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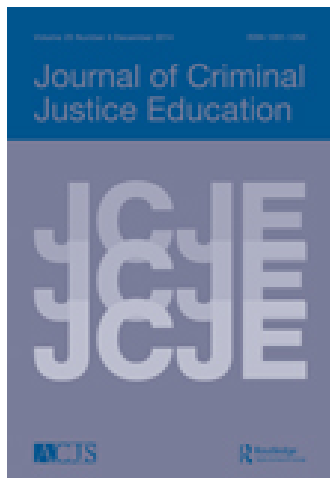
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Teaching Theories of Victimology

Heather Zaykowski and Lena Campagna

While there has been significant growth in victimology theories since its roots in the mid twentieth century, these developments have not been adequately transferred to victimology textbooks. This paper evaluates the representation of theories in victimology textbooks using a content analysis approach. It specifically examines the amount of space dedicated to theory, what specific theories are discussed, and the way theories are integrated into the text. Although these texts provide a solid foundation in the historical development of victimology, measuring victimization, and to a lesser extent, the criminal justice response and remedies for victims, students are often not given a framework for which to understand and explain patterns and risk factors of victimization. In light of the paucity of attention to theories of victimology, suggestions for teaching theories of victimology in ways that supplement existing texts and implications for future textbooks are discussed.

Introduction

Over the past several decades, the field of victimology has grown dramatically, particularly through developments in the measurement of victimization, the criminal justice response to victims, and attention towards victim trauma and services (e.g. Baumer & Lauritsen, 2010; Buzawa & Buzawa, 2003). Scholars have also advanced diverse theoretical frameworks in better understanding why some individuals and groups are victimized at higher rates than others (e.g. Miethe & Meier, 1994; Sampson & Lauritsen, 1990; Schreck, 1999). While these developments are well known, it is unclear how such advances have been translated into pedagogical tools, specifically in student textbooks. The current study aims to address this gap in analyzing undergraduate victimology textbooks, with a specific focus on the area of victimology theory.

Textbooks can play a pivotal role in organizing the current state of knowledge in a way that students, instructors, and future practitioners understand key challenges for crime victims. Textbooks act as gatekeepers to knowledge by excluding some topics, while profiling others (Ross, 2008). Scholars increasingly recognize the importance of theory in textbooks. Theories are a set of concepts and propositions believed to be true about a particular phenomenon that can be empirically examined. Scholarly recognition is evident when looking at the expansion of textbook space devoted to theory, particularly at

the introductory level. Recent textbooks are more likely than older textbooks to include specific theoretical chapters or section titles and to devote whole chapters rather than section to theory (Harley, 2008).

Theory plays a critical role in helping students make sense of their environments and in understanding concepts introduced in the classroom. Theory requires students to understand often complex material and to “see” its relevance in their everyday world (Hand, 2007). Ideally, students should be able to observe and recognize aspects of theory throughout their daily routine (Fails, 1988). A theoretical grounding in the potential causes of victimization can provide the student with a framework to critique victim policy, reduce victimization risk, and appreciate the broader context of victimization risk as criminal justice agents, first responders, and service providers.

To date, there has not been a systematic examination of victimology textbooks or use of theory in victimology courses to our knowledge. Given the importance of theory in pedagogical practice (e.g. Fails, 1988; Hand, 2007; Harley, 2008), this study explores three related research questions: (1) how much space do victimology textbooks dedicate to theory; (2) what theories are represented; and (3) how are theories represented? To answer these questions, we conduct a content analysis of eight recently published victimology textbooks across several key theoretical domains.

Theories of Victimology

Theories of victimology have been classified in numerous ways (e.g. Fattah, 2000; Mawby & Walklate 1994; Wilcox, 2010). While it is beyond the scope of this manuscript to address these debates, we wanted to recognize that our classification is not the only model. For the current study, we examine theories across several broadly defined categories based on prior research and how theories emerged in the texts examined: victim precipitation, exposure/opportunity, learning/culture, control critical, and “other” theories. We begin with an overview of these domains in the following section.

