RETHINKING VICTIMIZATION: AN INTERACTIONAL APPROACH TO VICTIMOLOGY

James A. Holstein*
Gale Miller
Marquette University

This article suggests an interactional approach for analyzing victimization—that is, the social processes through which person come to be known and understood as victims. The authors conceptualize victimization in terms of interactional and descriptive practices through which victim status is assigned to persons and/or groups. Using data from the public media and fieldwork in everyday settings, the authors illustrate some techniques, objectives, and outcomes of victimization. The authors conclude by recommending several issues and directions for study that would be appropriate for victimological research that construes victims as interactionally constituted.

The emerging discipline of victimology—the scientific study of victims (Drapkin and Viano 1974)—has attempted to distinguish itself from criminology and other studies of harm-doing by conceiving of crimes and other instances of "victimization" as dynamic social relations (Viano 1976). Victimization has been cast as an interactional phenomenon contingent upon features of both victimizer and victim, thus leading victimological research to focus on the social contexts, correlates, and consequences of victimization (Dadrian 1976). In doing so, victimology has cultivated a new appreciation for a variety of social problems attendant to being a victim.

The attempt to formulate victimization as an interactional phenomenon is particularly significant because it offers alternative, even innovative, possibilities for studying the *social processes* through which persons become "victims." Yet, despite this intriguing promise, victimology has remained committed to a rather static, incomplete vision of

*Direct all correspondence to: James A. Holstein, Department of Social and Cultural Sciences, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI 53233.

Symbolic Interaction, Volume 13, Number 1, pages 103–122.

ISSN: 0195-6086.

victimization as involving objectively constituted and identifiable victims and victimizers. The discipline's fundamental premises and definitions have been so reified that consideration of their conceptual underpinnings is virtually precluded. Conventional victimology, it appears, *presupposes* that some persons or groups are objectively "victims" without explicitly considering the interpretive definitional processes implicated in assignment of victim status.[1]

Ironically, victimologists' reification of victims and victimizers has occurred despite a simultaneously burgeoning sociological concern for studying the interactional bases of social life (Blumer 1969; Berger and Luckmann 1966; Garfinkel 1967). Indeed, victimology was implicitly invited to an interactionist perspective when Quinney (1972) challenged victimologists to rethink the static image by conceiving of "victim" as a "social construction" that emerges interactionally. The challenge was intended as a rationale for broadening the range of persons considered victims (e.g., victims of the police, wars, and oppression), but an even more compelling aspect of this constructionist approach lies in its implicit recommendation to analyze the *interactional dynamics* of how persons become "victims."

The latter orientation to victimization rests on the premise that the meaning of objects does not inhere in those objects, but is conferred upon them as they are interpreted, organized, and represented through social interaction (Blumer 1969). Quinney (1972) implies that victims are "produced" through practical and political activity that is abetted by a "rhetoric of victimization." This imagery departs radically from conventional formulations of the victimization process, for it allows us to reconceptualize victimization in terms of interactional and discourse *practices*. In particular, it directs us to the interpretive and descriptive work through which assignments of victim status are made. From this perspective, victims are *interactionally constituted*.

An interactional analysis of victim assignment practices would respect the integrity of social life as an interpretive process (Blumer 1969), and would thus enrich our understanding of how persons become victims. This article offers programmatic suggestions for a "victimology" that is primarily concerned with the creation and manipulation of meaning—suggestions that should extend, not undermine, the conventional focus of the field. First, we outline our perspective on victimization as interactional practice through which meaning is assembled and assigned in the course of everyday life. Then we discuss some of the forms and objectives of victimization, suggesting ways to analyze victimization as practical, descriptive activity. We next discuss victim designations as the products of descriptive "contests." Finally, we consider how an interactionally oriented victimology might be developed.

VICTIMIZATION AS INTERACTIONAL PRACTICE

Everyday life (Bittner 1973) engages a reality that is objectively "out there," existing apart from the acts of observation and description through which it is known. Meaning inheres in acts and objects, appearing to be self evident. Words are believed to merely *convey* meanings, so the essential task of language is simple description—*telling about* reality. An alternate view, however, conceives of everyday realities as interactively constructed and sustained (Blumer 1969; Garfinkel 1967). From this perspective, interaction, in general, and, more specifically, talk and language-use do not merely convey

meaning, but rather, are ways of "doing things with words" (Emerson 1983, p. 32) to *produce* meaningful realities. In some ways, then, the orderly and recognizable features of social circumstances are "talked into being" (Heritage 1984, p. 290). In this view, descriptions—as when we describe someone as a "victim"—are not disembodied commentaries on ostensibly real states of affairs. Rather, they are reality *projects*—acts of constructing the world.

In common sense terms, we all know what a "victim" is. We routinely label persons believed to have been unjustly harmed or damaged as victims. And just as routinely, we gloss the interpretive procedures through which the term is selected, applied, and justified. We believe that persons become vicitms when they are the objects of harmful, unfair treatment. We merely attach the relevant sign to the appropriate, deserving referent. But, if "victim" is analytically construed as a label that *formulates* reality, our notion of how one becomes a "victim" is radically transformed. We can conceive of "victimization" as *descriptive practice*—the interpretive and representational process for assigning victim status to ourselves and others. "Victimization" then becomes interactional activity that underpins victims' reality status. Describing someone as a victim is more than merely reporting *about* a feature of the social world; it *constitutes* that world.

Considered in this fashion, "victim" is a categorization device (Sacks 1972)—an interpretive framework (Schutz 1970) that provides a set of instructions for understanding social relations. "Victimizing" someone, then, implicitly advocates a distinctive understanding of that person and his or her circumstances. "Victim" descriptions are *reflexive* in the sense that they both instruct observers in how to appreciate the situationally specific meanings of persons as "victims" and simulatenously invoke and create those meanings. They are also *indexical*, taking their sense and meaning from the occasions of their production (Garfinkel 1967). Finally, they are *rhetorical*—partisan activity intended to persuade others to adopt and act on preferred understandings of persons and circumstances (Burke 1950).[2]

The study of victimization as interactional practice focuses on the social circumstances of everyday life in which persons are characterized and/or treated as "victims." We take our definition of victim from its common sense usage which typically refers to persons believed to have been unjustly harmed or damaged by exogenous forces beyond their control. Our analytic interest is not in the "factual" characteristics of victims or the correctness of the victim-labelling process. Rather, it is in the dynamics and conditions of everyday victim assignment practices. The analysis is developed by considering the public discourse and rhetoric through which victim identities are offered and negotiated.

