STREET CULTURE, YOUTH VIOLENCE, AND MECHANISMS OF CHANGE

Eric A. Stewart
Florida State University
College of Criminology & Criminal Justice
**RATIONALE**

- Youth violence is a pressing public concern.
- Early offending can have adverse consequences for future prosocial outcomes.
- Understanding the causes of youth violence is paramount.
THE STREET CODE

The street code is a powerful, informal set of rules that regulate the use of violence, especially among the young.

The street code offers an explanation for youth violence in disadvantaged and high crime neighborhoods.
CONDITIONS THAT PRODUCE THE STREET CODE
Conditions that Produce the Street Code

Intense neighborhood disadvantage and disorganization
Conditions that Produce the Street Code

Lack of trust and faith in the criminal justice system
Conditions that Produce the Street Code

The retreat of protective institutions → consequences?

“A man goes up for himself, takes up for himself, and calls on no one else to fight his battles” (Anderson, 1999: 307)
THE STREET CODE EMPHASIZES...
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- “... that one must maintain the respect of others through a violent and tough identity, and a willingness to exact retribution in the event of disrespect, or risk being “rolled on” or physically assaulted” (Anderson, 1999:73)

- “...that an important part of the code is not to allow others to chump you, to let them know that you are ‘about serious business’ and not to be trifled with (Anderson, 1999:130)

- “...that those who fail to adopt the street code may be more vulnerable, resulting in diminished respect and, consequently, a higher level of victimization.”
The Street Code emphasizes...

- Respect
- Physical Violence
- Retribution/Deterrence
- Toughness
Family and Community Health Study (FACHS): A multi-site investigation of neighborhood effects on adolescent development

One of the largest ongoing studies of African American families in the nation.

Wave 1 1997

46% MALES

867 African American Adolescents
HOW DOES THE STREET CODE IMPACT YOUTH VIOLENCE?
HOW DOES THE STREET CODE IMPACT YOUTH VIOLENCE?

- Increased risk to personal safety, especially for young men
- Increased confrontation between individuals following the street code
- Increased attention given to gaining respect (or props)
VOICES FROM THE STREETS:

How are you viewed?
Voices from the Street

Respondents were asked how they are viewed in their neighborhood:

“Let me tell you something, you got all these dudes running round like they hard, but they ain’t nothing. How you going to be gangster and get respect if you ain’t done time or been shot? I been shot, done a bid and used that tool. They see me.” (Rick, age 17)
Voices from the Street

Respondents were asked how they are viewed in their neighborhood:

“To be honest with you, I used to do work [violence] to these guys out here. My rep and props ring out all over the streets. Anybody that run up on me better be ready cause I got that heater. They respect me around this here.” (John, age 17)
Voices from the Street

Respondents were asked how they are viewed in their neighborhood:

“I used to be in school with a lot of these folks in the neighborhood before I got kicked out in the 9th grade. I got caught up in a beef at school and kicked this dude’s butt in the hall for tryin’ me. I got respect by kicking his butt in front of everybody. I’m respected round these parts.” (Freddy, age 17)
VOICES FROM THE STREETS:

Your view of the police
Voices from the Street

Respondents were asked how they viewed police in their neighborhood:

“It’s hard to trust the law. I always get roughed up by them and dissed. I have to handle my business with no police. They is the one of the reasons violence is so high and I keep my gun for protection.” (Nate, age 15)
Voices from the Street

Respondents were asked how they viewed police in their neighborhood:

“The police will react faster when somebody from a white neighborhood call and say a crime happening and treat them with more respect. In my neighborhood, you call the police and say a crime happening they take their time and will jam the caller up. You got to handle your business yourself.” (Chris, age 16)
Voices from the Street

Respondents were asked how they viewed police in their neighborhood:

“Straight up, I want the police in our hood. I just don’t want the police constantly treating me and my boys like we criminals. None of us breaking the law but they keep treating us like we do. This makes many people not trusting of them. With no trust in the police, everybody handling they own business and we have more crime.” (Bernard, age 17)
STREET CODE AND PROBLEMATIC OUTCOMES
Threatened to physically hurt another person in the past 12 months
VIOLENCE & STREET CODE

Got into a physical fight in the past 12 months

- High Street Code: 54%
- Low Street Code: 15%
Got into a physical fight where they used a weapon (knife, gun, etc.) in the past 12 months

- High Street Code: 32%
- Low Street Code: 4%
Carrying a weapon for protection in the past 12 months
Shooting at someone with a gun

High Street Code: 5%
Low Street Code: 0%
VIOLENCE & STREET CODE

Victim of violence in past 12 months

High Street Code: 62%
Low Street Code: 11%
STREET CODE AND PROBLEMATIC OFFICIAL OUTCOMES
SUSPENSION & STREET CODE

School Suspension

High Street Code: 59%
Low Street Code: 11%
POLICE CONTACT & STREET CODE

Arrest

High Street Code: 79%
Low Street Code: 35%
COURT CONTACT & STREET CODE

Conviction

High Street Code: 42%
Low Street Code: 17%
PREDICTING SUCCESS AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS
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• Importance of Warmth and Control:
  • Parenting qualities that predict good youth outcomes ("Authoritative Parenting")
    • High involvement and warmth
    • Close monitoring and limit setting

• Neighborhood qualities that predict good youth outcomes ("Collective Efficacy")
  • Neighbors know and help each other
  • Neighbors supervise each others’ children
  • Neighbors work together to solve neighborhood problems
Synergy occurs between families and the community:

- The beneficial effects of high-quality parenting are STRONGER in neighborhoods high on collective efficacy (cohesion and mutual supervision of youth).
Conclusion

The street code is associated with increased levels of youth violence.

Youth who scored high on street code beliefs were at increased risk for violent offending and victimization, as well as official punishments.
Thank You!