Victim Precipitation Theories

Victim precipitation theories seek to explain what actions or characteristics of victims increase risk for harm. Applications of this framework include both broad and narrow conceptualizations such as the victim’s legal culpability, engagement in criminal lifestyles, direct confrontation or initiation of conflicts with others, and careless behavior known as facilitation. Put simply, the victim is believed to play an active role in causing his or her own harm.

Criminologists von Hentig (1941) and Mendelsohn (1956) recognized a range of vulnerable characteristics that made some victims more attractive to offenders and distinguished between innocent, partially responsible, and guilty

victims. Wolfgang (1958) examined precipitation in his empirical study of Philadelphia homicide data, finding support that victims were not always passive recipients of violence, often knew their attacker, and that alcohol was commonly tied to homicide victimization. Drawing from Wolfgang's work, a more notorious example of precipitation came from Amir's *Patterns in Forcible Rape* (1971), which argued that some victims invited sexual victimization.

Interactional models, which view victimization and other phenomenon as a process rather than static events, describe in greater detail how victims precipitate or increase risk to be harmed. Luckenbill's (1977) "situated transaction" described the escalation of verbal disputes into physical altercations. He argued that individuals try to "save face" through verbal and, later, physical displays of power. Similarly, Felson and Tedeschi (1994) argued that individuals express grievances and perceived injustices through coercive actions.

Despite critiques of victim precipitation theories, there is extensive evidence that there is an "overlap" between victims and offenders (Jennings, Piquero, & Reingle, 2012) and that "deviant" lifestyles are associated with greater risk of victimization (Sampson & Lauritsen, 1990). Deviant lifestyles research integrates more broadly how lifestyles or routine activities may influence risk for violent encounters. Cultural theories, discussed later, also provide greater context for understanding situations when "offenders" become victimized or victims turn to offending.

Exposure and Opportunity Theories

Exposure and opportunity theories explain victimization through examining the structural context of risk across spaces including neighborhoods, school, family, and peer group contexts, while understanding what makes a target more vulnerable within such contexts. The combination of environment and vulnerability creates an "opportunity" for a motivated offender. In contrast to precipitation theories, which focus on the victim's actions, the opportunity theories address how social contexts facilitate victimization. Included in this category are lifestyles exposure, routine activities, structural choice, and more broadly, spatial theories.

Seminal works by Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo (1978) and Cohen and Felson (1979) provided the foundation for opportunity theories. Hindelang et al. (1978) examined how and why young, male, low income, and African-American demographic characteristics related to higher victimization risk. Hindelang et al. (1978) "lifestyle theory," argued that social role expectations (e.g. responsibilities and activities considered normal for certain ages) and structural constraints (e.g. few job opportunities) shape lifestyles. Consequently, these lifestyle choices placed individuals in peer groups and environments conducive to criminal behavior.

Also commenting on everyday lifestyle patterns, Cohen and Felson (1979) published an influential paper on how routine activities or common activity

changed over time. They argued that routine activities involved more time spent away from home and in the public sphere, thereby leaving homes vulnerable to offenders. Items within homes became lighter and more mobile, making them more suitable to potential offenders. Looking at the specific context of a crime, Cohen and Felson (1979) argued that the crime event must include a victim or target, lack of capable guardianship, and a motivated offender. In more recent work, Miethe and Meier (1994) extended the work of Cohen and Felson (1979) and Hindelang et al. (1978) by analyzing target attractiveness, level of guardianship, exposure to crime, and proximity to motivated offenders.

Each of these theories examined victimization as a product of a social structural context. Empirical evidence indicates general support for these theories, with the most promising findings for predatory offenses (e.g. Sherman, Gartin, & Buerger, 1989). Recent studies expanded the opportunity framework by intersecting individual and structural environment as well as addressing related factors such as fear of crime (Tillyer, Fisher, & Wilcox, 2011). Critics argue that opportunity theories do not adequately explain violence within the family (e.g. Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996).