Interactionists and ethnomethodologists studying deviance have long been concerned with the politics of negotiating, establishing, and sustaining "deviant" statuses (Becker 1963; Garfinkel 1956). Our approach to victimization provides an analogue to these traditions. As we shall later elaborate, practical definitions of troubles typically promote someone as the "troublemaker" (Emerson and Messinger 1977). Simultaneously, specifications of the troubled party—the "victim"—are generally implicated in the definitional process. If "deviants" are constituted through public definition and "dramatization of evil" (Tannenbaum 1938), then we might also view the production of "victims" as the public articulation and dramatization of injury and innocence.

The following sections discuss features of the victimization process and suggest ways to analyze the purposes, circumstances, and outcomes of victimization. Throughout the

article, we draw upon data collected from the public media as well as though fieldwork in community mental health, social control, and human service settings (see Holstein 1984, 1987a, 1987b, 1988a, 1988b, 1990, forthcoming b; Gubrium and Holstein 1990; Miller 1987, 1990; Miller and Holstein 1989). Our data illustrate the discourse of victimization, and they are used to suggest topics, issues, and questions that can be engaged when "victimization" is construed as interactional practice.

Victimization occurs in many emotionally and politically charged circumstances. The illustrations of victimization practices used throughout this article are intended neither to question nor legitimate native assignments of victim status. Our analysis attempts to "bracket" the "facticity" of victim status so we might examine the practices through which a sense of "victim-as-a-fact" is achieved. Our intent is not to deny, demean, or challenge native formulations of victims and those responsible for their harm. We do not wish to "ironicize" (Pollner 1987) everyday practices by assuming some definitive or accredited version of who is and who is not a victim against which native depictions can be invidiously compared. Rather, we take these native descriptions seriously, as forms of purposeful social action that meaningfully organize aspects of persons' everyday lives. They are our topic for analysis.

VICTIMIZATION AS INTERPRETIVE INSTRUCTIONS

From our perspective, a person is "victimized" when he or she is nominated for membership in the "victim" category. Calling someone a victim organizes understandings of that person as a particular *type* to whom certain characteristics are attributed and orientations are taken. For example, when a member of an Alzheimer's disease caregiver support group announces that the disease has "two victims" (Gubrium 1987), she offers a distinctive way of appreciating the caregiver's experience. Describing the caregiver as a "victim" instructs others to acknowledge the ways in which the disease harms the *caregiver* as well as the Alzheimer's patient, disrupting both her relationship with the stricken person and her daily life's circumstances. The label implicitly underscores the caregiver's injury, frees her from fault for her troubles, and renders her worthy of others' concern.

Calling someone a victim encourages others to see how the labelled person has been harmed by forces beyond his or her control, simultaneously establishing the "fact" of injury and locating responsibility for the damage outside the "victim." The discourse of "victimization" is thus *practically situated social action* that promotes practical definitions of everyday circumstances. Consider the understandings implicit in the following instances of victimization:

> I just hope they see him as a victim and take that into consideration.
> —Ms. Eugene Hassenfus (NBC-TV News:10/21/86) discussing the Nicaraguan trial of Eugene Hassenfus on terrorism charges.

> . . . he's been the victim of a staff that's out of control, not serving him well.
> —Nancy Reagan (NBC-TV News:2/24/87) discussing Ronald Reagan and his implication in secret diversions of military assistance to Iran and Nicraraguan rebels.

In both instances a concerned wife was describing her husband as she attempted to explain his problematic involvement in potentially discrediting circumstances. Hassenfus

was portrayed as a dedicated, though now-renounced, employee of a disloyal CIA, who had hired him to provide supplies for Nicaraguan rebels. A staff inappropriately usurping power in the name of questionable causes was blamed for Reagan's troubles. The wives' characterizations of their husbands as "victims" served the primary purpose of focusing attention on *the husbands* as the parties who had been unjustly injured by the circumstances under discussion. Casting the husbands as victims implicitly instructed observers to consider the ways that the husbands had been harmed by the actions of *others*. The wives' descriptions thus "produced" the sense that the husbands had been the objects, not the sources, of harmful behavior. Culpability was assigned to others, thus exonerating the husbands and preserving their identities and reputations.

As an act of interpretive reality construction, victimization unobtrusively advises others in how they should understand persons, circumstances, and behaviors under consideration. We see this illustrated in the following newspaper account of a study concerning inappropriate psychotherapist-patient sexual relations. The article stated that 20 percent of psychological counselors surveyed indicated that they had treated clients who had been involved in a sexual relationship with a previous counselor. The report was introduced by the following statement: "The incidence of clients being victimized sexually . . . is far higher than previously thought . . ." (*Milwaukee Journal*:9/25/86). Throughout the article, these clients were called "victims." In doing this, the writer instructed the reader, in a concise and tacit fashion, about how to interpret the research findings in the absence of any other information regarding the nature or circumstances of the "sexual relationships" that were reported. Using the term "victim" cast the clients as recipients of improper sexual attention, and underpinned the implicit claim that clients had been harmed by their therapists. The organization of the discourse concerning these clients typified the clients and their experience so as to promote, in a shorthand fashion, a distinctive understanding of their circumstances that could be distinguished from other possible interpretations.

Victimization can also specify understandings of the source of harm. Implicit in the preceding illustrations, for example, is the understanding that the described persons had been "victims at the hands of others." Thus, the assignment of victim status to persons is sometimes associated with the assignment of victimizer status to others. Victims can also be depicted as the objects of harm by *amorphous, impersonal* forces. The well-known "victim of circumstances" is exemplary in this regard. This characterization was part of accounts given for the failed Supreme Court nominations of Robert H. Bork and Douglas H. Ginsburg. On various occasions, both men were characterized as victims of circumstances. For example, a professor of American culture at Northwestern University said of Ginsburg:

> There is a revolution in social acceptability of all sorts. And various people are caught in those changes and they are, in a sense, victims in a changed moral world. (*New York Times Service*:11/8/87)

And Bork was similarly portrayed:

> Bork was . . . a victim of outside forces. Those forces were not the special interests the Republicans excoriated. Rather Bork was a victim of a particular moment in history (*New York Times Service*:10/7/87).

In both cases, commentators used victim designations to remove responsibility for confirmation failures from the nominees, casting them as casualties of circumstances beyond their control. In this way, readers were encouraged to treat the nominees as personally faultless for their failed candidacies.

VICTIMIZATION'S PRACTICAL OBJECTIVES

Victim designations typically emanate from troubled circumstances in which there are practical as well as theoretical interests in defining what is going on and what can be done about it. Troubles become progressively more concrete and recognizable as they are made public and remedies are sought (Emerson and Messinger 1977). As parties to a trouble negotiate its definition, sources, and resolutions, the trouble is consolidated around understandings of who is responsible for the trouble and who has been injured, processes which often involve victimization.

