

Chapter 3

Violence-Related Norms and the “Code of the Street”



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Youth violence remains an important topic in urban sociology and sociologists seek explanation to investigate the link between space and action. Furthermore, youth violence is associated with disorganized communities and risky neighborhoods as well as to individual socio-demographic factors. However, the scope of this chapter is on the interplay between individual norms and influences of risky neighborhoods. Therefore, literature about violence-related norms and the code of the street, as a specific concept, which takes the social and spatial environment into account, is reviewed. The goal is to formulate empirical markers of the code of the street, for use in the empirical section of the study.

3.1 Violence and Norms: An Overview

Before discussing the basic conceptual assumption of violence-related norms, three important terms need a definition.¹

1. *Violence* is defined as the “exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse” (Merriam-Webster 2018). The World Health Organization (2016) provides a comprehensive definition of violence: “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.”
2. *Youth* is defined as “the period between childhood and adulthood” (Oxford Dictionary 2018). However, the term youth is used variably in various context. In sociology, youth is defined as a social construct instead of a biological category (Kehily 2007: 03). The UN defines youth as individuals whose age range between

¹The concept, “norms”, has been defined in Chap. 2.

15 and 24 years old for statistical consistency across the regions. However, for sample access and comparative analysis, the age group 16–21 years old is the focus of this study.

3. When youth perpetrate acts of violence against victims this is called *youth violence*. This kind of violence can be in the form of physical injury, damage of property, use of force to hurt people physically or their property, vandalism, emotional blackmailing, sexual offences, mental torture, provocation, gazing, and bullying (World Health Organization 2016). For this study, violence committed in the age group 16–21 in form of physical abuse, cursing, sexual offences, vandalism, disrespect, and humiliation of nonviolent people and is referred to as youth violence. Any retaliation in response to the inflicted violence that cannot justify a claim of self-defense is also considered as an act of violence for this study.

As already stated, the understanding of youth violence requires a neighborhood and individual-level explanation. For instance, youth violence can be explained by analyzing neighborhood processes that influence personal norms during adolescence. On an individual level, young people have a various motive for engaging in violent behavior, including gaining respect and honor. Thus, we find a broad range of explanations for youth violence in the psychological as well as in the criminological literature. Through these lenses, we focus on the literature regarding violence-related norms. These norms are rules that govern one’s behavior within a social situation (Mahalik et al. 2003: 03) and include the endorsement of a normative belief in acceptance of antisocial behavior that includes aggression and violence. Anderson (1999) illustrates the contextual effect of neighborhood-level street culture—the *code of the street*—in governing interpersonal interaction. Various accounts explain the reciprocity of acceptance of violence-related norms among young males, including social ecology (Lilleston et al. 2017), masculinity (Mahalik et al. 2003), playing aggressive games (Krahé and Möller 2004), and peer group association (Seddig 2014).

Additionally, the role of family is considered paramount to understand why adolescents are prominent participants in violent situations. The family provides emotional support and parental upbringing plays a major role in behavior development. Family adversities, including poverty, family stress, disorganization, and parental conflict are associated with antisocial behavior and violence (Labella and Masten 2018). Through an ethnographic study of inner-city neighborhoods of New York City, Dunlap et al. (2009) revealed that children described physical assault from parents, particularly from their mothers, as an “expression of love” and thus as a deserved punishment. Dunlap et al. (2009) proposed that these daily experiences and violent socialization prepared the children to operate successfully in the street culture.

Anderson (1999) identified two types of families—*decent* and *street*—within the impoverished neighborhood. *Decent families* instill middle-class values and counteract the influence of street code. By contrast, children of *street families* are cultured with street etiquette to survive on the streets. Moreover, the presence of role models mediates street culture. Anderson (1999: 180) argued that the male role model is

a primary source of social control in risky neighborhoods. Regarding the effect of neighborhood culture to individual norm, Stewart and Simons (2010) suggested that the presence of traditional role models mediates neighborhood structural effects on adolescent violence. Similarly, Nowacki (2012) examined the influence of family attachment and adoption of the street code among youth by using longitudinal data of the National Youth Survey. The result showed that family attachment reduces the acceptance of street code for both boys and girls. However, Drummond et al. (2011) found inconsistency between positive family characteristics and acceptance or rejection of street culture. They articulated that *code-switching* can be an explanation for this inconsistency. At this point, Lindegaard and Zimmermann (2017) show, using the example of townships in Cape Town, that the ability of code-switching has a protective effect on male juveniles.