Social Learning and Cultural Theories

Social learning and cultural theories examine victimization as a process by which norms, values, and expected behaviors are transmitted through interaction between victim and offender, peer groups, family, or more broadly, society, including media exposure and other cultural influences. Victims and/or offenders learn that violence/crime is normal or appropriate to use in particular circumstances. One prominent example of this theory is the cycle of violence that seeks to explain why women do not leave abusive relationships. Walker (1984) argued that abusive relationships involve a series of different phases in which, at times, the relationship appears very positive, loving, and supportive. With time, tension builds in which the abuser becomes more aggressive and confrontational, and at times, may use physical force against the victim. The abuser then moves into the honeymoon phase in which he may feel or express remorse and promise to the victim that he will change. The abuser's promise and apparent change convince the victim that the troubles are over. The cycle of abuse then desensitizes victims to violence, with what some researchers believe causes learned helplessness.

Learning and cultural theories have also been used to explain victimization through a broader acceptance of violence. Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967) first explained this perspective as a subculture of violence in which some social groups develop values counter to mainstream culture. More recently, Anderson (1999) argued that cultural norms supporting violence are an adaptation to adverse environments in which the police are unable or unwilling to manage disputes and respond to victims.

Cultural and learning theories posit that victimization and/or offending is learned or transmitted via norms and values. Recent attention in this area addressed the empirical relationship between victimization and offending and the role of cultural values across geographic contexts (Berg, Stewart, Schreck, & Simons, 2012). Although empirical support for learning and cultural theories is cited throughout literature, critics argue that the perspective does not acknowledge potential factors that could interfere with the process of transmitting values (Akers, 1996).

Control Theories

Control perspectives examine victimization and/or offending through weak internal or external controls. Control theories assert that individuals conform to societal norms contingent upon their relationships to society both on a personal level and at large. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argued that individuals are raised to have varying levels of self-control. They believed that those with low self-control have a greater propensity toward criminal behavior and when presented with an opportunity is more likely to act on that propensity. Schreck (1999) extended the concept of self-control to explain victimization arguing that characteristics of low self-control such as lacking future orientation, empathy, tolerance for problem-solving, diligence, preferring physical acts as opposed to mental thought and risk avoidance can plausibly be linked to victimization. The effect is assumed to be indirect in which low self-control leads to risky lifestyles that enhance risk for victimization (Pratt, Turanovic, Fox, & Wright, 2014).

Research has found support for the application of self-control theory to victimization (e.g. Piquero, MacDonald, Dobrin, Daigle, & Cullen, 2005), particularly non-contact victimization such as online and fraud offenses (Pratt et al., 2014). Schreck found support for this relationship using data from the Tucson Youth Project (Schreck, 1999). Critics of self-control argue that opportunity is more important predictor of criminality (Grasmick, Tittle, Bursik, & Arneklev, 1993). It has also been observed that unlike the field of victimology as a whole, self-control studies have been limited in addressing family and intimate partner violence (Pratt et al., 2014).

Critical Theories

Critical theories examine harm through broader definitions of victimization and groups of people compared with traditional crime/victim categories. They also take issue with narrow legal definitions of crime and victimization and labeling of whom is a victim. Critical theories argue that victimization risk may be enhanced or explained through social marginalization (e.g. racism; sexism) and/or political forces such as state crime. For example, Mawby and Walklate

(1994) referenced the abuse of power by elites and leadership when describing critical victimology theory.

Critical victimology also explores the ways in which public policy responds to different types of victimization and the execution of legislation pertaining to specific categories of victims. Feminist research, which has been an important driving force behind explaining victimization of women, emphasizes that victimization is reified through power structures that place men over women and are supported by cultural patriarchy (e.g. Brownmiller, 1975; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009).

Current Study

In the current study, we sought to examine to what extent do contemporary victimology textbooks cover theories of victimization? As part of this inquiry, we were also interested in which theories were given greater focus than others and how generally the theories were presented in the texts.

