing with their woman—and thereby risking retaliation. Katz argues that “badasses” demonstrate a “superiority of their being” by dominating and forcing their will on others, and showing that they “mean it.”<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, street youth recognize this status system and manipulate it instrumentally to increase their status, or “juice,” by “campaigning for respect”—challenging or assaulting others and disrespecting them by stealing their material possessions or girlfriends.<sup>23</sup> They start a fight or “force a humiliating show of deference” by accidentally bumping another male, or challenging them with eye contact and the opening line, “Whatchulookin-at?”<sup>24</sup> These are self-image promoters.<sup>25</sup> At times, status is allocated on the basis of violent acts against outsiders in the neighborhood, such as members of other racial groups, which simultaneously increase the offender’s status as well as the neighborhood’s, as in the “defended communities” thesis.<sup>26</sup>

The proliferation of guns on the streets has raised the stakes: guns not only provide a quick and often final resolution to a dispute but also level the playing field, allowing less physical youth to compete for status if they are willing to “pull the trigger.” Guns can instantly transform a minor dispute over a stare, bump, or swear word into a deadly act. Guns become a valued commodity, infused with symbols of toughness, power, and dominance, and thereby an indication of repute and esteem.<sup>27</sup>

Once established, the code regulates and organizes violence on the streets. As an institutional feature of street life, it produces a strong incentive to acquire knowledge of its tenets not only for “street” but “decent” youth as well (to use Anderson’s ideal types). Those familiar with the code will know how to project a self-image as “not to be messed with,” how to prevent confrontations by avoiding eye contact with others, how to talk one’s way out of a dispute without violence or loss of respect. Naïve youth ignorant of the code will unwittingly invite confrontations, appear to be easy prey, and be unable to escape altercations unharmed. They risk victimization by violence. Thus, knowledge of the code serves a protective function for all youth, regardless of whether they participate in the street culture.

This is perhaps Anderson's most novel observation, and from it we can derive an important theoretical proposition: the "code of the streets" is an objective property of the neighborhood, rather than merely a subjective property of the individuals inhabiting the neighborhood. This proposition, in turn, has implications for the causes of violence. Violent behavior within the neighborhood is not merely an individual process in which a youth internalizes the code and thereby becomes motivated to attack others. There is also a contextual—in this case a neighborhood—effect due to the status system governed by the code. For example, an individual may not espouse the code, but in a neighborhood dominated by the code, be educated into violence through confrontations by status enhancers. Even those young males who reject the code, and its prescription for violence as a way of resolving disputes, may have difficulty turning the other cheek when challenged in public. In other words, on the streets, within confrontational situations, the result of interactions is not merely the sum of the biographical histories individuals bring to the setting but also an emergent property in which the "doing" of the code (in the ethnomethodological sense) results in a novel adjustment to the code. This emergence is illustrated by the character contest described by Luckenbill, in which actors exercise agency to adjust their responses in light of another's aggression, the code, and their own threatened identities. Emergence arises from the situation and thus, the *spatial* context within which it is embedded.

Youth who are ignorant of the code may be at greater risk of violence. Indeed, it might be that a mixed neighborhood dominated by the code but, at the same time, populated by many naïve youth ignorant of the code, will have the highest rates of violence. The volatile mix of potential violent offenders (motivated by the prospect of enhancing their status) and vulnerable youth victims (whose ignorance of the code makes them attractive targets) may spark explosive violence in the neighborhood.

### *Race, Structure, and Neighborhood Codes of Violence*

#### Race, Structural Opportunity, and Disadvantage

Research on the spatial configuration of disadvantage in urban areas shows that inequality in the labor market, coupled with residential segregation, produces inner-city neighborhoods characterized by high rates of poverty, residential instability, racial minorities, drug use, and violence.

These configurations are generated, in part, by a sorting process in which individuals at a competitive disadvantage in the labor market sort into disadvantaged and undesirable neighborhoods through preferences, or more likely because they either lack financial resources or face racial discrimination in the housing market.<sup>28</sup>

Over time, these sorting patterns become institutionalized and feed back to reinforce residential instability, poverty, and the like. Instability, poverty, and political powerlessness, in turn, undermine local institutions, such as families and schools, which undercut social control and supervision over youth. Such youth—having experienced violence in the home, failure in school, and early alienation—find themselves on the street joining other similarly situated youth, in the market for a sense of identity and self-worth. They are at risk of developing and participating in a system of neighborhood codes. As Shaw and McKay observed, such processes persist over generations of street youth through cultural transmission, so that spatial arrangements of neighborhood codes of violence remain stable over time.<sup>29</sup> The key to the diffusion of codes within and across neighborhoods is the distribution of communication networks. Concentrations of individual characteristics that increase interaction on the streets will increase the likelihood of codes diffusing within a neighborhood. For example, the intersection of concentrations of racial minorities and poverty should spawn a code of violence within a neighborhood. And if neighborhoods with similar race-class compositions are spatially contiguous, increasing communication, codes may diffuse across neighborhoods.

