

Seeing Life in their Shoes: Fostering Empathy Toward Victims of Interpersonal Violence through Five Active Learning Activities

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As educators of future law enforcement and social service personnel, one of the most important objectives of faculty members within the social sciences disciplines is to foster a sense of empathy toward victims of crime among their students. Empathy toward victims of crime, and domestic abuse in particular, is vastly important as evidence suggests that the reactions survivors encounter upon disclosure influences reporting behavior to law enforcement. Moreover, evidence indicates that by fostering empathy toward domestic abuse survivors among students, social science educators can reduce the endorsement of harmful victim-blaming attitudes that these individuals may otherwise carry with them into their public service. However, despite the importance concerning teaching empathy within the classroom, a dearth of information exists—particularly in the criminal justice pedagogical literature. To address this gap, the objective of this study was to assess several active learning activities designed specifically to foster victim empathy in students. To gather feedback about how these activities affected students, we utilized standard Likert scales as well as several free response questions.

Introduction

Intimate partner abuse (IPA) remains a serious social problem in the United States of America as well as around the world (Black et al., 2011). Although research continues to indicate that a majority of IPA survivors are female, victimization affects men as well (Black et al., 2011). Moreover, evidence indicates that IPA affects all age groups, crosses all racial/ethnic

boundaries, and impacts all sexual orientations (Black et al., 2011; Guadalupe-Diaz & Barredo, 2013). Given the scope of this persistent social problem, it is vastly important for educators to encourage greater understanding of—and empathy toward—victims of crime among students in higher education.

Empathy toward victims of crime, and domestic abuse in particular, is extremely important as evidence indicates that the reactions survivors encounter upon disclosure influence reporting behavior to law enforcement (Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Moreover, evidence indicates that by fostering empathy toward domestic abuse survivors among students, educators can reduce the endorsement of harmful victim-blaming attitudes (see Latshaw, 2015) that these individuals may otherwise carry with them. However, despite the importance concerning teaching empathy within the classroom, a dearth of information exists—particularly in the criminal justice pedagogical literature. To address this gap, the objective of this study was to assess several active learning exercises designed specifically to foster victim empathy among students. To evaluate how these activities affected students, we utilized quantitative data gathered through Likert scales, as well as qualitative data obtained through free response questions. Before discussing these activities and the corresponding outcomes, a review of the literature on the strengths of active learning is warranted.

Literature Review

The Impact of Active Learning within the Classroom Overall

Definitions of active learning vary widely across pedagogical literature, but this term generally describes the process by which students become *involved* in their own learning within the classroom through various activities (Grauerholz, 2007; Michael, 2006). Research on the utility of active learning within the classroom began emerging in the 1990s, and since that time it has widely been lauded as an effective teaching practice in various disciplines and settings (Grauerholz, 2007; Greek, 1995; Leshowitz, DiCerbo, & Symington, 1999; Michael, 2006; Murphy-Geiss, 2008; Robinson, 2000; Strangfeld, 2013; Sutherland & Bonwell, 1996; Van Auken, 2011). However, others have noted that the utilization of active learning is not without its challenges too: (1) the inability to cover the same amount of content as in a lecture, (2) the preparation time necessary for the activities, (3) the difficulties in utilizing activities in large class sizes, (4) and overall lack of resources available to

faculty (Sutherland & Bonwell, 1996). Yet, despite these challenges, the benefits of active learning in the classroom and in particular disciplines cannot be ignored (Sutherland & Bonwell, 1996).