Methods

Data

Data for this study came from “victimology textbooks” intended for an undergraduate student audience. Criteria for selection in this study included textbooks published in English within the past five years (January 2008–December 2013) that had a general focus on victimology or crime victims (rather than specific e.g. domestic violence). These criteria were selected in an effort to represent the types of books in which theory may be included and are most applicable to current teaching. For textbooks with more than one edition available, the most recent edition was evaluated. Study guides, encyclopedias and handbooks, readers, legal or law books, forensic and trauma evaluation manuals, case studies, treatment and service manuals, reprints of older editions, fiction and non-scholarly works were excluded.¹ In addition, the book had to be available via a desk copy or online format to review.

Searches were conducted in Amazon.com, books.google.com, bn.com (Barnes and Noble), and CourseSmart for key words “victimology” “crime victims.” The selection criteria resulted in eight textbooks ranging from first

1. We found three reader textbooks meeting the generality and recent edition criteria. Two readers were a collection of articles and did not include commentary. We felt that we would be analyzing the representation of theory in the articles rather than in a textbook format. One reader did mix traditional textbook style and articles, but it was too similar to another book in the analysis to be considered an independent case.

to eighth edition ($M = 3.9$). The mean publication year was 2011.4. The number of total pages ranged from 240 to 594 ($M = 445.3$).

Analytic Approach

The purpose of this study was to examine the scope of theories presented in victimology textbooks. To accomplish this goal, this study utilized a content analysis approach (Weber, 1990). We measured the proportion of each textbook that was dedicated to theory generally, and across the theoretical domains of victimology. The impact was measured by how many pages (or proportion of pages by dividing the number of lines discussing theory by the total lines per page) the theoretical group was discussed. Tables and figures were estimated by the amount of space taken on a respective page. In order to account for any disparities in the lengths of the chosen textbooks, we divided the total pages representing theory by the total number pages in the textbook. We used the official page count as the base for calculating theory representation.²

Coding focused on theories of victimology and related explanations of victimization. We distinguished theoretical arguments and discussions from sections of the text that provided empirical correlates of victimization except where empirical evidence was explicitly connected to providing evidence in support of a theory in a theoretical discussion. The coding schema included the following codes:

- General discussion of theory: mention of theory without specific attention to any one theory or summary or introduction of multiple theories.
- *Victim precipitation*: victims provoke or facilitate others to cause harm to them. Risk shaped by victim culpability, deviant behavior, and vulnerability.
- *Exposure/opportunity*: risk is shaped by structural proximity and exposure to risk (e.g. neighborhoods, school, family, etc.). Identifies victim vulnerability within context. Examines spatial distributions of criminal activity.
- *Social learning/cultural*: victims and/or offenders learn that violence/crime is sanctioned under certain circumstances. Sources of learning include, but are not limited to interaction between victim and offender; peer groups, family, or more broadly, society.
- *Control*: examines victimization through weak inner or outer controls.
- *Critical*: examines harm through broader definitions and groups of people compared with traditional crime/victim categories and critiques legal definitions of crime and victimization and labeling of whom is a victim. Victimization risk may be explained through social marginalization (e.g. racism; sexism) and/or political forces/state crime.

2. We used the total pages rather than total pages containing text or total pages of narrative (as opposed to contents, appendices).

- *Other*: any other theory or structured explanation of victimization or theory that does not meet the criteria for any of the above categories.

Theoretical arguments that could not be classified into one of the categories above were considered “other” theoretical arguments (e.g. theories of criminal behavior, psychological and biological perspectives). We examined these codes through the general arguments associated with each perspective as well as specific theories and/or theorists associated with these perspectives. Although some perspectives could be argued for more than one coding group, we coded all theories in what we believed was the *best* match. Therefore, all codes were mutually exclusive.

Two coders reviewed all eight textbooks. Discussion of coding methods, and clarification for codes occurred throughout the coding process. Results for coders were analyzed using the interclass correlation (ICC) in SPSS software for each code. We examined the average measure across raters using a two-way random model for consistency (Shrout & Fleiss, 1979). The ICC for average measures ranged from .612 (moderate consistency) to .941 (excellent consistency) with a mean of .728. We first present the results of theory in general, then specific theory representation and finally, review general findings in how theories were presenting in the texts.

