

ACQUAINTANCE ROBBERY

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More than one-third of the robberies reported in the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) involve people who are acquainted with each other in some way. Why do offenders so frequently target someone who can identify them to the police? This issue is explored by comparing acquaintance robberies with the typical robbery involving strangers using NCVS data. The authors find that people who are Black, poor, young, and single are particularly vulnerable to acquaintance robbery. Their vulnerability is attributed to opportunity factors, and for youth, a reluctance to report incidents to the police. Evidence suggests that some acquaintance robberies are expressions of grievances, whereas others involve inside information about what the victim is carrying.

Robbery is typically regarded as the quintessential "stranger" crime. However, victimization data presented in this article indicate that in more than one-third of robbery incidents in the United States, the offender was known to the victim. These nonstranger relationships range from those in which the offender was recognizable by sight only to familial relationships. This research represents the first attempt to examine systematically how these acquaintance robberies differ from stranger robberies.

Our research reflects the general interest of scholars in how violence involving people who know each other is different from violence involving strangers. Recognition that these crimes may be different has led some researchers to analyze homicides between family members or friends separately from stranger homicides (Parker and Smith 1979; Smith and Parker 1980). Studies have revealed that the correlates of violence involving people who know each other are different from the correlates of violence involving strangers (Avakame 1998; Heller, Ehrlich, and Lester 1983; Parker and Smith 1979; Peterson and Krivo 1993; Sampson 1987; Smith and Parker 1980; Williams and Flewelling 1988). Recently, researchers have been interested in the

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distinctiveness of intimate partner homicide and assault (e.g., Dugan, Nagin, and Rosenfeld 1999; Felson and Messner 1998, 2000; Riedel and Best 1998).

We focus on two questions: How do social-demographic predictors of robbery risk vary across incidents involving persons in different types of relationships? How does the relationship between victim and offender influence robbery outcomes, including the amount taken from the victim, whether the victim was injured, and whether the victim called the police? Prior research consistently has demonstrated that the risk of robbery victimization (and other violent crimes) is high among people who are young, male, single, poor, Black, and living in urban areas (e.g., Bureau of Justice Statistics 1999; see also Gottfredson and Hindelang 1981; Laub 1997; Sampson and Lauritsen 1994). However, these findings are based on analyses that combine incidents involving strangers and acquaintances. As Sampson (1987) noted, "There is no a priori reason to expect that the patterns of stranger crime are necessarily the same as acquaintance crime" (p. 328). Most relevant to the present research, robberies involving strangers may result from circumstances and motives that are quite different from those associated with acquaintance robbery. If so, theories designed to explain variation in robbery risk and policies designed to prevent robberies should take into account these differences (Laub 1997; Sampson 1987). Thus, it is important to examine in a multivariate context the possibility that the risk of robbery (and other crimes) may vary depending on whether the crime is committed by a stranger or someone the victim knows.

We begin with a discussion of circumstances that might lead offenders to rob people they know. Our discussion draws on the rational choice/routine activities perspective (Cornish and Clarke 1986; Felson 1994). That is, in attempting to understand differences between acquaintance and stranger robberies, we consider the role of incentives, costs, and opportunities. These perspectives help generate some specific hypotheses about differential outcomes of acquaintance and stranger robberies. We test these hypotheses using data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). Before doing so, we compare the demographic patterns of offenders and victims in acquaintance and stranger robberies, since those patterns have never been described with a large, nationally representative sample.

VULNERABILITY TO ACQUAINTANCE ROBBERY

Why would offenders target someone who can identify them and report them to the police? Four circumstances for such criminal activity seem plausible: (1) The offender believes the victim will not report the incident to the police, (2) the offender has a grievance with the victim, (3) the offender has

inside information about the victim, or (4) the offender chooses a convenient target without consideration of the consequences.

Reluctance to Report Crimes to the Police

The ability to identify assailants and report them to the police to some extent protects individuals from robbery by people they know. Therefore, when individuals are unwilling to call the police, they become vulnerable to acquaintance robbery.¹

We can imagine a variety of reasons why victims are reluctant to call the police. First, they may be involved in crime themselves and fear prosecution if they report the crime (Sampson and Lauritsen 1990). Thus, robbers report that they sometimes prey on drug dealers and other local criminals (Wright and Decker 1997).² Second, victims may be afraid that the offender will retaliate if they report the crime. Retaliation is more likely when offender and victim know each other than when they are strangers. A victim who can be intimidated by an acquaintance may be a safe target. Third, in some groups (e.g., youths), victims who report crimes to authorities are stigmatized. Someone who is labeled a "snitch," a "rat," a "fink," or a "stool pigeon" may suffer a status loss and risk physical attack. Offenders may feel safe in robbing individuals who know them under these instances. Finally, victims may consider some incidents too minor or ambiguous in meaning to justify calling the police. If, for example, the offender's threat is implicit or involves small amounts of money (e.g., "Let me borrow a quarter"), the victim may not report the incident. In addition, if the robbery reflects a dispute between the offender and victim, there may be some ambiguity over whether the offender has some legitimate claim to the property or money in question.