Another component of youth violence in risky neighborhoods is substance abuse. Substance abuse is a symbol of the extreme dynamics of social marginalization and alienation in the inner city and in the shaping of everyday life on the street (Bourgois 2003: 2). Also, substance and alcohol use is considered an important part of contemporary street culture. Bourgois (2003) argues that youths from impoverished neighborhoods of the inner-city face “cultural assault” outside their neighborhoods. In response to it, young people search for personal dignity and respect in the street culture of inner-city neighborhoods, where alcohol and drug abuse is a major part of street culture. Consequently, the adoption of street culture leads them to self-destruction (Bourgois 2003). Moreover, studies have illustrated the drug abuse and violence nexus. Goldstein’s (1985) theoretical framework explains the relationship between drugs and violence in three ways: the psychopharmacological, the economically compulsive, and the systemic. Psychopharmacological violence is a violent behavior by the substance user as a result of short- or long-term ingestion. The drugs alter the consciousness and behavior of drug abuser and he or she behaves differently. In psychopharmacological violence, the drug user can be predator and victim of violence at the same time. Economic compulsion violence involves violence committed by drug user for monetary purposes to fund their drug addiction. Generally, drug abusers are not motivated to act violently, however, social context and the victim’s behavior leads to violence and crime.

Violence is an inherent part of the illegal drug economy including competitive and systemic violence. The dispute over territory between drug dealers, punishment for failing to pay for drugs and homicides of rivals are examples of competitive and systemic violence, respectively (Sandberg and Pedersen 2011: 121–135; Reuter 2009). In order to understand drug-related violence, Copes et al. (2015) analyzed the narratives of 30 incarcerated carjackers in Norway. By following Goldstein’s tripartite framework, the participants articulated that violence is commonplace in drug-prone areas and the use of violence is justified. The storylines of offenders followed the Goldstein tripartite framework to understand the link between drugs use and violence. The narrative “*it wasn’t the real me*” showed the empirical support of psychopharmacological violence when drugs become a substantial justification for the use of violence. Similarly, “*expected violence in drug areas*” is evidence of systemic violence, where the violence is an integral part of drug-prone areas and

it is considered instrumental in sustaining these areas. Other storylines were about “*addicts are deserving victims*”, which gave perpetrators the excuse to use violence and blame the victim for drug-related violence.

In “Code of the Street”, Anderson (1999: 55) argued that the drug trade and culture is everywhere in impoverished inner-city neighborhoods and abandoned buildings become hotspots for “crack” users. This is the environment in which children are socialized and become engaged in the drug trade (Anderson 1999: 199). Also, youths involved in the drug trade often relate themselves to the ideology glorified in rap music, which instigates the embrace of an oppositional culture and incites the use of violence. Applying the *code of the street* to understand criminal behavior, including gun carrying and drug trafficking, Allen and Lo (2012) found that the adoption of code-based beliefs is a significant predictor of drug trafficking and gun carrying behavior among their sample of high school students and correctional inmates in the age group 15–19 years old. In sum, the empirical review indicates that the street code and drugs nexus is complex. Research showed that street-oriented youth engaged in the drugs market to maintain their glorious lifestyle. Thus, drug abuse is a way of resistance to mainstream culture and find dignity in street culture and drugs abuse (Bourgois 2003).

In order to understand the micro–macro-link of violent behavior, the code of the street provides a multilevel explanation thereof. At the individual level, Anderson categorized individuals and families into “decent” and “street” when assessing adherence to the street code. According to this thesis, individuals who internalize the code behave violently. However, at neighborhood level, socio-structural disadvantages lead to the street code, which operates as an emergent sociocultural property of the neighborhood collective that shapes the residents’ behavior in certain urban spaces regardless of the individual’s norms (Bruinsma and Johnson 2018: 48). For instance, decent individuals who do not embrace the street code, still situationally use the street code for survival in conflict situations. Thus, the code of the street explains both accounts of individual- and neighborhood-level spatial variations of violence in various contexts. In the current study, the code of the street as a theoretical framework is chosen to understand spatial patterns of violence-related norms and behavior in risky neighborhoods in a cross-cultural comparison. Hereafter, the code of the street is described in greater detail and empirical results are discussed, as well as empirical implications.

3.2 Code of the Street

Twenty years ago, in 1999, Anderson’s groundbreaking book, *Code of the Street* was published. It was based on the intensive ethnographic study of an African American neighborhood in Philadelphia in the 1990s. The core of the idea is that male juveniles, particularly, develop a specific set of norms to cope with a threatening environment. In this regard, it brings together space or risky neighborhoods with violence-related

norms and can serve as a proper framework for the cross-cultural analysis of youth violence, by putting it into spaces.