The strength in active learning, as its proponents would assert, is that it requires students to use higher level thinking in the completion of activities (Leshowitz et al., 1999; Sutherland & Bonwell, 1996). Thus, instead of listening to information relayed by a professor and then repeating that information back through a formal assessment, students must engage in critical thinking in the completion of the activity—a valuable skill that is necessary within the educational and workplace environment. In a review of the literature, various types of active learning exercises exist across disciplines such as art (Dongfeng, 2013), criminology and criminal justice (Greek, 1995; Robinson, 2000), and psychology (Leshowitz et al., 1999). For example, Robinson (2000) provides 25 examples of active learning approaches that include activities such as debates, minute papers, pair checking, and truth statements. In another example, Grauerholz (2007) notes that game simulations are one of the most powerful forms of active learning—especially in sociology where students are often resistant to information that challenges their perceptions of their everyday social world. In fact, given the ability of active learning to foster “deep thinking” about what life is like in another’s shoes, this high-impact-based practice is particularly suited to disciplines like sociology (Grauerholz, 2007) and criminal justice (Robinson, 2000) where concepts such as “power” and “privilege” are important to understand through the lenses of race, class, and gender.

In contrast to other academic disciplines, sociologists in the classroom often encounter various challenges to effective teaching—one of which is that students arrive in class with already formed ideas about their everyday world that are often shaped by outside forces (Grauerholz, 2007). As a result, students may be resistant to rethinking their ideas about their social world or seeing what life is like in someone else’s shoes (Grauerholz, 2007). Given the aforementioned, then, as Grauerholz (2007) notes, a reliance on lecture is not as effective as other methods like active learning where activities can force students out of their comfort zones. The aforementioned is particularly important in conversations regarding sensitive topics like IPA where students may engage in victim-blaming instead of empathizing with the survivor.

The Role of Active Learning in the Education of Sensitive Topics

Despite numerous discussions and studies highlighting the effectiveness of active learning within various classroom settings in the literature (e.g. Dongfeng, 2013; Greek, 1995; Michael, 2006; Murphy-Geiss, 2008),

particularly in contrast to traditional instructional formats (Robinson, 2000), there is sparse information about this teaching practice within criminal justice (CJ). The aforementioned is surprising given that research has found that the utilization of active learning within the classroom can result in a transformative experience among students (Murphy-Geiss, 2008) and aid in the instruction of controversial subjects (Robinson, 2000).

The study of CJ is an exciting academic path. However, unlike other disciplines, this field often includes instruction on sensitive subjects (e.g. domestic abuse, sexual violence) that is difficult to address within the classroom (Robinson, 2000) even among the most skilled instructors. Part of this difficulty stems from the unfortunate reality that by the time youth enroll in post-secondary education, some will have been impacted by interpersonal violence either directly or indirectly (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 1999; Fisher, Daigle, & Cullen, 2010). As a result, while survivors of abuse may connect with and understand CJ material on interpersonal violence immediately, reaching other students whom have not had those life experiences may be difficult (Murphy-Geiss, 2008). Indeed, as noted by Murphy-Geiss (2008, p. 379), for those students who have not experienced the ramifications of victimization "... trying to understand the lives of people involved in domestic violence can be like crossing into another world." Taking into account the aforementioned challenges, some suggest active learning as a teaching practice to educate and foster empathy both within the classroom and beyond (Latshaw, 2015).

Research on the utilization of active learning within courses on sensitive subjects remains sparse across the pedagogical literature, but studies have found this practice to be highly effective in achieving a variety of outcomes—including fostering a greater understanding of the consequences of experiencing crime. In one noteworthy study, Greek (1995) assessed whether the utilization of active learning within a criminology course resulted in greater retention of information among students compared to those exposed to the traditional lecture format. At the conclusion of the study, Greek (1995) found that utilizing active learning resulted in several significant benefits among students: (1) there was more interaction and support in the course, (2) the students approached the material more seriously, and (3) there was more discussion participation in class. In another study, Latshaw (2015) assessed the impact of an active learning simulation exercise on fostering empathy within a sociology course. At the conclusion of the exercise, Latshaw (2015) found students demonstrated greater empathy toward victims of crime. Additionally, results indicated that students demonstrated less

agreement with victim-blaming attitudes (Latshaw, 2015), which is an important step forward in encouraging survivors of crime to report to law enforcement (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010).