These principles may help explain why a significant number of robberies occur in school (Toby 1983). Presumably, the victims recognize the offenders in many of these incidents, particularly those committed by other students. However, young people, in school or out, may be reluctant to report incidents to the police. Their reluctance may stem from their own criminal behavior, their fear of retaliation, or the stigma associated with reporting their peers to authorities. In addition, the incident may involve ambiguous threats or the theft of small amounts of lunch money.

Street Justice

Robbery is usually conceived of as a predatory crime in which an offender wants something and preys on someone who can provide it. Targets are to a large extent substitutable: An offender can wait and choose a favorable target and situation based on tactical concerns (e.g., Cook 1976). And, as noted

above, strangers seem to be the logical choice for victimization, since they cannot report the identity of the offender to the police.

It is likely, however, that some robberies are dispute related rather than predatory. In a dispute-related crime, offenders are mainly interested in one target—the person with whom they have a grievance. Offenders may rob people they know for the same reason they assault people they know: These individuals have provoked their anger in some way. These robbers want retribution and revenge rather than remuneration.

Black (1983) makes a similar argument when he attributes robberies involving people who know each other to informal social control or self-help. In these crimes, individuals punish the person who has offended them rather than rely on the criminal justice system to satisfy their grievance. Homicide and assault are more typical methods of informal punishment, but burglary, vandalism, arson, and robbery also are used. Thus, Black describes some thefts between people who know each other as a form of debt collection (see also Wright and Decker 1994, 1997; Feeney 1986).

Crimes between people who know each other are not necessarily grievance oriented. People do, after all, covet their neighbors' possessions. In addition, people can develop grievances against strangers after a brief encounter; grievances are not limited to acquaintances. Still, the argument that crimes involving people who know each other are more likely to involve grievances than crimes involving strangers seems reasonable.

Inside Information

Although some robbers may have grievances, most are financially motivated, typically selecting targets who are vulnerable and likely to provide a good "take" (e.g., Cook 1976; Feeney 1986; Miller 1998; Wright and Decker 1997). For this reason, someone who is known by the offender may make an attractive target. Offenders may rob someone they know if they are aware that the person is carrying large amounts of cash or valuable property. In other words, offenders are more likely to have inside information about acquaintances. Consistent with this line of reasoning, Wright and Decker (1997) found that robbers view known drug dealers as attractive victims because they often carry large amounts of cash.

Proximity and Impulsiveness

Most offenders do not give much thought to the consequences of their decisions and do little planning (Feeney 1986; Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990). For example, the robbers interviewed by Wright and Decker (1997) usually committed robberies in response to an immediate need for cash to

support their "fast-lane" lifestyle. If they ran out of money for drugs, for example, they would quickly find someone to rob. Impulsive (or intoxicated) offenders, with a need for immediate cash, may target anyone in proximity, and people they know may be convenient targets. They are likely to be acquainted with many of the people who live near them, at least to know them by sight.

THE PRESENT STUDY

In this study, we compare acquaintance and stranger robberies using the redesigned NCVS. We first describe the demographic characteristics of acquaintance and stranger robberies and assess the effects of these characteristics on the different kinds of robberies. We then test two hypotheses about the outcomes of these crimes based on the theoretical discussion presented above.

Demographic Differences in Acquaintance versus Stranger Robberies

Two analytical strategies are used to examine the social-demographic characteristics of acquaintance and stranger robberies. First, we use person-level data to examine the risk of the different kinds of robbery victimization for a merged sample of robbery victims and nonvictims in the NCVS. These analyses reveal the effects of the respondent's demographic characteristics on the likelihood of being a victim of robbery by offenders in different relationships (including robbery by strangers) in comparison with not experiencing any robbery victimization. In other words, nonvictims are the comparison group. Second, we use incident-level data to estimate the conditional probability that a robbery victimization involved acquaintances rather than strangers. In these analyses, we examine the effects of offender and victim demographic characteristics on the risk of one type of robbery victimization relative to the risk of the other types of victimization.

Note that a group may have a high risk of acquaintance robbery but no greater conditional risk of acquaintance robbery because it also has a high risk of stranger robbery. Alternatively, a group may have a greater conditional risk of acquaintance robbery if it has a small risk of acquaintance robbery but an even smaller risk of stranger robbery. For example, if youths have a high overall rate of robbery victimization but are equally likely to be robbed by acquaintances and strangers, they have a high risk of acquaintance robbery (they are more likely to be robbed by acquaintances than are older persons) but

have no greater conditional risk of acquaintance robbery than stranger robbery (they are more likely to be robbed by acquaintances and by strangers than are older people).

Hypotheses Concerning Outcomes of Acquaintance Robberies versus Stranger Robberies

In addition to examining the social-demographic characteristics of acquaintance and stranger robberies, we explore the effects of victim-offender relationship on the outcomes of robbery incidents. For these analyses, we use incident-level data but treat the different victim-offender relationships as independent variables. Here, we examine different outcomes of acquaintance versus stranger robberies to test hypotheses about the possible motives for these crimes.

