STREET CODES, ROUTINE ACTIVITIES, NEIGHBOURHOOD CONTEXT AND VICTIMIZATION

Susan Mcneeley* and Pamela Wilcox

This study seeks to address the inconsistency in the literature regarding the relationship between the code of the street and victimization by drawing upon overlooked ideas embedded in Anderson’s work that are consistent with lifestyle-routine activities theory. Using Poisson-based multilevel regression models, we found that the effect of the street code on victimization was moderated by public activities: code-related values only contributed to greater risk of victimization for those with more public lifestyles. This interaction between the street code and routine activities was more influential in culturally disorganized neighbourhoods.

Keywords: code of the street, victimization, routine activities theory, communities and crime

Introduction

Elijah Anderson’s ethnographic work Code of the Street (1999) provides valuable insights for understanding the nature of violence, explaining that violence is believed necessary to gain respect due to limited financial means in disadvantaged, inner-city communities. A good deal of evidence supports a positive relationship between violent behaviour and beliefs related to the ‘code of the street’—attitudes that promote violence as a way to obtain respect and deal with interpersonal conflict (Hartnagel 1980; Stewart et al. 2002; Simons et al. 2003; Stewart and Simons 2006; 2010; Berg et al. 2012; Matsuda et al. 2012).

Some scholars have moved beyond studies of offending to assess whether adherence to a street code is related to victimization risk. However, the findings from literature to date on the relationship between subcultural ‘street’ values and victimization have often conflicted with theoretical expectations. For example, previous tests of the street code-victimization linkage (e.g. Stewart et al. 2006; Berg et al. 2012; Schreck et al. 2012) have been built largely upon Anderson’s suggestion that the code of the street is adopted to protect oneself from victimization. However, the empirical evidence that emerges from these studies is that the street code increases victimization.

We argue that this apparent contradiction exists because the theoretical foundation upon which extant work is built is potentially incomplete. In particular, most previous studies of the effect of the code on victimization have emphasized Anderson’s suggestion that the code might reduce victimization by prescribing behaviour that projects an image of invulnerability. But, this emphasis on the protection afforded by the code does not take into account the complexity of the expected effect of the street code on victimization that is embedded in Anderson’s description. The relationship between adherence to the code and victimization might be better understood by considering other aspects of Anderson’s

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work beyond his discussion of the potentially protective qualities of the code. More specifically, Anderson provides suggestions about the ways in which the code intersects with both routine activities and neighbourhood context to create opportunity for victimization.

Drawing upon this interpretation of Anderson, the present study invokes a conceptualization of code of the street theory that recognizes a complex interaction between adherence to the code, routine activities at micro-level places and broader neighbourhood context. Specifically, we propose that street codes and routine activities interact to affect victimization, with adherence to street codes enhancing risk of victimization for those who more often engage in public activities. In addition, because Anderson’s observations were based on urban, disadvantaged neighbourhoods, this individual-level interaction effect will be examined across neighbourhoods, as adherence to the street code when in public may be especially likely to create risk when in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Stewart and Simons 2010). The extent to which the interaction between the street code and routine activities varies across neighbourhoods can thus provide further insight regarding the situational nature of the relationship between the street code and victimization. We test these ideas by estimating multilevel Poisson regression models using survey data from a sample of approximately 3,500 adults residing within 123 Seattle census tracts.

The Code of the Street and Victimization

According to Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967), a criminogenic subculture is a group that, while being part of the larger culture, holds values that are not consistent with those held by mainstream society. This theory assumes that individuals who participate in the groups that adhere to the contradictory values are socialized into the subculture, so that their behaviour is appropriate according to the beliefs of the group. These groups often enforce these behaviours; individuals who do not engage in activities that are valued by the subculture may be subjected to ridicule or other means of social control. Anderson’s (1999) Code of the Street explores the effect of structural characteristics on criminogenic subcultures. Because of a lack of upward mobility, individuals in severely disadvantaged inner-city communities may turn to what Anderson terms the ‘code of the street’ for strategies to become successful within the community.

Respect—which is necessary to demonstrate one’s dominance and status—was the predominant capital in the Philadelphia neighbourhoods observed by Anderson. Anderson argues that, because traditional methods of obtaining respect—such as earning money legitimately, forming and providing for a family, and joining local organizations—are withheld from individuals living in communities marked by concentrated disadvantage, some members of impoverished communities turn to the code of the street for new strategies for earning respect and prestige. Under the street code, respect is earned through violence and sexual prowess and can be lost by failing to respond appropriately to perceived slights. Consistent with Anderson’s observations, beliefs related to the use of violence as a source of respect are rather robust predictors of violent behaviour and aggression in adults, adolescents and children (Hartnagel 1980; Felson et al. 1994; Stewart et al. 2002; Simons et al. 2003; Ousey and Wilcox 2005; Stewart and Simons 2006; 2010; Berg et al. 2012; Matsuda et al. 2012). Further, studies testing ideas described by Anderson have been conducted in a number of different settings, indicating that the processes he observed were not necessarily unique to inner-city Philadelphia.
While there is extensive research on the effect of adherence to a street code on offending, there has been less focus on the effect of a street code on victimization. According to Anderson (1999), the street code is perceived by residents of disadvantaged communities to increase one’s safety because of the belief that potential attackers will recognize an individual who displays aggressive behaviour as someone best left alone. In contrast, failing to follow the street code is believed to leave one vulnerable to attacks; individuals who do not behave according to the code are labelled ‘weak’ and could be considered optimal targets. For example, active street offenders claim that they must retaliate violently to assault or theft in order to show the attackers and others that continuing to target them would not be in their best interests (Jacobs 2004; Jacobs and Wright 2006). Other qualitative research demonstrates that individuals holding street values feel pressured to adopt these values in order to avoid losing respect, thereby inviting victimization (Ray and Simons 1987; Kennedy and Baron 1993; Garot 2007; Brookman et al. 2011).