We have already suggested victimization's general use as interpretive instructions, and briefly described how the "fact" of unjust harm can be tacitly established through the application of the victim label. The following sections elaborate these points and consider additional purposes that are served by describing someone as a victim. Victimization is analyzed as a procedure for deflecting responsibility, assigning causes, specifying responses and remedies, and accounting for failure.

Deflecting Responsibility

Victimization is a method for absolving persons of responsibility. When trouble emerges, an "innocent" party—the object of the injury or trouble—can be specified by assigning victim status to one or more persons, thus exempting them from blame. Such as occasion arose, for example, in a Community Mental Health Center (CMHC) "socialization" program which stipulated that members had to be on time for all sessions. Glen Coleman,[3] a CMHC client, had been late on numerous occasions and was in danger of being dropped from the program. His case manager felt that Coleman was doing well in the program and that dismissal would be a major setback for him. After discussing the situation with Coleman, the case manager met with the program director to argue against Coleman's dismissal:

> Glen's come a long way with responsibility, and I think the [socialization] program's got a lot to do with it. I don't think this lateness thing is indicative [of a lack of responsibility]. You know he lives out in Bradford and has to take the bus. He leaves in plenty of time to get here, but you know, I think Glen's as much a victim of the lousy transportation system as he is irresponsible. That's not really a good reason to kick him out.

Portrayed as a "victim" of the unreliable bus system, Coleman was relieved of responsibility for his lateness. The case manager's description highlighted Coleman's motives in violating program rules: his intent was to abide by those rules even though he routinely broke them. Casting Coleman as a victim instructed the program director to understand Coleman's lateness as unintentional, something Coleman could not control; the problem

plagued Coleman as much as it did the director. Thus, one aspect of assigning victim status can be its specification of persons' harmless motives, commonly a key to exonerating persons from blame.

Because the meanings of behavior and character are mutually constituitive, persons' actions are understood in light of identities assigned to them, which, in turn, rest on interpretations of person' actions (see Garfinkel 1967). As an identity, victim is an interpretive framework that promotes a distinctive understanding of problematic behavior and circumstances. It emphasizes particular aspects of persons' conduct and character while glossing over other features that might suggest more reprehensible identities. We can observe this in a recent criminal trial, for example, where the District Attorney (DA) prosecuting a police officer on multiple charges of sexual assault repeatedly cast the involved females, all of them adolescents, as "victims" of the officer's actions. The officer admitted his sexual encounters with the females, but denied malicious intent. Uncontested testimony revealed that all of the females had consented to sexual relations, and had willingly participated on numerous occasions. The females testified that they had repeatedly gone to the officer's house, visited early in the morning when is wife was gone, and called him to meet them when he was off duty. Each stated that she had not been coerced by the officer (*Milwaukee Journal*:10/11/87).

In prosecuting the case, however, the DA claimed the officer "repeatedly took advantage of his victims [and] exploited his position in the community." The DA called the officer's conduct reprehensible, noting that it involved "multiple victims . . . over a period of years. . . . There seemed to be something about age 14 for this guy. All his victims were 14 or had just turned [15]." (*Milwaukee Journal*:10/11/87). These depictions can be analyzed as concerted efforts to minimize the volitional component of the females' behavior. Using the term "victim" instructed hearers and readers to understand the females' sexual activities as matters which they were incapable of controlling. Victimization was justified by invoking the immaturity and innocence associated with adolescence, which, in turn, were emphasized by the victim label. Thus, the DA portrayed the sexual relationships as something *done to* the females, rather than as activities in which they were capable of willingly and responsibly collaborating. In this way, the victim designation displayed the sense in which the females could not be held accountable for their behavior, as well as the harm done to them, albeit harm that the adolescents were incapable of recognizing. Casting them as victims, in effect, dramatized their essential innocence.[4]

Assigning Causes

Categorizing a person as a victim also instructs others to identify the sources of harm. Assigning victim status, then, implicitly designates a victim's *complementary opposition*—a victimizer, in common sense terms. Note in all of the prior examples how "victims" and (by implication) "perpetrators" of harm are simultaneously constituted. This is accomplished by virtue of our mundane (Pollner 1987) positivist assumption that all consequences have their causes, as well as through explicit designation.

Consider what the prosecutor in a sexual assault trial was trying to achieve by using the rhetoric of victimization. Tracy Booth had accused Kevin Weber, an "acquaintance," of sexual assault. There was clear evidence that sexual contact had taken place during an evening the two had spent together, and Booth contended that it had taken place without

her consent—an instance of rape. The district attorney (DA) prosecuting the case began his opening arguments with the following claims:

> Tracy Booth never asked for what happened to her. She never gave her consent. . . . She may have known him. That's right, they were friends, but that doesn't make her any less of a victim. That's right, a victim. She didn't come on to him and she wasn't just fooling around. None of that. . . . So if she didn't consent, if she put up a struggle, how can it be anything but rape. She was the victim, pure and simple, of this man's unforgivable attack. . . . You have to hold him accountable. You have to find him guilty. You have to give him the punishment he deserves.

The charge of sexual assault was being contested in this case, and, as a matter of practical definition, the DA needed to establish that the sexual encounter between the plaintiff and defendant was something other than consensual—an assault rather than a tryst. Declaring Booth a "victim" directed observers to interpret the "facts" of the case in a particular way, providing for a judgment of the situation as "rape." At the same time, the DA portrayed the defendant as the cause of the trouble and fully culpable for it. By designating a victim, then, the perpetrator of harm was simultaneously produced. One cannot exist without the other. The dramatization of innocence and evil were simultaneously accomplished.

Producing victim's complementary opposition sometimes implicates persons, or impersonal forces, who might otherwise be excluded from understandings of a trouble. For example, consider the debates concerning the "real" and "hidden" causes of the destruction of Iran Air Flight 655 that killed 290 persons. Some contend that it was a military blunder, a tragic mistake (*Milwaukee Journal*:7/5/88). This claim was elaborated by the suggestion that flawed U.S. foreign policy increases the dangers faced by innocent persons in the region. Others argued that it was a "premeditated act of aggression . . . a massacre" by the U.S. government (*Milwaukee Journal*:7/14/88). Counter claims challenged these attributions of responsibility by "Holding the victims to blame" (*Milwaukee Journal*:7/11/88)—framing the incident as the culmination of Iranian conspiracies. Others held Iranian officials partly responsible based on their military activities in the area. They stated that such tragedies were an inevitable product of war (*Milwaukee Journal*:7/14/88). All of the politically-charged rhetoric was directed, at least in part, at establishing who was the victim and who was responsible—the perpetrator. And all the illustrations cited were efforts to assign some degree of culpability to persons who were not present during the incident.