We examine three outcomes of robbery: the size of the take, whether the victim was injured, and whether the incident was reported to the police. Our hypothesis about injury is based on Black's (1983) assertion that acquaintance robbery is more likely than stranger robbery to stem from disputes. It is also based on the assumption that a robber motivated by a grievance has a different proximate goal than a predatory robber. The proximate goal of aggrieved offenders is to harm the victim (Felson 1997). In contrast, the proximate goal of predatory offenders is compliance; harm is incidental to them. The fact that most robbers use only the force and armament necessary to establish a credible threat and generate compliance suggests that most robberies are predatory (Cook 1976; Luckenbill 1980, 1982).

The structure of robbery and other thefts reveals this difference. A theft of any kind, when successful, produces two outcomes: a personal gain for the offender and a loss for the victim. Either of these outcomes could be a proximate goal. In the typical predatory robbery, the offender wants money or property, and the victim's loss is incidental. In dispute-related theft, the offender wants to deprive the victim of his or her property; the offender's gain is either incidental or an added bonus.³ While there are certainly mixed cases, there is probably a primary motive in most incidents.

Predatory offenders are not angry or aggrieved, unless the target does not comply with their threat. Their use of violence during the offense is usually tactical, not gratuitous.⁴ This reasoning leads to the hypothesis that offenders are more likely to injure victims during a robbery when they know the victim than when they do not. Offenders who want to harm the victim are more likely to choose a variety of means to do so. Predatory offenders, on the other hand, are more likely to use just enough violence to force the victim to comply.

We hypothesize that the take will be higher when the offender is acquainted with the victim because offenders sometimes have inside information on what these victims have on their person. When targeting strangers, robbers must rely on visible characteristics of victims, such as age, race, or clothing, to predict who is likely to provide a good take (Wright and Decker 1997). Stereotyping is not likely to be as reliable as information on specific individuals, and therefore robbery of strangers may be, on average, less profitable. Thus, we predict that successful acquaintance robberies will be more profitable for offenders than successful stranger robberies.⁵

We also examine the effect of offender-victim relationship on reporting robberies to the police, but we make no prediction about whether victims of acquaintance robberies are more or less likely than victims of stranger robberies to call the police. On one hand, acquaintance robbery victims might be more likely to call the police, since they can identify the offender. On the other hand, victims may have been targeted because offenders did not think that they would call the police (Sparks 1982). Also, it is not clear whether fear of further attack from people one knows encourages or inhibits reporting (Felson, Messner, and Hoskin 1999).

DATA AND ANALYTIC STRATEGY

Data

The NCVS collects information on victimizations from a nationally representative sample of households in the United States. The sample for a given year includes approximately 50,000 households and 100,000 individuals age 12 and older. Interviews are bounded, with respondents reporting victimizations experienced within the past six months (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1997). The NCVS is the only nationally representative data source with highly detailed information on the situational dynamics of criminal victimizations in the United States (Laub 1997). In addition, the NCVS is large enough to yield sufficient numbers of cases (when pooled over years) to permit multivariate modeling (Bachman and Taylor 1994). We use the 1992-95 (the most recent data available at the time of our research) incident- and person-level NCVS data to conduct our analyses (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1997).⁶

The incident-level data include all robbery incidents (whether completed or not) reported by NCVS respondents (the applicable *Ns* are identified along with the results).⁷ The public release person-level data include all NCVS respondents who reported a robbery victimization in the prior six months and a 10 percent random sample of all NCVS respondents who reported no robbery victimizations during that period.⁸

Measures and Analytical Strategy

The key variable in our research is the relationship between victims and offenders in robberies. We determine four types of relationships between victims and offenders: (1) family members (spouses, ex-spouses, romantic partners and ex-partners, other family members); (2) nonfamily acquaintances, that is, people in other ongoing relationships (friends and other well-known acquaintances including neighbors, roommates, schoolmates, and coworkers); (3) acquaintances known by sight only; and (4) strangers.⁹

In the analyses of robbery victimization risk using NCVS person-level data, victim-offender relationship is treated as a polytomous dependent variable; in these analyses, multinomial logistic regression is used to contrast the four types of robbery victims (i.e., robbed by strangers, by sight-only acquaintances, by nonfamily acquaintances, or by family members) with respondents who reported no robbery victimization. In the analysis of conditional risk using the incident-level data, victim-offender relationship is again treated as a polytomous dependent variable. For these analyses, we use multinomial logistic regression to examine contrasts between the three acquaintance categories and the stranger category. Finally, in the analysis of robbery incident outcomes, victim-offender relationship is treated as a set of dummy-coded independent variables, with strangers serving as the reference category. The incident outcomes are all dichotomous; hence, we employ binary logistic regression to estimate the effects of victim-offender relationship on these outcomes.¹⁰