However, recent quantitative studies measuring the street code and victimization have provided evidence that the code actually increases the risk of victimization (Stewart et al. 2006; Berg et al. 2012; Schreck et al. 2012)—a finding that is consistent with a now-extensive literature highlighting the correlation between offending and victimization (Wolfgang 1958; Hindelang et al. 1978; Sampson and Lauritsen 1990; Schreck et al. 2008). Scholars have explained the positive relationship between adherence to the street code and victimization as a result of victim precipitation (see Wolfgang 1958), in which those with violent values may contribute to their own victimization by others with such beliefs. As noted by Stewart et al. (2006), adherents of the street code frequently behave in ways that are perceived as disrespectful. This behaviour, in turn, encourages other adherents of the code to respond violently in order to save face, increasing the risk of victimization or the intensity of a violent encounter (Wolfgang 1958; Felson and Steadman 1983; Ganpat et al. 2013). Unlike many scholars who assume that the street code creates a condition in which violence is inevitable, Collins (2008) argues that violence is difficult to accomplish and that the street code is generally enacted as posturing in an effort to avoid violence. However, he notes that this posturing may be unconvincing and victimization may occur, especially when ‘code-switchers’—those who do not fully adhere to the code of the street but attempt to display it in an effort to protect themselves—encounter someone who is hard-core street.

The debate regarding the nature of the influence of the code of the street on victimization has not yet been resolved. To shed greater light on this debate, we explore how adherence to a street code might interact with routine activities and neighbourhood context in affecting victimization. Below, we first review briefly the effects of routine activities on victimization, and then we move into a discussion about how these effects can work in conjunction with adherence to a street code and neighbourhood context to enhance the risk of victimization.

Street Codes in Context: Lifestyle-Routine Activities and Neighbourhood Contingencies

Lifestyle-routine activities theory

One of the most popular theoretical frameworks in the victimization literature is lifestyle-routine activities theory, which explains victimization as a function of differential criminal opportunity due to differences in routine behaviour (Hindelang et al. 1978; Cohen and Felson 1979). According to individual-level applications of lifestyle-routine
activities theory (see Cohen et al. 1981; Miethe et al. 1987), one’s daily activity affects the likelihood of being in a situation in which victimization is likely to occur. Specifically, individual patterns of leisure activities are related to the risk of victimization; activities outside the home, in particular, are thought to increase exposure to potential offenders. A good deal of research supports this idea. For example, numerous studies have shown that victimization risk is positively related to the number of nights spent outside the home, time spent at bars or “partying,” time spent in school or working, and time spent in public, more generally (e.g. Miethe et al. 1987; Kennedy and Forde 1990; Miethe and Meier 1990; Sampson and Lauritsen 1990; Miethe and McDowall 1993; Fisher et al. 1998; Mustaine and Tewksbury 1998).

**Street codes in context**

The current study seeks to integrate findings from the lifestyle-routine activities perspective in order to address the nature of the relationship between the street code and victimization. In particular, we seek to more fully incorporate Anderson’s observations regarding the situational contexts (public activity) and the broader neighbourhood contexts in which individuals display their street personas. Studies applying Anderson’s theory to victimization—specifically in an attempt to explain why adherence to the code should decrease victimization—have not fully taken into account the complexity of crime opportunity that we see embedded in Anderson’s work. Rather, they have focused almost exclusively on Anderson’s statements on how the code reduces vulnerability. As such, the concept of target vulnerability (see Finkelhor and Asdigian 1996) has been elevated over other aspects of opportunity that would increase the risk of victimization in such situations (e.g. exposure to offenders, individual routine activities, proximity to high-risk people and places).

**Street codes at public places**

Anderson (1999), in fact, alludes to the complex, and somewhat contradictory ways, in which adherence to the code intersects with micro-level places. For example, Anderson explains that public places—such as parks, street corners or bars and clubs—serve as staging areas in which followers of the street code can build their reputations by committing violence in front of an audience, increasing the amount of respect earned by a single encounter. This respect, in turn, should reduce the risk of victimization, as potential offenders will know that the individual is not vulnerable to attacks. In this respect, Anderson seems to suggest that the street code is protective against victimization when it is used in public spaces. At the same time, he does acknowledge the danger that code-followers face when in public due to their proximity to potential offenders, regardless of the effectiveness of their tough persona:

A person’s public bearing must send the unmistakable, if sometimes subtle message that one is capable of violence, and possibly mayhem, when the situation requires it, that one can take care of oneself....Even so, there are no guarantees against challenges, because there are always people around looking for a fight in order to increase their share of respect – or ‘juice,’ as it is sometimes called on the street. (Anderson 1999: 72–3)

Thus, according to Anderson, while adherence to the street code reduces target vulnerability, it may not always compensate for the increased risk at which their activities
and settings place them. However, we contend that public activities increase the risk of victimization for followers of the street code not only because of proximity/exposure to motivated offenders, but also due to the influence of the street code over their behaviour during the time that they are proximal/exposed to potential offenders. We hypothesize that the effect of street values on victimization will be greater for individuals who participate in public activities more frequently. While the code may provide an image of invulnerability, as suggested by Anderson, it may also increase the motivation of potential offenders to select him as a target due to victim precipitation that results from an increase in target antagonism (see Finkelhor and Asdigian 1996). These latter effects, which were also suggested by Anderson, are especially likely to occur when code-following individuals spend a great deal of time in public. Overall, public lifestyles can be expected to increase the likelihood of victimization due to victim precipitation for those who adopt the street code for two reasons: (1) an increase in antagonistic behaviour while in public spaces and (2) a more likely violent response by potential offenders to such antagonism.

