



Framing the Victim: Domestic Violence Media and Social Problems (Social Problems and Social Issues)

By Nancy S. Berns

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“Whether you are drawn to this book because of interest in media, social problems, or domestic violence, reading it will help you better understand the impact media stories have on our perceptions of social problems.” That is how Nancy Berns introduces her book. It is a work that unabashedly examines not only domestic violence, but also the larger picture of how politics and processes shape our responses to social problems. *Framing the Victim* also distinguishes serious research from media, which promote entertainment, empowerment, and drama.

This book is a must read for anyone concerned about our understanding and response to social problems. Berns shows how victims of domestic violence are molded to accord with the perspectives of the dominant media and how, as a result, they are falsely blamed for a crime committed by another. She critiques with insight the stories that emerge when social problems are formed by guidelines that promote entertainment, victim empowerment, drama, inspiration, and a political agenda. Berns also provides suggestions for constructing a social problem that focuses less on the victim, and more on the abuser as well as the cultural and social context within which violence is learned and tolerated.

This unique effort in communications studies indicates both the gains and the losses in understanding reality from the prism of television talk shows, women's magazines, and political magazines with a wide variety of agendas—other than scientific—and how this large panoply of media blitzes serve to frame the victim, in the sense of locating them and, more dangerously, typecasting them. Berns fully appreciates how this emphasis on victims may have contributed to useful outcomes for intervention and providing resources for victims; but there remain serious barriers to achieving a public awareness of the larger context of violence.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Nancy Berns is assistant professor of sociology at Drake University, in Des Moines, Iowa. She is the author of important papers in *Gender & Society* and *Sociological Quarterly*.

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