Other independent variables vary for the different analyses. In the analyses of the risk of robbery victimization, which are based on the person-level data, the primary independent variables are demographic characteristics of respondents (both victims and nonvictims). Gender is treated as a dummy variable (1 = male, 0 = female). Age of the victim is dummy coded as younger than 18, 18 to 29, or older than 29, with the oldest respondents serving as the reference category. Race is dummy coded as Black, White, or other (i.e., Native American, Aleut, Eskimo, Asian, or Pacific Islander), with White serving as the reference category. The marital status of victims is measured with a dummy variable coded one for respondents who were unmarried at the time of the interview and zero otherwise. Poverty status of victims is coded one if respondents report household income at or below the 20th percentile of NCVS respondents' reported income and zero otherwise. Finally, we control for the population size of the communities in which NCVS respondents reside.¹¹

In the analyses of conditional risk based on the incident-level data, we add to the models variables measuring characteristics of offenders. The codes for gender, age, and race of offenders are the same as the codes used for victims.

We also include a measure of the presence of multiple offenders, coded one if there was more than one offender and zero otherwise.¹²

In the second set of incident-level analyses, we examine the effect of offender-victim relationship on the outcome of robbery incidents. Our three outcomes are the monetary value of property or cash stolen (coded one if \$500 or more was taken and zero otherwise),¹³ victim injury (coded one if the victim reported an injury and zero otherwise), and whether the victim reported the incident to the police (coded one if reported and zero if not reported; incidents reported by third parties are excluded). In addition to the independent variables described above, in these equations we include dummy variables to reflect whether the offender used a firearm, some other weapon, or no weapon (the reference category).

RESULTS

Frequency distributions are presented in Table 1. The results show that slightly more than one-third (34.8 percent) of robberies reported in the NCVS between 1992 and 1995 involved an offender with whom the victim was acquainted. The most common acquaintance category comprises people outside the family (15.3 percent). The typical offender was a young Black male acting alone. The typical victim was a single White male age 30 or older. In most incidents, the victim was not injured and lost less than \$500. Almost half of the incidents were not reported to the police.

Risk of Acquaintance and Stranger Robberies

Table 2 presents results from two equations: a binomial logistic regression model that shows the effects of respondent characteristics on the risk of being robbed (vs. not being robbed) and a multinomial logistic regression model that shows the effects of these characteristics on the risk of being robbed by different types of offenders (vs. not being robbed). These analyses enable us to assess the risk of robbery involving offenders and victims in different types of relationships for different demographic groups.

The results in model 1 indicate that the overall risk of robbery is higher for persons who are young, poor, non-White, unmarried, and male, and who live in more heavily populated areas. These patterns are consistent with past research (Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo 1978; see also Laub 1997; Sampson and Lauritsen 1994), lending credibility to the data source. Of greater interest is model 2, which shows the effects of these variables on robberies disaggregated by victim-offender relationship.

TABLE 1: Descriptive Statistics for Analysis of Victim-Offender Relationships and Outcomes in Robberies

	<i>Percentage</i>
Victim-offender relationship	
Strangers	65.2
Sight-only acquaintances	9.1
Nonfamily acquaintances	15.3
Family members	10.4
Incident characteristics	
One offender	55.7
Two or more offenders	44.3
Value of property taken \geq \$500	20.6
Value of property taken $<$ \$500	79.4
Offender used firearm	24.7
Offender used other weapon	27.9
Offender unarmed	47.4
Victim injured	30.2
Victim not injured	69.8
Police called by victim	35.4
Police called by third party	18.8
Police not called	45.8
Victim demographic characteristics	
Male	63.6
Female	36.4
White	73.2
Black	21.4
Other	5.4
Younger than 18	21.4
18 to 29	33.4
30 and older	45.2
Unmarried	76.9
Married	23.1
Poor	17.8
Nonpoor	82.2
Community population size (median) = 175,000	
Offender demographic characteristics	
Male	91.9
Female	8.1
White	34.9
Black	52.7
Other	12.4
Younger than 18	20.8
18 to 29	55.9
30 and older	23.3

NOTE: Percentages are based on the maximum number of cases available for analysis in the regression equations for a given variable after listwise deletion of missing values. For victim-offender relationship, victim and offender demographic characteristics, and number of offenders, $N = 1,362$. For victim injury, calling the police, and offender weapon use, $N = 1,201$. Finally, the percentages for value of property taken are based on 749 completed robberies.

TABLE 2: Binomial and Multinomial Logistic Regressions Predicting Type of Robbery (reference category is nonvictim) (N = 95,267)

