

Risk Factors for Youth Victimization: Beyond a Lifestyles/Routine Activities Theory Approach

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Past efforts to understand the risks for youth victimization have primarily utilized concepts from lifestyle or routine activity theory, such as the increased exposure and reduced guardianship that are entailed when youth engage in risky or delinquent behavior. In this article, we argue that other personal characteristics put youth at risk, not through any lifestyle or routine activity mechanism, but by making certain youth more "congruent" with the needs, motives, or reactivities of potential offenders. Three specific types of such characteristics are those that increase the potential victim's *target vulnerability* (e.g., physical weakness or psychological distress), *target gratifiability* (e.g., female gender for the crime of sexual assault), or *target antagonism* (e.g., behaviors or ethnic or group identities that may spark hostility or resentment). Using data from a national youth survey, we test variables measuring such aspects of target congruence and show that they make a significant contribution over and above lifestyle variables alone in predicting nonfamily, sexual, and parental assault.

Youth are the most victimization-prone segment of the population. Data from the National Crime Survey show that youth ages 12-17 suffer 2.3 times more violent crime than the population as a whole, including 2.4 times as much assault and 1.8 times as much robbery (Moone, 1994). Over half of all sexual assault victims reported to law enforcement are under 18 (Langan & Harlow, 1994). Moreover, other studies also show youth to be considerably more vulnerable than the adult population to intrafamily violence (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994b; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), a form of victimization that is poorly estimated in law enforcement statistics and the National Crime Victimization Survey, especially for the youth population (Whitaker & Bastian, 1991).

LIFESTYLE AND ROUTINE ACTIVITIES THEORY

Within the field of criminology, explanations for young people's differential vulnerability to victimization have in recent years generally been drawn from the closely related "lifestyle

exposure" and "routine activities" theories (Cohen, 1981; Garofalo, Siegel, & Laub, 1987; Gottfredson, 1986; Hindelang, Gottfredson, & Garofalo, 1978). Such theories highlight the fact that lifestyles and activities of different groups of individuals put them in environments or situations where they are more or less in contact with potential offenders and at risk of potential victimization. Miethe and Meier (1994), arguing that lifestyle and routine activities are essentially the same theory, have distilled the four central concepts that have been used in these approaches to explain the connection between lifestyles and risk: proximity to crime, exposure to crime, target attractiveness, and guardianship. So, for example, living in high crime areas and being out at night increase a person's *proximity* and *exposure* to criminals. Owning desirable and portable possessions increases a person's *target attractiveness*. And spending considerable time alone or apart from the family or other possibly protective individuals reduces the potential for *guardianship* that would deter would-be offenders. These concepts have proven useful in empirically explaining why certain groups like men, blacks, and single people have higher crime victimization rates, and why rates have increased over time.

These concepts have been applied to the analysis of youth victimization, in particular how increased exposure and decreased guardianship heighten youth vulnerability. Young people are viewed as engaging in risky behaviors, such as staying out late, going to parties, and drinking, which compromise the guardianship provided by parents and adults and expose them to more possibilities for victimization (Jensen & Brownfield, 1986). Much of the research on youth victimization has particularly stressed its connection to *delinquent activities* (Lauritsen, Laub, & Sampson, 1992; Lauritsen, Sampson, & Laub, 1991). Delinquency is seen as a lifestyle that puts a person in close proximity to other offenders — aggressive or delinquent companions or rival gang members — and also greatly reduces guardianship because delinquents tend to avoid conventional social environments and through their activities also largely forfeit their claims on the protection of police and other authorities (Sparks, 1982). Empirical research has confirmed that delinquents are indeed more prone to victimization than other youth (Lauritsen et al., 1991, 1992).

CRITIQUE OF LIFESTYLE AND ROUTINE ACTIVITIES THEORY

However, this perspective on youth victimization has some obvious limitations. For one thing, many youth get victimized without any involvement in delinquency. Delinquent activities are primarily the domain of adolescents, particularly adolescent boys, but even young children get assaulted, kidnapped, and sexually abused (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994b) without any connection to delinquent behavior. Moreover, the lifestyle and routine activities theories were designed for and have always been best at explaining variations in stereotypical street crime like stranger assaults and robberies. But much of youth victimization, especially of younger children, occurs at the hands of acquaintances and family members (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994b).

These acquaintance and intrafamily victimizations are not well suited to the lifestyle or routine activities concepts. For example, routine activities studies often operationalize *exposure to crime* as the amount of time routinely spent out at night or *away* from the family household. However, for a child at risk of parental violence, such activities do not increase risk.

Thus, it is not surprising that theories developed to explain children's victimization by acquaintances and family members have virtually ignored lifestyle theory and have relied

on other concepts besides exposure and guardianship. For example, in trying to account for who becomes the target of bullying, observers have noted that these tend to be children with "avoidant-insecure" attachment relationships with primary caregivers, who lack trust, have low self-confidence, physical impairments, are socially isolated, and physically weaker (Olweus, 1993; Smith, Bowers, Binney, & Cowie, 1993).

