

Table 4—Opportunity Theories

Opportunity Theorists, such as Cohen and Felson (1979) assume that crime is an event involving:

- **A Motivated Offender**
- **A Suitable Target (victims, objects)**
- **The Absence of a Capable Guardian**
- **If these 3 elements come together in time and space, then there is an OPPORTUNITY for a CRIMINAL EVENT to occur**

Looking at the UCR and the NCVS, Opportunity Theorists find that not only are young, urban poor black males likely to be offenders, they are also likely to be victims—i.e., the victim-offender match

Opportunity theorists might explain these racial disparities in crime and victimization by looking at what brings black offenders and black victims together in time and space and therefore provides opportunities for criminal events to occur:

- **For example, they might look at the routine activities of the black urban poor to try to understand how a pool of potential black victims routinely exposes itself to a pool of motivated black offenders (EXPOSURE)**
- **In so doing, they might look at the situations and places where potential victims expose themselves to motivated offenders**
- **They might also look at how black urban criminals select crime sites and how that affects the victimization risk of urban blacks (PROXIMITY)**
- **Opportunity theorists also look at how an increase or decrease in the juxtaposition of the 3 elements needed for a criminal event to occur explains trends in crime**

How Opportunity Theorists might critique Offender-Centered Theorists