Specifying Responses and Remedies

Troubles are typically described for the purpose of doing something about them. Designating victims not only contributes to the specification of trouble, but it is also central to the formulation of responses and remedies. Specifically, victimizing someone suggests that the person deserves help or compensation, while indicating that others should be sanctioned or provided restitution for harmful occurrences. Indeed, failure to sanction harm-doers and/or provide restitution may be portrayed as a second victimization increasing the harm done to innocent persons. Note how victimization practices are implicated in resolving the following organizational "trouble" in a Community Mental Health Center.

Barry Fox, a chronically mentally ill client, was denied admission to a vocational rehabilitation program for the disabled. The program's director ruled that Fox did not meet the program's disability criteria, but Fox's case manager disagreed and telephoned to plead for Fox's admission:

> I just don't see why my client's not eligible. He's handicapped. I wouldn't say he's totally disabled, but he's a victim of mental illness. We can't let Barry be a victim of unemployment for the rest of his life, too.

Claims to victim status, both current and projected, were mobilized to render the client appropriate for the vocational rehabilitation program. By casting the client as the "victim of mental illness," the case manager did much more than report Fox's psychiatric status. She formulated the condition as an injury that should, to the extent that it was possible, be put right. And the specter of injustice was raised a second time by suggesting that Fox might suffer even greater undeserved hardship—as a "victim of unemployment"—if he were not admitted to the program. The victim label was used to substantiate a quasi-moral imperative to help Fox by resolving the dispute in his favor.

Victim status is frequently argued in situations where a troubled party demands redress. Compensatory litigation, for example, attempts to establish that damage has been done and restitution is in order. Consider, for example, how the victim label was employed by the attorney for two Houston police officers who filed a law suit seeking damages stemming from a barroom incident in which they scuffled with four New York Mets baseball players. In arguing the officers' case, the attorney stated that "these officers have been victimized by prima donnas and (the Mets) were able to get away with it because they're celebrities." The attorney claimed that recompense was due because his clients had been "victimized by public ridicule, mocking." (*The Sporting News*:7/27/87). Calling the officers "victims," rhetorically established that harm had been done, and also that something should be done to restore the losses of the injured parties. The attorney used the term "victim" to underscore the just and appropriate character of the demand for compensation. As a rhetorical device, it was a warrant for action as much as a description.

Victimization also serves as a rationale for sanctioning perpetrators in order to "set things right." Consider the following involuntary mental hospitalization hearing, where Lee Smith's commitment was considered. Smith indicated to the presiding judge that his recent eviction from a board and care facility resulted ostensibly from his failure to pay his rent. He claimed that his monthly disability check had covered the rental cost, but each month the landlord charged more for "incidental fees" that were not specified in his board and care contract, hence his current inability to pay. The judge was outraged at what he clearly felt was an unfair arrangement:

> I don't see how going back [to the board and care facility] is going to work out. I think you'd be better off in the hospital for now, at least for a while. But damn it, this man is a victim here, and I'm going to see to it that somebody looks into this. Those people [the operators of the board and care facility] better be able to explain this, or I'll have their license.

In this instance, a so-called care-giver was transformed into an "exploiter" through the victimization of his client. By casting Smith as a "victim," the judge implicitly censured

the practices and person believed to be responsible for the trouble at hand. This then served as warrant for scrutinizing those practices and, perhaps, revoking his operator's license.

Finally, remedial actions themselves may be specified and warranted through victimization. Consider, for example, how the victim imagery is mobilized in the following account for unconventional actions taken during Brief Family Therapy. A meeting had been arranged between a therapist and the mother of a teenage girl who was allegedly being sexually abused by her step-father. After observing the session for several minutes (Brief therapy is typically conducted with cotherapists observing through one-way mirrors and communicating suggestions to the primary therapist), the supervising therapist brought the daughter to the therapy room and joined the session herself, a practice seldom followed in the Brief method. The supervising therapist then began to tell the mother what "must" be done, another atypical practice in Brief therapy. After the clients left, the supervising therapist explained her actions to several trainees who had been observing the session:

> You probably noticed that I didn't follow the model [usual Brief therapy approach] in there. I did that because this is a unique case and we couldn't treat it like a normal one. I had to be direct because that girl is being victimized by her step father. Our first responsibility in that case is to get the victim out of the situation, then we can work with them on their problems. But we have to worry about their safety first. . . . I played the role of the "heavy" [with the mother] because it was important for the mother to understand the gravity of the situation and the legal ramifications of it. It is important that someone take the side of the victim, everyone cannot be neutral.

This example demonstrates how specifying a victim may call forth a remedy. It is especially noteworthy because the rhetoric of victimization was used to account for, and justify, an atypical, even radical (for Brief therapy) technique. The supervisor authorized a normally inappropriate intervention by using the image of victim to constitute the situation as "unique,"—one that called for special measures.

Accounting for Failure

In the course of daily life, we all fall short of our, and others', expectations. The ways in which we depict, account for, and manage these failures is central to maintaining our public and self identities as competent practioners of everyday life. Emerson and Pollner (1976) argue that descriptive practice may be central to managing apparent deviations from philosophical and behavioral models. Their discussion of the use of "dirty work designations" shows how we use vernacular descriptions to establish moral distance from aspects of our work. Victimization practices may be used in an analogous fashion. In addition to denying responsibility for particular actions, designating one's self, or another, as a victim provides an economical way of telling others that the performance at hand should not be taken to exemplify the nature, quality or potential of either the actor engaged in it, or the activity itself. Such practices help us maintain a sense of purpose and competence in the face of situational demands which might ostensibly give little evidence that goals are being accomplished or standards being upheld.

In the world of work, for example, where accountability is a major concern, we often find individuals "victimizing" themselves to account for failures, oversights, and other

unsatisfactory performances (Miller 1990). Community mental health administrators, for example, sometimes claim they are "victims of deinstitutionalization" or "underfunding" to deflect criticism and blame for failing to adequately serve their client populations. Other human services workers may portray themselves as victims of counter productive rules and procedures required by organizational superiors, and police officers claim they are victims of judges who make rulings that restrict their ability to fight crime. As practical, goal-oriental descriptive activity, then, victimization is available to account for, and distance oneself from, faulted performance and its consequenecs.