The literature on parental assault on children also takes a very different tack from the lifestyles approach. This literature tends to equate victimization risk primarily with family and parental attributes, like family stress, isolation, alcoholic and violence-prone caretakers, parents who have victimization histories and unrealistic expectations of their children (National Research Council, 1993), and youth characteristics such as oppositional behavior, difficult temperament, or impairments that are a burden or source of disappointment for caregivers (Berdie, Berdie, Wexler, & Fisher, 1983; Garbarino, 1989; Libby & Bybee, 1979; Schellenbach & Guernsey, 1987).

A still different victimization literature, the one on child sexual assault, notes even some other risk factors: girls, children from stepparent families, children whose parents fight or are distant and punitive, reduced parental supervision, and emotional deprivation that make children and youth vulnerable to the offers of attention and affection that sexual predatory offenders sometimes use to draw children into sexual activities (Finkelhor, 1993; Finkelhor, 1994).

The concepts from these other literatures can to a limited extent be subsumed into the routine activities conceptual framework. Thus, for example, lack of supervision (as a risk for sexual abuse) does correspond to the guardianship concept. Family social isolation (as a risk for parental physical abuse) also has an element of missing guardianship, but in this case the guardians are not the family members themselves, but members of a related social network. One might also consider characteristics like insecure attachment, having an impairment, being a female, or being emotionally deprived as features of "target attractiveness."

But target attractiveness, in the routine activities literature, has primarily been utilized in a very narrow sense, in reference to the value and portability of material objects that as a result of their lifestyle a person may own or carry (Hough, 1987; Miethe & Meier, 1994). It could be extended without too much distortion to refer to the value of a victim as an object of desire, such as for a sexual crime. But it takes on a very different meaning in the case of violent victimizations, one in which the word "attraction" seems quite inappropriate. A child who is beaten by a parent because the child's disability disappoints and frustrates a parent is an "attractive target" for parental anger in only a very ironic and convoluted idea. Moreover, it is not necessarily true, as is often the case for property crime, that the offender is simply choosing among more attractive targets. In the example of parental assault, if the child were not disabled, it is not clear that some other child would then suffer the abuse.

But perhaps the biggest objection to trying to subsume such concepts into routine activities theory is that none of these target attributes constitute a lifestyle nor do they necessarily increase risk through routine activities. Thus, femaleness is not a routine activity. Moreover, while maleness may put men at differential risk for physical assault because men engage in more unsupervised and risk-taking behavior (a lifestyle feature), femaleness does not put women at differential risk for sexual assault by virtue of anything they do. Femaleness itself is the risk attribute. Similarly, while emotional deprivation may change a person's routine activities, if a molester preys on such a child because she is needy, it is not the routine activities of the child that necessarily elevate the risk. The routine activities idea of target attractiveness as developed by theorists like Hough (1987) does not seem broad enough.

A REVISED CONCEPTUALIZATION

Thus, to explain the full range of victimizations youth suffer, the lifestyle or routine activities framework needs to be modified. Concepts like guardianship, exposure, and proximity, when it comes to victimization by intimates, need to be seen not as aspects of routine activities or lifestyles, but as *environmental* factors that expose or protect victims from victimization. Thus, when a child is placed at risk for sexual abuse because parents are fighting and inattentive, the lack of guardianship is an environmental condition conducive to victimization, not a problem of a lifestyle or routine activity for the child.

But in addition to the environmental conditions highlighted by the lifestyle theory to explain the risks for youth victimization, more attention also needs to be given to the risk-increasing potential of individual characteristics and attributes, like female gender or emotional deprivation. These personal characteristics of individuals would appear to increase vulnerability to victimization, independent of any routine activities, because these characteristics have some *congruence with the needs, motives or reactivities* of offenders. That is, because certain offenders are drawn to or react to certain types of victims or certain characteristics in victims, such victims are more vulnerable. This process might be called "target congruence" and it increases risk in one of three more specific ways, referred to here as *target vulnerability, target gratifiability, or target antagonism*:

- 1) In the case of *target vulnerability*, some victim characteristics increase risk because they compromise the potential victim's capacity to resist or deter victimization and thus make the victim an easier target for the offender. For youth victimization, the prototypical risk factors in the vulnerability category would be attributes like small size, physical weakness, emotional deprivation, or psychological problems.
- 2) In the case of *target gratifiability*, some victim characteristics increase risk because they are some quality, possession, skill, or attribute that an offender wants to obtain, use, have access to, or manipulate. The prototypical risk factor in the gratifiability category would be female gender for the crime of sexual assault, but keeping in mind that for some sexual offenders gratifiability focuses on prepubescent children or in some cases boys. Having valuable possessions, as in the routine activities notion of target attractiveness, would also fall into this category.
- 3) In the case of *target antagonism*, some characteristics increase risk by being qualities, possessions, skills, or attributes that arouse the anger, jealousy, or destructive impulses of the offender. Examples in this category would be ethnic characteristics or being gay or effeminate (for hate crimes), or being anxiously attached, a "mama's boy," etc. (as in the case of bully victims). In the case of parental assaults, characteristics such as being a burden due to disability or being disobedient would be other examples.