Results

How Much Space Do Victimology Textbooks Dedicate to Theory?

Responding to our first research question, we measured how much space textbooks dedicated to theoretical perspectives regarding victimization. Across the eight textbooks, the percent of total pages representing any theoretical orientation ranged from 2.3 to 10.8% ($M = 6.5\%$). Textbooks with higher percentages had both greater breadth and depth representing theory.

Which Theories Are Discussed in Victimology Textbooks?

For the second research question, we examined which theories were represented in the text. Table 1 presents the results of the coding analysis. Each number represents the percent of pages in the textbook focused on that theoretical group. Figure 1 presents the results showing variation across textbooks labeled randomly by the first name of the textbook author(s).

The perspective with the greatest representation proved to be theories on victim precipitation, which was evident in 1.5% of pages (Figure 1, polka dot). Precipitation theories prominently featured von Hentig and Mendelsohn’s typologies of precipitation and culpability (Mendelsohn, 1956; von Hentig, 1941) and discussions of Wolfgang’s Philadelphia homicide studies (1958).

Table 1 Percent of pages representing theoretical categories

	N	Min. %	Max. %	M (%)	SD
General discussion	8	0.0	1.0	0.5	0.3
Victim precipitation	8	.6	2.1	1.5	.5
Exposure/Opportunity	8	.5	2.7	1.2	1.0
Learning/Culture	8	.3	2.5	1.1	.8
Control	8	.0	.4	.1	.2
Critical	8	.0	.6	.3	.2
Other theories	8	.0	6.7	1.8	2.2
All theories	8	2.3	10.8	6.5	2.8

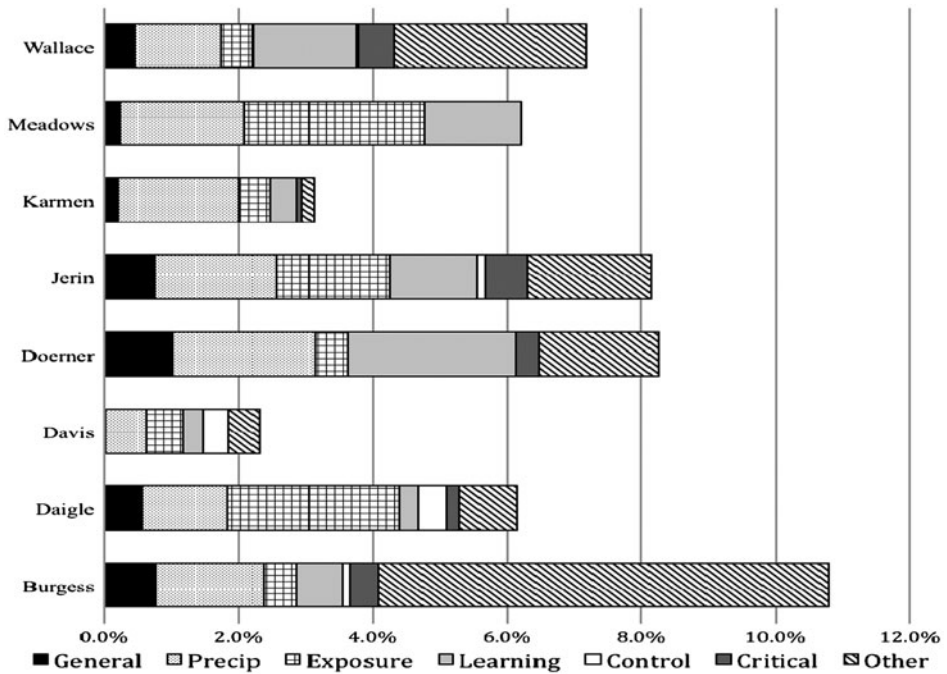


Figure 1 Variation in theory representation across textbooks

Exposure and opportunity theories (Figure 1, grid pattern) were also widely represented across all textbooks (1.2% of pages). Lifestyles (Hindelang et al., 1978) and Cohen and Felson’s (1979) routine activities theory were both frequently mentioned. However, it was often unclear that these perspectives were distinct theories.