Gaps Remaining and Research Questions

While scholars continue to advocate the utilization of active learning within the classroom to increase critical thinking and knowledge retention, there is a shortage of information about the effectiveness of this practice in fostering empathy and understanding toward survivors of interpersonal violence. Therefore, our primary research questions were whether students exposed to active learning reported having greater empathy toward, and understanding of, survivors of interpersonal violence. We hypothesized that students exposed to various active learning exercises would report increases in both of the aforementioned categories: (H1) greater empathy toward victims of abuse and (H2) greater understanding of the ramifications survivors of interpersonal violence experience.

Methods

Data

Data for this study were gathered during the spring and fall 2013 semesters at a mid-size four-year university located within the Midwest and, specifically, within a Victimology course. The Victimology course comprised both undergraduates ($N = 119$) and graduates ($N = 8$) as the class is cross-listed within the home department. The student audience consisted of mainly criminal justice majors ($N = 114$) with a small amount of criminal justice minors ($N = 13$).

After obtaining IRB approval, the surveys were administered by a graduate student not affiliated with the course at the end of each semester. The surveys were then collected, sealed, and not accessed until after final grades were entered each term. Ultimately, four sections of students were surveyed and the total respondents included 127 students. The survey tool utilized included both closed-ended and open-ended questions in order to gather quantitative and qualitative data. In regard to quantitative data, students were asked to assess each activity along a standard Likert scale: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree or disagree, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree.

Active Learning Exercises and Corresponding Assessment Results¹

This section will provide a description of each assignment utilized as part of this study, including the objectives associated with each, as well as the results of our assessment.

Activity One: The “Draw a Victim” Activity

On the first day of class, students drew a picture of what they thought of when they heard the term “victim.” Crayons, markers and paper were provided by the instructor to complete this activity. Students were then required to present their illustration to the class, and explain how they interpreted the term “victim.” After all the students presented their illustration, there was discussion about how larger society views victims and the treatment of victims in different types of crimes. The main objective of this activity was to investigate who and what students associated with the term “victim” in order to uncover biases and stereotypes associated with victimization. By identifying these biases and stereotypes early in the semester, the instructor was then able to immediately challenge incorrect notions regarding victimization to ultimately increase a greater understanding of who “victims” are—a diverse group of individuals with various backgrounds.

The feedback regarding this activity was exceedingly positive. When asked whether drawing a picture for the term “victim” assisted them in defining how they viewed victims, a majority of students either agreed (44%) or strongly agreed (34%). In addition to the quantitative data, qualitative responses underscored this positive feedback. The following quotes demonstrate that students liked the assignment and felt they were able to express themselves, yet were forced to think about what life was like in someone else’s shoes:

- (1) Drawing the picture forced me to think about how I viewed a victim and drawing it was uncomfortable, because we NEVER draw in college classes (that aren’t art) but it did help me see how I view victims.
- (2) Drawing a picture was by far the most interesting assignment I ever had. It forced me to define something without writing a paper!
- (3) My picture was stick figures and not very good. But drawing it and listening to the professor showed me that how I feel about victims is victim blaming. I am not sure I would have seen it so clearly if we had to write a paper. I had no idea that I was blaming rape victims.
- (4) It was the BEST assignment. I really liked expressing myself and seeing other people’s drawings.

1. For copies of any of these assignments, please contact the corresponding author (Dr. Shelly Clevenger).

- (5) It was so fun! But it also made me think. I never thought about what a victim was other than someone that was hurt.
- (6) I liked drawing the picture and also talking about it. I am so over writing a little response paper about something. This was so much more interesting!
- (7) Best. Assignment. Ever. I loved getting to draw in a CJ class. Usually the first day is so boring and I don't even remember it. I will always remember drawing a picture and thinking about victims.
- (8) Really put it into perspective for me how I view victims.