Although these target congruence concepts, and particularly the target gratifiability one, have similarities to the notion of target attractiveness, the word attractiveness and its stereotypical applications in the crime of sexual assault have victim-blaming connotations that need to be avoided. The attractions implied in the concepts used here are specific to the predispositions, proclivities, and reactivities of the offender, hence the idea of congruence. Thus gratifiability means that the target fits what the offender is looking for, whether conventionally desirable or merely satisfying of an offender's idiosyncratic motive. Antagonism does not imply provocation in the conventional sense: without some predisposition a crying baby does not provoke assault any more than does being the member of a minority

It is important to note, as the examples also illustrate, that target congruence changes considerably from crime to crime, and from offender to offender. Thus a female may have more target gratifiability for a sexual assault, but a male may have more target antagonism for a gay-bashing. Characteristics that might increase target antagonism for parental assaults, like disobedience, may have little if anything to do with risk for peer victimization. There may be some generalized target congruence characteristics, like weakness, but even this may be a relatively insignificant factor in many victimizations.

These target congruence elements also clearly play a greater role in some offenses than others. In relatively impersonal street crimes or group victimizations (e.g., sniper attacks) and also in the case of family members who live with very violent individuals, offenders may not be choosing victims on the basis of any personal characteristic at all, only proximity. In other victimizations (e.g., attempts to assassinate the president, stalking crimes, or a parent maltreating a colicky baby) the congruence of the personal characteristics of the victim with the motives or reactivities of the offender provide a virtually complete explanation of victim choice.

These target congruence concepts seem to encompass most of the characteristics that have been cited in the literature on youth victimization outside the lifestyle theory domain, characteristics like low self-esteem, and disobedience. But they also seem quite relevant to the prediction of forms of victimization, like street crime, that have been the primary focus of routine activities research. Our hypothesis is that when variables operationalizing these concepts are included in analyses of youth victimization, they will increase the explanatory power of the models, over and above what is explained by conventional lifestyle-type variables.

CURRENT STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

The second portion of this paper attempts an empirical test of whether this reformulation of the lifestyles framework into a more general framework might be helpful in predicting youth victimization. In particular it examines whether the inclusion of the concept of target congruence would add explanatory power to an analysis. The data for this test, although not collected specifically for this purpose, come from the National Youth Victimization Prevention Study (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994a), a two-wave, random digit dial telephone survey of young people and their caretakers that looked at the exposure to and impact of victimization prevention education programs. In Wave 1, a nationally representative sample of 2,000 youth between the ages of 10 and 16 were interviewed about their victimization experiences and exposure to victimization prevention instruction. Upon contact with the household, interviewers spoke with the primary caretaker, explaining the objectives of the study and asking him or her some questions relevant to child victimization and prevention. They then obtained parental permission to interview the child. Speaking to the children, the interviewers again explained the study, obtained their consent, and proceeded with an interview that lasted between 30 minutes and one hour.

In Wave 1, the participation rate was 88% of the adults approached (10,656 of 12,146; including adults without children and adults with children outside the appropriate age range), and 82% of the eligible children in the households of cooperating adults (2,000 of 2,431). About four-fifths of the refusals came from caretakers denying permission to interview the children and the rest from the children not wishing to be interviewed. Children in households that refused participation were more likely than those in participating households to

be in the two youngest age groups (10-11) (35% vs. 30%, $p < .001$) and parents in the refusing households were more likely to believe that violence was not a problem in their community (77% vs. 72% in participating households, $p < .01$).

The households were recontacted for a follow-up interview with much the same procedure and content. Follow-up interviews occurred between 8 and 24 months after the initial interview with the average delay being 15 months. Five hundred twenty (26%) of the original sample was unavailable for reinterview, 360 of whom we were unable to locate, and 160 who refused (115 parents and 45 children) to be interviewed. Twenty-three additional cases were dropped due to incomplete data.

Sample attrition was more likely to come from lower educated and Black and Hispanic households, families that had experienced a move in the year prior to Wave 1, and also households in which children were not living with both natural parents or had experienced a previous attempted or completed sexual victimization. In the Wave 2 sample of 772 boys and 685 girls, 84% were White, 8% Black, 6% Hispanic and 3% other. In terms of income, 14% came from families with incomes under \$20,000, 50% from families with incomes between \$20,000 and \$50,000 and 36% with incomes over \$50,000. Compared to U.S. Census data, Black and Hispanic children, as well as children from low income families, were somewhat underrepresented.