#### Local Neighborhoods as Social Systems and Codes of Violence

In general, the principles underlying codes of violence are available in American culture and known to most members of society, regardless of social class or neighborhood. As noted by Anderson, principles such as avenging a violent act perpetrated on a family member or never backing down from a fight can be traced to earlier historical periods such as the American Wild West and Japanese Samurai era. While cognizant of these codes, most members of society live their lives unencumbered by the codes' consequences. Thus, we disagree with Anderson, who implies that such codes are known only to inner-city residents. Indeed, toughness, aggression, and violence have been central to the concept of masculinity throughout American life, causing young males to connect masculinity-power-aggression-violence as part of their own developing male



identities.<sup>30</sup> We agree, however, that such codes become institutionalized as part of a social group's culture only when interacting members face structural barriers to conventional roles and a positive sense of self. For example, adolescents face barriers to full participation in adult roles and are, therefore, at risk of participating in the code to gain status.

The process by which individuals are allocated to housing creates neighborhoods with distinct socioeconomic characteristics, access to resources, and cultural complexions. Such neighborhood attributes facilitate or impede local solidarity and consensus, collective efficacy, and organization against crime. Affluent, homogenous, stable neighborhoods are able to create consensus and use political, cultural, and social capital to organize against crime. Codes of violence may be known to residents but are not relevant for everyday life. Affluent youth may be exposed to such codes on the playground, but fail to internalize them (as their parents counter the codes' violent themes), and instead find more attractive conventional ways of attaining self-worth.

In contrast, heterogeneous neighborhoods with high rates of instability, poverty, African Americans, and immigrants are less likely to achieve consensus, organize against violence, and provide the capital necessary for their children to develop positive self-images within conventional institutions. Indeed, as Anderson observed, parents themselves may be from "street" backgrounds, and socialize their children, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, into the tenets of violent codes: "Don't come in here crying that somebody beat you up; you better get back out there and whup his ass. If you don't whup his ass, I'll whup your ass when you come home."<sup>31</sup> In these neighborhoods, not only are violent codes known, but they become an organizing principle around which status is allocated. The code is perhaps most institutionalized when it organizes violent turf gangs in the neighborhood.<sup>32</sup>

#### Systematic Variation and Measurement

From our discussion so far, we conclude that subcultural theories and ethnographic studies suggest that something like the code of the streets within inner-city, impoverished, African American neighborhoods plays a key role in their high rates of violence. From a social-scientific standpoint, however, the limitations of ethnographic methods suggest the need for a more systematic examination of the street code thesis. Therefore, in this chapter, we explore four preliminary questions that are fundamen-

tal to the viability of the thesis. First, can we use social-scientific measuring instruments to determine whether neighborhood codes of violence exist? Second, assuming they can be measured reliably, are neighborhood codes distributed spatially in ways implied by ethnographic observations and predicted by subcultural theory? Ethnographic research has identified codes of the street in the inner-city, impoverished, African American neighborhoods studied, but have only assumed, rather than demonstrated, that such codes are absent in other neighborhoods. An important question is whether these codes are the exclusive property of the neighborhoods studied or are equally present in more affluent White neighborhoods. Third, can we conceive of codes of violence as an objective property of neighborhoods, rather than a subjective property of individuals? Here we cannot resolve the ontological question of objective existence, but instead can provide a scientific, evidence-based answer derived from the measurement properties of neighborhood codes and their distribution across areas. Fourth, are codes related to neighborhood violence, as expected?

### *Data and Methods*

We examine these questions using survey data on Seattle neighborhoods collected in 2002–2003. Seattle provides an instructive case, given that most research on codes of violence has been carried out in large cities, such as Philadelphia and New York, which are racially segregated and have high rates of violence. In contrast, Seattle has a moderate level of residential segregation, a small but growing minority population, moderate levels of concentrated disadvantage, and relatively little violence. Thus, we might expect difficulty in identifying neighborhood codes of violence in Seattle, and consequently, empirical support for such codes would constitute very strong evidence.