	Model 1			Model 2						
	Binomial Regression			Multinomial Regression						
	Robbed	Robbed by Stranger	Robbed Only Acquaintance	Robbed by Sight- Acquaintance	Robbed by Non- family Acquaintance	Robbed by Family Member	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)
Victim less than 18	0.424*	1.529	0.069	1.065	1.434*	4.195	1.458*	4.297	-0.818*	0.441
Victim 18 to 29	0.335*	1.397	0.377*	1.458	0.376	1.456	0.292*	1.339	0.390*	1.477
Poor victim	0.367*	1.444	0.201*	1.223	0.714*	2.042	0.854*	2.349	0.264	1.302
Black victim	0.497*	1.644	0.514*	1.672	0.611*	1.842	0.457*	1.579	0.408	1.504
Other-race victim	0.428*	1.535	0.590*	1.804	0.286	1.331	-0.229	0.795	-0.246	0.782
Unmarried victim	0.854*	2.349	0.672*	1.958	0.997*	2.710	1.451*	4.267	1.423*	4.150
Male victim	0.677*	1.967	0.908*	2.479	0.816*	2.261	0.655*	1.925	-1.194*	0.303
Population size	1.040*	1.000	1.374*	1.000	0.784*	2.190	-0.100	0.999	-0.153	0.999
Model chi-square	939.21*			1,347.63*				1,347.63*		
Degrees of freedom	8			32				32		32

NOTE: Coefficients for population size expressed in millionths.

* $p \leq .05$ (two-tailed).

The results reveal that some groups with a high risk of overall robbery victimization exhibit roughly similar patterns of risk across the different types of robbery victimization. Respondents who are poor, Black, and unmarried are significantly more likely than their counterparts to be robbed by strangers, sight-only acquaintances, and nonfamily acquaintances. For family robberies, the effects of these variables are in the same direction but are significant only for marital status. The middle-age group (18-29) also exhibits higher risk of robberies for all categories of offenders, although the coefficient is not significant for sight-only acquaintances.

In other instances, however, interesting differences appear across relationship categories. The pattern for school-aged youths (less than 18) is mixed. School-age youths are much more vulnerable to robbery by sight-only and nonfamily acquaintances. However, they are no more vulnerable to stranger robbery and less vulnerable to robbery by family members than are older respondents. According to these results, the idea that youths are more likely to be the victims of violent crime needs qualification, at least in the case of robbery. Youths have a special vulnerability, but only to people they know outside of their families. Their greater overall risk of robbery (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1999) is driven by their greater victimization by nonfamily acquaintances. This victimization is probably due to the fact that their acquaintances also tend to be young, and young people have relatively high rates of offending. Their family members, on the other hand, are not as likely to be young, and pose less risk.

A striking difference across relationship categories also appears for gender. The overall risk of robbery is almost twice as high for men in comparison with women ($e^b = 1.967$), but this gender differential is reversed for robberies by family members. The male risk of being robbed by family members is less than one-third that of women ($e^b = 0.303$). Similarly, different patterns across types of robbery emerge for population size. As the population size of the respondent's community increases, so does the risk of robbery victimization by strangers and sight-only acquaintances. Presumably, the larger the community, the more likely it is that people have contact with strangers and people they know by sight only (Larson 1984). Population size has no effect on the risk of robbery by nonfamily acquaintances and family members. More generally, these analyses of the risk of robbery indicate that the determinants of this offense are not uniform across different kinds of victimization.

Conditional Risk of Acquaintance and Stranger Robberies

Table 3 presents results from a multinomial logistic regression model that estimates determinants of being robbed by a particular type of acquaintance, with robberies involving strangers serving as the reference category. The

TABLE 3: Multinomial Logistic Regressions Predicting Types of Robbery (omitted category is stranger robbery) ($N = 1,362$)

	<i>Sight-Only Acquaintances</i>		<i>Nonfamily Acquaintances</i>		<i>Family Members</i>	
	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)
Offender less than 18	0.309	1.362	0.349	1.418	-1.302*	0.272
Offender 18 to 29	-0.932*	0.394	-0.804*	0.448	-0.994*	0.370
Male offender	-1.221*	0.295	-1.382*	0.251	-1.026*	0.358
Black offender	-0.406	0.666	-1.794*	0.166	-2.470*	0.085
Other-race offender	-0.349	0.705	-0.890*	0.411	-1.993*	0.136
Multiple offenders	0.002	1.002	-0.754*	0.470	-3.051*	0.047
Victim less than 18	0.939*	2.557	1.067*	2.907	-0.146	0.864
Victim 18 to 29	0.017	1.017	-0.088	0.916	-0.099	0.906
Male victim	-0.095	0.909	-0.185	0.831	-1.906*	0.149
Black victim	0.453	1.573	1.144*	3.139	1.517*	4.559
Other-race victim	-0.457	0.633	-0.877	0.416	-1.288*	0.276
Poor victim	0.728*	2.071	0.885*	2.423	0.170	1.185
Unmarried victim	0.386	1.471	0.898*	2.455	0.863*	2.370
Population size	-0.544	0.999	-1.540*	0.999	-1.410*	0.999
Model chi-square	1,656.51*		1,656.51*		1,656.51*	
Degrees of freedom	45		45		45	

NOTE: Coefficients for population size expressed in millionths.

* $p \leq .05$ (two-tailed).

model includes demographic characteristics of both offenders and victims. We first discuss the types of offenders who are more likely to commit acquaintance robberies than stranger robberies.

The age, gender, and race of the offender have strong and consistent effects. Young adult offenders (age 18 to 29) are less likely than older offenders to commit acquaintance robberies than stranger robberies. Female offenders are much more likely than male offenders to commit acquaintance robberies than stranger robberies. Blacks are much less likely than Whites to target family members and nonfamily acquaintances.