First, as noted by Stewart et al. (2006), the code of the street likely encourages attitudes and behaviour that may be perceived by others as disrespectful or injurious. Other work suggests that behaviour stemming from the code is more likely to occur when engaged in public activities, specifically. After all, public leisure activities provide an opportunity to display one’s street persona to code-following peers; failing to act in accordance with the code in public can be more detrimental to one’s reputation than a similar failure in a situation with few witnesses (see Copes and Hochstetler 2003). Similarly, because public spaces serve as staging areas in which individuals can demonstrate their adherence to the code, motivation to follow the code is higher when in public. The result is an increase in disrespectful behaviour toward others in public, thereby increasing the likelihood of a victim-precipitated attack.

Second, adherents of the code of the street generally socialize with or near others who also hold these beliefs. Therefore, disrespectful behaviour is likely to result in violence, especially when it occurs in public. Even minor rude or insulting behaviour in public with witnesses present is likely to lead to violence, as another code-follower will feel pressured to violently respond to threats to his masculinity in an attempt to prevent others from perceiving him as weak:

With so much at stake a man, or a woman, can easily feel disrespected by another who looks at him for ‘too long’ or simply by being cut off in the concession line...As the situation deteriorates, it may be very difficult for either party to back down, particularly if members of an audience are present who have, or are understood to have, a significant social investment in who and what each participant presents to be. (Anderson 1999: 78–9)

Fights over seemingly trivial insults are especially likely to occur in public areas that attract people from outside the neighbourhood—such as shopping areas, theatres and sporting arenas, as code-followers are eager to represent their communities:

People from other neighborhoods who come to a staging area and present themselves are said to be ‘representing’ both who they are and the ‘world’ or ‘hood’ from which they hail...There are often enough young people in the staging area to provide the critical mass of negative energy necessary to spark violence. (Anderson 1999: 77)
Individual street codes, public lifestyles and neighbourhood street culture

Beyond examining the interplay between the code and public activity on victimization risk, the current study also examines the manner in which the interaction between street values and public lifestyles is affected by neighbourhood cultural context. According to Anderson, neighbourhood subculture—a product of structural disadvantage—is distinct from individual beliefs. The neighbourhood environment is an important component of Anderson’s discussion, as the dangerousness of communities with violent subcultures provides a setting in which violent behaviour is considered necessary, sometimes even when it is not desired by the perpetrator. Anderson describes two cultural orientations of residents of disadvantaged, urban neighbourhoods. ‘Street’ individuals are socialized into the code of the street as children and value the use of violence. However, the majority of those living in these communities are ‘decent’ individuals who do not believe in the street code but are aware of it and behave in accordance when they consider it necessary for survival.

Anderson’s observations imply an interaction between individual street values and the cultural context of the community, especially during the times that individuals engage in public activities. ‘Street’ individuals from communities with strong violent subcultures strongly internalize the values derived from the code, forming their self-concept based on the respect from others in their communities afforded them by their adherence to these beliefs. Aggression is widely encouraged or expected in communities with pervasive street codes, providing those who value aggressive, disrespectful behaviour with additional social incentives to engage in violence or other disrespectful actions. Therefore, compared to individuals with violent values who live in neighbourhoods where traditional cultural values are promoted, street values held by those who reside in areas where the code of the street flourishes are more likely to lead to code-related behaviour when one is in public in the presence of other code-followers. As discussed above, this behaviour, in turn, is likely to place them at risk.

Research on the contextual influence of the code of the street has found that aggregate-level subculture is a significant predictor of crime and victimization above and beyond the effect of individual-level violent values. For example, Stewart and Simons (2010) and Berg et al. (2012) found that neighbourhood subculture had an independent effect on violent delinquency after controlling for other community- and individual-level factors. In addition, neighbourhood street culture also affected one’s risk of victimization; those residing in communities in which the street code is dominant were more likely to experience violence (Berg et al. 2012).

There is limited empirical evidence that the effects of individual belief in the street code depends upon neighbourhood cultural context. For example, Stewart and Simons’ analysis of the effect of individual street values on delinquency across neighbourhoods (2010) showed that juveniles’ belief in the street code more greatly contributed to violent delinquency in communities with widespread street cultures. To date, few studies have applied this relationship to victimization. According to Stewart et al. (2006), risk of victimization was greatest for individuals who had strong beliefs in the street code and lived in neighbourhoods with high levels of violence. In contrast, a recent qualitative study of South African youth by Lindegaard et al. (2013) suggested that the street code had a protective effect against victimization when youth enacted it in neighbourhoods in which the code of the street was pervasive.
These previous studies have not accounted for potential changes in the effect of the street code brought on by both the neighbourhood context and the situational context (i.e., the importance of the code when interacting with others in public spaces). Anderson’s discussion of the way in which residents of disadvantaged communities interact with their environments suggests that individuals living in communities in which the code of the street is strongest perceive greater expectations and incentives for code-related behaviour, especially when spending time in public, than do those who live in other neighbourhoods. As discussed above, engaging in code-related behaviour while in public spaces is likely to result in victimization due to a combination of proximity and exposure to potential offenders and an increased likelihood of provoking violent responses from these potential attackers. Therefore, it is expected that the greater risk of victimization that results from the interrelationship between the street code and activities will be enhanced among residents of communities with violent subcultures.