#### The Seattle “Neighborhoods and Crime Survey”

We use data from the “Seattle Neighborhoods and Crime Survey,” a multilevel survey of nearly five thousand households within 123 census tracts in Seattle. The survey combined three sampling designs. First, a stratified cluster sample randomly selected two block groups for each census tract, and eight households per block group. Second, an ethnic

oversample randomly selected two households within each of the two blocks (with the highest rates of minorities) for each of 141 block groups with the highest proportions of minorities. Third, a replication sample randomly selected two households in each of six street segments selected in the earlier Seattle Criminal Victimization Survey of one hundred census tracts.<sup>33</sup> A telephone survey of one adult per household yielded a response rate of approximately 50 percent. Comparisons with census data suggest that our sample contains more highly educated, White, and affluent respondents than are found in the city as a whole. We therefore control for these characteristics in our analyses.

We asked respondents about their households, crime victimization, neighborhoods, and ties to the community. We also asked a series of questions designed to measure individual, as well as neighborhood, codes of violence. Neighborhoods are defined by census tracts. Empirical research, as well as local knowledge of neighborhoods, suggests that census tracts are fairly good approximations of neighborhoods in Seattle.

#### Statistical Methods

We begin our analysis by examining reliability and other measurement properties of our indicators of neighborhood and individual codes of violence. That is, we determine whether they hang together, or covary, in ways consistent with ethnographic research, using confirmatory factor analysis on ordinal measures.<sup>34</sup> We then examine whether our neighborhood codes of violence are related to neighborhood characteristics using a three-level hierarchical linear model.<sup>35</sup> The first (measurement) level incorporates our confirmatory factor model of five indicators. The second (individual) level adjusts our neighborhood-level estimates of neighborhood codes for response bias due to differences in the demographic composition of neighborhood residents (informants)—and their own personal beliefs in violent codes. The third (neighborhood) level examines whether our neighborhood codes of violence correlate with neighborhood characteristics (e.g., racial composition, poverty, stability), as predicted.

#### *Modeling Neighborhood Codes of Violence*

There are two ways of measuring neighborhood codes of violence. In the most straightforward method, we could measure the degree to which indi-

viduals espouse the code and then aggregate their responses to the neighborhood level. This method has three weaknesses: (1) measures of individual codes may be fraught with social desirability effects; (2) youth participating in street codes in one neighborhood may reside in another; and (3) youth espousing the code will be rare, difficult to sample, and least likely to respond to surveys.

Alternatively, under the assumption that neighborhood codes of violence are objective properties of neighborhoods, we could use residents as "informants" about codes in their neighborhoods. This would avoid the difficulties with measuring individual codes. It does assume, however, that residents are aware of codes within their neighborhood. However, this assumption should hold because all residents have an incentive to know the code, either to protect themselves or to gain status.

#### Measures of Neighborhood Codes of Violence

To measure neighborhood codes of violence, we use our samples of residents as informants, who report on the existence of codes within their neighborhood. Because violent codes have multiple dimensions, we use five measures, each designed to tap into a different domain. Each question was prefaced by, "Do people in your neighborhood agree that . . ." The first item gets at the heart of the code, which entails gaining respect through violence: "In this neighborhood, for young people to gain respect among their peers, they sometimes have to be willing to fight." The second item captures the socialization process, in which "street" parents teach their kids to fight back: "In this neighborhood, parents teach their kids to fight back if they are insulted or threatened." The third item taps the concept of reciprocity, and specifically the notions of "payback" and "disrespect": "In this neighborhood, if a loved one is disrespected, people retaliate even if it means resorting to violence." The fourth item captures Anderson's observation that knowledge of the code can serve a protective function: "In this neighborhood, young men often project a tough or violent image to avoid being threatened with violence." The fifth item reflects the street status that accrues to possession of guns: "In this neighborhood, young men who own guns are often looked up to and respected." These five items capture the major dimensions of codes, and collectively should differentiate those neighborhoods in which the code is a key feature of social life, organizing status and violence, from those in which the code is irrelevant, non-existent, or rejected.