Activities in human service settings offer ample illustrations of the ways victim designations are used to account for apparent failures. Work in these settings is often ineffective; recidivism and disruption are common features of clients' lives. Rather than allowing observers to construe these problems as evidence of service providers' ineffectiveness or failure, however, the rhetoric of victimization instructs observers to attend to the "real" intent and practice of care givers. It focuses on the gap between institutional intent and the circumstances of care givers' work, emphasizing the constraints imposed upon them by organizational limitations as well as uncooperative and hopeless clients. For example, a therapist at a CMHC openly acknowledged to an organizational colleague that she seldom "cured" any of her chronically mentally ill clients. Indeed, she admitted that she seldom saw much "therapeutic progress" at all. She followed this confession with the following explanation, an account for her apparent failure:

> We have a good program but we have so little to work with. All the therapy techniques are pretty verbal, and that's one thing they [mentally ill clients] just don't have. They can't hold a conversation, so I'm a victim of their illness, too. How can I do therapy with a delusional schizophrenic?

As a "victim" the therapist denied responsibility for her ineffectiveness, but retained the right to claim that the results might have been otherwise if she was not constrained by her therapeutic resources and her non-verbal clients. She implied that she should not be held accountable for failure to adhere to more exacting professional standards or to attain more positive results. Nonetheless she continued to maintain and honor the standards and results through her account of why they were not being upheld.

In sum, victimization is a rhetoric for preserving good intentions and ideals by discounting failures in their realization. It does not deny failure; rather, it invites such a conclusion while maintaining persons' integrity. A sense of competence is maintained by portraying persons as dissatisfied, yet helpless in relation to the circumstances that militate against their success.

VICTIM CONTESTS

Victim assignments are always open-ended. On many occasions, portrayals of victims and the causes of victimization become topics of open disputes and negotiation. Shifting practical circumstances may motivate diverse descriptions, while similar victim assignments may emerge from seemingly disparate situations. Moreover, victim status may be assigned and then withdrawn in response to changing circumstances, understandings, or "political" considerations. Take, for example, the varying characterizations of alleged

rapist Gary Dotson and his female accuser. *Both* parties were variably characterized as victims over the course of the trial, the woman's recantations of prior accusations, and the aftermath in which Dotson was released from prison only to be re-arrested for other violations while his life history was repeatedly elaborated through the media. Dotson's initial status as sex-offender was retracted as he came to be seen as a victim of the woman's duplicitious testimony. But his subsequent misbehavior (coupled with skeptical responses to explanations offered for the woman's change of heart) have led to widespread reconsiderations, leaving many to recast Dotson as something other than a victim after all. This case illustrates how victim status is dependent on the interpretive enterprise of those reporting and describing events.

While the practical, rhetorical side of victimization is typically glossed over, there are nonetheless occasions where victim status is openly negotiated, contested, and even imposed. Such instances epitomize the political character of description. If "victim" is regarded as a *claim* about the world, then belief in the "factual" status of the description depends upon such things as credibility, influence, and warrant for honoring one set of claims over another. The version that is treated as real is thus a product of the "politics of description" (Foucault 1972), with victim status depending as much on the identities, bases of influence, and rhetorics and counter rhetorics of contesting parties as it does on the characteristics of the candidate "victims" themselves. These all represent analyzable topics for an interactional analysis.

Disagreements about assignments of victim status may become conflicts in which the assignments are openly disputed. Both injury and responsibility may be at stake in such disputes. Consider, for example, an emotionally charged discussion between a psychotherapist and a representative of an ex-mental patients' advocacy and support group (herself an ex-mental patient) regarding the failures of the psychiatry. The therapist argued that the psychiatric profession had been constrained in its ability to help the chronically mentally ill because of a lack of public concern (and, consequently, funding) for mental health services. He claimed that the community mental health movement was "the victim of public apathy" and argued that too much was being expected of a profession that was being taxed to its limits. The patients' advocate, however, felt the psychiatric profession was less concerned for its clients than it was for its own professional prestige, financial gain, and control over its clients. Her response to the therapist included the following rejoinder:

> That's crap about you being victims. What have you ever lost? You got it all. If there's a victim in this it's the ex-patient. You won't let us get better. We're all victims of a psychiatric conspiracy to have everyone see us as sickies who have to be zonked on drugs or we'll be completely bananas. Like we can never change.

The patients' advocate denied the therapist's initial claim for victim status, which had apparently been offered to deflect responsibility for psychiatry's failure to produce better results. Her denial was supported by the demand that the therapist document injury, the essence of being a victim. In contrast, the advocate made her own claim to victim status, specifying both the injury that had been done and the source of that injury—the psychiatric conspiracy. Laying a successful claim to victim status, then, is an artful practice because claim, offered as ostensibly objective descriptions, may be challenged and repudiated by others offering counter claims and warrants.

We frequently find such contests in legal proceedings. Consider the following exchange that occurred in the previously discussed rape trial. Recall that the prosecution's strategy was intended to establish the plaintiff, Tracy Booth, as a "victim" of sexual assault. However, the defense employed a similar "victimization" strategy in challenging Booth's testimony and arguing that the defendant, himself, was an innocent "victim." Specifically, the defense attorney claimed that the defendant, Kevin Weber, was a "victim of a confused young women who thought she could get him to love her if she got him to sleep with her." The opposing claims to victim status were supported by vastly different versions of what transpired. The prosecution argued that Weber had "lured" Booth into a drive to a fast food restaurant, then back to his apartment, with every intention of seducing her. The DA claimed that when the defendant approached her, Booth refused and tried to leave, but was physically restrained and forced to go have sex with Weber. The defense countered with an account in which Booth eagerly accompanied Weber to his apartment where *she* seduced him. Afterward, it was argued, she became upset when she could extract no commitment from Weber regarding a long-term relationship. According to Weber, harsh words were exchanged, some pushing and shoving took place, and Booth's blouse was torn as Weber tried to restrain Booth when she tried to leave before some amicable resolution to the argument had been reached. The defense claimed that no forcible assault had taken place, that the "rape" was merely a vindictive post hoc fabrication of which Weber was the victim.

Then, during Booth's testimony, the defense attorney challenged her claim to victim status. Booth vigorously resisted:

> Attorney: . . . and isn't it true that you fully consented and it's only now that you claim that you didn't want to have anything to do with him?
> Booth: That's not true
> Attorney: Didn't you sleep with him, then change your mind after he said he wasn't ready for a commitment?
> Booth: No, no. That's not true. That's not fair. Look what he's doing. I'm the victim here and he's trying to make me look guilty. You're trying to say it's my fault, and that he's the victim. That's not true.

The defense attorney reinterated this theme in his closing summation:

> I'm sure this young woman has been hurt emotionally. She was disappointed. She wanted something she couldn't have. But that doesn't make her a victim. . . . No, this story is just too insidious for her to be the victim. How can my client protect himself? They had been intimate, but now she had a change of heart, and he has no way to protect himself. If there is a victim here, it's Kevin, because she is trying to get back at him.