Lone offenders are more likely than multiple offenders to rob nonfamily and family acquaintances. The effect for family acquaintances is particularly strong. The involvement of lone offenders in incidents with victims with whom they have had prior interaction is consistent with the notion that many of these incidents stem from disputes. Dispute-based robberies are probably more likely than predatory robberies to involve only two antagonists—the aggrieved and the target of the grievance.

Table 3 also reveals strong differences in vulnerability to acquaintance robbery for different demographic groups. The results reveal that youths younger than 18 are more likely than adults to be victimized by nonfamily

acquaintances and people they know by sight only (relative to their risk of victimization by strangers). Only school-age victims, not young adults, have greater risks of acquaintance robbery, suggesting that many of these incidents occur on school property or on the way to and from school.¹⁴ In addition, female victims are much more likely than male victims to be robbed by a family member.

We also observe effects of race and poverty. Black victims face a relatively higher risk of acquaintance robbery than White victims. The coefficient for sight only is in a similar direction, but it is smaller and not quite statistically significant.¹⁵ The victim's poverty is significantly related to two of three categories of acquaintance robbery. Victims who are poor are more likely than victims with higher incomes to be robbed by nonfamily acquaintances and people they know by sight only. The coefficient for family relationships, on the other hand, is small and not statistically significant.

Finally, the victim's marital status has effects. Unmarried victims have a greater relative risk of victimization by family and nonfamily acquaintances.

Outcomes of Robbery Incidents

In Table 4, we examine differences between acquaintance and stranger robberies in the outcomes of robberies using binary logistic regression. We use dummy variables to represent the respective types of relationships, with stranger serving as the reference category. Our primary focus is on the effects of these dummy variables on the amount stolen, whether the victim was injured, and whether the victim reported the incident to the police.

The take. The first two columns in Table 4 present results from a logistic regression equation predicting whether the value of the property or cash stolen in completed robberies was \$500 or more. There is mixed support for the hypothesis that acquaintance robbery yields a bigger take than stranger robbery. Consistent with our expectations, acquaintance robberies involving family members yield a significantly greater take than stranger robberies. Other types of acquaintance robberies, however, are not significantly different from stranger robberies in the take.

Effects of the victim's demographic characteristics are observed. School-age youths yield the lowest take, probably the result of their low financial resources. Female victims yield a greater take than male victims. Substantial offender effects are also observed. The older the offender, the greater is the take. Also, multiple offender incidents and incidents in which the offender used a firearm yield larger takes, suggesting that offenders with greater coercive resources choose more lucrative targets.

TABLE 4: Binary Logistic Regressions of Amount Taken, Victim Injury, and Calling the Police on Victim-Offender Relationship

	<i>Amount ≥ \$500 versus Amount < \$500</i>		<i>Victim Injured versus No Injury</i>		<i>Victim Called Police versus Police Not Called</i>	
	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)
Sight-only acquaintances	-0.158	0.854	0.526*	1.691	0.216	1.242
Nonfamily acquaintances	0.232	1.261	0.437*	1.549	0.578*	1.782
Family members	0.725*	2.065	1.151*	3.163	0.648*	1.911
Victim less than 18	-1.305*	0.272	-0.495*	0.610	-1.783*	0.168
Victim 18 to 29	-0.093	0.912	-0.139	0.870	-0.424	0.654
Poor victim	-0.210	0.811	0.362*	1.436	-0.238	0.788
Black victim	0.003	1.003	0.291	1.337	0.115	1.122
Other-race victim	-0.231	0.794	0.259	1.296	-0.116	0.890
Unmarried victim	0.095	1.100	0.199	1.221	-0.118	0.889
Male victim	-0.651*	0.522	-0.145	0.865	-0.444*	0.642
Offender less than 18	-1.227*	0.293	-0.307	0.735	-0.555*	0.574
Offender 18 to 29	-0.842*	0.431	-0.041	0.959	-0.228	0.797
Black offender	-0.102	0.903	0.111	1.117	0.489*	1.631
Other-race offender	0.668*	1.950	0.301	1.351	0.066	1.068
Male offender	0.120	1.128	0.404	1.497	-0.043	0.958
Multiple offenders	1.109*	3.031	0.645*	1.907	0.276	1.318
Offender used gun	1.033*	2.810	-1.340*	0.262	0.903*	2.468
Offender used other weapon	0.267	1.307	0.055	1.056	-0.127	0.881
Amount taken ≥ \$500					0.882*	2.416
Victim injured					0.446*	1.594
Model chi-square	97.085*		123.079*		224.205*	
Degrees of freedom	18		18		20	
N	749		1,201		975	

* $p \leq .05$.

Injury. The results for injury to the victim are presented in the second two columns of Table 4. The hypothesis that robbery victims are more likely to be injured by acquaintances than by strangers is supported. Consistent with research on other forms of violence (Heller et al. 1983; Timrots and Rand 1987), persons robbed by acquaintances are more likely to be injured than those robbed by strangers, and victims who are family members are particularly likely to be injured.