Methods

Data and sample

The current study uses secondary data from Ross Matsueda’s Seattle Neighborhoods and Crime Survey (for technical information on the research, see Matsueda et al. 2010). Seattle provides an interesting context for testing theories of the code of the street. Much of the research on the code of the street has been conducted in large cities with severe concentrated disadvantage and racial segregation. In contrast, Seattle has moderate rather than high residential segregation, a minority population that is made up of members of diverse groups, moderate levels of concentrated disadvantage and less violence than other large cities. Therefore, one might expect to find lower levels of adherence to codes of violence. However, the Seattle Neighborhoods and Crime Survey demonstrates that the code of the street is present in this context and follows patterns like those described by Anderson: neighbourhood codes in Seattle are concentrated in the inner city, are found in Black and Hispanic neighbourhoods and are correlated with neighbourhood violence (Matsueda et al. 2006).

The dataset contains information from households within all 123 census tracts in Seattle, Washington. There are between 21 and 110 households included from each census tract, with an average of 47. The data collection, conducted in 2002–03, involved telephone surveys using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). While CATI may be less reliable than face-to-face interviews when studying sensitive topics such as victimization (e.g. Mangione et al. 1982; Pridemore et al. 2005), it can be an effective mode of obtaining such information, as the administrative control allows accurate recording of answers while the conversational nature of the interview can help respondents feel comfortable with reporting sensitive information (Killias 1990; Kindermann et al. 1997; McNeely 2012).

Approximately half (50.5 per cent) of the sample analyzed herein was female. The age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 102, with an average age of 48.55. The majority (87 per cent) of the respondents categorized themselves as White, while 6.6 per cent of the sample was Asian, 4 per cent was Black, 4.7 per cent was Hispanic or Latino, 2.8 per cent was Native American and 3.3 per cent identified as ‘other’. These are consistent with US Census data collected for Seattle in 2000.
The sample over-represents individuals with higher levels of education and income. The majority of the sample (97.5 per cent) reported having at least a high school diploma or equivalent, while the US Census Bureau reports that 89.5 per cent of the general population in Seattle had high school diplomas in 2000. The median for respondent’s household income falls in the category representing $50,000 to $64,999; this is inconsistent with US Census data, which shows the median income for Seattle as $45,736.

Measures

Dependent variable

The outcome measure used in this paper is the frequency of assault victimization. Respondents were asked how many times they had been ‘physically attacked, beaten up, or threatened’\(^1\) in the two years prior to taking the survey (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics of all measures in the analysis). Assault victimization has been measured similarly in previous studies (e.g. Miehe and McDowall 1993; Wilcox Rountree et al. 1994; Stewart et al. 2006; Messner et al. 2007; Berg et al. 2012; Schreck et al. 2012). The range

\(^1\) It is possible that this measure includes individuals who were beaten up during an altercation they initiated. However, as our explanation of the relationship between the street code and victimization includes victim precipitation, we do not see this as a limitation.

### Table 1 Descriptive statistics

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<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<td>Don’t back down</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2.27</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>0.71</td>
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<td>Tough reputation</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.64</td>
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<td>Days out</td>
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<td>3.26</td>
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<td>0.39</td>
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<td>48.55</td>
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<td>Busy places</td>
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<td>2.64</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>123</td>
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for this measure was between 0 and 50. Approximately 6 per cent of the respondents reported experiencing at least one assault incident in the past two years.

Key independent variables
Individual adherence to the code of the street is measured using three single items representing the extent to which the respondent has internalized values favourable to crime and violence or experienced an attenuation of traditional values that view crime and violence negatively. The first item represents the norm of never backing down when disrespected or threatened: ‘If someone insults you or threatens you, you should turn the other cheek’. The second variable similarly reflects the notion that avoiding violence is seen as weak: ‘Out in public, it is important to avoid confrontation with strangers to avoid violence’. The third item captures the concept that respect is earned through tough behaviour: ‘It is important for young men to have a reputation as someone who is tough and not to be messed with’. The response set for each variable was a four-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’, so that, for the first two variables discussed above, higher scores indicate values consistent with the code of the street. The third variable, which asked respondents whether they believe it is important for young men to have a tough reputation, was recoded for consistency. Previous research on the subculture of violence and the code of the street more specifically have also used measures that emphasize displaying a tough image and responding appropriately to insults (see Felson et al. 1994; Stewart et al. 2002; Simons et al. 2003; Stewart and Simons 2006; Stewart et al. 2006; Stewart and Simons 2010; Berg et al. 2012; Matsuda et al. 2012). Because these measures are meant to represent internalization of the street code, ‘decent’ individuals—those who are merely aware of the code and enact it when necessary—are expected to have lower scores than ‘street’ individuals who have internalized the values.

To measure public lifestyle, we use three separate items that capture respondents’ movements away from their homes. The first item indicates how many evenings the respondents reported spending outside their homes per week. The second measures how many days per week respondents’ homes were left unoccupied for at least four hours, which signifies activities outside the home occurring during the day. The third variable specifies the number of days per week respondents spent at bars or nightclubs, further emphasizing activities located in public settings.