Activity Two: Jaycee Dugard Letter

Students were required to read Jaycee Dugard's memoir, *A Stolen Life*, over the course of the semester. Alongside students reading the text, the instructor would engage the class in discussion about Jaycee's victimization and recovery. After they completed the reading assignment, they were then required to write a letter to Jaycee that expressed their thoughts or emotions about what she went through and how she coped. Thus, the main objectives of these activities were both to understand the nature of this type of victimization as well as to foster a sense of empathy for survivors of this type of violence. After completing their letter, students could then chose to actually mail their letter to Jaycee, via the instructor, or to keep it private with it only being read by the instructor. It is noteworthy that over the course of four semesters, only two students chose not to have their letters sent to Jaycee.

The feedback regarding these activities was positive. When asked whether reading *A Stolen Life* allowed the student to see what it was like to experience that type of victimization, a majority of students either agreed (24%) or strongly agreed (75%). Moreover, when asked whether writing a letter to Jaycee helped students reflect on her victimization and express thoughts about these types of crimes, most students either agreed (41%) or strongly agreed (40%). In addition to the quantitative data, qualitative responses underscored this positive feedback. The following quotes demonstrate that students appreciated the assignment's ability for them to develop a greater understanding of how victimization often has life-altering effects on the survivor aside from the trauma associated with the incident itself:

- (1) Writing Jaycee the letter blew my mind! I had to think about what to say to someone who had those awful things happen to her.
- (2) It took me a long time to write that letter. I had to really think about what happened to her and how to say what I was feeling and thinking.
- (3) I think the letter was what taught me the most. I had to actually write something that she would see. The rest of the stuff we did in class was

just pretend (although cool). This was real! I had to think about her case for a long time.

- (4) It was intimidating writing to an actual victim who was so well known and who we talked about pretty much all semester. Because it was going to a real person I put a lot of time into writing it and thought about it a lot.
- (5) This was a big case and everyone knew about it. I knew about it before this class so it was crazy to think about writing to her. But I definitely learned something through this though. That you have to really think about what you say to someone who has had such bad things happen to them.
- (6) This was my favorite thing we did. I also think it was what I got the most out of. Probably because it involved a real woman and who we got to know through the book. So writing to her was like writing to someone you knew in a way because she shared those personal things in the book. I connected with her and getting to write to her was awesome.
- (7) I never thought about actually talking to a real victim or how to do it until this assignment.
- (8) Loved this. You got to read from her point of view of what she felt in her own words and then write to her in your own words!

Activity Three: Media Project

In place of doing a standard paper and presentation in class, students were required to cover a topic in victimology using a form of media to convey information, but also emotion. Students could choose from creating a children's book, comic book, video, public service announcement, informational brochure, screenplay, or short story, photo essay or piece of artwork. The students were required to present the final product to the class. The objectives of this assignment were for twofold. First, students had to understand a topic in-depth in order to assess (or create) various forms of media about that topic. Secondly, in their design (or utilization) of a form of media, students had to convey the information and emotion associated with their topic in a manner in which other students would understand. Reaction to this active learning assignment was encouraging as a majority of students reported it made them think more about the topic they chose (strongly agreed = 47%; agreed = 41%). Many students also indicated that creating a media item allowed them to learn in a new way:

- (1) Doing the media project allowed me to see things in a totally new way! Writing and drawing up a comic on human trafficking forced me to dig deep.

- (2) I learned a lot doing my project. I had to figure out how to explain elder abuse in a children's book. It was challenging, but it was a lot of fun too.
- (3) It forced me to think about the topic in a different way. I learned a lot writing a screenplay that showed inmate abuse and the pain suffered.
- (4) I had to do a lot of research for just a short PSA [public service announcement] but I learned WAY more doing this than most papers I wrote.
- (5) Creating a painting that expressed some sort of info and emotion was tough. I like to paint for fun, but I never HAD to do it for a real purpose. I think that the one I did showed the problems and issues of homeless victims but also showed sadness. Even if it didn't I guess, I at least thought about those things when I painted it.
- (6) Doing the video was so cool. It was such a fun time. I got my roommates to dress up in costumes and we had a script. It felt like we were doing our own Law & Order SVU [Special Victims Unit]! They even told me that they learned about sexual assault after doing this video just as a favor to me. Totally not what I expected from those guys.
- (7) "Doing a video was awesome. I had to really research things so that I was sure I got it right. Plus we put it on YouTube and people who watched it said it was good and the information accurate!
- (8) Taking the photos and making story to explain victimization was so tough! WAY harder than any paper. I had to actually think about it because what I think shows victimization may actually not to others looking at the picture.