### Measures of Individual Codes of Violence

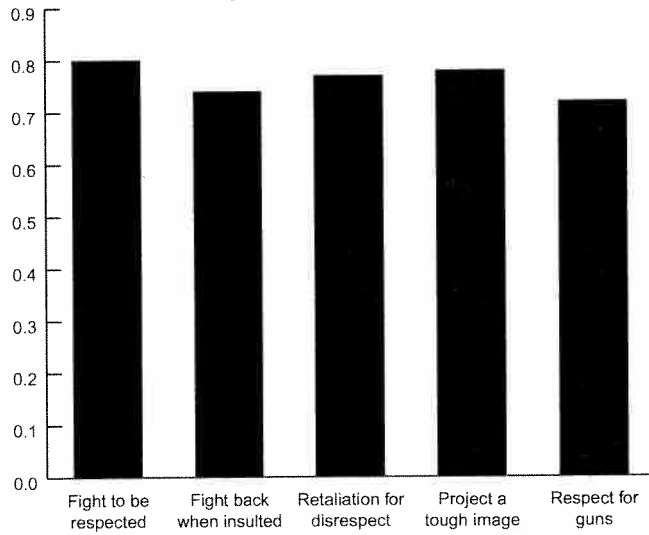
We could be wrong to assume that neighborhood codes of violence are an objective property of neighborhoods, but instead are merely the subjective properties of the individuals who inhabit a neighborhood. To address this issue, we collected five measures of *individual* violence codes, which asked residents about their own subjective views of violence. These measures resemble the neighborhood items, but use the stem, "Do you agree with the following?" The first item captures the core notion of respect from being tough: "It is important for young men to have a reputation as someone who is tough and not to be messed with." The second item taps the norm of never backing down: "If someone insults you or threatens you, you should turn the other cheek." The third item captures the protective function of knowing the code: "Out in public, it is important to avoid confrontations with strangers to avoid violence." The fourth item taps the socialization process by which parents, in this case, *discourage* the tenets of the code: "If your child were insulted and physically threatened by other children, you'd want them to talk their way out of it, rather than fight." The fifth item captures a general negative attitude about violence: "Violence is never justified under any circumstances."

### Measurement Models

As a first step in assessing the accuracy of our neighborhood and individual indicators of violence codes, we examine their reliability by modeling covariation across the individual items. We estimate a confirmatory factor model, which posits, for each respondent, that the neighborhood (individual) codes are each linear functions of the true neighborhood (individual) codes plus a random measurement error term. A poor or unreliable measure of a concept will not covary with the other measures, and this will result in large measurement errors and low reliabilities.

Figure 18.1 presents the models' standardized loadings, which are the correlations between the "true score" and the indicator.<sup>36</sup> Higher loadings indicate greater reliability. The loadings for the neighborhood code items are uniformly high (about .80) and nearly identical. The loadings for the individual codes vary, ranging from highly reliable ("talk their way out") to moderately reliable ("turn the other cheek," "avoid confrontations," and "violence never justified").<sup>37</sup> Thus, we have some evidence that our neighborhood code measures hang together better than do our individual

*Neighborhood Codes of Violence*



*Individual Codes of Violence*

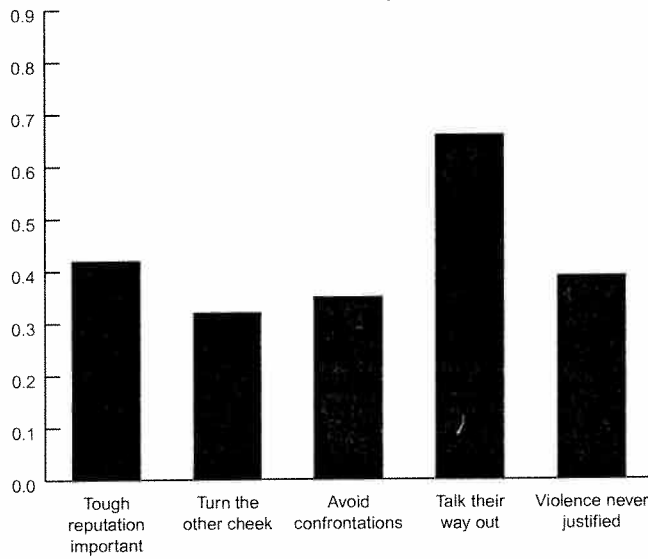


Fig. 18.1. Standardized Loadings from Measurement Model Neighborhood Codes of Violence

measures. Of more importance is whether they vary across neighborhoods and correlate with neighborhood variables as expected.

#### Multilevel Models of Neighborhood Codes

We test a substantive model in which codes of violence are structured by the neighborhood composition of race, class, violence, and residential mobility. Before estimating this model, however, we need to obtain unbiased estimates of neighborhood codes from our survey measures. We do this using a three-level hierarchical linear model. The first level models between-item, within-individual variation in neighborhood codes, and controls for random measurement error in each item.<sup>38</sup> The standardized loading estimate (.77) is about the average of the individual loadings from our confirmatory factor analysis.