The dispute over victim status was an explicit contest over meaning. The "facts" of the case were dependent upon the interpretive schemata implicit in the alternate formulations of who was the victim. They were given meaning as the defense and prosecuting attorneys assigned and justified their clients' victim labels. Thus, the attorney's differing assignments of victim and victimizer statuses were rhetorical procedures for organizing the issues at stake in the trial as well as expressing their positions on the issues. The practical definition of the "victim" in this situation centered on the attorneys' and witnesses' rhetorical skills in expressing and justifying their positions.

SOME DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Our objective in this paper has been to broaden the scope of victimology to include the interactional processes through which victims are determined. We have suggested an analytic focus on naturally occurring interactional and descriptive *practices* through which victims are constituted, rather than simply studying persons who are commonsensically and non-reflectively assumed to be victims. Our focus on social action directs us to the social organization, objectives, and consequences of "victimization" as topics for an *interactional victimology*.

Central to the perspective and analysis is a concern for the ways that victimization is used to assign and deflect responsibility. One way to develop an interactionist victimology is by analyzing victimization as one of several discourses concerned with responsibility. We might consider the circumstances associated with different responsibility-assigning discourses and how they are interactionally related, asking, for example, how they are used to elaborate or counter one another? Further, we might ask about the practical advantages of diverse responsibility-assigning discourses in varied situations. Or, we might ask about the conditions under which victimization might be inappropriate or ineffective for particular persons or issues? In answering such questions, we will extend the focus of victimology to show its relevance for substantive areas now treated as unrelated to it.

There are, at least, four other issues that might be addressed by interactionist research on victimization. We conclude by briefly discussing the relation between victimization and social problems claims-making, the affect of victimization, the sources of victimization, and the consequences of victimization for persons so portrayed.

Creating Problems by Creating Victims

From the social constructionist perspective "deviance" and "social problems" are interactively manufactured. As Spector and Kitsuse (1977) suggest, social problems are *processes* through which persons or groups define putative conditions as social problems. Problems are accomplished through claims-making that portrays aspects of everyday life as intolerable conditions about which something must be done. But collective understandings of problems also depend on demonstrations of how putative problem conditions are injurious to persons. Thus, part of social problems claims-making is designating (and dramatizing) the persons or groups who are injured by a putative social problem (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). In this way, "victims" and the causes of their injury are mutually established. Specifying "victims" elucidates "problems." Indeed, collective representations (Durkheim 1961) of putative conditions as social problems depend on establishing public images of "victims" if the problems are to gain acceptance as culturally shared and employed interpretive schemes.

One aspect of the analysis of victimization practices, then, involves examining how groups, in the abstract, are assigned victim status. Such studies may help us better understand how we come to comprehend and organize collective understandings of the social problems and troubles that beset our everyday lives. Following Spector and Kitsuse's (1977) recommendations for studying social problems, or its recent revisions and elaborations (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Ibarra and Kitsuse 1989), studies of victimization practices might consider their political, organizational, and rhetorical dimensions. Indeed,

many well-known studies of the political, public relations, and rhetorical activities involved in the creation of social problems have implicitly been studies of the creation of victims. Fishman's study of "crime waves" (1978), for example, not only illustrates the social creation of the "problem" of burgeoning urban crime, but also elucidates the simultaneous and necessary production of a class of elderly crime "victims" as part of the production of the problem.

Many "social problems in-the-making" are "problems in search of victims" in the sense that the problem itself is not fully constituted until its victims are made apparent. Take, for example, the "drought" in the midwestern U.S. in 1988. What had originally emerged in media reports and the public consciousness as an extended stretch of warm, dry weather—which might be interpreted as "good" weather—could be reframed as a problem by only demonstrating that it was harmful. Victims of the drought (such as farmers, livestock, wildlife, consumers, and gardeners) were thus produced to show how the weather had become a severe problem: "The giant Mississippi is another drought victim" (*Milwaukee Journal*:7/17/89). Thus, analyzing how victims are "produced" and identified" is central to understanding how social problems emerge.

This suggestion may be extended to the micro-interactional analysis of social problems as well. We have argued elsewhere (Miller and Holstein 1989) for more systematic analysis of the interactional work that is done to articulate lived experience with collective representations of social problems. Such "social problems work" provides us with "concrete" instances of problems by linking interpretive categories with aspects of everyday life. Given that producing identifiable examples of victims requires claims-making on both the representational *and* micro-interactional levels, we suggest that "victim work" practices through which victim categories are applied to actual persons—be given similar analytic attention.

The Affect of Victimization

Not only does the production of "victims" dramatize "problems," but it may also coalesce public *sentiment* regarding the "problem" and those afflicted. In his classic discussion of the psychology of punitive justice, Mead (1918) elaborated the Durkheimian notion that identifying problems or deviance heightens social cohesion. he argued that beyond uniting the community in emotional solidarity against the offending persons or groups, the social organization of processes by which we specify offenders emphasizes the offensive characteristics which are seen as the basis of the problems. Other characteristics tend to be suppressed. We might adapt this analysis to future examinations of vicitmization by studying how the creation of victim categories focuses on dimensions of victim populations that are useful in eliciting desired sentiments, such as sympathy or outrage. We might also consider how such efforts are contexted as others offer alternative categorizations that justify different attitudes toward so-called victims.

For example, designating "the homeless" as "victims" of a morally bankrupt social, political, and economic system captures the relevant, and poignant, aspects of the domestically disenfranchised, and promotes our compassion and emotional concern. This victim label encourages these feelings while simultaneously glossing over the more unseemly characteristics of many of the homeless that might stir different emotional responses. It also helps produce desired sentiments and actions toward persons cast as responsible for homelessness, such as politicians and mental health officials who are often

portrayed as the cause for the homeless' suffering. Future studies, then, might examine the affective side of victimization, considering, for example, the community-building aspects of victim assignments to better understand the ways descriptive practice might be implicated in social cohesion.

Who Is Reponsible For "Victimization?"

Studies of how persons are labelled "deviants" suggest an obvious answer to the question of "who is responsible for producing victims?" The groups most frequently engaged in victimization—that is, assignments of victim status—are, in one way or another, interested in social control. Just as we have come to realize that the categorization of individuals as deviants or criminals is the result of social control activities (Becker 1963; Kitsuse and Circourel 1963), so are assignments to their complementary oppositional categories. Formal control agents—police, judges, juries, psychiatrists, social workers, doctors, etc.—continually specify victims of diverse causes and conditions. To better understand the social organization of victimization practices, then, we might consider the social contingencies and orientations that shape descriptive activity in social control settings where victim status is attributed as a regular part of dealing with troubles. Just as a substantial literature has developed concerning the factors influencing arrests or convictions, we might begin to specify the conditions under which victim status is assigned or withheld.