Concepts

Variables within the study were selected that represented all of the major concepts discussed previously, including the lifestyle (or what will be termed here environmental) concepts of proximity, exposure, and guardianship, and the target congruence concepts of vulnerability, gratifiability, and antagonism. However, the fit was not always optimal because the study had not been designed for this purpose.

In trying to operationalize these concepts several complexities became clear. First, as already suggested, the concepts have very different meanings for different kinds of victimization. Living in a high crime neighborhood is a clear example of a proximity variable for nonfamily assault in the lifestyle theory as it plausibly increases risk for nonfamily victimization. But it does not have the same meaning for assaults by parents. Second, the same characteristic can be an example of two very different kinds of risks for different kinds of victimizations. Thus risky behavior (like running away or getting drunk) puts youth at risk for nonfamily assault by exposing them to potential offenders, but in the context of parental assault, risk-taking behavior puts youth at risk by angering parents or increasing their attempts to control or stop it—something better conceptualized as target antagonism. Finally a characteristic can contribute to risk *in several different ways* even in regard to the same kind of crime. Thus young age can decrease risk for nonfamily assault because it is associated with fewer out-of-the-family activities (less exposure, more guardianship), but it can also increase risk by being associated with physical weakness or less experience (target vulnerability). Thus some of the variables are used to operationalize different concepts and there is some ambiguity about the conceptual meaning of some of the variables described below.

Environmental Measures

Community Violence. For proximity to crime, a set of Wave 1 questions were chosen that asked parents and children about the dangerousness of the neighborhood they lived in and the school they attended. Parents indicated how much of a problem violence was in their

community and at their child's school. They also rated their level of concern over their child's safety at school and in the neighborhood. In addition, youth reported directly how safe they felt from crime when they were outside and whether the level of crime in their school was worse or better than that in other schools. Responses to these items were standardized (transformed to Z-scores) and then summed to form a composite measure of perceived community violence (Range = -6.3 - 13.00; $M = -.02$; $SD = 3.56$; Cronbach's alpha = .65).

Risky Behavior. Exposure to crime was operationalized by four different types of risky behavior engaged in during the year prior to their Wave 1 interview. Those behaviors included running away from home, stealing, getting drunk, and carrying a weapon to school (the referent period for the latter item was the previous month). For analysis purposes, youth were categorized as either engaging in none of the four behaviors (78.5%) or one or more of the behaviors (21.5%).

Parental Supervision. As one of several measures of guardianship, a measure of parental supervision was created by combining responses to two Wave 1 items that asked youth how often their parents know where they are and who they are with when away from the home (Cronbach's alpha = .68). Scores on the parental supervision index range from 2-10 and most youth reported relatively high levels of supervision ($M = 8.65$, $SD = 1.42$).

Positive Parent-Child Relationship. For another measure of guardianship, a general measure of the quality of the parent-child relationship was constructed from an additional set of Wave 1 items that asked youth to rate how much their parents trusted them, how likely they would be to talk to their parents if they were in trouble, how much fun they and their parents usually have together, and how often their parents nag them, take away privileges, and yell at them.¹ The latter three items were reverse coded so that when the items were summed to form a single index (Range = 6-30; Cronbach's alpha = .67), higher scores represented a better parent-child relationship. As with supervision, most youth reported having a positive relationship with parents ($M = 22.52$, $SD = 3.57$).

Parental Structure. As another guardianship indicator, dummy variables were included that described the parental structure of the household the children lived in at the time of the Wave 1 interview: step-parent households (11%), single-parent households (13%) and other types of nonparental guardianship (2%). The households with two-natural parents (74%) represented the comparison category.

Target Congruence Variables

Six indicators were adopted to represent the concept of target vulnerability: two indicators of physical stature, a question about physical limitations, a measure of psychological distress, an indicator of lower social competence and age.

Physical Stature. Two indicators of physical stature were derived from national weight and height norms for youth (Hamill et al., 1979). One categorizes all children who are at or below the 25th percentile in weight and height for their age and gender as "small." The other measure categorizes all children who are at or above the 75th percentile in weight and at or below the 50th percentile in height for their age and gender as "overweight." According to these criteria, 46 females ($M_s = 4'7"$ and 80 lbs for height and weight, respectively) and 29 males ($M_s = 4'9"$ and 88 lbs for height and weight, respectively) were classified as small and 50 females ($M_s = 5'0"$ and 135 lbs for height and weight, respectively) and 44 males ($M_s = 4'8"$ and 117 lbs for height and weight, respectively) were classified as overweight.

Physical Limitations. Information was also obtained about the presence of physical impairments that impede everyday functioning. Wave 1 respondents were asked the following question: "Do you have any conditions that limit the kinds of things you can do, like seeing, hearing, or moving?" Youth who responded in the affirmative (9.5%) were then asked to describe the nature of those conditions. The most common conditions were vision problems that required the use of corrective lenses, asthma, hearing difficulties, or muscular-skeletal problems that limited their range of activities or reduced their physical stamina.