The code of the street is thought to be an old human rule (Anderson 1999: 84). Thus, even if it is developed and tested mainly in the US context, it is treated as a general theoretical approach that explains youth violence independent of geographical location. However, there are also clear hints in the seminal work of Anderson that the code is a reaction within a specific context, like during an uprising and in spatially concentrated drug markets, in periods of deindustrialization (Anderson 1999: 28–29) and in contexts of racial discrimination (Anderson 1999: 88). Furthermore, it is more a description of cultural practices on the street as an explicit theory (Sandberg and Pedersen 2011: 45).

Many studies cite, criticize, or use the code as an analytical framework. It is not our intention to contribute to the discussion if the code exists, but to test if it works outside of the US. If it is true that it is a general rule, we should be able to find the code, as Anderson describes it, in different countries. Otherwise, we will find more culturally specific parts of a street code and that the original theoretical description of the street code, with its elements of the code of the street, is limited to specific contexts only.

3.2.1 *Basic Assumptions of the Code of the Street*

The code of street is a promising approach to understanding youth violence, particularly in risky neighborhoods. Anderson argues that the concentration of disadvantaged, social isolation and discrimination in an inner-city neighborhood spawns an oppositional culture specifically among youth whose norms and values are alienated from mainstream society. In this culture, the interpersonal relationship is governed by a street code as “a set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior, particularly violence. The rules prescribe both proper comportment and the proper way to respond if challenged. They regulate the use of violence and so supply a rationale allowing those inclined to aggression to precipitate violent encounters in an approved way” (Anderson 1999: 33). In inner-city neighborhoods, the street code is centered on respect. Subsequently the residents, particularly young men and women, campaign to gain respect that regulates public interaction, particularly through violence. Possession of respect safeguards persons against interpersonal violence on the street. Moreover, the lack of trust in police and other state institutions and prolonged deprivation lead to the emergence of *street justice* as a component of the code of the street. Moreover, it emanates from *people’s law*, where personal safety becomes the individual’s responsibility (Anderson 1999: 16). The street code prescribes a certain and prompt “payback” as a retaliation for assault and disrespect.

Anderson argues that violence and street codes are place-related phenomena and not limited to African American neighborhoods only (Stacer 2014). In inner-city neighborhoods, its conditions lead to the social division of residents as “street-oriented” or “decent” depending on the degree of alienation from mainstream values.

Individuals or families that embrace the street code and reinforce it are labeled as *street-oriented* (Anderson 1999: 66). They tend to react violently when faced with disrespect or threat. Many of them lack a proper education and are proud of their lifestyle, e.g. as a drug dealer. They tend to have little trust in police and institutional officials. Thus, they are alienated from middle-class value systems and uphold their violent reputation in public. Conversely, decent families have hope in the future and tend to accept middle-class values and inculcate their children with these values. Anderson (1999: 180) argues, that in inner-city neighborhoods, the traditional male role model is important and seen as the head of the family. Moreover, he exhibits a striking image on the street of inner-city neighborhoods and shows that he can protect his family. Young male members from decent families understand the dynamics of the code and have the ability to do code-switching.²

3.2.2 *The Code in the Socialization*

At an early age, children go through social shuffling processes on the street that challenge the early socialization at home. Subsequently, children from decent families become familiar with the code of the street and change their personal orientations toward street culture. Children observe the street dynamics and are fascinated with reputation, which is based on toughness and the willingness to fight (Anderson 1999: 135). In the inner-city poor neighborhood, the environment is conducive to learning, street code (Anderson 1999: 137). In these contexts, children learn to anticipate the situation and react accordingly. Sometimes it leads to conflicts. Later, adolescents feel insecure on the street and try to contract identities by abusive talk and outright aggression or violence. Similarly, the street-oriented home environment reinforces what they learn on the street. Older family members educate them about how to protect themselves in a different situation, even punishing children if they are unable to show aggression in public (Anderson 1999: 142).

Children, particularly without supervision, gain street knowledge at an early age. They are attracted to the street life and socialized in an arena where street-oriented and decent families' children shuffle between codes. Street knowledge becomes a source of power in the impoverished neighborhood. Moreover, youths believe that street knowledge safeguards them on the streets (Anderson 1999: 186). Subsequently, young people with street knowledge embrace the street code and it is believed that the most effective way of gaining respect to embody strength on the street is by taking another person's possessions. Even though the manifestation of the nerve to carry out the rules of the street code can be life-threatening, street-oriented youths accept this risk in lieu of gaining respect and prefer death to disrespect.