Learning theories and theories of cultural links to victimization (Figure 1, light gray) were observed in 1.1% of pages. Much of the discussion in this category described learned helplessness in the cycle of violence for victims of

intimate partner abuse. Although less often represented, some theories described the influence of the subculture of violence (Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1967) and Anderson's (1999) code of the streets. There was very little representation in victimology textbooks of control theories (.1% of pages).

Critical theories (Figure 1, dark gray) were represented in .3% of pages in textbooks. The most common critical theoretical perspectives drew from the feminist tradition, particularly in exploring patriarchal culture as promoting violence against women. Some texts also discussed Mawby and Walklate's critical perspective (1994), which adopts an expansive definition of victimization and takes issue with how the political landscape defines who is categorized as a victim. A few texts described sociological conflict theories in defining victims often excluded from public discourse. Other examples included a general discussion of conflict and/or Marxist theories questioning the role of capitalism and power in maintaining the status quo at the expense of the lower classes/less powerful (e.g. Sellin, 1938).

In addition to the main theoretical categories, there was quite a range of theories that did not fit specifically within one of these categories (Figure 1, diagonal stripe). Some theories within this group included other theories of specific types of victimization, theories of criminality, psychological, and biological perspectives of criminality and typologies of crime. For example, a few textbooks described the classical criminology perspective and its relationship to modern rational choice and deterrence theories. These sections were often embedded in a broader segment regarding general theories of crime rather than victimology specifically.

Several texts also discussed strains/social stressors or "resource" theories (e.g. Gelles, 1993) and social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976), particularly for explaining family (e.g. intimate partner, child, and elder) violence. Psychopathological theory was utilized across texts to explain rape/sexual assault, homicide, and other types of offending. Biological perspectives included documenting the influence of neurotransmitters, genes, hormones, and brain trauma on offending and victimization (e.g. Beaver et al., 2007). Textbooks cautioned that biological theories are best viewed as a factor that may influence criminality or victimization in interaction with particular environments.

We also included typologies of victimization in which the typology developed an explanation about offender motivations. For example, textbooks presented typologies of sex offending and homicide killings (e.g. Holmes & DeBurger, 1988). These findings suggested that in addition to relative low representation of theory across texts, there was also a great deal of variation of additional relevant theoretical perspectives presented.

How Were Theories Presented in Victimology Textbooks?

Of the eight textbooks, two included a full chapter on theory, four included approximately half of a chapter on theory, and two only integrated theory

throughout chapters. Textbooks that discussed theory more generally provided the main argument and most key components of theories. However, many did not transcend these basic arguments, such as to provide an example of the concepts. In addition, of the theories represented, most were quite dated. Although it is important to have a foundation in all of the major theoretical perspectives, little space in textbooks was dedicated to recent theories or new developments in older theories. For instance, other than victim precipitation, there was little discussion regarding the victim-offender overlap scholarship, which has garnered extensive research attention over the past few decades (Jennings et al., 2012). Another area that has experienced growth is the adaptation of cultural theories to explain victimization (Berg et al., 2012; Zaykowski & Gunter, 2012). Finally, theories were predominantly mentioned without any identification of strengths and weaknesses or implications for the future.

Discussion

The current study explored the representation of theories of victimology in undergraduate textbooks. The purpose of the study was to understand how much space in textbooks was dedicated to theoretical frameworks and what theories were most widely represented. In addition to these questions, we were also interested in how theories were presented. Findings from this study revealed that theory was not always a major component of textbooks, and theoretical discussions varied across different textbooks. The most widely represented theories were victim precipitation, exposure/opportunity theories, and social learning/cultural theories. Theories were presented predominantly in their original frameworks from the 1940s through the 1970s. Little discussion was presented for “newer” theories like the adaptation of self-control to explain victimization (Piquero et al., 2005; Pratt et al., 2014; Schreck, 1999; Turanovic & Pratt, 2014) and recent developments on older theories (Jennings et al., 2012). Theories were also frequently presented in a way that lacked critical insights including connections to the recent empirical literature.

