

EXTENT, THEORIES, AND FACTORS  
OF VICTIMIZATIONLearning  
Objectives

After reading this chapter, students should be able to

1. Compare and contrast common ways to measure victimization
2. Describe who the “typical” crime victim is and what the “typical” victimization is
3. Explain what the victim-offender overlap is
4. Apply different theoretical perspectives to explain why a person is victimized
5. Identify the key propositions for lifestyle-exposure theory and for routine activities theory
6. Analyze how biology, sociology, and psychology explain crime victimization

It was not exactly a typical night for Brittany. Instead of studying at the library as she normally did during the week, she decided to meet two of her friends at a local bar. They spent the evening catching up and drinking a few beers before they decided to head home. Because Brittany lived within walking distance of the bar, she bid her friends goodnight and started on her journey home. It was dark out, but because she had never confronted trouble in the neighborhood before—even though it was in a fairly crime-ridden part of a large city—she felt relatively safe. As Brittany walked by an alley, two young men whom she had never seen before stepped out, and one of them grabbed her arm and demanded that she give them her school bag, in which she had her wallet, computer, keys, and phone. Because Brittany refused, the other man shoved her, causing her to hit her head on the wall, while the first man grabbed her bag. Despite holding on as tightly as she could, the men were able to take her bag before running off into the night. Slightly stunned, Brittany stood there trying to calm down. Without her bag, which held her phone and keys, she felt there was little she could do other than continue to walk home and hope her roommates were there to let her in. As she walked home, she wondered why she had such bad luck. Why was she targeted? Was she simply in “the wrong place at the wrong time,” or did she do something to place herself in harm’s way? Although it is hard to know why Brittany was victimized, we can compare her to other victims to see how similar she is to them. To this end, a description of the “typical” crime victim is presented in this chapter. But what about why she was targeted? Fortunately, we can use the theories presented in this chapter to understand why Brittany fell victim on that particular night.

## MEASURING VICTIMIZATION

Before we can begin to understand *why* some people are the victims of crime and others are not, we must first know how often victimization occurs. Also important is knowing who the typical crime victim is. Luckily, these characteristics of victimization can be readily gleaned from existing data sources.

### Uniform Crime Report

Begun in 1929, the **Uniform Crime Report (UCR)** shows the amount of crime known to the police in a year. Police departments around the country submit to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) monthly law enforcement reports on crimes that are reported to them or that they otherwise know about. The FBI then compiles these data and each year publishes a report called *Crime in the United States*, which details the crime that occurred in the United States for the year. This report includes information on eight offenses, known as the Part I index offenses: murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson. Arrest data are also listed in the report on Part II offenses, which include an additional 21 crime categories.

### Advantages and Disadvantages

The UCR is a valuable data source for learning about crime and victimization. Because more than 97% of the population is represented by agencies participating in the UCR program, it provides an approximation of the total amount of crime experienced by almost all Americans (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2014a). It presents the number of crimes for regions, states, cities, towns, areas under tribal law enforcement, and colleges and universities. It does so annually so that crime trends can be determined for the country and for these geographical units. Another benefit of the UCR is that crime characteristics are also reported. It includes demographic information (age, sex, and race) on people who are arrested and some information on the crimes, such as location and time of occurrence.

Despite these advantages, it does not provide detailed information on crime victims. Also important to consider, the UCR includes information only on crimes that are reported to the police or of which the police are aware. In this way, all crimes that occur are not represented, especially because, as discussed shortly, crime victims often do not report their victimization to the police. Another limitation of the UCR as a crime data source is that the Part I index offenses do not cover the wide range of crimes that occur, such as simple assault and sexual assaults other than rape, and federal crimes are not counted. Furthermore, the UCR uses the **hierarchy rule**. If more than one Part I offense occurs within the same incident report, the law enforcement agency counts only the highest offense in the reporting process (FBI, 2009). These exclusions also contribute to the UCR's underestimation of the



► **Photo 2.1**  
Brittany, on her way home from the bar.

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extent of crime. Accuracy of the UCR data is also affected by law enforcement's willingness to participate in the program and to do so by reporting to the FBI all offenses of which they are aware.

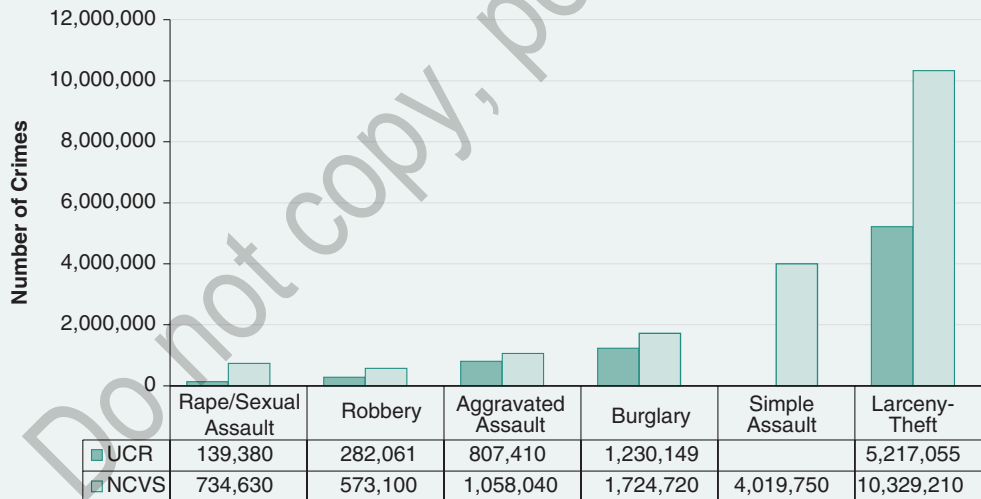
### Crime as Measured by the UCR

Nonetheless, the UCR can be used to paint a picture of crime in the United States. In 2018, the police became aware of 1,206,836 violent crimes and 7,196,045 property crimes (FBI, 2018a; FBI, 2018b). According to the UCR data shown in Figure 2.1 in this chapter, the most common offense is larceny-theft. Aggravated assaults are the most common violent crime, although they are outnumbered by larceny-thefts. The typical criminal who is arrested is a young (less than 30 years old) white male (although young Black males have highest offending rates) (FBI, 2018c).

### National Incident-Based Reporting System

As noted, the UCR includes little information about the characteristics of criminal incidents. To overcome this deficiency, the FBI began the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), an expanded data collection effort that includes detailed information about crimes. Agencies participating in the NIBRS collect information on each crime

**Figure 2.1** Number of Crimes Occurring in 2018, Comparison for Uniform Crime Report (UCR) and National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)



Source: Created by the author with U.S. Department of Justice data.

Note: The UCR includes only forcible rape, whereas the NCVS includes both rape and sexual assault. The UCR measures only aggravated assault, whereas the NCVS includes both aggravated and simple assault.

incident and arrest in 24 offense categories (Group A offenses) that encompass 52 specific crimes. Arrest data are reported for an additional 10 offenses (Group B offenses). Information about the offender, the victim, injury, location, property loss, and weapons is included (FBI, 2015a). Also of importance, NIBRS does not use the hierarchy rule when classifying or counting crimes (FBI, n.d.-a).