Psychological Distress. Psychological distress was measured using 10 Wave 1 items adapted from the Symptom Checklist-90-Revised (SCL-90-R) (Saunders, Arata, & Kilpatrick, 1990). Those items asked youth about difficulties falling asleep and staying asleep, feelings of guilt and hopelessness, and feeling irritable and being unable to control their temper. Each question was chosen primarily for its ability to measure reactions to trauma and, when summed (Range = 10-30; $M = 13.12$, $SD = 3.10$), the items formed an internally consistent index of distress (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$). However, this index is perhaps best regarded as a general measure of distress as it is strongly associated with other symptomatology such as depression ($r = .43$) and self-esteem ($r = -.49$).

Social Competence. A question was included about whether the child had a failing grade in school in the last year (38% indicated they had), as a marker of possible lower social competence, intellectual ability, and demoralization.

Age. Age was included as a vulnerability variable on the hypothesis that less experience and lower status in the social hierarchies of school could increase risk (Range = 10-16; $M = 12.87$, $SD = 1.92$).

There were not as many variables that could represent the concepts of target gratifiability and antagonism as there were for vulnerability. One obvious variable to operationalize target gratifiability was female gender in regard to the crime of sexual assault. It is also possible to conceptualize male gender as a gratifiability variable for the crime of physical assault. To the extent that physical assaults among youth are attempts to establish dominance (Olweus, 1991), beating up a male has a reputational gratification that beating up a female does not. So male gender was treated as a gratifiability indicator for nonfamily assault.

There were also limited illustrations for target antagonism. Since target antagonism may be most clearly observed in intrafamily assaults, this concept was represented with youth characteristics that would from the literature be predicted to incite anger or resentment in parents. One was youth disobedience and acting out behavior, such as drinking, stealing, and leaving home without permission. This is the same as the risky behavior measure. But in family assaults, risky behavior does not increase exposure to offenders, rather it would be conceptualized as increasing antagonism. The literature also suggests that physical limitations can be a source of parental rejection and abuse.

Sociodemographic Covariates

Each analysis included two sociodemographic covariates that might potentially create spurious associations between victimization and the lifestyle and target congruence variables: child race (84% White; 16% non-White) and educational level of the head of household. Educational level was an ordinal variable ranging from no formal schooling to graduate level degree.

Youth Victimization

The utility of target congruence concepts was tested on several kinds of youth victimization. Nonfamily assault was used because it is a type of victimization that has been the subject of past lifestyle theory analyses (Lauritsen et al., 1991). Two other types of victimization, however, sexual assault and parental assault, are important components of the youth victimization picture that have in the past fallen outside of the purview of those interested in victimological theory.

In contrast to the risk factor variables which all come from the Wave 1 interview, all the victimization variables come from the Wave 2 interview in order to establish proper causal sequence. Respondents were asked a total of 12 separate screener questions about possible attempted and completed victimizations in the interim between the two interviews. Two of the screeners were devoted to nonfamily assault, two others to family assault, and six to sexual assault. A child saying yes to any screener was asked a set of detailed questions about up to two of their most recent victimization experiences. Those questions covered facts such as who the perpetrator was and what the perpetrator did. The information obtained in this portion of the interview allowed us to make sure the episode met our definitional criteria and to classify the youth according to those who had experienced the types of attempted and completed victimizations used in the present analysis: nonfamily assaults (14%), sexual assaults (6%), and parental assaults (4%). (For details on the screener questions, definitions, and additional information about rates, see Finkelhor & Dzuiba-Leatherman [1994a].)

The majority of nonfamily incidents were completed dyadic assaults by one youth on an acquaintance, with just under one-third resulting in injury (Table 1). The sexual assaults were primarily against female victims, carried out by known males, half of whom were other youths and half adults. Only three of the sexual assaults were by family members. Ten percent of all the sexual victimizations were serious noncontact experiences, 41% involved actual physical contact, including 12% attempted penetration, but only 1% completed penetration. The rest (48%) were attempted sexual episodes that involved no contact. The parental assaults were typically committed by fathers (13% were carried out by a stepparent) and resulted in injury in almost one third of the episodes.

TABLE 1. Characteristics of Victimization Incidents

Characteristic	Type of Victimization		
	Nonfamily (n = 169) %	Sexual (n = 77) %	Parental (n = 39) %
Completed assault	66	52	54
Serious noncontact sexual	—	10	—
Contact sexual	—	41	—
Genital penetration	—	1	—
Male perpetrator	71	86	74
Adult perpetrator	11	52	100
Stranger perpetrator	15	20	—
Multiple perpetrators	35	12	10
Male victim	70	22	41
Injury	30	7	31
Medical attention	3	0	0

FINDINGS

To examine how much the target congruence variables added to the prediction of victimization over and above the environmental variables, hierarchical logistic regression was used in two of the analyses (nonfamily and sexual assault), but not in the analysis of parental assault for reasons discussed below.