The results show that youths are less likely to be injured than older victims. This evidence, along with evidence showing a lower take when young people are involved, suggests that robberies involving young people tend to be less serious. Poor victims are more likely than nonpoor victims to be injured, as

are victims of robberies that involve multiple offenders (see Laub 1997). Finally, consistent with previous research, robberies in which the offender used a firearm are much less likely to result in an injury to the victim (Cook 1982; Kleck and Delone 1993; Luckenbill 1980, 1982). Armed offenders apparently are able to pose a credible threat and gain compliance without injuring the victim.¹⁶

Reporting to the police. In the last two columns of Table 4, we examine determinants of the likelihood that the victim reported the robbery to the police. Research on assault and rape suggests that the victim's relationship to the offender has little or no effect on whether the victim reports the incident to the police (Bachman 1998; Felson et al. 1999; Laub 1997; Skogan 1984). In contrast, the results in Table 4 show that victims of robbery are more likely to report their victimization to the police when the offender is a nonfamily acquaintance or a family member than when the offender is a stranger. As suggested earlier, victims may be more willing to report robberies by acquaintances because they can identify these offenders or because they fear further victimization.

The results for the other explanatory variables are largely consistent with prior research on the reporting of violent crimes (Skogan 1984; Laub 1997). Victims are more likely to notify the police if they are older, are female, suffered a large financial loss, or were injured during the robbery. Victims were also more likely to report the incident if offenders were older than 18, Black, or used a firearm in the commission of the robbery. Finally, there is no evidence that Blacks or poor people are less likely to report robberies to the police.

DISCUSSION

Prior research shows that the risk of robbery (and other violent crime) is high among people who are young, male, single, poor, and Black, and who live in urban areas. That research generally ignores the possibility that these groups experience different risks of victimization depending on whether they are robbed by strangers or whether they are robbed by people they know. To address this issue, we examined the effects of the social-demographic characteristics of victims on the risks of these types of robberies. Our results show, with some exceptions, that acquaintance robberies are more likely than stranger robberies to involve victims who are young, Black, poor, and unmarried. The results suggest that one should not examine the routine activities that expose people to robbery victimization without considering the type of

robbery involved. Activities that expose people to stranger robbery, such as time spent in public places, are likely to be different from activities that lead to acquaintance robbery.

The evidence suggests that school-age youths are particularly likely to be victims of acquaintance robbery. We suspect that youths are vulnerable to robbery by acquaintances for two reasons: their contact and association with other young persons, who have high offending rates and are unlikely to serve as capable guardians, and their reluctance to call the police. The latter argument is supported by evidence showing that youths are much less likely than older victims to report robbery incidents. In addition, the evidence suggests that those incidents tend to be relatively minor: The take is small, offenders are unlikely to use weapons, and injuries are relatively rare. Each of these factors is associated with a lower probability of the victim calling the police.

The vulnerability to acquaintance robbery of people who are Black, poor, and unmarried may also be due to their greater likelihood of contact and association with people who have high rates of offending. For poor Blacks, increased contact with offenders is likely to arise from differential association and residential segregation. Because they live in high-crime areas, they associate more with criminal offenders. Note that these groups are just as likely to report robberies to the police, so reluctance to report crimes cannot explain their high acquaintance robbery victimization.

Gender differences in victimization also vary depending on the relationship of the victim and offender. Men are more likely than women to be robbed by strangers and people they know outside the family. Women are more likely than men to be robbed by family members. We suspect that this gender difference reflects the tendency for dispute-related violence involving women to occur at the hands of family members. It is consistent with evidence showing that assaults against women are more likely than assaults against men to involve family members (e.g., Craven 1996).

We also observed differences between acquaintance and stranger robberies in the characteristics of offenders. Stranger robbery offenders are much more likely than acquaintance robbery offenders to be Black, young adults, and men. It appears that groups with higher crime rates are more likely to commit stranger robberies than acquaintance robberies. We suspect that this finding is related to the fact that many acquaintance robberies arise out of disputes. Variation in violent crime across groups is primarily due to variation in predatory crime. Thus, NCVS data reveal higher rates of robbery than assault among young adult offenders, Blacks, and men (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1999).

A second goal of this research was to examine why offenders might commit acquaintance robbery in spite of the potential costs. Following Black's (1983) theory of self-help, we suggested that one reason offenders

target people they know is that they have a grievance with them. Some of these robberies are similar to assaults in the sense that the offender wants to harm the victim but uses a different method. Because the goal of the offender in these instances is to harm the victim, not achieve compliance, we predicted that victims would be more likely to be injured. In support of this hypothesis, we found that victims are more likely to be injured in acquaintance robberies than in stranger robberies. While we acknowledge that the link between injury and motivation is indirect, we find it difficult to conceive of a convincing alternative explanation of the relationship between injury and type of robbery.