In poor inner-city neighborhoods, street culture diffuses across the boundaries of schools within neighborhoods. The school environment induces children to learn

²However, it is not clear how code-switching works and what the difference between code-switching and different social roles are.

street knowledge for personal safety (Anderson 1999: 139). Over time, children are apt to embrace the street code as it is in compliance with the school environment and prevails in most of their society. Consequently, schools become primary staging areas for children in neighborhoods. School environments equally affect children from decent and street-oriented families. However, family background, peer association, and role models are strongly associated (Anderson 1999: 142). These settings reinforce the beliefs of street-oriented children, whereas children from decent families learn to switch codes, which means that they follow the code of the street in one situation and are able to exhibit more decent manners in another. In the beginning, children adopt the street code for self-defensive in their schools and neighborhoods. Over time, adolescents internalize the street code and street peer association encourages involvement in street activities. Mingling in school makes encounters with street-oriented children inevitable. In some severe cases, street-oriented children may bring knives and guns to school to threaten people (Anderson 1999: 192). A competitive environment emerges where children campaign for respect. In impoverished neighborhood schools, children seek respect on the street rather than through academic achievement. Children are prepared to fight and defend themselves in any situation. Consequently, violence is always a possible way to resolve the matter. Moreover, material goods are important for self-esteem and young people show a particular lifestyle to maintain respect. In school, decent children also follow street-oriented lifestyle and it is difficult for teachers to differentiate among decent and street children. Hence the school teachers regard them all as street oriented (Anderson 1999: 193).

Generally, children and juveniles may acquire knowledge at an early age and internalize these values over time. In their campaign for respect, youth manifest and promote a self-image of manhood in staging areas by challenging others. The possession of material goods, including branded clothes and jewelry, endorses the respect and stimulates the disrespect process. In the campaign for respect, reputations are challenged again and again by others to gain more respect on the street. Material goods like branded goods and golden chains serve as symbols of status (Anderson 1999: 39). Young people own these material goods to impress others, despite the risk of being robbed by others. Furthermore, taking possession of a girlfriend or material goods is seen as winning pride or winning a trophy. In the case of a successful assault, the victim loses respect until he or she regains it by a forceful retaliation. In some cases, young men are protected because of street-corner groups and family members (Anderson 1999: 148).

Young people search for their identity in inner-city neighborhoods. At different stages of life, they try to follow different roles but some of these attempts do not work. In impoverished neighborhood schools, along with social isolation and alienation, teachers' and administrators' behavior shape the youth's identity. Decent children are more likely to switch the code as they realize that they will not get recognition from teachers and administration. In this aspect, mainstream society's values have a little regard for inner-city society and young people find the code of street more tempting as a way of life in the neighborhood. In this situation, there is a dilemma for the decent kids, as they find there is tension between what they learn at home and experience on

the street. Street-oriented peers become important agents of socialization for decent children. These children develop an ability to code-switch and behave at home and in public spaces differently, as it is important to gain street knowledge and adopt the code of the street for survival in the inner-city streets (Anderson 1999: 138).

3.2.3 *Manhood and the Code*

Although Anderson (1999) also mentioned that young women campaign for respect by winning love and giving birth to children. Nowacki (2012) showed that girls of inner-city neighborhood embrace the code of the street as eagerly as their male counterparts, the code of the street is largely an account of male young. However, Anderson (1999: 185) argues that the major concern of youth in inner-city neighborhoods is to gain respect and acquire manhood identity. Respect and manhood are two sides of the same coin, meaning that young people need to show self-confidence, physical strength, and the ability for a prompt violent response, if necessary (Anderson 1999: 186). If a male person is unable to reflect an identity of manhood in public, his and his family’s safety is at risk in the neighborhoods.

It is the staging area, a spatial character of inner-city neighborhoods, where the code of street sprouts and develops among youth. It is a place of self-representation that is mainly dominated by young male residents of neighborhoods, where they hang around. Anderson (1999) mentioned three different types of staging areas. It might be the local liquor store and bar and the staging area might be inside or outside on the corner of street. The second type is small business areas in neighborhoods and the third an event activity, including multiplex sports events and concerts. Even young people from other neighborhoods come to the staging area to present not only selfhood, but to present their neighborhoods. In staging areas, people incite each other and some respond to insults with violence. In the clash, challenging statements make situations worse; participants want to draw back. In this situation, when bystanders are not willing to break up the standoff, there is the risk of knife and gun use. Most of the time, the conflicts are not resolved on the spot. In most of the cases, the victim may wait to become better off and then retaliate for the disrespect of the past.