Although the NIBRS represents an advancement of the UCR program, not all law enforcement agencies participate in the system. As such, crime trends similar to those based on national data produced by the UCR are not yet available. As more agencies come online, the NIBRS data will likely be an even more valuable tool for understanding patterns and trends of crime victimization.

With consideration of these limitations, at the end of the year in 2019, the 17,429 law enforcement agencies (43% of all law enforcement agencies) participating in NIBRS reported 6.6 million criminal offenses, almost 7 million victims (4.7 million individual victims), and 5.6 million known offenders. Of the offenses, 59.5% were property crimes, 24.1% were crimes against persons, and 16.4% were crimes against society (also referred to as victimless crimes) (FBI, 2018d). There were 3,480,625 arrests for offenses tracked in NIBRS in 2018 (FBI, 2018e).

NIBRS is also a source of information on crime victims and incidents. Slightly less than one-quarter of victims were between 21 and 30 years of age and 51% of victims were females. Almost 70% of victims were white, 21.6% were Black or African American, 1.9% were Asian, 0.7% were American Indian or Alaska Native, and less than 0.4% were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (FBI, 2018f). In a slight majority of crimes against persons and robbery from the person (51.1%), the victim knew his or her offender but was not related to the offender, and in 10.7% of the crimes against persons, the perpetrator was a stranger (FBI, 2018g). Most crimes against the person occur at a victim's home (62.8%), whereas slightly more than 4 in 10 property crimes occur at a victim's home (although this was the most common location of property crime category) (FBI, 2018g).

## National Crime Victimization Survey

As noted, the UCR and NIBRS have some limitations as crime data sources, particularly when information on victimization is of interest. To provide a picture of the extent to which individuals experience a range of crime victimizations, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) began, in 1973, a national survey of U.S. households. Originally called the National Crime Survey, it provides a picture of crime incidents and victims. In 1993, the BJS redesigned the survey, making extensive methodological changes, and renamed it the **National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)**.

The NCVS is administered by the U.S. Census Bureau to a nationally representative sample of about 151,000 households. Each member of participating households who is 12 years old or older completes the survey, resulting in about 243,000 persons being interviewed (Morgan & Oudekerk, 2019). Persons who live in military barracks and in institutional settings (e.g., prisons and hospitals) and those who are homeless are excluded from the NCVS. Each household selected remains in the study for 3 years and completes seven interviews 6 months apart. Each interview serves a **bounding** purpose by giving respondents a concrete event to reference (i.e., since the last interview) when answering questions in the next interview. Bounding is used to improve recall. In general, the first interview is

conducted in person, with subsequent interviews taking place either in person or over the phone (Truman & Morgan, 2016).

The NCVS is conducted in two stages. In the first stage, individuals are asked if they experienced any of seven types of victimization during the previous 6 months. The victimizations that respondents are asked about are rape and sexual assault, robbery, aggravated and simple assault, personal theft, household burglary, motor vehicle theft, and theft. The initial questions asked in the first stage are known as **screen questions**, which are used to cue respondents or jog their memories as to whether they experienced any of these criminal victimizations in the previous 6 months. An example of a screen question is shown in Table 2.1. In the second stage, if the respondent answers affirmatively to any of the screen questions, the respondent then completes an **incident report** for each victimization experienced. In

this way, if an individual stated that he or she had experienced one theft and one aggravated assault, he or she would fill out two incident reports—one for the theft and a separate one for the aggravated assault. In the incident report, detailed questions are asked about the incident, such as where it happened, whether it was reported to the police and why the victim did or did not report it, who the offender was, and whether the victim did anything to protect himself or herself during the incident. Table 2.2 shows an example of a question from the incident report. As you can see, responses to the questions from the incident report can help reveal the context of victimization.

Another advantage of this two-stage procedure is that the incident report is used to determine what, if any, incident occurred. The incident report, as discussed, includes detailed questions about what happened, including questions used to classify an incident into its appropriate crime victimization type. For example, in order for a rape to be counted as such, the questions in the incident report that concern the elements of rape, which are discussed in Chapter 7 (force, penetration), must be answered affirmatively for the incident to be counted as rape in the NCVS. This process is fairly conservative in that all elements of the criminal victimization must have occurred for it to be included in the estimates of that type of crime victimization.

The NCVS has several advantages as a measure of crime victimization. First, it includes in its estimates of victimization several offenses that are not included in Part I of the UCR; for example, simple assault and sexual assault are both

**Table 2.1 Example of Screen Question From NCVS**

(Other than any incidents already mentioned) has anyone attacked or threatened you in any of these ways (exclude telephone threats)?
(a) With any weapon, for instance, a gun or knife
(b) With anything like a baseball bat, frying pan, scissors, or stick
(c) By something thrown, such as a rock or bottle
(d) Include any grabbing, punching, or choking
(e) Any rape, attempted rape, or other type of sexual attack
(f) Any face-to-face threats
OR
(g) Any attack or threat or use of force by anyone at all? Please mention it even if you are not certain it was a crime.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics (2015a).

**Table 2.2 Example of Question From Incident Report in NCVS**

Did the offender have a weapon such as a gun or knife, or something to use as a weapon, such as a bottle or wrench?
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Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey (2015b).

included in NCVS estimates of victimization. Second, the NCVS does not measure only crimes reported to the police as does the UCR. Third, the NCVS asks individuals to recall incidents that occurred only during the previous 6 months, which is a relatively short recall period. In addition, its two-stage measurement process allows for a more conservative way of estimating the amount of victimization that occurs each year in that incidents are counted only if they meet the criteria for inclusion.

Despite these advantages, the NCVS is not without its limitations. Estimates of crime victimization depend on the ability of respondents to accurately recall what occurred to them during the previous 6 months. Even though the NCVS attempts to aid in recall by spanning a short period (6 months) and by providing bounding via the previous survey administration, it is still possible that individuals will not be completely accurate in recounting the particulars of an incident. Bounding and using a short recall period also do not combat against someone intentionally being misleading or lying or answering in a way meant to please the interviewer. Another possible limitation of the NCVS is its treatment of high-frequency repeat victimizations. Called **series victimizations**, these incidents are those in which a person experiences the same type of victimization during the 6-month recall period at such a high rate that he or she cannot recall specific details about each incident or even recall each incident. When this occurs, an incident report is only completed for the most recent incident, and incident counts are only included for up to 10 incidents (Morgan & Ouwerkerk, 2019). As such, estimates of victimization may be lower than the actual amount because the cap for counting series victimizations is 10. On the other hand, even without recalling specific detail, these incidents are included in estimates of victimization. Including series victimizations in this way reveals little effects on the trends in violence estimates (Morgan & Ouwerkerk, 2019). In addition, murder and “victimless” crimes such as prostitution and drug use are not included in NCVS estimates of crime victimization. Another limitation is that crime that occurs to commercial establishments is not included. Beyond recall issues, the NCVS sample is selected from U.S. households. This sample may not be truly representative, for it excludes individuals who are institutionalized, such as persons in prison, and does not include homeless people. Remember, too, that only those persons ages 12 and over are included. As a result, estimates about victimization of children cannot be determined.