Activity Four: Victim Impact Statement

Students were required to write a victim impact statement in order for them to experience what it is like to express feelings and harms suffered because of victimization through a written statement delivered publicly. Thus, the main objective of this exercise was for students to emotionally connect with survivors of violence. In order to get students in this mindset, they were required to imagine they had been victimized in one of the following types of crimes: burglary, rape, robbery, or the murder of a family member. Aside from noting the details of the event, students were required to express the physical, financial, and/or emotional harm they suffered because of the crime. Finally, they were required to make sentencing and/or treatment recommendations for the offender and could request restitution. Students then read their statement to the class, which served as the courtroom that day.

When students were asked whether writing their own victim impact statement gave them an understanding of expressing the feelings and harms of victimization, a majority of the respondents either agreed (41%) or strongly

agreed (44%). This feedback was also underscored in the free responses provided by the students:

- (1) I never thought about what it would be like to be a victim or write a statement. After doing it, I have more respect for those who went through it.
- (2) I never even knew that victims could write a statement and pretending to do it was hard. I don't know how people who have been actually hurt do write one.
- (3) Even though this was just for class, it really got me emotional thinking about having a family member murdered. It was a good assignment.
- (4) Crazy! I never even thought about a victim having to write something and then reading it. This was not real, but just doing this was a challenge.
- (5) I liked this one. It made me think about how I would feel if I was a victim, which I never thought of before.
- (6) I had to think about being robbed. I never really thought about how I would feel or a victim would feel.
- (7) Writing this was totally weird and cool at the same time. I never thought about what it would be like to be a victim. Never ever. Now though, I really do see how awful it would be and then how terrible having to write about it and read it, but also how that could make you feel better by sharing it.
- (8) Writing this from the victim point of view made it powerful.

Activity Five: The "Why Doesn't She Just Leave" Assignment

The inspiration for this assignment arose from the many years of teaching about IPA and the numerous times students have asked, "Why doesn't she just leave?" Thus, the main objective of the "Why Doesn't She Just Leave" activity was to prompt students to critically think through the escape process as if they were placing themselves in those survivors' shoes. Specifically, the activity was designed to simulate the financial and psychological challenges associated with escaping an abusive relationship. In order to accomplish this objective, students are required to imagine they are a woman with three children and a dog in the midst of an escape from an IPA relationship.

In order to truly put themselves in the survivor's shoes, students are required to imagine what this woman's life is like as well as the lives of her children and the family pet. After determining the details of the people involved, students are then required to think about the type of violence going on in the home. The inclusion of the animal is an important part of the aforementioned, because many students neglect to think about the fact that pets are often proxy victims for domestic abusers. Moreover, not all shelters accept family pets, so the inclusion of the dog is an additional but *realistic* challenge for the students to critically think through.

To be successful in this assignment, students must create a short-term safety plan to escape the relationship and get to resources within the community. After creating the short-term plan, students are then required to

create a long-term plan for the survivor to achieve independence. In creating the short-term and long-term plans, students are required to calculate the financial costs of leaving the abuser (e.g. finding emergency housing that is pet friendly, buying food and basic essentials, etc.) as well as the costs associated with independence (e.g. arranging childcare for work, locating permanent housing, securing a job, and transportation, etc.). At the conclusion of the activity, students are prompted to reflect on the emotional and psychological issues surrounding the escape process (i.e. empathy building) and assess whether they have a greater understanding of “why doesn’t she just leave?!”