Individual-level control variables
A number of variables that have been linked with victimization are included as controls. Age is a continuous measure representing age in years. Gender is a dichotomous variable, with males coded as 0 and females coded as 1. Four dichotomous variables were included to represent race; these show whether the respondent identified as Black/African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic or other race, with Whites used as the reference group. Because opportunity theory assumes that the presence of others

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2 The dataset includes six questions on the respondents’ beliefs regarding crime and violence. However, the low reliability between these items (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.530$) suggests that they measure different underlying concepts rather than one complete set of beliefs, requiring the use of single-item measures. For the sake of parsimony, we extracted three of the six items most relevant to attitudes regarding public behaviour for use as single-item measures.

3 These items are examined separately rather than combined because they demonstrate low reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.502$).
in one’s household provides guardianship against victimization, the analyses include a binary measure reflecting whether the respondent lives alone.

Socioeconomic status is measured using three separate items. The first is respondent’s income. Respondents were asked to choose the category within which their income fell. There were 15 categories, ranging from less than $5,000 to more than $200,000. The second item is the respondent’s highest level of formal education, which ranges from ‘eighth grade or less’ to ‘graduate or professional school’. Third, respondent’s current employment is measured as the number of hours worked per week.

Previous research shows an increased risk of victimization for individuals who are involved with crime or delinquency (e.g. Gottfredson 1984; Sampson and Lauritsen 1990). The dataset used in this study does not contain a true measure of offending; however, we use one survey question as a proxy for offending. Respondents were asked how much, on a four-point scale from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’, they agreed that they had never committed a crime for which they could be arrested. This variable was recoded as a binary measure, with ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ coded as 0 and ‘disagree’ and ‘strongly disagree’ coded as 1, to indicate whether or not the respondent had previously committed a crime.

Neighbourhood-level variables

Neighbourhood context is measured with five variables. First, a measure of neighbourhood street culture (Cronbach’s α = 0.864) is included as the key community-level theoretical construct. Survey participants were asked to what extent their neighbours would agree with the following six statements regarding the importance of violence for gaining respect in their community:

1. In this neighbourhood, for young people to gain respect among their peers, they sometimes have to be willing to fight.
2. In this neighbourhood, if a loved one is disrespected, people retaliate even if it means resorting to violence.
3. In this neighbourhood, young men who own guns are often looked up to and respected.
4. In this neighbourhood, residents believe that sometimes you have to resort to crime to get ahead.
5. In this neighbourhood, parents teach their kids to fight back if they are insulted or threatened.
6. In this neighbourhood, young men often project a tough or violent image to avoid being threatened with violence.

These questions were measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. Individual responses to these six items were summed at the individual level and then averaged within census tracts.

Next, in line with previous work on both crime and victimization, community-level structural correlates of social disorganization were included in our analysis (Shaw and McKay 1942; Sampson and Wooldredge 1987; Smith and Jarjoura 1989; Kennedy and Forde 1990; Sampson and Lauritsen 1990; Miethe and McDowall 1993; Lee 2000).
Individual survey responses were aggregated to the census tract level in order to estimate socioeconomic characteristics that are typical of disadvantaged communities: average income, racial heterogeneity and residential instability. First, we include the average income of respondents within each census tract, which was measured by aggregating the individual responses regarding household income. Second, racial heterogeneity (see Blau 1977) was created by subtracting from one the sum of the squared proportions of respondents from each racial group per census tract \((1 - \sum \hat{p}_i^2)\). Third, respondents were asked how many times they had moved in the five years prior to taking the survey; these responses were averaged within census tracts to estimate neighbourhood-level residential instability.

Finally, high-density mixed land often generates opportunities for crime, as offenders can easily access targets at such locations (e.g. Greenberg et al. 1982; Roncek and Lobosco 1983; Brantingham and Brantingham 1993; 1995; Wilcox et al. 2004). Therefore, the final neighbourhood characteristic included in the analysis is an additive scale indicating the presence of non-residential, commercial land within a neighbourhood (Cronbach’s \(\alpha = 0.701\)). Respondents were asked about the presence of the following structures within three blocks of their homes: hotels or motels, bars or restaurants and shopping malls. These individual items were aggregated to the census tract level and then summed to create an overall measure representing the presence of busy places within each neighbourhood. A measure of neighbourhood collective efficacy was considered; however, it was excluded from the analysis due to high correlation with neighbourhood street culture \((r = -0.711)\).

**Analytic strategy**

The proposed models of victimization are estimated using multilevel modelling. Multilevel modelling is used because (1) it accounts for non-random distribution of individuals within neighbourhoods by adjusting the standard errors appropriately, (2) it allows for characteristics of individuals and neighbourhoods to be entered as predictors simultaneously, and (3) it allows for the exploration of cross-level interactions (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). The theoretical models of victimization are estimated in HLM 7.0 using multilevel Poisson regression, which is appropriate for modelling count data such as measures of the number of victimization incidents. The outcome variables were skewed, requiring the correction for overdispersion available in Poisson-based models. Checks
for multicollinearity were conducted and no problems were found. The predictors were grand-mean centred in all models in order to avoid confounding contextual and compositional effects (Britt 2000; Raudenbush and Bryk 2002).