Nonfamily Assault

In the model predicting nonfamily assault, seven variables were assembled to represent environmental concepts. Community violence represented proximity to crime, risky behavior represented the youth's exposure to crime, and supervision represented guardianship. Several other aspects of guardianship were represented by the quality of the parent-child relationship and three variables regarding family structure (stepfamily, single parent family, and other nonnatural parent family). Two other variables, race and social class (as indicated by education of the head of household), were also included as covariates.

Several additional variables were assembled to represent target congruence factors. Psychological distress was included as an indicator of target vulnerability from a behavioral vantage point, along with a failing grade in school — conceptualized as a confluence of behavioral risk factors like lower intelligence, demoralization, and lower social competence. Target vulnerability from a physical vantage point was represented by small size, being overweight, or having some kind of physical impairment. Age was included as another vulnerability factor, representing smallness and inexperience. Gender served as a target gratifiability factor; that is, since much youth assault may be conceptualized as attempts to establish hierarchy or show dominance (Olweus, 1991), boys are a more congruent target for these assaults than girls, boys get reputational gratification by beating up other boys. Correlations among these variables appear in Table 2.

The results of the multivariate analysis, shown in Table 3, indicate that environmental variables and target congruence variables both make independent contributions to the prediction of nonfamily assault. From the environmental variable group both the proximity measure (risky behavior) and the exposure measure (risky behavior) are predictors, but the guardianship measures are only marginally associated. From the target congruence group, two vulnerability factors — psychological distress and failing grade in school — make a contribution. Age is also a predictor, and the fact that *younger age is associated with more victimization* (once risky behavior has been controlled for in the lifestyle group) suggests that age in this model is also operating as a vulnerability factor. Gender, which we conceptualize here as a gratifiability factor, also makes a contribution.

Sexual Assault

The model for sexual assault is fairly similar to the model for nonfamily assault. The environmental concepts are represented by community violence (proximity), risky behavior (exposure), and the supervision, parent-child relationship and family structure variables as measures of guardianship. Target congruence variables related to vulnerability are represented by psychological distress, small size, overweight, and having a physical limitation. Female gender and age are conceptualized as target gratifiability variables, since for most sexual aggressors sexually mature adolescent girls are their preferred target. Two generalized covariates for race and social class are included.

In the analysis (Table 4) variables related to exposure (risky behavior) and guardianship (having a stepparent) were significant and the proximity variable (community violence)

TABLE 2. Intercorrelations Among Environmental & Target Congruence Predictors

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Comm. Viol.	1.0															
2. Risky Beh.	.16	1.0														
3. Par. Superv.	-.08	-.28	1.0													
4. Pos. P-C Relat	-.14	-.34	.37	1.0												
5. Step-parent	.03	.06	-.01	-.08	1.0											
6. Single-parent	.18	.07	-.05	-.04	-.14	1.0										
7. Other Family	.05	.05	-.05	-.05	-.05	-.05	1.0									
8. Edu. HOH	-.16	-.01	-.01	.05	-.08	-.08	-.01	1.0								
9. Race (White)	-.22	-.10	.03	.05	.02	-.12	-.01	.08	1.0							
10. Psych. Dist.	.15	.23	-.16	-.38	.04	.02	.05	-.06	-.06	1.0						
11. Failing Grade	.21	.25	-.18	-.18	.09	.10	.07	-.22	-.12	.20	1.0					
12. Phys. Limits	.01	.10	-.04	-.07	.02	.06	-.01	.07	-.001	.10	.03	1.0				
13. Overweight	.11	.03	.04	.01	.05	.03	-.02	-.07	-.07	-.01	.08	-.01	1.0			
14. Small	.01	.02	.04	-.06	.03	.01	.01	-.01	.01	.04	.04	.01	-.06	1.0		
15. Age	.04	.17	-.09	-.25	.01	.07	.03	-.02	-.02	.09	.02	.08	.02	.06	1.0	
16. Female	.08	-.17	.25	.06	-.01	.02	.01	-.02	-.02	.03	-.14	-.003	.03	.07	.04	1.0

TABLE 3. Environmental and Target Congruence Predictors of Nonfamily Assault: Logistic Regression

Variable	Type	Partial Model			Full Model		
		Odds	R	χ^2	Odds	R	χ^2
Environmental Variables							
Community violence	Prox	1.08***	.09		1.08**	.09	
Risky behavior	Exp	1.82**	.08		1.57*	.05	
Parental supervision	Guard	.91	-.02		.98	.00	
Positive P-C relations	Guard	.98	.00		.97	.00	
Step-parent family	Guard	1.57*	.04		1.59+	.04	
Single-parent family	Guard	1.43	.02		1.50+	.03	
Other family structure	Guard	1.35	.00		1.46	.00	
Education HOH	Cov	1.06	.00		1.09	.00	
Race (White)	Cov	1.43	.02		1.51+	.03	
				47.4***			
Target Congruence Variables							
Psychological distress	Vuln				1.07**	.07	
Failing grade	Vuln				1.46*	.05	
Physical limitations	Vuln				.94	.00	
Overweight	Vuln				.97	.00	
Small	Vuln				.61	.00	
Age	Vuln				.87**	-.08	
Gender (Male)	Gratif				1.92***	.10	
							38.7***