3.2.4 *The Code as Decency Dilemma*

“Decent” families or individuals face a dilemma. On the one hand, they try to follow middle-class values and on the other hand in public spaces they need to follow street values. This dilemma is shaped by macro-driven dynamics. As stated before, long-term unemployment and welfare dependency, discrimination and an underground economy demoralize the residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods. Anderson (1999: 2) described that deindustrialization left many unskilled and semiskilled workers unemployed. The presence of an underground drug economy provided them

with alternative financial resources. The drug economy ushered in the violence in the society and rules of the street became the operating normative system of the neighborhoods. In this environment, violence is used to gain respect and extends security on the street.

Most children encounter the streets and they prepare to keep themselves safe on the street at an early age, which is true for children from “decent” families as well. They recognize the situation and learn how to watch their back in society. Later, in school, adolescents start the intuitive process of gaining a sense of self and the self of the future (Anderson 1999: 195). In their attempt at self-discovery, they try out the different roles of the decent and the street to make sense of them. In schools, teachers’ inability to distinguish between decent and street children creates in adolescents’ a sense of lack of appreciation at school, thus alienating them from school. The result is that they invest in the street code and seek respect there. Older street peers become a role model for these adolescents who campaign for respect and want to see themselves as visibly different. In this situation, adolescents of decent families face a dilemma as they develop their identity beyond the family. Street life is antagonistic to family socialization and street life becomes more attractive and at that age their neighborhood peers are far more important to them. Consequently, decent youth engage in street life, dreaming of gaining self-worth and respect in the neighborhood.

3.2.5 *The Code and Violence*

Anderson (1999: 27) claims that inner-city neighborhoods have higher levels of crime, homicide, and violence. Moreover, these neighborhoods are characterized by widespread joblessness, welfare dependency and an underground economy. He depicted a vicious cycle of joblessness, drug use, and alienation. Owing to the longstanding discrimination and prejudice, young people fail to get jobs. In these distressed settings, drug dealing becomes an attractive and easy way to make a livelihood. Moreover, young people are fascinated by the glamorous lifestyle of drug dealers. In these destitute environments, drug trade becomes an everyday life activity. In the absence of a regular economy, people will then work in the underground economy, which emboldens the oppositional value system in that society.

Anderson’s thesis provides insight into the accounts of youth violence in inner-city poor neighborhoods, specifically those of Philadelphia in the USA. Anderson (1999: 69) hinted that the code may account for youth violence generally. Since then, some empirical studies attempted to elaborate on the concepts in different contexts. However, some writers contested Anderson’s thesis, for instance, Wacquant (2002) pointed out that there is ambiguity about the concept of a code of the street. He argued that it is unclear whether the code is value orientation or scripts of behavior and how it originates in the inner city. He also questioned the agency of individuals to embrace or oppose the street culture in the neighborhood. However, there is ongoing debate from both camps. But the question remains whether the concept of the code

is sufficient to explain youth violence in different settings.³ Garner (2018) criticizes, that the code of the street has its focus only on norms and that in the original work Anderson did not reflect his data in context of the history of the region where he did his research.

3.3 Empirical Findings of the Code of the Street in Further Studies

Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in investigating street life using Anderson’s framework. A body of scholarship attempted to gauge the validity and generalizability of the thesis. Nevertheless, most of the studies have been conducted in US contexts. Through a review of the literature, we clustered the studies into four themes: empirical, family, safety-related studies, and those which take identity into account.

Before diving in detail into a discussion about the code of the street, one structural finding of the studies, using the street code approach, needs to be mentioned. Anderson describes in different parts of his book the specific circumstances under which those codes occur and talks carefully about the elements he found in his data, on the one hand. On the other hand, in some parts of the book he claims generalizability of his concepts, without having the material at hand to do that, which limits this thesis to an assumption, which needs to be proved. Now the structural finding is that the street code concept was often used unquestioned or with just a minimum of reflection and more of a pragmatic concept worthy of study. For example, some studies are using the street code concept, only with neighborhood data, like the percentage of African American males, aged 35 years and older who are currently married, out of the total African American male population aged 15 years or older (Parker and Reckdenwald 2008: 718). However, the moral beliefs, which are the most important part of the theoretical approach, are not considered, neither these studies take into account in what kind of household children live. For example, it is often not discussed if it is a single-parent family where the child grows up, if the parents even take care of their children or if the child grows up with its grandparents, etc. All these factors need to be assumed but cannot be measured with data about the social structure of a neighborhood only. Furthermore, those indicators can differ significantly in their meaning between neighborhoods, cities or countries. Other scholars leave the street completely and try to find out if the code operates among 245 undergraduate students (Intravia et al. 2017: 964). We do agree that the street code concept as articulated by Anderson is a useful approach to explain violence, but, as Anderson claims himself, that the social structural and normative context matters for the code of the street, and its explorative power is embedded in the interplay of space, peers and individual beliefs and circumstances.