The second level models within-neighborhood, between-respondent variation in neighborhood codes. Here we address the issue of measurement bias. Given that we use our respondents as informants about their neighborhood's true codes, we need to adjust our neighborhood-level estimates of codes for individual characteristics that might bias those estimates. For example, suppose older White respondents tend to underestimate their neighborhood's codes of violence. Then, if our neighborhood sample has a disproportionate number of older White respondents, our estimates of neighborhood codes might be underestimated relative to other neighborhood samples with fewer older White respondents. Our individual-level model uses covariates that may influence a respondent's estimates of neighborhood codes: sex, age, education, income, race, length of residence, and victim of violence. We also adjust our neighborhood estimates for our respondents' individual subjective belief in codes. We hypothesize that those who believe in violent codes will tend to think other residents are like themselves, and overestimate the true neighborhood codes; conversely, those who reject the codes will tend to underestimate the true level. The key to this approach to measuring neighborhood codes is the assumption that most residents—decent or street—have an incentive to know the codes, either to gain status or to protect themselves from violence. Consequently, the average resident will know whether objective codes of violence exist in the neighborhood or not.

We can also test the competing assumption that codes of violence are actually subjective properties of individuals, rather than objective properties of neighborhoods. Under this assumption, once we control for indi-

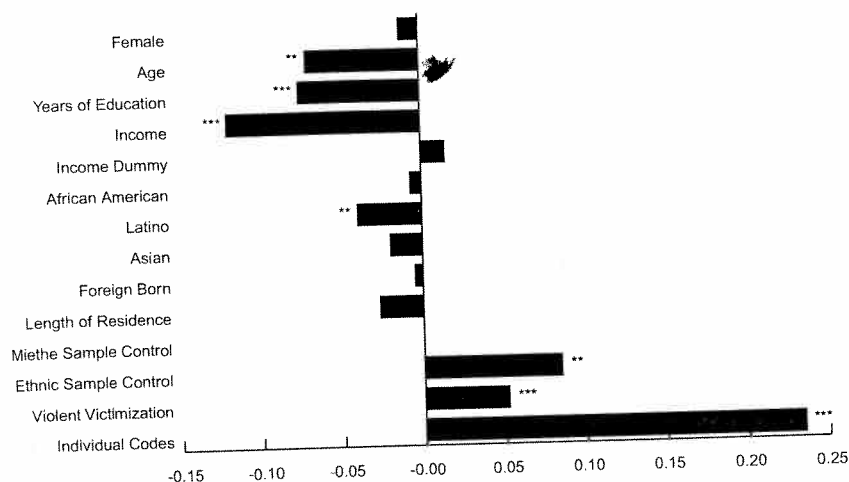


Fig. 18.2. Standardized Person-Level Coefficients from Regression of Neighborhood Codes of Violence. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

vidual codes—now, the “true” codes of violence—our informant reports of neighborhood codes will have little variance, which is randomly distributed across neighborhoods. Therefore, neighborhood codes will not be related to neighborhood structural characteristics in our substantive models, once we control for individual codes at the individual level. Regardless of which assumption is correct, our estimates of neighborhood variation in codes will be conservative, given that individual codes could partly tap “true” codes.

Figure 18.2 depicts our individual-level coefficients. We find, as expected, that neighborhood codes are underestimated by respondents who are older, are more educated, and earn more income. Thus, it appears that respondents isolated from the streets—more affluent and older respondents—tend to underestimate the presence of neighborhood codes. Being female has no effect, perhaps because females are aware of what goes on in the streets through their husbands, boyfriends, and brothers. Surprisingly, among our race (dummy) variables, only the coefficient for Latino is significant: relative to Whites—the omitted category—Hispanics tend to underestimate neighborhood codes. The coefficients for Blacks and Asians are nonsignificant. We do find that net of race, members of our ethnic oversample tend to overestimate neighborhood codes. As hypothesized, those who have been victimized by violence overestimate neighborhood



codes. Finally, as expected, those respondents who espouse individual codes themselves tend to overestimate the existence of neighborhood codes. This is the largest effect in the model. Once we purge respondents' estimates of neighborhood codes of the biasing effects of respondent characteristics, we can model the effects of neighborhood composition on neighborhood codes.

The third level models effects of neighborhood characteristics—race, poverty, affluence, and residential stability—on neighborhood codes of violence. Our demographic attributes of neighborhoods derive from the 2000 census. Our measures of race/ethnicity consist of the percentage of African Americans and Hispanics in a census tract. We discovered, however, that percent Asian and percent immigrants are nearly perfectly correlated due to the high percentage of Asian immigrants living in the same neighborhood. We therefore construct an index combining the two into Asian/Immigrant.

