

Book Review

Adolescent online victimization: A test of routine activities theory

Catherine Davis Marcum

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Adolescent Online Victimization: A Test of Routine Activities Theory is LFB Scholarly Publishing's most recent addition to its Criminal Justice Recent Scholarship series (McShane and Williams III, eds.). This series offers up scholarly work related to crime and criminal justice from emerging scholars on a range of contemporary issues (for example, policing and immigration, adolescent drug use and offending). Catherine Davis Marcum's contribution to the series is particularly well timed given the growth of online crime and victimization. Indeed, the growing interest among criminologists, victimologists and others in studying and explaining cybercrimes shows no signs of slowing. For good reason, cyber-crime may well be the next frontier for criminological theory.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of Marcum's work in *Adolescent Online Victimization* is not in the particular statistical findings she reports, but in the application of routine activities theory beyond its originally conceived temporal/spatial confines. In Chapter One, Marcum provides a brief history of the growth of online communications and discusses some of the ways in which these new forms of communication have resulted in online victimization, particularly among young people. Marcum notes that online harassment, unwanted exposure to sexual materials and sexual solicitation (the study's dependent variables) are three types of victimization that appear to be increasing, yet the reasons for such growth have not been well explained.

Chapter Two delves deeper into the use of the Internet as a method of communication for adolescents and young people (for example, online social networks, chat rooms). These types of forums facilitate the convergence of victims and offenders in online environments, allowing for increased opportunities for adolescent victimization. Marcum reviews recent studies of online victimization with a specific eye toward studies of online youth victimization (for example, Youth Internet Safety Survey). The chapter concludes with a review of protective measures related to online security (that is, filtering and blocking software). Chapter Three recounts the historical development of routine activities theory from its macro-level roots to its current micro-level incarnations and its possible utility in explaining online victimization.

Chapter Four describes the study's methodology for explaining both online adolescent victimization and the formation of online social relationships. In order to explore these relationships, the author utilized self-report surveys for data collection ($N=483$). Marcum explains that ideally, data from youths aged 12–17 would have been most appropriate, but difficulties in obtaining such data necessitated sampling freshman college students (approximately 18–19 years old) instead. This becomes a potential methodological limitation for



two reasons. First, respondents may have experienced difficulty recalling victimization experiences from their high school years. Second, the pace of technological change and advancements in online communications means that respondents were experiencing the Internet differently in their high school days than they were presently as college freshmen. The chapter also explains the operationalization of the key theoretical concepts in routine activities theory – target attractiveness (for example, posting information online that may make one a more attractive target, such as gender), exposure to motivated offenders (for example, time spent online, types of online activities) and capable guardianship (for example, restrictions to time spent online, presence of capable guardians in the room at time of Internet use).

Chapter Five provides the univariate and bivariate results related to the independent and dependent variables. Chapter Six lays out the risk factors for online victimization based on a series of logistic regression models. Marcum divides her findings into two primary sets of analyses: one retrospective, based on students' online experiences while they were in high school, and one modern, asking students about their current online experiences as college freshmen. She also examines males and females separately. Consistent with theoretical expectations, exposure to motivated offenders (for example, communicating with others online) and target attractiveness (for example, providing information to others online) increased likelihood of victimization. However, contrary to what routine activities theory would predict, higher levels of guardianship served to increase adolescent victimization.

Chapter Seven includes a summary of the study and a discussion of the findings with respect to its implications for crime prevention. The author advocates education as perhaps the best solution to the increasing problem of the victimization of youth online, especially in light of society's increasing reliance on the Internet for communication. For instance, Marcum suggests that children and adolescents should be encouraged to communicate with those they know and trust, but also be aware of the possible threats and dangers posed by online encounters with strangers. Further, this Internet safety education should include instructions about how to safeguard personal information, as this is one of the known antecedents to victimization. *Adolescent Online Victimization* concludes with appendices that include the survey questionnaire used in the study, an informed consent form and a list of counseling services for victims.

The lasting contribution of *Adolescent Online Victimization* may well be in the innovative application of the routine activities perspective to cybercrime, rather than in the specific findings reported within. In fact, the empirical findings necessitate replication in light of the unexpected effects of guardianship on victimization. Capable guardianship is one of the key mechanisms by which crime can be prevented, so Marcum's findings to the contrary warrant additional research attention. Guardianship (that is, restrictions on Internet use by parents, presence of a capable guardian in the room while engaging in online routine activities) was reported to increase the likelihood of victimization among respondents. Further, the presence of protective computer software either had no effect or in some cases (that is, males during the high school time period) increased likelihood of victimization. Security professionals and Internet safety organizations should consider Marcum's findings as they design their Internet safety curricula. For instance, considering the effects reported for guardianship, advocating monitored Internet use may not be the best approach to online guardianship. On the other hand, the author candidly admits that this finding may be attributed to a temporal ordering issue – specifically that respondents may have previously had



their activities restricted after encountering problems online. As such, further work applying routine activities theory to online victimization (including different types of cybervictimization) is needed.

While a number of scholars have speculated as to the potential applicability and role of routine activities in explaining cybercrime and victimization, Marcum has been among the first to take the necessary next steps. Namely, she has advanced the field of cybercrime by moving beyond the speculation and into application.

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