Notes. + $p \leq .10$. * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

TABLE 4. Environmental and Target Congruence Predictors of Sexual Assault: Logistic Regression

Variable	Type	Partial Model			Full Model		
		Odds	R	χ^2	Odds	R	χ^2
Environmental Variables							
Community violence	Prox	1.08*	.07		1.06+	.04	
Risky behavior	Exp	1.92**	.08		2.12**	.09	
Parental supervision	Guard	1.08	.00		.96	.00	
Positive P-C relations	Guard	.94+	-.05		1.03	.00	
Step-parent family	Guard	2.03**	.08		1.98*	.07	
Single-parent family	Guard	.81	.00		.80	.00	
Other family structure	Guard	1.07	.00		.60	.00	
Education HOH	Cov	.98	.00		1.03	.00	
Race (White)	Cov	1.24	.00		1.40	.00	
				31.1***			
Target Congruence Variables							
Psychological distress	Vuln				1.14***	.14	
Physical limitations	Vuln				.43+	-.05	
Overweight	Vuln				1.38	.00	
Small	Vuln				1.31	.00	
Age	Gratif				1.28***	.14	
Gender (Male)	Gratif				3.48***	.17	
							65.6***

Notes. + $p \leq .10$. * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

was tending toward significance. However, it was the target congruence variables that were the most important contributors in the combined model. Not surprisingly female gender was the most powerful predictor, and being older was also important. Thus, the target gratifiability variables loom large in predicting sexual assault. But it is also important to note that psychological distress—a target vulnerability factor—played a role in predicting sexual assault. Curiously, having a physical limitation (which bordered on significance) operated opposite to expectation with limitations protecting against rather than increasing the risk for sexual assault.

Parental Assault

The model for parental assaults is very different from the two previous models for non-family or sexual assault. The environmental concepts of proximity and exposure (as indicated by such things as high crime neighborhoods or risky activities) do not apply because these are not indicators of greater exposure to the offenders, who in this case are parents. Guardianship also cannot be represented by such variables as parental supervision, since more supervision might in fact create more opportunity, not more protection. Instead, almost all the relevant variables are best conceptualized as target congruence measures.

Children are more vulnerable to parental assault by being smaller, more dependent, or weaker. Thus age, size, and being overweight were chosen as vulnerability indicators. Some indicators of vulnerability, however, may also be conceptualized as antagonism factors. Thus having a physical limitation, which makes a child less able to resist, may also be a source of burden or disappointment for a parent. Being an adolescent girl, which could be seen as a vulnerability factor, may also be treated as an antagonism factor, as fathers in particular try to cope with and control their daughters' sexuality. Risky behavior is conceptualized here as an antagonism factor—a source of conflict and something that parents often try to control using force. Two other antagonism factors are having a poor relationship with parents and having a parent who is not biologically related. Having a single parent is also included as an antagonism factor because the burden of caretaking responsibilities on this single parent may breed resentment toward the child. Race and social class are included as generalized covariates.

The results of the multivariate analyses (Table 5) do show that several of these target congruence variables are predictive of parental assault. None of the vulnerability variables were significant. The antagonism factors that are significant include having a limiting condition, engaging in risky behavior, and having a stepparent.

DISCUSSION

This article has argued that lifestyle theory explanations have insufficiently conceptualized some important ways in which the personal characteristics of victims put them at risk for victimization, and that these characteristics should be viewed as features that make the victims (or targets) "congruent" with the motives, needs, or reactivities of particular offenders, in the way that adolescent females are congruent with the sexual orientation of most rapists. We have further broken down this target congruence into three components: target vulnerability—characteristics like weakness that make the victim easier to victimize; target gratifiability—characteristics like gender that make the victim an appropriate source of gratification; and target antagonism—characteristics that arouse the perpetrator's anger,

TABLE 5. Target Congruence Predictors of Parental Assault: LogisticRegression

Variable	Type	Odds	R	χ^2
Target Congruence Variables				
Psychological distress	Vuln	1.04	.00	
Age	Vuln	.87	-.03	
Overweight	Vuln	1.50	.00	
Small	Vuln	1.89	.00	
Physical limitations	Antag	2.24**	.08	
Gender (Female)	Antag	1.62	.03	
Risky behavior	Antag	3.51***	.16	
Positive P-C relations	Antag	.92	-.03	
Step-parent family	Antag	3.12**	.13	
Single-parent family	Antag	1.93	.04	
Other family structure	Antag	3.80*	.06	
Education (HOH)	Cov	1.06	.00	
Race (White)	Cov	.87	.00	
				55.57***

Notes. + $p \leq .10$. * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

resentment, or jealousy. The data analysis demonstrated that variables representing target congruence do make an independent contribution to the prediction of victimization over and above variables representing conventional lifestyle concepts.