To measure concentrated affluence and poverty, we use Massey's index of concentration at the extremes (ICE), which can be computed for a given neighborhood by first subtracting the number of poor families from the number of affluent families, and then dividing the result by the total number of families.<sup>39</sup> ICE provides a measure of the imbalance of affluence versus poverty in a neighborhood on a scale that ranges from +1 (all families are poor) to -1 (all families are affluent), with values of 0 indicating an equal balance of poor and affluent families. We measure residential stability with an index of two census items: average length of residence and percent homeowners.

Figure 18.3 depicts coefficients for our model of neighborhood codes of violence. The bivariate relationship reveals that neighborhood codes are disproportionately present in extremely impoverished neighborhoods: the ICE coefficient is negative and significant, indicating that neighborhood codes diminish in balanced neighborhoods, and diminish even more in affluent neighborhoods. However, controlling for race, the ICE coefficient diminishes in size and becomes nonsignificant. Moreover, as expected, neighborhood codes are disproportionately present in neighborhoods with more African Americans. This coefficient, the largest of the model, supports ethnographic research that suggests that street codes are characteristic of inner-city neighborhoods with higher proportions of Blacks.

Similarly, we find that neighborhood codes are more prevalent in neighborhoods with higher percentages of Latinos, again consistent with

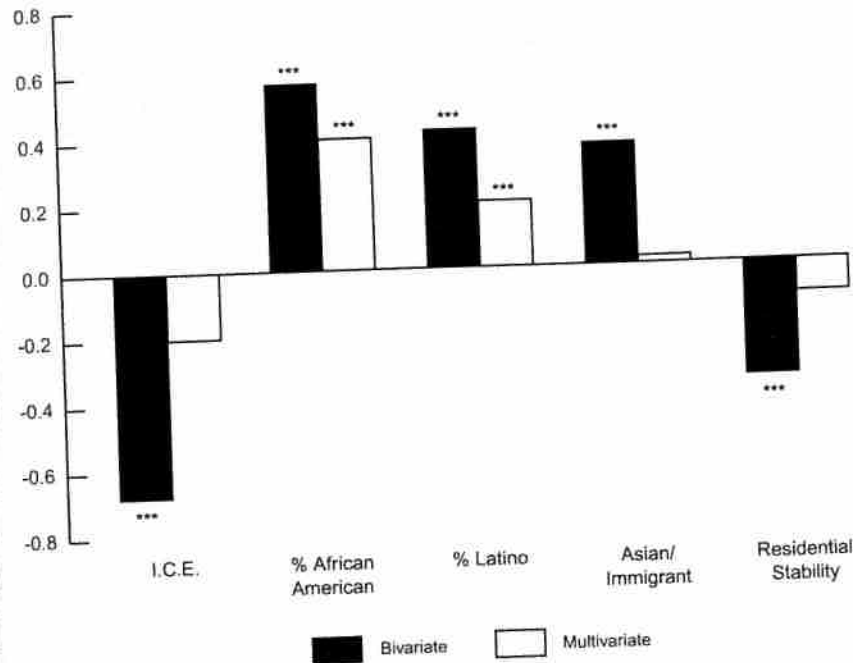


Fig. 18.3. Standardized Bivariate and Multivariate Contextual Effects on Neighborhood Codes of Violence. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

ethnographic research. The bivariate effects of Asian/immigrant and residential stability are significant and in the expected direction, but disappear in our multivariate models. Finally, we examined the crucial hypothesis that neighborhood codes are associated with neighborhood violence. From our multilevel model, we computed predicted neighborhood scores for violence codes adjusted for response error (first level) and bias due to individual covariates (second level), and computed a correlation with violent crime rates (years 2002–2004) by census tracts.<sup>40</sup> We find a strong, statistically significant correlation (.56), which is depicted in Figure 18.4.<sup>41</sup> We see that the violent crime rate is low in the northern half of the city and high in the southern half, and neighborhood codes follow a similar pattern. Neighborhood codes are concentrated in the inner city (Central District) and surrounding neighborhoods, and remain high as one moves southward down the Rainier Valley. Rates of violence are highest in the Central District, and are somewhat higher down the Rainier Valley. These