A vast majority of surveyed students reported the “Why Doesn’t She Just Leave” assignment allowed them to better understand the reasons why a victim may not leave their abusers (strongly agreed = 81%; agreed = 16%). Aside from increasing the understanding of why victims of IPA may fail to leave, or return to, abusers, this active learning exercise also provided the opportunity for students to “walk in the shoes” of an actual survivor running for her life and the lives of her family members. In assuming the aforementioned role, the following comments underscore the point that this assignment also increased the students’ level of empathy toward victims of violence:

- (1) I always thought that women who were in domestic violence situations deserved it. But after doing this assignment, I see that is it NOT the case at all because there is a lot more that goes into leaving than I knew.
- (2) I never thought about what it would be like to be in that position. Now that I did this assignment, I know how hard it must be and how hard it would be to leave.
- (3) I learned that IPV and being a woman who is in this situation sucks!!! After doing this assignment, I will shut my mouth and stop saying things like I said before. Leaving abuse is hard. I never realized all you would need and all the challenges you would face.
- (4) I hated the idea of this assignment. HATED it. I thought that it was going to be such a waste of time because the women who stay deserve it. But, doing the research and pretending to be “Nancy” let me see that it is hard to leave and not easy to just pick up and go.
- (5) I have to admit, I used to say why doesn’t she just leave? Now I see THIS is why she just doesn’t leave. Leaving is hard. If it was me in this situation, I probably wouldn’t leave. Ever.
- (6) I had no idea. Really, no idea about IPV. This changed my world.
- (7) Of all the cool things we did in this class, I will remember this one the most. It changed how I viewed this issue. I never realized what it would be like to be this woman. Now I know that there many reasons that a woman just doesn’t leave.
- (8) I did not like this assignment. It made me feel uncomfortable to think about being a victim. That being said, it did change me. I was forced to think about and be this woman and being her. As a guy, I didn’t get it before. Now I do.

Students' feedback on active learning exercises as gathered through Likert scales

Activity	Question asked of respondent	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither agree or disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	N
Drawing a victim	The drawing of a picture to illustrate "victim" assisted me in defining how I viewed victims.	2.36	4.72	14.96	44.09	33.86	127
Jaycee Dugard letter	Reading Jaycee Dugard's <i>A Stolen Life</i> allowed me to see what it was like to experience that type of victimization. Writing a letter to Jaycee helped me to reflect on her victimization and express my thoughts about these types of crimes.	.00	.79	.79	23.81	74.60	127
Media project	Creating a media assignment assisted me in learning and thinking more about the topic I chose.	.00	1.59	10.32	41.27	46.83	126
Victim impact statement	Writing my own victim impact statement gave me the understanding of expressing the feelings of victimization.	.00	3.15	11.81	40.94	44.09	127
"Why Doesn't She Just Leave"	Researching the cost of different items for the "Why doesn't she just leave?" assignment allowed me to better understand the financial reasons why victims may not leave their abusers.	.00	1.57	1.57	15.75	81.10	127

Full report of narrative comments per activity

Drawing a victim

- I liked getting to express myself
- This was so fun and informative. I liked seeing what everyone else thought a victim was
- Doing the pic forced me to define a victim and it was hard
- I feel that all the assignments were enjoyable and helped me to see the victim's side, but this one was the most enjoyable

Letter to Jaycee

- Jaycee's book had such great detail I felt that I had almost experienced it and I had never really thought in-depth about what happened to her prior to the book & how hard it had to have been to survive. Writing her letter really reinforced that
- Reading Jaycee's book a Stolen Life and writing to her was awesome
- Anyone can be a victim and anyone could be in Jaycee's situation
- The Jaycee assignment puts things in perspective and helped me grasp what goes on in real life
- I believe the Jaycee assignment enhanced my understanding of victimization

Victim impact statement

- Definitely an eye opening experience as to what it is like being a victim
- It showed me what one type of victim goes through and it was very sad
- It really puts things into perspective, especially since you were essentially putting yourself in the victim's shoes
- It showed me how victims feel through their victim impact statements and what they have to go through to get any compensation
- Made me think how certain aspects of life can affect people
- It was stressful for me, so in real life it definitely must be stressful