³See also Andersons (2002) response as well as Wilsons and Chaddha (2009) comment.

3.3.1 General Findings About the Code of the Street

Some scholars tried to assess the quantitative generalizability of the code to explain youth violence in various contexts. Using the National Youth Survey (NYS), a U.S. annual survey of youths aged 11–17 years, a panel survey of self-reported delinquent behavior conducted by the Behavioral Research Institute, Brezina et al. (2004), analyzed the data to assess the quantitative validity and generality of Anderson's thesis. They used three waves of data collection. The first wave in 1977 was conducted with a total of 1725 respondents and one parent per youth was also interviewed. In the second and third waves, 1655 and 1626 youths were interviewed. However, research focused only on a male sample of 918 respondents. They created a causal model that links social position, perceived opportunity and victimization, and parental supervision to violence-related beliefs and behavior among youth over time. Their results show that future violent behavior is associated with socioeconomic status and mediated by supervision. Moreover, association with aggressive peers and perceived victimization are subsequent factors in the development of violent behavior. The study extended its generalizability of findings of the street code in different neighborhoods. However, the study used secondary data and failed to give comprehensive explanations, including unclear associations regarding code-belief and race, and contextual explanations of code-related beliefs.

Brookman et al. (2011) examined the elements of street culture in the UK by interviewing convicted violent offenders. The study was designed to capture a variety of aspects of street violence by using purposive sampling in six prisons. The sample consisted of a diverse group of respondents, including 80 males and 30 females with an average age of 28 and 24 years, respectively. The findings suggested the major factors resulting in the adoption of violence in street culture, being: street justice for disrespect, as a safeguard against perceived retaliation, the confidence to revenge personal matters, and maintaining the street culture reputation through violence. In the study, the narratives of offenders supported the existence of the code of street in UK streets, as suggested by Anderson (1999) in Philadelphia, USA. The study broadens the generalizability of code of the street outside the USA and extends it to both males and females.

It has already been mentioned that children learn street culture or the code of the streets via their family and street socializations. In poor inner-city neighborhoods, adolescents learn from adults who live in their neighborhoods. In everyday interactions, adolescents shape their identity and follow a street script. Lauger's (2014) ethnographic observation in Indianapolis confirmed these processes of socialization. The study included 55 interviews, of which 54 were males ranging in age 13–45 years old. The sample included active gang members as well as former street gang members. The personal violent stories shape the script and transmit street culture among street gangs and street-oriented adolescents and that street culture establishes an expectation to behave violently in particular situations. The study provides accounts of the transformation of street violent culture among children and how it is internalized through street socialization. The study points out that socioeconomic disadvantaged

factors lead to violent behavior, which is one of the major arguments of Anderson’s thesis. He claims that structural socio-economics cultivate violent behavior among the youth. Furthermore, the study showed how a neighborhood-based normative structure, or its absence, leads to a violence-centered way of socialization of youth in these risky neighborhoods.

3.3.2 *Code and Family*

Stewart et al. (2006) attempted to explain violent behavior among African American youths in distressed neighborhoods relying on Anderson’s thesis. They combined both structural characteristics, like cultural family and racial discriminatory factors to comprehend the adaptation of violent behavior and the code of street. Therefore, they used data from 720 African American adolescents from 259 neighborhoods, collected from two waves of the Family and Community Health Study (FACHS). This is a multi-site investigation of neighborhood and family effects on health and development, in Georgia and Iowa. Findings suggest that neighborhood disadvantages contribute to the adoption of the code of the street, and family characteristic like street-orientation and racial discrimination are mediators for engaging in violent behavior among African American adolescents. The results followed Anderson’s hypothesis by upholding the code of street. In another study, Stewart and Simons (2006) analyzed the relationship between the adoption of the code of the street with neighborhood characteristics and family type by using data of a mixed gender sample of 780 adolescents (10–13-year-olds) from families from two waves of the FACHS from 1997 and 1999. Findings affirmed Anderson’s thesis that neighborhood disadvantage, discrimination, and violence are strongly associated with the adoption of the code of the street and family characteristics. Moreover, the adoption of the code of the street may support violent behavior among adolescents.