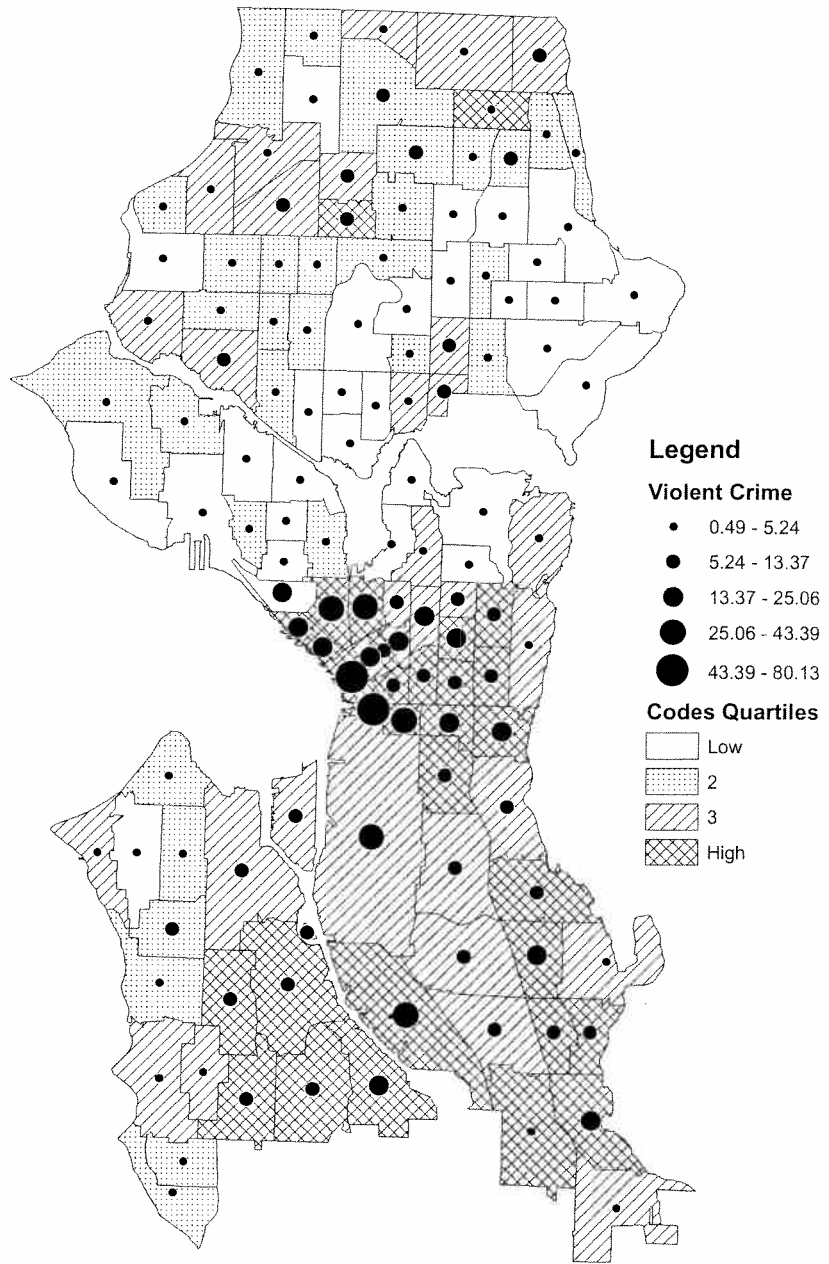


Fig. 18.4. Neighborhood Street Codes by 2002–2004 Average Yearly Violent Crime Rate, Seattle

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patterns generate the high correlation between neighborhood codes and violence, supporting our key proposition.

### *Discussion*

This chapter draws on a long history of ethnographic research on race, social structure, and neighborhood codes of violence to subject the findings to systematic empirical test. This is important because critics often argue that ethnographic findings do not meet conventional social science standards of evidence. According to this argument, ethnographers do not show that the street codes are disproportionately represented in violent inner-city neighborhoods, but merely observe examples in a single inner-city neighborhood, infer they are widespread there, and assume they are absent elsewhere. Furthermore, critics argue that concepts such as "code of the streets" cannot be measured using scientific instruments, and therefore, we cannot determine their distribution in violent inner-city neighborhoods versus others.

Our research tackles this challenge, takes the ethnographic evidence seriously, and translates concepts discovered through careful ethnographic research into quantitative survey measures. The content of our measures captures dimensions of "never back down from a fight," "violence gains respect," "got your back," "retaliate when one's crew is disrespected," "project a tough image to avoid being punked." We find their measurement properties acceptable, and in models of neighborhood variation in codes, we find support for theoretical expectations: neighborhood codes are disproportionately found in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods, as well as neighborhoods with high rates of violence. Thus, contrary to critics, we find support for the basic propositions of ethnographic research on codes of violence.