Results

In Model 1, the main effects of the street code and routine activities are examined, net of controls. The results can be seen in the first column of Table 2. In line with previous research, two of the three street values were positively related to assault victimization: the belief that one should not back down after being insulted or threatened \((b = 0.633, p < 0.001)\) and the belief that it is important to have a tough reputation \((b = 0.518, p < 0.01)\). For each one-unit increase in the belief that it is wrong to back down after an insult, the estimated incidence rate of victimization increased by 88.3 per cent.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Hierarchical overdispersed Poisson models for assault victimization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient (SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-1.043 (1.558)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t back down</td>
<td>0.633 (0.157)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confrontations okay</td>
<td>0.008 (0.197)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tough reputation</td>
<td>0.518 (0.152)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days out</td>
<td>0.073 (0.057)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nights out</td>
<td>0.279 (0.047)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time at bars or clubs</td>
<td>-0.007 (0.139)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.039 (0.010)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.730 (0.193)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>-0.100 (0.365)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>-0.777 (0.378)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>-0.900 (0.419)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-0.483 (0.387)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives alone</td>
<td>-0.107 (0.282)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-0.037 (0.050)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.205 (0.100)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week</td>
<td>-0.016 (0.009)†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood street culture</td>
<td>0.109 (0.062)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average income</td>
<td>-0.222 (0.172)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential instability</td>
<td>-0.284 (0.251)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial heterogeneity</td>
<td>-0.317 (0.764)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy places</td>
<td>0.247 (0.167)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Random effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variance component (SD)</th>
<th>(\chi^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>0.066 (0.258)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 error</td>
<td>2.735 (1.654)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results are based on 2,734 individuals within 123 census tracts.

\(p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001; †p < 0.10.\)

8 According to Allison (1999), multicollinearity may be problematic when tolerance is lower than 0.40 and/or variance inflation factor (VIF) is higher than 2.5. Here, the lowest value of tolerance was 0.408 and the highest VIF was 2.453.

9 This was obtained by subtracting the odds ratio from 1 and multiplying by 100.
Similarly, a one-unit increase in the belief that one must have a tough reputation increased the estimated incidence rate of victimization by a factor of about two-thirds. Additionally, one public activity—spending evenings away from home—had a significant, positive effect on assault victimization ($b = 0.279$, $p < 0.001$). For each additional night spent away from home, the estimated incidence rate of victimization increased by a factor of one-third.

Five of the individual-level variables were significantly related to assault victimization. Age ($b = -0.039$, $p < 0.001$) and education ($b = -0.205$, $p < 0.05$) were associated with lower risk of assault victimization. Females were less likely than males to experience assault ($b = -0.730$, $p < 0.001$). Asians ($b = -0.777$, $p < 0.05$) and Hispanics ($b = -3.900$, $p < 0.05$) were less likely to be victimized than were Whites.

The interactions between the street code and activities are presented in Table 3. To ease presentation of the results from the nine models in which interaction terms were estimated, we do not report the level 1 and level 2 fixed effects, as no substantive changes in such effects existed from those reported in Table 2. The results show that there are six significant interactions between activities and the street code variables. The effect of the belief that it is important to have a tough reputation was positively moderated by all three types of public activities. Similarly, the effect of the belief that one should not back down after being insulted was positively moderated by spending days and nights away from home. These significant, positive interactions show that, in general, the street code’s positive relationship with victimization was particularly evident for those with more public lifestyles. Conversely, there is a significant and negative interaction between the belief that one should not back down and the time spent at bars, which indicates that this belief was associated with lower risk of victimization among those who spent more time at bars or clubs.

Figures 1 and 2 provide illustrations of these moderating effects. As can be seen in the figures, belief in the street code generally led to more incidents of assault for those who engaged in public activities more frequently, with one exception regarding time spent at bars or clubs. Conversely, for those with less public lifestyles, street values either did not have an effect on assault victimization or had a slight protective effect. The main effects of the street values are generally still significant when accounting for the moderation by public activities; this may indicate that the increase in target antagonism caused by these beliefs outweighs their reductions in target vulnerability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Interactions between street values and routine activities in estimating assault</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Days out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient (SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t back down</td>
<td>0.172 (0.045)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confrontations okay</td>
<td>-0.023 (0.090)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tough reputation</td>
<td>0.140 (0.057)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results are based on 2,734 individuals within 123 census tracts. IRR, incidence rate ratio.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

9 The effects of ‘don’t back down’ and ‘tough reputation’ are no longer significant when the interactions with time spent at bars are included in the models.
Next, cross-level interactions were estimated to determine whether the interrelationships between the street code and routine activities were affected by community context.\footnote{Before estimating cross-level interactions, a random coefficients model was tested in which the slopes for street values, activities and the interaction terms were allowed to vary across census tracts while holding the slopes for the other predictors fixed (e.g. Wilcox Rountree et al. 1994; Stewart and Simons 2010). The results (not presented here) showed that the product terms significantly varied across census tracts when the components (the street code variables and activities) were fixed. Therefore, in the next stage of the analysis, the components of the product term were fixed and the product terms were allowed to vary randomly.} The results (see Table 4) show two positive interactions between neighborhood context, activities and the street code. Specifically, the strength of neighborhood street cultures moderated the interaction between the belief that one should not back down and two indicators of lifestyle: spending nights away from home ($b = 0.144$, $p < 0.001$) and spending days away from home ($b = 0.109$, $p < 0.001$). These positive interactions indicate that the combination of strongly-held street values and public lifestyles was more likely to result in increased risk of assault victimization in communities with a widespread street culture than in communities where mainstream values are more dominant.
As discussed above, the empirical evidence regarding the effect of the code of the street on victimization has not completely supported Anderson’s observations. In particular, Anderson suggests that individuals perceive the code as a necessary means of self-protection, and studies have shown that those who adopt the code believe this to be true (Jacobs 2004; Jacobs and Wright 2006; Garot 2007; Brookman et al. 2011). However, many studies explicitly measuring the effect of street values on victimization have found that those who adopt the code are more likely to become victims of violent crime (Stewart et al. 2006; Berg et al. 2012; Schreck et al. 2012, but see Baron et al. 2001). Findings such as these have been interpreted as being at odds with Anderson’s ideas.