Atkinson's (1978) study of coroners' interpretive practices in determining suicides is exemplary in this regard. From his analysis, it is evident that "victims of suicide" are *created* through the coroner's work. The work centers on common sense reasoning, and practical theories of how and why people die. Suicide is thus specified by coroners' interpretive and assignment practices, rather than some "objective" feature of a corpse and the circumstances in which it was discovered. Indeed, one cannot officially become a "victim" of suicide without the coroner's certification. But coroners are not unique. Assignment and certification of victim status is often contingent on the routine assessments and actions of many institutional officials. For example, victims of crime are created by criminal justice officials, victims of disease by physicians, and victims of natural disaster by government officials. The pervasiveness of these practices suggest that a major aspect of an interactional victimology should be the study of institutional victimization—how institutions determine who are victims.

Finally, our reconceptualization of victims and victimization calls attention to the relation between conventional victimological studies and their topics. Traditionally, victimologists have assumed that victim status inheres in persons and situations, not in the ways they they are described. Consequently, they have analyzed victims as objectively identifiable objects of unjustified injury. In this way, *victimologists* have assigned victim status to persons and groups in order to study them. The assignments involve the same mundane assumptions about social reality (Pollner 1987) that are used by agents of social control, or anyone else who calls someone a victim. Viewed from an interactional standpoint, then, victimization is the central activity of academic victimology, so, accordingly, victimology is itself analyzable.[5] Scholarly debates concerning who should be studied as victims are part of the victimization process—they *create* and negotiate victims —and should themselves be considered for their own social organization and politics, just as we have suggested for other native victimization practices.[6]

Consequences of "Victimization"

Exoneration from responsibility accompanies victimization. The essence of being a "victim" resides in a person's perceived lack of control over the harm that he or she has experienced. Thus, to "victimize" someone instructs others to understand the person as a rather *passive*, indeed *helpless*, recipient of injury or injustice. While this can be situationally useful, it may also convey a general and undesired understanding of persons. In a sense, "victimizing" a person "dis-ables" that person to the extent that victim status appropriates one's personal identity as a competent efficacious actor. Thus, describing a person as "victim" can "debilitate" that person in the minds of others as they interpret ongoing activities through the "victim" framework.

Consider how being labelled (and labelling herself) a "victim" both exonerated and enervated Mary Davis, a case manager for chronically mentally ill clients in a community health program. During a discussion between other program staff members and an interviewer, conversation turned to Davis and the difficulties she had with some of her clients. A fellow case manager reviewed a list of Davis' recent complaints, then commented:

> . . . But Mary's never to blame for any of this. To hear her, she's the victim of this bureaucracy, or that disorganized system, or some other thing. Well maybe she is a victim, we all know it's hard to get anything accomplished around here. But come on, you gotta take control occasionally, take charge, make something happen. This job seems to be more than she [Mary] can handle sometimes.

Davis' victim status conveyed her vulnerability to forces beyond her control, and, to some extent, appeared to free her from blame for some of her clients' difficulties. But, at the same time, being seen as a victim suggested her general inability to cope with exogenous troubles. By claiming to be a victim, Davis, to some extent, also claimed to be ineffectual within the circumstances she typically encountered. She allowed for, if not promoted, the understanding that she was not in control of her work. She might be seen as blameless for failures, but she might also appear less than capable of success.

Kathleen Barry, in her analysis of "female sexual slavery" (1979), suggests the extent of such debilitating consequences of victimization for women who have been sexually abused. Barry argues that a major feminist objective has been to "prove women's victimization" by establishing them as "victims" of sexual oppression and assault. The impulse for this resides in the desire to dispel public beliefs that women are responsible for their own harm, injury, and anguish. This effort has been generally successful in creating a new consciousness within which women's experience is formulated. Barry, however, regards it as a "mixed blessing."

When victim status was "created," and became widely allocated to abused women, it categorized them in terms of "what happened to her," creating a "mind set eliciting pity and sorrow" (Barry 1979, pp. 44–45). In the process, Barry argues, abused women ceased to be known as whole persons; they were understood only as helpless, passive objects of injury.[7] Loseke and Cahill (1984) elaborate this theme, suggesting that attributions of victim status typify an entire category of persons as incapable of managing, even understanding, their own affairs without assistance. By extention, such "victims" lose control over their self-definition, interpretations of experience, and even their private

affairs. Barry generalizes this phenomenon to other American minorities who are sometimes portrayed as "passive receptors of injustice" by well-intentioned, but patronizing "political and academic left-liberalism" (Barry 1979, pp. 45–46).

Victimization thus provides an interpretive framework and a discourse that relieves "victims" of responsibility for their fates, but at a cost. The cost involves the myriad ways that the "victim" image debilitates those to whom it is applied. Just as the "medicalization" of various forms of putative deviance has relieved the "deviants" of moral responsibility for their actions only to leave them under the control of medical professionals (Conrad and Schneider 1980), victimization too absolves "victims" of responsibility for their fates while justifying the intervention of others intent on "protecting" their interests.

CONCLUSION

It seems that victimology, as it is traditionally constituted, has generally overlooked the interactional and descriptive practices through which persons come to be known and understood as victims. Our suggestion for an interactionally-oriented victimology directs analysis to the reality construction procedures through which "victims" are *created*, particularly those practices that are typically "seen but unnoticed" (Garfinkel 1967). It has been, perhaps, premature for the social sciences to engage the issues of what "causes" persons to become victims or what happens to them when they do, without first trying to understand the social processes that cast persons as victims in the first place. Our suggestions for rethinking victimology urge a more self-conscious attempt to appreciate the category of "victim" as an important feature of the social organization of everyday life and the interactional production of social problems.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article has benefitted from the helpful discussions, comments, and suggestions of Doni Loseki, Jay Gubrium,, Bob Emerson, and David Karp.

NOTES

1. While we do realize that many victimologists deal with the issue of who is, or should be, considered victims, we will later discuss such arguments as examples of the "victimization" process itself.

2. Indeed, all descriptive activity is in some sense persuasive in that it implicitly advocates particular understandings of the world it purports to merely describe.

3. All persons identified in our field data have been assigned pseudonyms.

4. Throughout the newspaper article and in the DA's talk quoted in the article, the females were referred to as "girls." Note how the use of "girls" (as opposed to "women," say) would tacitly suggest particular interpretations of this case by implicitly focusing the issues of age and responsibility. We note this merely to underscore our argument that descriptions promote rather than convey meaning.