The target congruence variables did have predictive power with three separate kinds of youth victimization: nonfamily assault, sexual assault, and parental assault. Moreover, variables representing each of the three subcategories of target congruence variables—vulnerability, gratifiability, and antagonism—were all significant contributors in predicting at least one kind of victimization, although we did not have variables to represent these concepts for all three victimization types. The inclusion of target congruence variables did add considerably to predictive power, especially certain target vulnerability factors like psychological distress.

There are, nonetheless, considerable limitations to this analysis. As has been the case with much lifestyles theory analyses, this one also did not have the best indicators to operationalize all the concepts of interest. For example, there was not an extensive list of all the risk-taking and exposure activities that might put youth at risk. It is conceivable that with better indicators of the traditional lifestyle concept of exposure, the indicators measuring concepts of target congruence would not have made a significant contribution to the equation. Thus if there had been better indicators of risky activities, the psychological distress indicator, which could conceivably be having its effect through the promotion of risky behaviors, might have dropped out.

Another important limitation is reciprocal impact. A characteristic like psychological distress can be the result of victimization as well as the cause. Our measure of distress was from Wave 1 of the study and thus clearly prior to the victimizations. But it is possible that victimizations prior to Wave 1 may be creating distress at Wave 1, and they would also be likely to be associated with more vulnerability for victimization at Wave 2.

Similarly risk-taking, which was conceptualized in the model of parental assault as an antagonism factor, sparking parent anger or attempts to control and discipline, might actually be a result of parent violence rather than a cause. Although some of the risk-taking

behavior may be temporally prior to the parental violence, it may also have been a reaction to *earlier* parental violence. This is also a possible problem with the limiting conditions variable; vision and asthma problems could have been caused by being the victim of earlier abuse.

Some of the operationalized variables may not in fact operate according to the concepts that they were chosen to represent. Thus psychological distress, conceptualized as a target vulnerability factor, could have promoted risk in other ways as well. For example, it could be a target antagonism factor, with offenders finding distressed youth to be provocative or annoying. The risk-taking variable has similar ambiguities. Although it was conceptualized as increasing exposure for nonfamily assault, it could also have been seen as an antagonism factor: for example, acting in delinquent ways might inspire the hostility of other rival youth. But it is also possible that these risk-taking behaviors could be the result of previous victimizations, in which case some of the contribution to the explanation of victimization could be spurious. The task for future analyses, especially in the case of a variable that can imply different mechanisms, is to find more specific measures that differentiate the mechanisms.

In spite of their limitations, these results do add weight to the point that analyses of victimization risk need to move beyond lifestyle concepts and include other processes by which individuals are differentially targeted. Variables representing such processes need to be included in victimological research. Moreover, researchers considering past work in this field need to consider the possibility that some of the variance explained by lifestyle concepts in this prior research was actually the spurious effect of what we called target congruence processes. So for example, if delinquency increases the risk for victimization, some of the vulnerability may be due, not to exposure, but to the fact that delinquents are more psychologically distressed and therefore vulnerable individuals, or that delinquents are more aggressive in character and thus more likely to arouse antagonism in others. A good example might be an emotionally disturbed girl who engages in delinquent activities for the approval of peers, but who is also very vulnerable to the ploys of sexually predatory men and boys who can flatter her into situations where she is easily preyed upon.

Other efforts are needed to try to conceptualize and test some of the target congruence variables proposed here. Some of the areas that obviously need development concern the issue of target gratifiability, for which we had few measures in this study. In a study that looked at vulnerability to robbery and theft, an obvious gratifiability measure would be the ownership of valuable possessions, which in the case of youth might include motorcycles, audio equipment, etc.

In addition, some of these concepts should be turned toward theorizing about youth victimization in comparison to adult victimization. Some of the concepts developed here may be useful in explaining why youth appear to be more vulnerable to victimization than adults in general. For example, youthfulness is associated with certain vulnerabilities not present among adults such as small size, inexperience, interpersonal dependency and emotional vulnerability. Youth also appear to provoke certain antagonisms, in part because of their place in the social structure—their marginality—and because of special roles they occupy. For example, because they are functionally, financially, and emotionally dependent on parents, they elicit an intensity of antagonistic reactions from caretakers. Finally, youth are differentially targeted particularly for sexual assaults because some of their characteristics appear to be specially gratifying in the hierarchy of sexual attractiveness—a factor that may have a biological as well as a cultural basis (Symons, 1979). Such new concepts in victimology may provide some help in understanding and preventing the serious problem of youth victimization.

NOTE

¹The item referring to the frequency with which parents yell at their children was removed from the parent-child relationship index in the analyses predicting parental violence. This was done so that the association between parent-child relationship and parental abuse would not be artifactually inflated because of redundancy in the predictor and outcomes variables.

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