This study attempted to put a different spin on such ‘conflicting’ findings by introducing lifestyle and neighbourhood context as a way to better understand the nature of the relationship between the street code and victimization—an approach that is more consistent with the extensive literature citing the overlap between offending and victimization (Wolfgang 1958; Hindelang et al. 1978; Sampson and Lauritsen 1990; Schreck et al. 2008). According to Anderson, the code of the street provides information on how one should behave in public, especially in interactions with others. We hypothesized that an increased risk of victimization would be more pronounced with greater levels of public activity due to the likelihood that those who adhere to the street code behave in ways that would be perceived by others as disrespectful, provoking violent responses from other code-followers (see Jacobs and Wright 2006). This hypothesis was partially supported. The effects of two of the street values—the belief that one should not back down after being insulted and the belief that it is important to have a tough reputation—varied by time spent in public. Specifically, the general pattern showed that for those with more public lifestyles, the effect of the code was positive, with stronger belief in the code leading to more incidents of violence. For those who less frequently engaged in activities away from home, belief in the street code did not have a strong relationship with assault. However, the moderating effects of time spent
at bars were inconsistent; spending more time at bars made one street value protective, while it increased the risk of victimization for adherents of another type of street value. This suggests that the street code’s relationship with victimization may be more nuanced than previous literature suggests.

The finding that public activities moderate the influence of the street code on victimization could help to explain why studies examining the relationship between adoption of the street code and victimization find a positive effect of the street code. Because previous studies have not considered the way that lifestyle could influence the effect of the code on victimization, they have not fully accounted for the complexities of the relationship between the street code and victimization. The hypothesis that the code provides protection by creating a perception of invulnerability may be accurate, but this may be contingent upon the situation or location in which one displays his street persona. For example, it is possible that bars and clubs serve as important staging areas where code-followers may be more likely to spread an invulnerable image and thereby reduce their risk of victimization than are code-followers who spend time in other public areas. At the same time, the increased criminal opportunity due to public activities, especially in ‘unowned’ public spaces with few place managers or guardians, is compounded by adherence to the street code. Therefore, while a potential target’s general level of attractiveness may be reduced by adherence to the code, his adoption of street values and its effect on his behaviour may contribute to crime events while engaged in public activities. More work is needed to determine how the relationship between the street code and victimization varies by specific activities and settings.

The results also suggest a possible extension of lifestyle-routine activities theory. Traditionally, lifestyle and activities have been examined in terms of how they create opportunity for victimization by increasing exposure and proximity to offenders. Originally, the theory suggested that those who spend time engaging in public leisure activities are at greater risk of victimization. Our results add to a growing body of evidence suggesting that public activities may not uniformly increase victimization, as original statements of the theory implied. Importantly, the effect of public lifestyle observed here was not as substantial for those with low levels of belief in the street code. We speculate that, when in public, those who do not hold beliefs related to the street code are likely to be located in prosocial areas and/or in the company of prosocial peers, thereby increasing guardianship against assault. In contrast, a significant, positive effect of public activities was only observed when in conjunction with other dimensions of opportunity—average or high levels of adherence to the code of the street, specifically. We interpret this conditional effect as being due to the fact that those with stronger adherence to the code might provide more provocation when in public.

Thus, rather than simply increasing risk by providing opportunity for criminal victimization, lifestyle appears to interact with other factors in affecting victimization. Such findings extend other research in the routine activities tradition. For example, previous work has shown that the effects of delinquent lifestyle, alcohol use and night activity on victimization risk interact with gender; most of such work suggests that these activities are more strongly related to victimization for males due to gender differences in behaviour while engaging in such activities (see, e.g. Miethe et al. 1987; Felson 1997; Felson and Burchfield 2004; Felson et al. 2013; but see Wilcox et al. 2009). The conditional nature of routine activities could be further explored with other characteristics.
known to be related to victimization, and we contend that this is an important direction for the future development of lifestyle-routine activities theory.

In addition, it was expected that the street code and public lifestyles would integrate to affect victimization more strongly in communities in which the code of the street is pervasive. This hypothesis was partially supported—there were significant or near-significant interactions between two of the individual-level street values, activities and neighbourhood levels of street culture. The positive interaction between the street code and activities was stronger among individuals living in communities with strong criminogenic subcultures. Compared to those living in neighbourhoods characterized by more traditional cultures, residents of neighbourhoods with strong street codes were more likely to be at increased risk of assault victimization if they both adhered strongly to the street code and led public lifestyles. This provides further evidence of the complexity of the relationship between the adoption of street values and victimization.

Policy implications

The results of this study have important implications for policy. First, because belief in the street code is related to increased risk of victimization, methods that reduce the reliance on the code—such as improving structural conditions and promoting the legitimacy of the police—are likely to reduce crime and victimization, especially when focused on communities with violent subcultures (see Stewart et al. 2008).

Second, the results of this analysis suggest that activity patterns promote certain types of conflict resolution, increasing the risk of victimization (see also Kennedy and Forde 1990). To reduce victimization that arises due to the reliance on the street code, other means of conflict resolution should be promoted, especially in communities with violent subcultures. A review of research shows that conflict resolution programs in schools generally result in the use of more constructive methods of dealing with conflict (Johnson and Johnson 1996). Such programs could be adapted for use in managing conflicts in neighbourhood settings.