5. There have been repeated calls to expand victimology's scope to include the study of a variety of "victims"—"victims of sexual abuse," "victims of domestic violence," "victims of political oppression," "victims of environmental pollution," and victims of "corporate crime,"

just to name a few (see, for example, Birkbeck 1983; Burt 1983; Carrington 1975; Elias 1986; Scherer 1982; Viano 1983). Indeed, Elias (1986) and Bumiller (1988), among others, have analyzed the "politics of victimization" from the perspective that many "objective" conditions of victimization have gone unrecognized as such for political reasons. While these analyses are, in a sense, political social constructionist arguments (cf. Quinney's (1970) discussion of the "social reality of crime"), they nonetheless maintain the belief in objectively identifiable "victims." We clearly share many of Elias' and Bumiller's analytic concerns, but at the same time, we must point out the extent to which they, and similar commentators, are themselves acting as "creators" of victims as much as they are analyzing victims and victimization. Their victimological analyses are themselves *claims* that particular persons and/or groups are victims. As such they are rhetorical practices that *constitute* rather than *report* victims and victimization.

6. Of course this argument ultimately pertains to this analysis as well.

7. Barry goes on to argue for the use of the term "survivor" to describe women who have experienced sexual assault. She suggests that this label imparts a more positive connotation to women's perseverance of the ordeal of assault.

REFERENCES

Atkinson, J. 1978. *Discovering Suicide*. London Macmillan.

Barry, K. 1979. *Female Sexual Slavery*. New York: New York University Press.

Becker, H.S. 1963. *Outsiders*. New York: Free Press.

Berger, P.L. and T. Luckmann. 1986. *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Anchor.

Birkbeck, C. 1983. "Victimology is What Victimologists Do' But What Should They Do?" *Victimology*. 8: 270–275.

Bittner, E. 1973. "Objectivity and Realism in Sociology." Pp. 111–129 in *Phenomenological Sociology*, edited by George Psathas. New York: Wiley.

Blumer, H. 1969. *Symbolic Interactionism*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Bumiller, K. 1988. *The Civil Rights Society: The Social Construction of Victims*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Burke, K. 1950. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Burt, M.R. 1983. "A Conceptual Framework for Victimological Research." *Victimology*. 8: 261–269.

Carrington, F.G. 1975. *The Victims*. New Rochell, NY: Arlington House.

Conrad, P. and J. Schneider. 1985. *Deviance and Medicalization: From Badness to Sickness*. Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Dadrian, V.N. 1976. "An Attempt at Defining Victimology." Pp. 40–43 in *Victims and Society* edited by Emilio Viano. Washington, DC: Visage.

Drapkin, I. and E. Viano. 1974. *Victimology: A New Focus*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Durkheim, E. 1961. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. New York: Collier-MacMillian.

Elias, R. 1986. *The Politics of Victimization*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Emerson, R. M. 1983. *Contemporary Field Research*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Emerson, R.M. and S. Messinger. 1977. "The Micro-politics of Trouble." *Social Problems* 25: 121–134.

Emerson, R.M. and M. Pollner. 1976. "Dirty Work Designations: Their Features and Consequences in a Psychiatric Setting." *Social Problems* 23: 243–254.

Fishman, M. 1977. "Crime Waves As Ideology." *Social Problems* 25: 531–543.

Foucault, M. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Random House.

Garfinkel, H. 1956. "Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies." *American Journal of Sociology* 61: 420–424.

_____. 1967. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Gubrium, J.F. 1987. *Oldtimers and Alzheimers*. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
Gubrium, J.F. and J.A. Holstein. 1990. *What is Family?* Mt. View, CA: Mayfield.
Heritage, J. 1984. *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
Hilgartner, S. and C. Bosk. 1988. "The Rise and Fall of Social Problems." *American Journal of Sociology* 94: 53–78.
Holstein, J.A. 1984. "The Placement of Insanity: Assessments of Grave Disability and Involuntary Commitment Decisions." *Urban Life* 13: 35–62.
_____. 1987a. "Mental Illness Assumptions in Civil Commitment Proceedings." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 16: 147–175.
_____. 1987b. "Producing Gender Effects on Involuntary Mental Hospitalization." *Social Problems* 34: 141–155.
_____. 1988a. "Court Ordered Incompetence: Conversational Organization in Involuntary Commitment Proceedings." *Social Problems*.
_____. 1988b. "Studying 'Family Usage': Family Image and Discourse in Mental Hospitalization Decisions." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 17: 261–284.
_____. 1990b. "Describing Home Care: Discourse and Image in Involuntary Commitment Proceedings." In J. Gubrium and A. Sanker (eds.) *The Home Care Experience: Ethnography and Policy*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
_____. Forthcoming, a. "The Discourse of Age in Involuntary Commitment Proceedings." Journal of Aging Studies.
Ibarra, P. and J.I. Kitsuse. 1989. "Vernacular Resources in the Construction of Social Problems: Clarifying the Research Agenda." Presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Berkeley, CA.
Kitsuse, J.I. and A.V. Cicourel. 1963. "A note on the uses of official statistics." *Social Problems* 12: 131–139.
Loseke, D.R. and S.E. Cahill. 1984. "The Social Construction of Deviance: Experts on Battered Women. *Social Problems* 31: 296–310.
Mead, G.H. 1918. "The Psychology of Punitive Justice." *American Journal of Sociology* 23: 577–602.
Miller, G. 1987. "Producing Family Problems: Organization and Uses of the Family Perspective and Rhetoric in Family Therapy." *Symbolic Interaction* 10: 245–266.
Miller, G. and J.A. Holstein. 1989. "On the Sociology of Social Problems." In *Perspectives on Social Problems* edited by J.A. Holstein and G. Miller. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
Miller, G. 1990. Enforcing the Work Ethic. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
Pollner, M. 1987. *Mundane Reason*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
Quinney, R. 1970. *The Social Reality of Crime*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
_____. 1972. "Who Is The Victim?" Criminology. 10: 314–323.
Sacks, H. 1972. "An Initial Investigations of the Usability of Conversational Data for Doing Sociology." in D. Sudnow, (ed.). *Studies in Social Interaction*. New York: The Free Press.
Scherer, J. 1982. "An Overview of Victimology." Pp. 8–27 in *Victimization of the Weak* edited by J. Scherer and G. Shepard. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
Schutz, A. 1970. *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Spector, M. and J.I. Kitsuse. 1977. *Constructing Social Problems*. New York: Aldine.
Tannenbaum, F. 1938. *Crime and the Community*. Boston: Ginn and Co.
Viano, E. 1976. *Victims and Society*. Washington, DC: Visage.
_____. 1983. "Victimology: The Development of a New Perspective." *Victimology*. 8: 17–30.