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Book Review of Understanding Violence and Victimization

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Understanding Violence and Victimization (7th ed.) by Robert J. Meadows, Pearson Education, 2019, 274 pages.

Understanding Violence and Victimization is an expertly crafted Seventh Edition textbook by Robert J. Meadows, a professor and Chair of Criminal Justice at California Lutheran University. When compared to previous editions, several improvements have been made, including the addition of a chapter on firearms and victimization (Chapter 9), a table in Chapter 10 that lists key federal victims' rights legislation from 1974 to 2015, and updated web sources and statistics throughout. In this review, I will specifically focus on Chapters 2, 4, 6, and 8 – and in doing so, provide an overview of the book in its entirety. Despite victimology being a relatively new science, this text presents a multitude of theories that touch upon subjects including victim-offender relationships, places where violence occurs, its overall impact and cost, and even explanations of causation.

Chapter 2, *Victimization Theory*, focuses on the science of victimology, how it differs from criminology, its early theorists, recent developments and theory construction, and offers explanations for why many victims fail to seek assistance from the criminal justice system. Meadows comments on various compensation programs that aid victims by helping pay for medical bills, lost wages, and to aid in recovery. It's impossible to measure how much a victim has lost, both physically and emotionally, but acknowledging the value of victim compensation programs helps bring this issue to light. The impact of crimes on their victims is not lost on Meadows, as he devotes a large portion of this chapter to their pain and strife. Meadows frequently uses familiar terms that include "post-traumatic stress disorder," "victim compensation," and "false allegations." Comparatively, he also includes terminology that may be less familiar including "avoidance phenomena" and "passive precipitation." In both cases, he provides examples and easy-to-understand explanations intended to facilitate understanding.

Chapter 4, *Nonfamiliar Violence and Victimization* focuses on violent crime and its nature of unpredictability. Meadows presents victimization within the context of violent personal crime, introduces his readers to the topic of spontaneous victimization, reviews hate and bias crimes, and presents interesting material on terrorism and its political objectives, its overall effects. He even delves into the motives that drive serial killings.

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Furthermore, Meadows addresses the impact that violence has upon the justice system, specifically mentioning the Church Arson Prevention Act (pg. 98) to show how hate and bias crimes have resulted in the creation of new legislation. Overall, this chapter tackles a wide variety of topics despite being only twenty pages in length. By keeping the chapters brief, Meadows focuses his content to the most essential facts and retains the interest of his readers. This is due, in part, to the rapid introduction of new material which requires constant changes in perspectives and encourages active reader involvement. Not only that, but the method in which Meadows presents his information allows for ample application to the readers daily life, providing a realistic understanding of the material.

Chapter 6, *School Violence and Victimization* is especially relevant due to the epidemic of school shootings occurring worldwide and because of its increasing prevalence on college and university campuses. Meadows starts with recent research to help his readers understand this extreme and often misdirected form of violence, provides warning signs and strategies for its management and prevention. He calls schools “miniature societies” that are essentially a melting pot of different people with varying attitudes, personalities, and histories; this naturally compounds stress and mental illness that can result in violence. Attention Hyperactive Deficit Disorder (ADHD) and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) are mentioned as disorders that regularly contribute to aggressive opposition to authority. Also discussed within this chapter is gang violence and involvement. Meadows refers to the reputable *National Crime Victimization Survey* (2007) on page 149 that reports that nearly a quarter of students in this particular study have noticed a gang presence in their school or community. As he often does, Meadow’s then offers a series of warning signs for gang violence or involvement, some of which include “hard looks,” otherwise known as disrespectful or threatening glances intended to provoke violence, gang hand signs, members or groups preparing to fight, and show-bys, where gang members drive by a building to show off weapons or throw up gang signs before a shooting takes place.

Human Trafficking and Victimization (Chapter 8) is by far the most difficult chapter to read due to its heavy content. Even though human trafficking may involve those who pay others to facilitate their illegal passage into another country, much of it centered on forced prostitution. Furthermore, even with the so-called “willingness” of some victims to be subjected to the plight of human trafficking, none deserve to be abused or treated inhumanely. Meadows presents the latest information about this industry including its size, current legislation intended to prevent it, victim selection, and the difference between trafficking for forced labor and trafficking for the sex trade. Despite its uncomfortable nature, Meadows does not shy away from the fact that trafficking victims are abused in unimaginable ways and are especially vulnerable to mental health problems and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Another area Meadows presents includes the dramatic influx of migrants and refugees into the United States and the unique challenges created for both the victims as well as for those working to provide the necessary assistance. Undoubtedly, the most significant section of this chapter covers the laws prohibiting human trafficking. This section sheds light on the crucial work being done to study, address, and prevent human trafficking in all forms. Meadows includes the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, the first comprehensive federal law designed to fight human trafficking and provide support to its victims, as well as the Polaris Project (2011), a web-based source founded on making information about human trafficking accessible; Polaris is also involved in lobbying for legislation to combat human trafficking.

Ultimately, this text lives up to the promise of its title. Meadows provide his readers with a plethora of definitions and fundamentally sound examples/scenarios that earnestly explain the material presented. His writing style follows a pattern of compartmentalizing information into comprehensive sections that are properly sequenced and flow effortlessly from one topic to the next. Victimology may be a relatively young field of study, but it is expanding, in part due to scholars like Robert Meadows, who take time to understand the pain of the victim and the role academia has played in furthering our awareness of this topic.