Third, previous research has found that, when disputes arise in public areas, mediation by third parties may reduce the severity of the resulting violent incident (e.g. Felson and Steadman 1983; Ganpat et al. 2013). Therefore, bystander intervention training may be a practical method of reducing victimization that arises from interpersonal conflicts. Currently used to reduce gender violence and sexual assault, bystander intervention training promotes community prevention by educating community members in identifying conflicts that will lead to violence and in appropriate ways to intervene before or during an assault (Johnson and Johnson 1996; Banyard et al. 2004).

Finally, another strategy that may be relevant given these findings is problem-oriented policing, in which the police identify particular crime or disorder problems that face the community and then develop strategies for addressing those problems (Goldstein 1979; Eck and Spelman 1987). Because of the importance of public lifestyles for victimization, both in creating opportunity and moderating the effect of the street code, an emphasis on public areas may decrease crime events that arise due to the street code. This would be especially helpful if police identified and focused on public settings in disadvantaged areas that are likely to serve as staging areas.
Limitations and suggestions for future research

While the findings provide a meaningful contribution to the victimization literature, there are limitations of the study that must be acknowledged. First, the results indicate that the street code is associated with victimization to a greater degree for those with public lifestyles. However, because the data are cross-sectional, it is not possible to determine causality, as experiences with victimization could influence adherence to the code of the street as well as lifestyles and routine activities. Still, our findings are consistent with previous longitudinal research on the relationship between the street code and victimization, which supports the theory that adoption of the code of the street increases risk of later violent victimization (e.g. Stewart et al. 2006; Berg et al. 2012; Schreck et al. 2012). To better determine whether the relationship between the street code and victimization varies by lifestyle, future research on this topic should use longitudinal data.

A second limitation is that the sample may have limited generalizability, given the age of the data (the survey was collected over ten years ago) and that the respondents were generally wealthier and better educated than the general population in Seattle. Relatedly, there are issues with the community-level variables used. Community characteristics were estimated by aggregating individual survey responses; however, it is unknown how well the respondents represent their neighbourhood contexts. This may be especially problematic in terms of measuring neighbourhood disadvantage, as the sample overall was over-representative of individuals with higher income and education. It is possible that these problems could explain the lack of significant findings at the neighbourhood level.

Another possible limitation is that the sample used in the current study is not typical for research on the code of the street. Anderson’s work was based on observations of predominantly African American youth in disadvantaged communities, and previous studies of the street code and victimization have examined samples drawn from these populations. Further, as discussed above, Seattle residents may be less likely than those in other cities to adhere strongly to values related to the street code. While our significant results indicate that values like those described by Anderson are held by members of other groups and that these values impact victimization in ways predicted by Anderson, it is possible that the results of the current study under- or overestimate the effects of the street code and activities on victimization. Future research can address this issue by examining the effects across subgroups, such as age, gender, race or neighbourhood, or by replicating the study in other locations.

Another issue is that the outcome variable used here is not limited to victimization that occurred in the respondent’s neighbourhood. Because of this, it is assumed in the analyses that street values may be carried to settings outside one’s residential community, affecting victimization in public settings in other areas as well. However, there is debate regarding the extent to which street values are internalized, with some scholars arguing that such beliefs are situationally adopted in order to navigate dangerous conditions within a community (Sampson and Wilson 1995; Sampson and Jeglum-Bartusch 1998; Sampson and Bean 2006). The effect of a situationally adopted code on victimization could also transfer across neighbourhood boundaries, as dangerous public encounters are unlikely to be confined to one particular community. In fact, communities that are spatially proximal to one another are likely to offer similar situations (e.g. see Morenoff...
Ultimately, we cannot determine where victimizations measured in this study actually occurred and we cannot discern whether one’s adoption of a street code is internalized or situational in nature. Nonetheless, the fact that the street code was significantly related to assault victimization in the current study suggests that individuals who adopt the street code may enact the street code in a multitude of settings that extend beyond the neighbourhood of residence.

While our study cannot determine whether one adopts a street code situationally, the effect of adopting the code on victimization appears situational—the effect appears contingent on levels of public activity and neighbourhood street culture. These findings contradict recent qualitative work by Lindegaard et al. (2013), which found that victimization risk associated with street culture varied according to how the culture was enacted; those who engaged in code-switching in order to fit in with the local culture were most insulated from victimization. Our results suggest the opposite—that enacting the street code while in public is most dangerous for those who live in areas where the street code is predominant. More work is needed to unpack this inconsistency in the literature.

Finally, the dataset analyzed for the current study only included three items capturing routine activities, and only one (nights per week at bars/clubs) was specific as to the type of activity engaged in while away from home. A future direction for research on the interaction between lifestyle and the street code is to examine more specific measures of activities, as well as the settings in which these activities take place. Previous research has demonstrated the importance of specifying types and locations of activities (see Mustaine and Tewksbury 1998; Henson et al. 2010; Hoeben and Weerman 2014). These studies show that simply engaging in activities outside one’s home does not necessarily increase the risk of victimization or offending. Future research should analyze whether certain types of activities differentially moderate the effect of the street code. Similarly, utilizing neighbourhood-specific activities would be beneficial, as it may provide further insight on the interrelationships between the street code, activities and neighbourhood context.

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References


STREET CODES AND ROUTINE ACTIVITIES