Our findings also raise new research questions about the dynamics of neighborhood codes. We noted that ethnographic research suggests that Black males from inner-city impoverished neighborhoods distrust the police and legal system, and therefore turn to their own devices, using violence to resolve their disputes. Research is needed to examine this proposition empirically: Do inner-city residents in fact distrust the police and does that foster the formation of codes of violence to resolve disputes and gain status?

Shaw and McKay's social-disorganization and cultural-transmission

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theories suggest that neighborhood disorganization leads to loss of social control over youth, which in turn spawns a delinquent cultural tradition and high rates of delinquency. Recent research on social disorganization emphasizes neighborhood collective efficacy as a key aspect of informal social control. Our research suggests that neighborhood codes of violence constitute an important aspect of a delinquent cultural tradition. This raises the question of whether collective efficacy and neighborhood codes are related, as suggested by Shaw and McKay: Disorganized neighborhoods undermine collective efficacy, which spawns neighborhood street codes, and consequently criminal violence.

Our perspective is consistent with social learning theories, such as differential association, in presuming that codes of violence diffuse spatially across households and neighborhoods. Such diffusion is related to communication networks, which may explain why race has stronger effects than social class, given racial barriers to social interaction. Future research is needed to model potential spatial diffusion effects across geographic units. Do contiguous neighborhoods share similar codes, and do we observe diffusion over time?

We found a strong correlation between neighborhood codes and violent crime rates. Additional research, however, is needed to model this relationship explicitly, controlling for other covariates of neighborhood violence. Furthermore, does the effect of neighborhood codes on violence rates persist even when researchers control for spatial autoregressive effects?

Finally, although we carefully operationalized the multiple dimensions of violent codes on the basis of a close reading of the ethnographic literature, there remains the question of how such codes operate in concrete situations—a question that qualitative research is better suited to answer. Research is needed in which analysts go into key neighborhoods and gather qualitative data. Such data can explore the nuances by which neighborhood codes are used to negotiate confrontations, achieve a sense of respectability while maintaining safety, and innovate new twists on the codes' themes—in short, to accomplish a sense of the neighborhood code of violence in everyday street settings. Moreover, by sampling on and off the regression lines of our models, we may gain further insights into the operation and nonoperation of codes.<sup>42</sup> In particular, by sampling neighborhood outliers, and exploring local processes of social control, we may gain new theoretical insights beyond our principal findings supporting neighborhood codes of violence.

NOTES

1. Thrasher 1927:287.
2. Sutherland 1937:35-38.
3. Cressey 1969.
4. Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Sampson and Wilson 1995; Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967.
5. Shaw and McKay 1942.
6. Sutherland 1947.
7. Matsueda 1988; Sutherland and Cressey 1978.
8. Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Cohen 1955.
9. Cohen 1955.
10. Miller 1958.
11. Cloward and Ohlin 1960.
12. *Ibid.*:175.
13. Short and Strodtbeck 1965.
14. Horowitz 1983.
15. *Ibid.*:81.
16. Anderson 1999.
17. Wilson 1987.
18. Anderson 1999:81.
19. See also Kubrin and Weitzer 2003.
20. Anderson 1999:76.
21. Luckenbill 1977.
22. Katz 1988:81.
23. Anderson 1999.
24. Katz 1988:110.
25. Toch 1969.
26. Green, Strolovitch, and Wong 1998; Pinderhughes 1997:134.
27. Fagan and Wilkinson 1998.
28. Massey and Denton 1993.
29. Shaw and McKay 1942.
30. Messerschmidt 1986:56.
31. Anderson 1999:70-71.
32. For example, see Decker and Van Winkle 1996.
33. Miethe and Meier 1994.
34. Jöreskog and Sörbom 1996-2001.
35. Raudenbush and Bryk 2002.
36. Because our measures used ordinal (Likert) scales, we used polychoric correlations, a weight matrix indexing departures from normality, and weighted least squares estimation using Jöreskog and Sörbom's LISREL approach.

37. We also find that neighborhood, but not individual, codes approximate parallel measures (equal slopes and measurement error variances).

38. Here we incorporate our confirmatory factor model, but assume parallel measures. This measurement model corrects for attenuation in our substantive regression coefficients due to unreliability in each item.

39. Massey 1996.

40. Our measure of the violent crime rate is based on reported violence by census tract from the Seattle Police Department.

41. Details of statistical models and full tables are available upon request.

42. Pearce 2002.