The results of this study raise the issue that textbooks’ presentation of theory was, in most cases, problematic. We recommend instructors who prefer to use textbooks as primary readings to (1) provide materials that reference a variety of theoretical perspectives and offer enough details that students can comprehend each theoretical orientation; (2) provide examples of theories that may include studies specifically testing a theory or a general reading or activity for which theories can be applied; (3) engage students in critical thinking regarding existing theories and challenge them to identify strengths and weaknesses.

For the first recommendation, we suggest using materials that may be available through other textbooks, or summaries of theories in academic encyclopedias, which institutional libraries may have or be willing to order in an online

format that would be easily accessible for students.³ To assess knowledge of theoretical foundations, instructors may want to use active learning methods that allow students to craft their own diagrams, models, or presentations. This method would illustrate whether or not students understand the fundamental interrelationship between concepts and predictions. Another strategy is to recruit students to be leaders of discussion for different theoretical topics (e.g. Casteel & Bridges, 2007).

For the second and third recommendations, to provide examples of theory and think critically about theory, there are a few readers and text/readers available that could complement or replace traditional texts. Students can also be assigned to seek scholarly articles on their own or develop a research project that explicitly explores the ability of a theory to explain a phenomenon regarding victimization (e.g. "how well does learned helplessness explain why women do not leave abusive relationships?") Another avenue is to choose an academic or nonacademic book, story, or film that could apply to a variety of theories and have students make an argument for which theoretical perspective best explains the type of victimization represented in the book or media. Numerous studies have emphasized the benefits from these alternative methods and sources (e.g. Malcom, 2006; Rockell, 2009). Students can be assessed on their comprehension through class engagement, group work in and out of class, online discussion boards and blogs, written exercises, and other techniques.

Students should not be taking any theory for fact, but rather appreciating theory as a framework for which to understand social phenomenon. With that said, it is also important for students to recognize what the theory is able to explain, and what it is not, and why (Rinehart, 1999; Sears & Cairns, 2010). Although this study provided some insights into the representation of theory in textbooks, the study posed several limitations. We recognize that the sample of textbooks was small ($N = 8$), but did represent the population of textbooks in the time frame of interest. It is possible that additional textbooks, particularly those that are not United States focused, may have greater (or less) focus on theory.

In this study, we focused on theory that explained the causes of victimization. Although we did not explicitly measure theories explaining other aspects of victimization, there was very little mention of perspectives to explain victim help-seeking and consequences of victimization. Also, few texts described theories to explain specific problems such as repeat victimization or the victim-offender overlap. Further research examining the representation of theory in these areas is needed. Moreover, we only included two coders in this

3. A list of suggested supplemental readings is included in an appendix (online). This list includes theoretical readings in victim help-seeking, psychological responses to victimization and fear of crime.

analysis. Additional coders would possibly improve the reliability and validity of the findings in the current study.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to assess methods in teaching theories of victimology, a great deal of insight can be drawn from existing pedagogical literature including research in this special issue (citations from special issue). For future textbook development and revised editions of existing textbooks, we would strongly recommend additional attention towards theory and the application of theory. In addition, for some texts, the descriptions of theory and connections to relevant empirical evidence were not effectively communicated. Failure to thoroughly disentangle theory from empirical research will confuse rather than demystify theory. Textbook authors may also want to consider engaging students with challenges that arise with new applications of theory. For example, can routine activities theory explain cybercrime victimization? How does new technology and surveillance alter theoretical propositions? As a discipline, victimologists should be reflexive in understanding current state of theory and its potential future direction. Furthermore, as teacher scholars, students can help us to learn and challenge our own thinking with regard to theory.

Notes on Contributors

Heather Zaykowski is an assistant professor of Sociology at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Her research interests include criminal victimization, victim help-seeking, and youth violence.

Lena Campagna is a doctoral student in the Sociology program at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Her scholarly interests include victimology, gender studies, and Native American studies.

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Appendix. Victimology textbooks reviewed

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