## Extent of Crime Victimization

Each year, the BJS publishes *Criminal Victimization in the United States*, a report about crime victimization as measured by the NCVS. From this report, we can see what the most typical victimizations are and who is most likely to be victimized. In 2018, more than 19,800,000 victimizations were experienced among the nation’s households (Morgan & Ouwerkerk, 2019). Property crimes were much more likely to be experienced compared with violent crimes; 6.4 million violent crime victimizations were experienced compared with 13.5 million property crime victimizations. The most common type of property crime reported was theft, whereas simple assault was the most commonly occurring violent crime (see Figure 2.1).

## The Typical Victimization and Victim

The typical crime victim can also be identified from the NCVS. For all violent victimizations except for rape and sexual assaults, males and females are equally likely to be



victimized. Persons who are Black and those under the age of 24 also have higher victimization rates than others. Characteristics of victimization incidents are also evident. Less than half of all victimizations experienced by individuals in the NCVS are reported to the police. Property crimes are less likely to be reported than are violent crimes, with some crimes being much more likely to come to the attention of police than others. For example, rape and sexual assault are the least likely of all violent crimes to be reported, whereas aggravated assault is the most likely to be reported. Almost 80% of motor vehicle thefts are reported to the police, but only about 30% of all thefts are (Morgan & Oudekerk, 2019). This disjuncture in reporting is likely tied to features of the victimization and motivations for reporting. For example, the lack of reporting may be related in part to the fact that most victims of violent crime know their offender; most often, victims identified their attacker as a friend or acquaintance. Strangers perpetrated only about one-third of violent victimizations in the NCVS (Morgan & Oudekerk, 2019). Reporting, on the other hand, may be tied to wanting to secure property back, especially a car. In addition, when a person has his or her car stolen, a police report is necessary for insurance purposes, so a person may be particularly motivated to report this type of victimization to the police. Returning now to incident characteristics, previous findings from the NCVS show that females are more likely than males to be victimized by an intimate partner. In about 58% of incidents, the offender had a weapon, and about 55% of violent crimes resulted in the victim being physically injured (Truman, Langton, & Planty, 2013). Now that you know the characteristics of the typical victimization and the typical crime victim, how do Brittany and her victimization compare?

### International Crime Victims Survey

As you may imagine, there are many other self-report victimization surveys that are used to understand more specific forms of victimization, such as sexual victimization and those that occur outside the United States. Many of these are discussed in later chapters. One oft-cited survey of international victimization is the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS), which was created to provide a standardized survey to compare crime victims' experiences across countries (van Dijk, van Kesteren, & Smit, 2008). The first round of the survey was conducted in 1989 and was repeated in 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004/2005. Collectively, more than 340,000 persons have been surveyed in more than 78 countries as part of the ICVS program (van Dijk et al., 2008). Respondents are asked about 10 types of victimization that they could have experienced: car theft, theft from or out of a car, motorcycle theft, bicycle theft, attempted or completed burglary, sexual victimization (rapes and sexual assault), threats, assaults, robbery, and theft of personal property (van Dijk et al., 2008). If a person has experienced any of these offenses, he or she then answers follow-up questions about the incident. This survey has provided estimates of the extent of crime victimization in many countries and regions of the world. In addition, characteristics of crime victims and incidents have been produced from these surveys.

### Crime Survey for England and Wales

Similar to the NCVS and the ICVS, the **Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)** is conducted to measure the extent and characteristics of victimization in England and

Wales. CSEW is a victimization survey of persons ages 16 and over living in England and Wales. Beginning in 1982, the CSEW was conducted every 2 years until 2001, when it was changed to reflect victimizations during the previous 12 months. Beginning April 1, 2012, the CSEW changed its name to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (from the British Crime Survey). Using computer-assisted personal interviewing to aid in interviewing, it is a nationally representative survey of about 35,000 adults and 3,000 children in the 10- to 15-year-old supplement. Persons are asked about victimizations that their households and they experienced. To get the sample, about 1,000 interviews are conducted in each police force area. If individuals answer yes to any screen question about victimization, they complete a victim module that includes detailed questions about the event. Findings from the CSEW for year ending June 2019 indicate that there were 11.1 million crimes when including computer fraud and misuse against households and those 16 and older, with 1.3 million violent incidents (Office for National Statistics, 2019b).

## THEORIES AND EXPLANATIONS OF VICTIMIZATION

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Now that you have an idea about who the typical crime victim is, you are probably wondering *why* some people are more likely than others to find themselves victims of crime. Is it because those people provoke the victimization, as von Hentig and his contemporaries thought? Is it because crime victims are perceived by offenders to be more vulnerable than others? Is there some personality trait that influences victimization risk? All these factors may play at least some role in why victimization occurs to particular people. The following chapters address these possibilities.

### Link Between Victimization and Offending

One facet about victimization that cannot be ignored is the link between offending and victimization and offenders and victims. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the first forays into the study of victims included a close look at how victims contribute to their own victimization. In this way, victims were not always assumed to be innocents; rather, some victims were seen as being at least partly responsible for bringing on their victimization—for instance, by being an offender who is victimized when the victim fights back. Although the field of victimology has moved from trying to place blame on victims, the recognition that offenders and victims are often linked—and often the same person—has aided in the understanding of why people are victimized.

### Victim and Offender Characteristics

The typical victim and the typical offender have many commonalities. As mentioned before in our discussion of the NCVS, the group with the highest rate of violent victimization are young and Black persons. The UCR also provides information on offenders. Those with the highest rates of violent offending are also young and Black. The typical victim and the typical offender, then, share common demographics. In addition, both victims and offenders are likely to live in urban areas. Thus, individuals who spend time with people who have the characteristics of offenders are more likely to be victimized than others.



## Explaining the Link Between Victimization and Offending

Some even argue that victims and offenders are often one and the same, with offenders being more likely to be victimized and vice versa. It is not hard to understand why this may be the case. Offending can be viewed as part of a risky lifestyle. Individuals who engage in offending are exposed more frequently to people and contexts in which victimization is likely to occur (Lauritsen, Laub, & Sampson, 1992).

There also may be a link between victimization and offending that is part of a broader cultural belief in the acceptability and sometimes necessity of violence, known as the subculture of violence theory. This theory proposes that for certain subgroups of the population and in certain areas, violence is part of a value system that supports the use of violence, in response to disrespect in particular (Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1967). In this way, when a subculture that supports violence exists, victims will be likely to respond by retaliating. Offenders may initiate violence that leads to their victimization by, for example, getting into a physical fight to resolve a dispute. Recent research shows that the victim–offender overlap does indeed vary across neighborhoods and that this variation is related to the neighborhood’s strength of attachment to the “**code of the streets**” and degree of structural deprivation (M. T. Berg & Loeber, 2012; M. T. Berg, Stewart, Schreck, & Simons, 2012).

Being victimized may be related to offending in ways that are not directly tied to retaliation. In fact, being victimized at one point in life may increase the likelihood that a person will engage in delinquency and crime later in life. This link has been found especially in individuals who are abused during childhood. As discussed in Chapter 9 on victimization at the beginning and end of life, those who are victimized as children are significantly more likely than those who do not experience child abuse to be arrested in adulthood (Widom, 2017) or to engage in violence and property offending (Menard, 2002).

The reasons why victimization may lead to participation in crime are not fully understood, but it may be that being victimized carries psychological consequences, such as depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder, that can lead to coping through the use of alcohol or drugs. Victimization may also carry physical consequences, such as brain damage, that can further impede success later in life. Cognitive ability may also be tempered by maltreatment, particularly in childhood, which can hinder school performance. Behavior may also change as a result of being victimized. People may experience problems in their interpersonal relationships or become violent or aggressive. Whatever the reason, it is evident that victimization and offending are intimately intertwined.