We also suggested that offenders may prefer to target acquaintances when they possess information that the robbery is likely to produce a good take. Offenders would be more likely to know whether someone was carrying large amounts of cash if that person was an acquaintance. We find some evidence consistent with this line of reasoning: Robberies of family members tend to be more lucrative than robberies of strangers.

In sum, acquaintance robbery is different in many ways from stranger robbery. Its motivation is somewhat different, it offers the offender special financial incentives, and it poses special risks. Acquaintance robbery also differs from stranger robbery from the perspective of victims. School-age youths and poor Blacks—demographic groups vulnerable to criminal victimization generally—are particularly vulnerable to acquaintance robbery. Further examination of the special dynamics of the relatively neglected offense of acquaintance robbery is an important task for future criminological research.

NOTES

1. In some instances, offenders may disguise themselves. Because offenders may still be identifiable, this is likely to be a risky and, therefore, infrequent strategy.

2. On the other hand, offenders who target criminals face a greater risk of retaliation (Jacobs, Topalli, and Wright 2000).

3. Property destruction destroys the victim's property without property gain.

4. Aggrieved offenders who choose theft might avoid identification by using stealth rather than confrontation. However, offenders motivated by retribution and revenge may prefer that victims know who has harmed them. Otherwise, offenders will not be able to use the punishment for deterrence or saving face.

5. It could be argued that the take would be less in acquaintance robberies if these offenders are less likely to be financially motivated. However, an aggrieved offender may want to harm the victim financially as much as a financially motivated offender wants to profit from the crime.

6. A serious limitation of the original National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) was the appreciable underreporting of incidents, especially those that occur between persons who know one another (Garofalo 1990; O'Brien 1985; Skogan 1984, 1986). Factors affecting underreporting include embarrassment, victim culpability, feelings that these matters are private, and perceptions that the incidents are not crimes (see Skogan 1986). The redesign of the NCVS has evidently overcome these biases to some extent, as suggested by the greater "pro-

ductivity" in the recording of incidents (Bachman and Saltzman 1995; Perkins et al. 1996). The new methodology encourages more complete reporting in several ways. The survey questions substitute behavior-specific language for criminal justice terms to prompt respondents to report experiences even if they are uncertain as to their criminal status. The screening questions cue respondents by enumerating in greater detail situations in which victimizations might have occurred. In addition, interviewers probe for victimizations by nonstrangers by explicitly calling attention to the tendency for people to fail to recall "incidents committed by someone they know." The data files used in the analyses were obtained from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (Study #6406) (U.S. Department of Justice 1998).

7. Not all of the observations in the incident-level file are independent, since some respondents ($n = 69$) were robbed more than once. However, analyses in which only a single robbery from each respondent was included produced similar results.

8. The Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research traditionally has limited the availability of National Crime Victimization Survey person-level files to include a 10 percent random sample of nonvictims due to considerations of disk storage and mainframe computing costs (personal correspondence with Kay Marz, 1999). The use of this sample produces coefficients that are consistent with those obtained from a file that includes all nonvictims, but standard errors are somewhat larger due to the reduced sample size.

9. We also considered using a more detailed conceptualization of victim-offender relationship by further disaggregating family robberies into intimate and nonintimate robbery incidents. Unfortunately, our analysis revealed that the pooled NCUS data set used for this research did not contain enough intimate family robberies ($n = 41$) to obtain reliable maximum likelihood estimates for many of the variables included in our multivariate models.

10. We estimated the binary logistic equations with the SAS LOGISTIC procedure and multinomial logistic equations with the SAS CATMOD procedure. For a discussion of multinomial logistic regression, see Clogg and Shihadeh (1994), Demaris (1995), and Hoffman and Duncan (1988).

11. The original variable for community (defined as a census place) population size in the National Crime Victimization Survey is a 16-category variable ranging from communities of 1,000 or less to those of 1 million or more. For the present research, we created a measure of population size in which respondents were assigned the value corresponding to the midpoint of the population category they occupied on the original variable.

12. Incidents with multiple offenders required special coding. We coded the small number of incidents involving multiple offenders with different relationships to the victim ($n = 13$) according to the closest relationship. Incidents involving offenders of different ages were coded as the age of the oldest offender. If any of the offenders were men, the offender was coded as such. Offender race in incidents where offenders of more than one race were involved were coded as the race of the majority of offenders. We excluded the few incidents ($n = 31$) in which there was no clear racial majority among offenders.

13. We treat the take variable as dichotomous (and use logistic regression) because it is highly skewed. We also estimated the equation with ordinary least squares, treating the take as a continuous variable and truncating its highest value at \$1,000. Similar results were obtained.

14. In analyses not presented, we included a dummy variable identifying robberies that occurred in school or on school property. The coefficients for this school variable were statistically significant, and the effects of age were reduced. We cannot determine to what extent the remaining effects are due to robberies occurring on the way to and from school or to some other factor.

15. We will not discuss differences between other races and Whites, since the other-race category includes a variety of groups.

16. In equations not presented, we included victim resistance as a control variable. It was unrelated to whether an incident resulted in an injury and did not alter the effects of the other variables included in the model.

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