It is well explained by Anderson (1999) that children learn the code of the street at an early age. The patterns of development of street culture are mediated with exposure of structural disadvantages in neighborhood and peer. To test this thesis, Moule et al. (2015) employed FACHS data of 879 people by applying group-based trajectory modeling for analyzing developmental patterns and stability of individuals’ street code beliefs through emerging adulthood. The age of the target youth, which included 45% female in both the first wave of data collection (1997) and last wave (2011) was between 10 and 12 years and 21 and 26 years old, respectively. Findings showed slight stability over a long period of time. Depending on risk factors, five trajectories of street code developed. Male respondents who faced discrimination have a stronger belief in street crime. Moreover, racial discrimination, parental monitoring, neighborhood crime and being male are significant factors in the development of code of the street beliefs.

In neighborhood streets, children interact and play in a group where street-oriented and “decent family” children mingle together. In these streets, children develop social bonds and share a pool of common knowledge, negate and affirm and follow what

they see at home and in the street. In this street socialization, peer group is influential in adopting street culture in risky neighborhoods. Regarding the reciprocal effect between peer group association, acceptance of norms and violent behavior among adolescents (13–17 years of age), Seddig (2014) used the data set from German longitudinal sociological and criminological study “Crime in the Modern City (Crimoc)”. An integrative approach—a “structural dynamic model” combining assumptions from various theories like anomie, control theory, and social learning—was used to examine peer group influence on violent behavior. Findings explained a mechanism, which indicates that delinquent peer group association and acceptance of pro-violent norms, for instance, approval of offences like violent, property and vandalism offences, and behavior is self-reinforcing over time and delinquent peer groups are apt social milieu to learn violence-related norms. Furthermore, structural dimensions, like gender, education, and migration also influence peer group association and normative standards regarding pro-violent behavior. Consequently, peer association is significantly associated with the acceptance of violence-normative systems.

Earlier it was explained by the Andersons (1999) thesis that social and structural factors like poverty, the absence of guardians and mistrust in state institutes induce street culture among African American adolescents in inner-city neighborhoods. Besides, “street families” have little expectations for the future. Therefore, they have a strong belief in the code of the street. Drummond et al. (2011) used the Mobile Youth Survey (MYS) to explain violent behavior pathways among adolescents aged 13–19 years from 13 neighborhoods. The study used a longitudinal dataset from 2004 and 2005 to measure the effect of parenting, a sense of community, peer association, and hopelessness as contributing factors to adopting the code of the street among youth. Results suggested positive parenting, a sense of community and neighborhood are mediating factors for the adoption of the code of the street and violent behavior. Moreover, hopefulness is significantly important to predict the adoption of a street code and violent behavior among youth.

Generally, the absence of guardian or traditional role model most likely leads to developing a code of the street and eventually to violent behavior. Parker and Reckdenwald (2008) examined the relationship between absences of traditional role models and violent behavior. They used a large dataset of three different resources, including the Uniform Crime Report, Census of Population and Housing 2003 and those of the Federal Adult Correctional Facilities. The sample consisted of 199 cases of 17-year-old offenders. Analysis showed the presence of the traditional male role model in urban areas could reduce the rate of violent behavior among African American youth. In disadvantaged neighborhood, it offers social control that prevents adolescents from adopting the street code. Consequently, a role model is an important figure to mediate the relationship between structural disadvantages and violent behavior. Anderson delineated two types of family—decent and street family—which can influence the development of the street code. As is mentioned above, in the street family structure the absence of a guardian figure leads to engaging with the street code. Thus, the street code and family relationship are twofold.

3.3.3 *Code as a Strategy to Gain Safety*

In his work, Anderson argued that the adoption of the street code increases safety and prevents future victimization in distressed contexts. According to the street code, adolescents show violent behavior not only to gain respect but to deter others to prevent future victimization. Stewart et al. (2006) aimed to understand the relationship between the street code and victimization in socially disadvantaged neighborhoods. Their study used a longitudinal sample of 720, mixed gender African American adolescents from 259 neighborhoods collected through the FACHS in 1997 and 1999. Findings show that there is a positive relationship between the code of the street and victimization in high-violence neighborhoods. However, the level of violence in neighborhoods mediates the level of victimization. Findings thus negate the thesis of Anderson, which states that adoption of the code may reduce the level of victimization. Similarly, Matsuda et al. (2013) demonstrated that gang membership and adherence to a violent belief system are linked. Using a diverse sample of 2216 respondents in seven cities, the researchers attempted to understand gang membership and behavior outcome. Results showed that gang membership is significant to the adoption of a violent belief system and leads to violent behavior among youth. Matsuda et al. concluded that adoption of the code makes youth more vulnerable.