Inasmuch as victimization and offending are linked, it makes sense, then, as you will see in the following chapters, that the same influences on offending may also affect victimization and hence may explain the link between victimization and offending. This is not to say that the only explanations of victimization should be tied to or be an extension of explanations of offending—just remember that when you read about the research that has used criminological theories to explain victimization, it is largely because of the connection between victimization and offending.

## Routine Activities and Lifestyles-Exposure Theories

In the 1970s, two theoretical perspectives—**routine activities and lifestyles-exposure theories**—were put forth that both linked crime victimization risk to the fact that victims

had to come into contact with a potential offender. Before discussing these theories in detail, first, it is important to understand what a **victimization theory** is. A victimization theory is generally a set of testable propositions designed to explain why a person is victimized. Both routine activities and lifestyles theories propose that a person's victimization risk can best be understood by the extent to which the victim's routine activities or lifestyle creates opportunities for a motivated offender to commit crime.

In developing routine activities theory, Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson (1979) proposed that a person's routine activities, or daily routine patterns, impact risk of being a crime victim. Inasmuch as a person's routine activities bring him or her into contact with **motivated offenders**, crime victimization risk abounds. L. E. Cohen and Felson thought that motivated offenders were plentiful and that their motivation to offend did not need to be explained. Rather, their selection of particular victims was more interesting. Cohen and Felson noted that there must be something about particular targets, both individuals and places, that encouraged selection by these motivated offenders. In fact, those individuals deemed to be **suitable targets** based on their attractiveness would be chosen by offenders. Attractiveness relates to qualities about the target, such as ease of transport, which is why a burglar may break into a home and leave with an iPad or laptop computer rather than a couch. Attractiveness is further evident when the target does not have **capable guardianship**. Capable guardianship is conceived as a means by which a person or target can be effectively guarded to prevent a victimization from occurring. Guardianship is typically considered to be *social* when the presence of another person makes someone less attractive as a target. Guardianship can also be provided through *physical* means, such as a home with a burglar alarm or a person who carries a weapon for self-protection. A home with a burglar alarm and a person who carries a weapon are certainly less attractive crime targets! When these three elements—motivated offenders, suitable targets, and lack of capable guardianship—coalesce in time and space, victimization is likely to occur.

When L. E. Cohen and Felson (1979) originally developed their theory, they focused on predatory crimes—those that involve a target and offender making contact. They originally were interested in explaining changes in rates of these types of crime over time. In doing so, they argued that people's routines had shifted since World War II, taking them away from home and making their homes attractive targets. People began spending more time outside the home, in leisure activities and going to and from work and school. As people spent more time interacting with others, they were more likely to come into contact with motivated offenders. Capable guardianship was unlikely to be present; thus, the risk of criminal victimization increased. Cohen and Felson also linked the increase in crime to the production of durable goods. Electronics began to be produced in portable sizes, making them easier to steal. Similarly, cars and other expensive items that could be stolen, reused, and resold became targets. As Cohen and Felson saw it, prosperity of society could produce an increase in criminal victimization rather than a decline! Also important, they linked victimization to everyday activities rather than to social ills, such as poverty.

Michael Hindelang, Michael Gottfredson, and James Garofalo's (1978) lifestyle-exposure theory is a close relative of routine activities theory. Hindelang and colleagues posited that certain lifestyles or behaviors place people in situations in which victimization is likely to occur. Your lifestyle, such as going to bars or working late at night in relative seclusion, places you at more risk of being a crime victim than others. Although the authors of lifestyles-exposure theory did not specify how opportunity structures risk as

clearly as did the authors of routine activities theory, at its heart, lifestyles-exposure theory closely resembles routine activities theory and its propositions. As a person comes into contact—via lifestyle and behavior—with potential offenders, he or she is likely creating opportunities for crime victimization to occur. The lifestyle factors identified by Hindelang and his colleagues that create opportunities for victimization are the people with whom one associates, working outside the home, and engaging in leisure activities. In this way, a person who associates with criminals, works outside the home, and participates in activities—particularly at night, away from home, and with nonfamily members—is a more likely target for personal victimization than others. Hindelang and colleagues noted that a person's lifestyle is structured by social constraints and role expectations. That is, because of a person's demographic characteristics, he or she may be afforded less opportunity to engage in particular activities. Consider the fact that females are socialized differently from males. Females may be expected to be the caretaker of the home and, when younger, may be supervised more closely than males. Accordingly, females may spend more time at home and spend more time under the supervision of their parents or other guardians. Given these social constraints and role expectations, females may be less likely to engage in activities outside the home that would place them at risk for victimization, hence explaining why females are at lower risk for victimization than males.

Hindelang et al. (1978) further delineated why victimization risk is higher for some people than others using the **principle of homogamy**. According to this principle, the more frequently a person comes into contact with persons in demographic groups with likely offenders, the more likely it is the person will be victimized. This frequency may be a function of demographics or lifestyle. For example, males are more likely to be criminal offenders than females. Males, then, are at greater risk for victimization because they are more likely to spend time with other males. Now that you know about routine activities theory, do you think Brittany's routines or lifestyle placed her at risk for being victimized? Today, researchers largely treat routine activities theory and lifestyles theory interchangeably and often refer to them as the routine activities and lifestyles theory perspectives.

One of the reasons that routine activities and lifestyles-exposure theories have been the prevailing theories of victimization for more than 30 years is the wide empirical support researchers have found when testing them. It has been shown that a person's routine activities and lifestyle impact risk of being sexually victimized (Cass, 2007; B. S. Fisher, Daigle, & Cullen, 2010a, 2010b; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 1999, 2007; Schwartz & Pitts, 1995). This perspective also has been used to explain auto theft (Rice & Smith, 2002), stalking (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 1999), cybercrime victimization (Holt & Bossler, 2009), adolescent violent victimization (Lauritsen et al., 1992), theft (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 1998), victimization at work (Lynch, 1997), and street robbery (Groff, 2007).

Recent research on routines suggests that people may also alter them *after* being victimized. You may expect that a person who is victimized may engage in more protective behaviors such as installing a burglar alarm following a break-in at his or her house or avoiding walking alone at night after being mugged at night. Researchers have investigated whether such changes in behaviors occur. Some of the first works in this area showed that victims had greater use of defensive behaviors (things like avoiding certain areas or people), and that property crime victims engaged in higher use of household protective efforts such as installing lights and timers (Skogan, 1987). Victimization has also been linked to moving, which would certainly alter your routines (Dugan, 1999; Xie & McDowall, 2008). For

example, using data from the NCVS, Bunch, Clay-Warner, and McMahon-Howard (2014) found that while victims did change some of their behaviors after being victimized compared with nonvictims (such as going out at night more often!), these differences were not due to the victimization event but could be attributed to preexisting differences between victims and nonvictims that influence victimization risk.

## Structural and Social Process Factors

In addition to routine activities and lifestyles theories, other factors also increase a person's risk of being victimized. Key components of life—such as **neighborhood context**, family, friends, and personal interaction—also play a role in victimization.

### Neighborhood Context

We have already discussed how certain individuals are more at risk of becoming victims of crime than others. So far, we have tied this risk to factors related to the person's lifestyle. Where that person lives and spends time, however, may also place him or her at risk of victimization. Indeed, you are probably not surprised to learn that certain areas have higher rates of victimization than others. Some areas are so crime prone that they are considered to be **hot spots** for crime. Highlighted by Sherman, Gartin, and Buerger (1989), hot spots are areas that have a concentrated amount of crime. Sherman and colleagues found through examining police call data in Minneapolis that only 3% of all locations made up most calls to the police. A person living in or frequenting a hot spot will be putting himself or herself in danger. The features of these hot spots and other high-risk areas may create opportunities for victimization that, independent of a person's lifestyle or demographic characteristics, enhance chances of being victimized.

What is it about certain areas that relates them to victimization? A body of research has identified many features, particularly of neighborhoods (notice we are not discussing hot spots specifically). One factor related to victimization is **family structure**. Robert Sampson (1985), in his seminal piece on neighborhoods and crime, found that neighborhoods that have a large percentage of female-headed households have higher rates of theft and violent victimization. He also found that **structural density**, as measured by the percentage of units in structures of five or more units, is positively related to victimization. **Residential mobility**, or the percentage of persons 5 years and older living in a different house from 5 years before, also predicted victimization.

Beyond finding that the structure of a neighborhood influences victimization rates for that area, it also has been shown that neighborhood features influence personal risk. In this way, living in a neighborhood that is disadvantaged places individuals at risk of being victimized, even if they do not have risky lifestyles or other characteristics related to victimization (Browning & Erickson, 2009). For example, neighborhood disadvantage and neighborhood residential instability are related to experiencing violent victimization at the hands of an intimate partner (Benson, Fox, DeMaris, & Van Wyk, 2003). Using the notions of collective efficacy, it makes sense that neighborhoods that are disadvantaged are less able to mobilize effective sources of informal social control (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Informal social controls are often used as mechanisms to maintain order, stability, and safety in neighborhoods. When communities do



### ► Photo 2.2

This area may be a hot spot due to lots of people milling about at night.

not have strong informal mechanisms in place, violence and other deviancies are likely to abound. Such communities are less safe; hence, their residents are more likely to be victimized than residents of more socially organized areas.

### Exposure to Delinquent Peers

The neighborhood context is but one factor related to risk of victimization. Social process factors, such as peers and family, are also important in understanding crime victimization. Generally, one of the strongest influences on

youth is their peers. Peer pressure can lead people, especially juveniles, to act in ways they normally would not and to engage in behavior they otherwise would not. Having **delinquent peers** places youth not only at risk of engaging in delinquent behavior—juvenile delinquency does, after all, often take place in groups—but also of being victimized (Lauritsen, Sampson, & Laub, 1991; Schreck & Fisher, 2004). Spending time with delinquent peers places people at risk of being victimized because, as routine activities and lifestyles-exposure theories suggest, spending time in the presence of motivated offenders increases risk. Never mind that these would-be offenders are your friends! Another reason having delinquent peers may be related to victimization is that a person may find himself or herself in risky situations (such as being present for a fight) in which being harmed is not unlikely. In this situation, it may not be your friends per se who harm you, but others involved in the fight may attack you, or you may feel the need to come to the aid of your friends. T. J. Taylor, Peterson, Esbensen, and Freng (2007) note that being a member of a gang increases a young person's risk of experiencing violence.

### Family

Especially during adolescence, the family also plays an important role in individual experiences. Having strong attachments to family members, particularly parents, is likely to insulate a person from many negative events, including being victimized. Not surprisingly, research has found that weak emotional attachment between family members is a strong predictor of victimization (Esbensen, Huizinga, & Menard, 1999; Lauritsen et al., 1992). This may be due to parents being unable and unwilling to exert control over the behavior of their children, such that they are more likely to end up in risky situations. Family units may also spend more time together when there is strong attachment, thus reducing exposure to motivated offenders. Youth may also be less likely to place themselves in risky situations because they do not want to disappoint their parents, for they place high value on the relationships they have with them. In these ways, emotional attachment to family members serves to reduce risky behavior. At this point, you may be noting that familial attachment may be related to routine activities and lifestyles-exposure theories—and you



would be right! Research investigating the link between familial attachment and victimization has found that the better a person feels about his or her family, the less likely they are to be victimized (Schreck & Fisher, 2004).

## Social Learning Theory

According to social learning theory (Akers, 1973), criminal behavior is learned behavior. Specifically, it is learned through differential association (spending time with delinquent or criminal others) whereby imitation or modeling of behavior occurs. A person learns behavior as well as the definitions about behavior, such as whether it is acceptable to engage in crime. The likelihood that a behavior will persist depends on the degree of reward or punishment. In this way, behaviors are differentially reinforced, and people continue to engage in behaviors that are rewarded and cease to engage in behaviors that are punished. When a behavior is rewarded, the definitions favorable toward that act will eventually outweigh the definitions against that act. Although this social learning process was originally posited to explain delinquency, it has also been used to explain victimization, especially intimate partner violence in the sense that children who are exposed to violence between parents in the home are more likely to be victims of intimate partner violence than others later in life (see Chapter 8 for a more detailed discussion). Other research has linked social learning theory to stalking victimization (Fox, Nobles, & Akers, 2011).

## Immigration and Victimization: Are They Related?

If you have been paying attention to the news, you may have heard people blame the crime problem in the United States on immigrants—legal or otherwise—who have come across our borders. This argument has been made all the more salient in the wake of mass shootings on our soil like the one that occurred in Orlando, Florida, on June 12, 2016, at Pulse nightclub that resulted in 49 deaths and 53 people injured. Even though the shooter was a U.S. citizen (and was even born here!), some people reinforced their calls for tighter security and reduced ability for people to enter the country. This concern is related to crime that may be committed by people coming to our country, but there is also concern that immigration is related to victimization. There are many reasons to be concerned about the victimization experiences of immigrants. In a study of criminal justice personnel throughout the nation, it was found that these individuals believe that recent immigrants are less likely than others to report their victimization experiences to the police because of language barriers, fear of retaliation, and lack of knowledge about the criminal justice system (R. C. Davis & Erez, 1998). Other research has found that increases in immigration are not linked to increases in crime victimization (this study examined immigration in western Europe) (Nunziata, 2015). At the individual level, some research has documented that immigrant youth are at particular risk for being bullied in schools, whereas other research has not found an elevated risk. Still other research has suggested that assimilation is the driving factor behind increased risks for victimization and that lifestyles and routines can help understand this relationship (Peguero, 2013). Immigration and being an immigrant need to be more fully studied to understand if they play a role in victimization risk.



## FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Latino day laborers (LDLs), who are often undocumented migrants, are exposed to multiple forms of victimization and other deleterious outcomes due to a lack of social and health services, their illegal status, poverty, and discrimination. Negi et al. (2019) interviewed 25 LDLs living and working in Baltimore, Maryland, about victimization experiences and the effects of their lifestyle on their well-being. The participants described being affected by street-level

assaults and robbery, along with workplace victimizations such as unpaid labor, verbal and physical abuse, and even abandonment at job sites. These experiences coupled with a lack of social support fostered feelings of isolation and desperation and participants reported increased alcohol abuse. How do you think communities and social support organizations should address the support issues of Latino day laborers to prevent their victimization?