In a socially disorganized neighborhood, Richardson and Vil (2016) investigated ways in which low-income persons manage relationships with peer groups, gangs, and schoolmates to avoid victimization. This study explored the complexities of decision-making in adolescence by conducting interviews with 15 African American adolescents aged 12–16-year old in an inner-city neighborhood. Most of the adolescents kept weakened ties with street adolescents to stay safe. Moreover, some of them isolated themselves from street culture to avoid victimization. Similarly, Intravia et al. (2014) aimed to investigate the relationship between police discrimination and adoption of the street code and how characteristics of neighborhoods mediate this relationship. A longitudinal study used a sample of 963 adolescents with age ranges 10–13 and 12–15-year olds from the first and second wave (1997) of the FACHS data, respectively. This study endorsed Anderson’s (1999) thesis; perceived police discrimination is a contributive factor to embracing the code of the street. Nonetheless, in neighborhoods with high levels of violence, adoption of the code of the street is well pronounced.

Taylor et al. (2010) compared attitudes towards the code of street-related violence among different contexts and groups. Their study used data of the Gang Resistance Education and Training program consisting of a racially mixed sample of 1659 males and 1666 females from multi neighborhoods in seven cities. Results show that the support/acceptance of the street code varies considerably across racial/ethnic groups and gender. Males are more committed to the street code-related violence than females. It also different across geographical sites. In large cities, youth showed more attitudinal support for street code-related violence. Nevertheless, the findings show racial and ethnical contextual differences. These findings are unclear about a correlation between the adoption of the code of the street and safety. Some studies

showed that adoption of the code of street makes youths more vulnerable and others, like Anderson, proposed that the motive to adopt the code of the street was to gain safety on the streets in these neighborhoods.

3.3.4 Code and Identity

Recently research on identity, culture and youth violence in inner-city neighborhoods has helped to understand how the street code influences the identity and behavior of youth. Holligan (2015) interviewed 37 young male offenders (16–18 years old) about past experiences. Narratives of the offenders depict the presence of the code of the street, articulated as by Anderson (1999), in Scotland. Historical and cultural development of the code of the street is imbued with retaliatory justice and masculinity behavior in disorganized neighborhoods. These narratives of the youths indicated that following the street code and presenting a violent image was justified to ensure survival on the street.

The way the code of the street works in an intimate relationship was studied by Barr et al. (2013). They used a sample of 218 couples from the fifth wave of the FACHS. Findings showed that street-oriented males are more dissatisfied with their intimate relationship compared to their female counterparts. Adherence to the code of the street reduces the commitment of males and females in romantic relationships. Furthermore, research tried to explore how the code of the street is embodied in the everyday life of adolescents living in inner-city communities. Kubrin (2005) analyzed the contents of 403 rap songs from 1992 to 2000 to understand music culture and identity. He argued that rap music and the street code are constitutive components of street culture inner-city neighborhoods. Analysis showed a clear relationship between the street code and rap music. The lyrics clearly portray different themes of the street code. Moreover, rap music constructs a violent social identity by referencing images of toughness and the willingness to use violence. Furthermore, the lyrics clearly describe the rule of street culture, like not “snitching” and the use of violence as a response to disrespect and as retaliation.

3.4 The Code of the Street as the Analytical Framework for the Empirical Analysis

The abovementioned empirical studies show that the *code of the street* is instrumental in explaining youth violence in risky neighborhoods. These studies include the quantitative validity and generalizability of the street code in other contexts outside the USA. Various studies discussed diverse aspects of the code to understand the dynamics of youth violence. This validity and reliability allow us to use this theoretical framework to understand youth violence in three different contexts. Through

careful scrutiny of the work of Anderson, nine main aspects of the code can be discerned, which are also used in the empirical section of the study in Chap. 9. The dimensions of the code are as follows:

- Respect
- Social Space/Neighborhood
- Enemy
- Toughness
- Symbols
- Friends
- Street Wisdom
- Violence

These dimensions are interrelated and operate together in the street code. However, the causal pathways are not clear and it is questionable if causalities can be identified clearly. In this study, we seek to investigate various dimensions operating in three countries. Therefore, the themes will be used as a starting point for the analysis.

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