*Source:* Adapted from Negi, N. J., Siegel, J., Calderon, M., Thomas, E., & Valdez, A. (2019). "They dumped me like trash": The social and psychological toll of victimization on Latino day laborers' lives. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 65(3-4), 369-380.

### Control-Balance Theory

A general theory of deviancy, **control-balance theory**, may also apply to victimization. Developed by Charles Tittle (1995, 1997), this theory proposes that the amount of control that people possess over others and the amount of control to which one is subject factor into their risk of engaging in deviancy. When considered together, a **control ratio** can be determined for individuals. Control-balance theory posits that when the control a person has exceeds the amount of control he or she is subject to, that person has a **control surplus**. When the amount of control a person exercises is outweighed by the control he or she is subject to, that person has a **control deficit**. When a person has a control surplus or deficit, he or she is likely to be predisposed toward deviant behavior. The type of deviant behavior to which a person will be predisposed depends on the control ratio. A control surplus is linked to autonomous forms of deviance such as exploitation of others. Control deficits, on the other hand, are linked to repressive forms of deviance such as defiance.

Although not expressly a theory of victimization, control-balance theory is used by Alex Piquero and Matthew Hickman (2003) to explain victimization. They proposed that having a control surplus or control deficit would increase victimization risk as compared with having a control balance. Individuals with a control surplus are used to having their needs and desires met and have a desire to extend their control. In short, they engage in risky behaviors (in terms of victimization) because there is little to restrain their actions. They may treat others who have control deficits with disrespect in such a way that those individuals act out and victimize them. Those with control deficits are at risk for victimization for different reasons. So used to having little control at their disposal, they lack the confidence or belief that they can protect themselves and are, thus, vulnerable targets. They may also try to overcome their control deficits by lashing out or victimizing those who exercise control over them. Piquero and Hickman tested control-balance's ability to predict victimization and found that both control deficits and control surpluses predicted general and theft victimization.

## Social Interactionist Perspective

Marcus Felson (1992) posited that distress may be related to victimization. When experiencing stress, peoples' behavior and demeanor are impacted. People are more likely to break rules and to be generally irritating to others. Distressed individuals, thus, may entice a certain measure of aggression from others given their poor attitudes and rule-breaking behavior. Consider a student who goes to class having just learned that he failed a test in his previous class that effectively ruined his chances of passing that class. This student is likely experiencing a level of stress that will negatively impact his behavior in class. While in class, then, he may explode after a fellow student makes a comment that he finds unreasonable. The student who is the "victim" of the outburst may find the other student's behavior unacceptable and offensive. The attacked student then may, as a result, respond aggressively, effectively starting an aggressive exchange. This distress-and-reaction sequence is at the heart of the **social interactionist perspective**.

Stated more formally, Felson (1992) argues that aggressive encounters occur when distressed individuals break social rules and those who are aggrieved by the breaking of rules respond aggressively. The distressed individual is then placed in a situation in which he or she has to respond to aggression. If this person does so unsatisfactorily, the original aggrieved person is likely to implement punishment—in other words, victimization. The distressed individual then may retaliate, thus continuing the cycle of aggression. In this way, distress is a cause of victimization.

## Life-Course Perspective

Emerging in the 1990s in the field of criminology, the **life-course perspective** considers the development of offending over time. In doing so, it uses elements from biology, sociology, and psychology to explain why persons initiate into, continue with, and desist or move out of a life of crime. Contributing to the growth of this field, in large part due to the overlap between victims and offenders discussed shortly, victimologists have recently begun applying and testing the principles of life-course criminology to victimization. A summary of these theories is presented in Table 2.3.

## General Theory of Crime

In 1990, Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi published *A General Theory of Crime*. In this seminal work, they presented their **general theory of crime**, proposing that criminal behavior is caused by a single factor—namely, low self-control. They argued that a person with low self-control, when presented with opportunity, will engage in criminal and other analogous behaviors, such as excessive drinking. When examining the characteristics of persons with low self-control, the reasons this trait might lead to criminal behavior

**Table 2.3** Life-Course Criminological Theories Relevant for Victimization

Theory	Author(s)	Key Factor Related to Outcome
General theory of crime	Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990)	Low self-control
Age-graded theory of adult social bonds	Sampson and Laub (1993)	Social bonds: marriage and employment; marriage related to desistance

are clear. A person with low self-control will exhibit six elements, the first being inability to delay gratification; a person with low self-control will be impulsive and unable or unwilling to delay gratification. Second, the person will be a risk taker who engages in thrill-seeking behavior without thought of consequence. Third, an individual with low self-control will be shortsighted, without any clear long-term goals. Fourth, low self-control is indicated by a preference for physical as compared with mental activity. This preference may lead an individual to respond to disrespect with violence rather than having a discussion about the finer points of being respectful. Fifth, low self-control is evidenced by low frustration tolerance, which results in a person being quick to anger. Sixth, insensitivity and self-centeredness are hallmarks of low self-control. A person with low self-control will be unlikely to exhibit empathy toward others.

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that low self-control is fairly immutable once developed, which occurs during early childhood. They believe that, although self-control is an individual-level characteristic, it is not inherent; rather, it is developed through parental socialization. Once the level is set (around age 8), people will be hard-pressed to develop greater abilities to moderate their behavior. Without self-control, a person will act on impulses and seek personal gratification—often engaging in crime. Importantly, as noted, low self-control will lead individuals to engage in other behaviors that are similar to crime.

In 1999, Christopher Schreck applied the general theory of crime to victimization. He was one of the first researchers to apply to victimization what had been conceived as a theory of crime. This innovative approach was rooted in his recognition that persons who engage in crime are also likely to be victimized, a point we return to later. He also noted that because crime and victimization may be closely related, often with the same people engaging in both, the same factors that explain crime participation may also explain crime victimization. He tested his theory and found that low self-control increased the likelihood that a person would experience both personal and property victimization, even when controlling for participation in criminal behavior. This finding suggests that solely being involved in crime does not increase risk of victimization but that low self-control has significant, independent effects on victimization. In a recent meta-analysis, which is a type of study that examines all the research that has been conducted on a subject—in this case, the link between low self-control and victimization—collectively producing an effect size for the magnitude of this relationship, self-control was found to have a modest effect on victimization. The overall mean effect size for low self-control on victimization is .154, which means that a one standard deviation increase in low self-control corresponds to a .154 standard deviation increase in victimization. The relationship was strongest for victimizations that were noncontact in nature such as online victimization (Pratt, Turanovic, Fox, & Wright, 2014). Recent research has linked self-control with neighborhood disadvantage to victimization risk.

### Age-Graded Theory of Adult Social Bonds

Not all criminologists agree that there is a single cause of crime (or victimization) called low self-control. Others noted that people do indeed move in and out of criminal activity, a phenomenon that is difficult to explain with a persistent trait, low self-control. Robert Sampson and John Laub (1993) instead believed that a person's social bonds could serve to insulate him or her from criminal activity. In their **age-graded theory of adult social bonds**, Sampson

and Laub identified two key social bonds—marriage and employment—that can aid people in moving out of a life of delinquency and crime as they emerge into young adulthood. If a person enters into marriage and has gainful employment, he or she is developing valuable social capital. In other words, a person who has these two social bonds will have much to lose by engaging in crime, which will promote crime desistance if he or she was previously involved in crime. If that person was not involved in crime, social capital would enable him or her to continue living a crime-free life.

Although this obviously is not a victimization theory, because of the link between victimization and offending, researchers have attempted to connect the attainment of adult social bonds with victimization in that individuals who are married and working will be less likely to be crime victims than those with little to lose. Leah Daigle, Kevin Beaver, and Jennifer Hartman (2008) found that entering into marriage did in fact predict desistance from victimization as individuals moved into early adulthood. They found that employment was not similarly protective; instead, employment reduced the chances that a person would desist from victimization. Looking at routine activities and lifestyles theories, however, this finding is none too surprising. The more time a person spends outside the home, at work, or in other activities, the greater the chances of being victimized.

## Biopsychosocial Factors and Victimization

In addition to the discussed factors, other biopsychosocial factors have been linked to victimization. For example, the life-course perspective in criminology has also centered on individual factors, such as genetics, that promote offending. This body of research has found a link between different genetic polymorphisms and behaviors relevant to criminology, such as criminal involvement and alcohol and drug use. A genetic polymorphism is a variant on a gene. Research has shown that sometimes these variations impact the likelihood of engaging in certain behaviors, such as violence, aggression, and delinquency. The genes that have been identified as linked to criminality are those that code for neurotransmitters, such as monoamine oxidase, serotonin, and dopamine. Neurotransmitters are chemical messengers responsible for information transmission. In terms of criminal behavior, relevant neurotransmitters are those linked to behavioral inhibition, mood, reward, and attention deficits. One important aspect of the link between genetics and crime is that possessing a variant for a gene, or having a certain polymorphism for a particular neurotransmitter, appears to “matter” only in certain environments. This is known as a **gene × environment interaction**. Genes tend to be important not for everyone in every circumstance but for particular individuals in particular contexts. For example, a person who is genetically predisposed toward alcoholism will express these alcoholic tendencies only if first exposed to alcohol.

As noted with other life-course perspective approaches, the applicability of genetic factors to the study of victimization has been explored. In fact, a gene × environment interaction for one gene in particular, dopamine, has been found to increase victimization risk. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter linked to the reward and punishment systems of the brain. Dopamine is released when we engage in pleasurable activities, thus reinforcing such behavior. Too much dopamine, however, can be a bad thing. High levels of dopamine are linked to enhanced problem solving and attentiveness, but overproduction of dopamine can be problematic. In fact, it has been linked to violence and aggression. One gene that

codes for dopamine is the DRD2 gene, a dopamine receptor gene. Research has found evidence for a gene × environment interaction between DRD2 and having delinquent peers. White males who have low levels of delinquent peers and who have a certain genetic polymorphism for DRD2 are more likely than others to be violently victimized (Beaver, Wright, DeLisi, Daigle, et al., 2007). Genes have also been implicated in the victim–offender overlap. Research has found that genetic factors account for from 54% to 98% of the covariation between delinquency and victimization (Barnes & Beaver, 2012). The link between genes and victimization is an emerging area of research and, therefore, additional research is certainly needed to understand fully how genes impact victimization.

In addition to genetics, research has shown that there is a link between other factors linked to biology and psychology that may help us understand why people are victimized. One such factor is head injury. In their study, Daigle and Harris (2019) found that youth who had experienced a head injury and head injury that resulted in a loss of consciousness were more likely to be victimized than other youth. The authors argued that head injury may be linked to poor executive cognitive functioning in the brain. That is, head injury may negatively influence the ability to plan, exert impulse control, and self-regulate. Further, head injury may be linked to the development of psychiatric disorders such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder and a reduction in low self-control. As a result, individuals who have experienced head injury may fail to attune to risk in their environment, may be aggressive, and may engage in risky behaviors—all of which are linked to victimization risk.

Another factor tied to victimization risk centers on mental disorders such as psychopathy. Psychopathy is a diagnosable mental health disorder characterized by an inability to form attachments, antisocial behavior, inability to delay gratification, lack of empathy, callousness, superficial charm, and short-temperedness (Hare & Vertommen, 1991). These characteristics likely place people at risk for being victimized. Engaging in antisocial activities, without care for others means that a person high in psychopathy would be a target and may not be able to avoid harm's way. Research shows that psychopathy does increase victimization risk (Beaver, Al-Ghamdi, et al., 2016; Dolan, OMalley, & McGregor, 2013; E. Silver, Piquero, Jennings, Piquero, & Leiber, 2011). In investigating why psychopathy is linked to victimization, Daigle, Harris, and Teasdale (2020) find that psychopathy is linked to risky behaviors as well as cognitions (e.g., motivation to succeed) that increase risk for victimization. Work by Daigle and Teasdale (2018) confirmed that psychopathy is linked to recurring victimization risk as well in that people high in psychopathy were at greater risk for experiencing more than one victimization.

### Role of Alcohol in Victimization

One of the common elements present in victimization is alcohol. According to data from the NCVS in 2008, 36% of victims perceived their offender to be under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident (Rand, Sabol, Sinclair, & Snyder, 2010). Alcohol use is commonplace among crime offenders, but many crime victims also report that just prior to their victimizations, they had consumed alcohol. Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes (2006) found in their National Violence Against Women Survey that 20% of women and 38% of men who experienced rape in adulthood had consumed alcohol or drugs prior to being victimized. Alcohol use is associated with other forms of victimization as well, such as physical assault. This fact should not be too surprising given the effects of alcohol on individuals. Generally, alcohol is linked to victimization because it reduces inhibition and

also impedes people's ability to recognize or respond effectively to dangerous situations. Offenders may also see intoxicated persons as particularly vulnerable targets for these reasons. Where a person consumes alcohol is also important. A person who drinks at home alone or with family is less likely to be victimized than a person who drinks in a bar at night. The latter person is likely interacting with motivated offenders without capable guardianship and may be perceived as a suitable target.

Alcohol use may place a person at risk of being victimized but also may impact how the victim responds to the incident. Research by R. Barry Ruback, Kim Ménard, Maureen Outlaw, and Jennifer Shaffer (1999) shows how alcohol use may be relevant to understanding why victims often do not report their experiences to police. In their study, college students evaluated various hypothetical scenarios that depicted victimization. Study participants were asked whether they would advise a victimized friend to report to the police based on a given scenario. When the friend in the scenario had been drinking, college students were less likely to advise that the police be contacted, and this relationship was particularly strong for victims depicted as being underage and drinking.

As you can see, the explanations of victimization are many. The hallmark victimization theory is routine activities and lifestyles, which is based on the notion that a person's routines and lifestyle, not social conditions, place him or her at risk. As you have read, however, explanations of victimization have expanded beyond this to include social process and structural factors. The explanations you are drawn to may be tied to the data you are examining, which you now know are impacted by methodology. To understand the causes of victimization, you must first know who the "typical" victim is and what characterizes the "typical" victimization. In some of the following chapters, specific types of victims are examined. Think about what theories can be used to explain their victimizations.

## SUMMARY

- The Uniform Crime Report (UCR) is an official measure of the amount of crime known to the police. According to this report, which is published annually by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the most common crime type is larceny-theft. The most common type of violent crime is aggravated assault. Criminal offending rates are highest for young Black males.
- The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) uses a nationally representative sample of U.S. households. Individuals ages 12 and over in selected households are asked questions about victimization experiences they faced during the previous 6 months. According to the NCVS, the typical victim is young and white, although Blacks have higher victimization rates than other racial or ethnic groups and females experience victimizations at similar rates as males.
- The typical victimization incident is perpetrated by someone known to the victim, is not reported to the police, and does not involve a weapon.
- There is a clear link between victimization and offending, as well as between victims and offenders. Persons who live risky lifestyles are more likely to engage in criminal or delinquent activity and to be victims of crime. Victims and offenders also share similar demographic profiles.



- Routine activities theory suggests that crime victimization is likely to occur when motivated offenders, lack of capable guardianship, and suitable targets coalesce in time and space. Lifestyles theory is closely linked with routine activities theory in proposing that a person who leads a risky lifestyle is at risk of being victimized.
- Neighborhoods are not equally safe. The risk of being victimized, then, differs across geographical areas, and even when controlling for individual-level factors such as risky lifestyle, neighborhood disadvantage predicts victimization.
- Spending time with friends who participate in delinquent activities places a person at risk of being victimized. These “friends” may victimize their nondelinquent peers and encourage them to participate in risky behaviors that may lead to victimization.
- Strong attachments to family may serve to protect individuals from victimization, whereas weak attachments may increase victimization risk.
- Victimization may also be a learned process, whereby victims have learned the motives, definitions, and behaviors of victimization and had them reinforced.
- According to control-balance theory, individuals with an unequal control-balance ratio—either having a control deficit or a control surplus—are more prone to victimization than those with a balanced ratio. Those with control deficits may be seen as easy targets. They also may get tired of being targeted and lash out, thus increasing their involvement in situations associated with violent victimization. Those with control surpluses may engage in risky behavior with impunity, which could set them up for being victimized or retaliated against.
- Research on the general theory of crime suggests that those individuals who have low self-control are more likely to be victimized than those with higher levels of self-control.
- Adult social bonds may explain why people who were once victimized are not victimized again as they age into young adulthood. Marriage appears to protect individuals from victimization.
- Genetic factors may also play a role in victimization. One specific genetic polymorphism of the DRD2 gene has been found to increase risk for white males who have delinquent peers. A genetic effect that occurs only under certain environmental conditions is known as a gene × environment interaction.
- Other biopsychosocial factors such as head injury and psychopathy have recently been linked to victimization and recurring victimization risk.
- Alcohol and victimization appear to go hand in hand. Alcohol impacts cognitive ability, and persons who are drinking are less likely to assess and recognize situations as being risky even when they are. In addition, alcohol is linked to behavioral inhibition, such that people may act in ways they otherwise would not, which may incite aggression in others. Alcohol is also linked to victimization when offenders purposefully select intoxicated victims because they are seen as easy targets.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast the UCR and the NCVS. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? Which is the best measure of victimization?
2. Apply the concepts of routine activities and lifestyles theories to evaluate your own risk of being victimized. What could you change to reduce your risk?
3. What are the individual-level factors that place people at risk of being crime victims? What are the structural factors and social process factors

that place individuals at risk of being crime victims?

4. Why is there such a strong relationship between alcohol and victimization? How can alcohol use by a victim fit into the typologies discussed in Chapter 1?

5. Given what you have read about the theories and factors that influence crime victimization, how can victimization be prevented? Be sure to tie your prevention ideas to what is thought to cause victimization.

## KEY TERMS

age-graded theory of adult social bonds 32  
bounding 19  
capable guardianship 25  
“code of the streets” 24  
control-balance theory 30  
control deficit 30  
control ratio 30  
control surplus 30  
Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) 22  
delinquent peers 28

family structure 27  
gene × environment interaction 33  
general theory of crime 31  
hierarchy rule 17  
hot spots 27  
incident report 20  
life-course perspective 31  
motivated offenders 25  
National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) 19  
neighborhood context 27

principle of homogamy 26  
residential mobility 27  
routine activities and lifestyles-exposure theories 24  
screen questions 20  
series victimizations 21  
social interactionist perspective 31  
structural density 27  
suitable targets 25  
Uniform Crime Report (UCR) 17  
victimization theory 25

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**“Alcohol and Crime”:** <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/ac.pdf>

This report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in connection with the U.S. Department of Justice, looks at the link between alcohol and crime. It includes several graphs and figures that show the link between crime, specifically violent crime, and alcohol. These statistics also show that alcohol-related crime is generally decreasing.

**Bureau of Justice Statistics: Victim Characteristics:** <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=92>

The NCVS provides information on characteristics of victims, including age, race, ethnicity, gender, marital status, and household income. For violent crimes (rape, sexual assault, assault, and robbery), the characteristics are based on the victim who experienced the crime. For property crimes (household burglary, motor vehicle theft, and property theft),

the characteristics are based on the household of the respondent who provided information about these crimes.

Property crimes are defined as affecting the entire household.

**Crime in the United States: The Nation’s Two Crime Measures:** [https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2013/crime-in-the-u.s.-2013/resource-pages/nations-two-crime-measures/nations\\_two\\_crime\\_measures#:~:text=Rape%2C%20robbery%2C%20theft%2C%20and,of%20rape%20against%20both%20sexes](https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2013/crime-in-the-u.s.-2013/resource-pages/nations-two-crime-measures/nations_two_crime_measures#:~:text=Rape%2C%20robbery%2C%20theft%2C%20and,of%20rape%20against%20both%20sexes)

This website is part of the FBI’s research on various crimes. This one specifically examines the differences, advantages, and disadvantages of the UCR and the NCVS. Both forms of research are important to the study of crime.

**“Opportunity Makes the Thief: Practical Theory for Crime Prevention”:** [https://popcenter.asu.edu/sites/default/files/opportunity\\_makes\\_the\\_thief.pdf](https://popcenter.asu.edu/sites/default/files/opportunity_makes_the_thief.pdf)

This article combines several theories that focus on the “opportunity” of crimes. This includes the routine activities approach, the rational choice perspective, and crime pattern theory. This publication argues that the root cause of crime is opportunity. This allows for prevention techniques to focus on how to lessen the opportunity for crime to occur.

**Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods:** <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/PHDCN/about.html>

The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods is an interdisciplinary study of how families, schools, and neighborhoods affect child and adolescent development. It was designed to advance understanding of the developmental pathways of both positive and negative human social behaviors. In particular, the project examined the pathways to juvenile delinquency, adult crime, substance abuse, and violence. At the same time, the project also provided a detailed look at the environments in which these social behaviors take place by collecting substantial amounts of data about urban Chicago, including its people, institutions, and resources.

## MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

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### Online Tool—Interactive Crime Data Explorer

<https://crime-data-explorer.fr.cloud.gov/>

Use this tool to explore Uniform Crime Reporting Program data across locales in the United States.

### Online Video—TED Talk: Strange Answers to the Psychopath Test

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xYemnKEKx0c>

In this TED Talk, the differences between sanity and crazy are discussed with particular attention on psychopathy.

### Podcast—*Reducing Crime*, Episode 16, “Marcus Felson” (the originator of routine activities theory)

<https://www.reducingcrime.com/podcast>

Listen to this podcast to learn more about the development of routine activities theory and its specific components.