Media Project

- The media project was great because it was open to creative interpretation where still focusing on a certain victimization topic
- I got to explore other individuals affected by this type of victimization. Not just those introduced in class
- The media project helped most because I learned about more information on child victims than I knew before
- It allowed me to do research on how different people fall victims and put it into art

(Continued)

- I think to me the media assignment gave me a better understanding on how a specific victim has to deal with their victimization
- It showed the fearful side and helplessness that some victims have
- The information that I had to look up reflected my understanding and thoughts as to how deeply these individuals are affected
- The informational brochure I did was hard. I had to take all of this information on rape and just break it down into small pieces that could fit on this paper while giving the person enough to know about the topic. I had to work on it a lot. I never realized how much work making a small brochure could be

Why doesn't she just leave?! assignment

- In the Why doesn't she just leave assignment forces you to take hours of time and really research what goes into it & how much \$ things actually cost & it's terrifying
- It put into perspective the totality of the costs of just leaving
- While I did not enjoy the single mom living and her own assignment, I did learn things. By the time you get done researching a few of the cost she needs to live on her own you realize she can't
- The paper I wrote a IPV was great in that I was able to pass along the knowledge to someone who needed it
- There were so many tiny details that I never took into account when thinking about victims lives. Research every penny took every bit of energy I had
- This is a question that I use to always ask when discussing IPV. I also hear people say the same thing. It really made it more understanding
- I had to actually calculate financial cost of leaving which made me realize how hard it was in real life
- I was able to see how expensive & difficult it would be for women to leave
- You don't know the actual costs to leave until you do the research yourself
- I really liked this hand on assignment. I think it helps you put yourself in a victim's shoes
- It was so in-depth that it made you really think about why they can't just leave
- The why doesn't she just leave assignment gave the experience first-hand just how expensive it was
- It opened my eyes to why people stay in abusive settings and why they can't get out
- The why doesn't she just leave project definitely showed me how victims of DV are stuck with the decision to leave their abusers. It gave me a clearer understanding of why it's not as simple as packing up and leaving. Great assignment
- This assignment, but really the whole course empowered people to not join the crowd and stigmatize victims but to look at them and see the individual and the devastation, frustration, and destruction forced upon them by another human being. This course also gives the tools on how to support victims and continue to educate others to change their behaviors

- The why doesn't she just leave assignment, it really helped me engage in the real life situations and troubles domestic violence has on people. Real life by going out and doing research for real things
 - It gave me the realization of how hard it can be to leave an abuser for people without support
 - I will say that I blamed victims of this crime before. I didn't know everything that went into it. But I see now that IPV is so much more complicated and leaving is hard
 - This assignment changed the way I view DV forever!
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Discussion and Limitations

Active learning has been widely recognized as an effective method by which to encourage critical thinking within the classroom (Grauerholz, 2007; Greek, 1995; Leshowitz et al., 1999; Michael, 2006; Murphy-Geiss, 2008; Robinson, 2000; Strangfeld, 2013; Sutherland & Bonwell, 1996; Van Auken, 2011). Additionally, these high-impact-based practices can—and have been—utilized to foster empathy and compassion toward survivors of violence (Murphy-Geiss, 2008). Yet, despite the benefits of active learning—even if used in conjunction with the traditional lecture style—a lack of information exists on its utilization within disciplines that attract students pursuing employment in law enforcement and social services (Robinson, 2000). This lack of information is especially surprising given that active learning can assist educators in forcing students out of their comfort zones particularly when controversial topics are discussed (Grauerholz, 2007; Robinson, 2000). Thus, in this study, we sought to address that gap in by adding to the sparse information in the literature about various active learning exercises educators could utilize when discussing IPA within the classroom. These activities were designed not only to increase general knowledge of IPA, but also—and more importantly—to foster empathy among the students toward survivors of violence.

Overall, all five activities presented here were successful in the classroom. In terms of the research questions guiding this study, our first hypothesis of these activities fostering greater empathy among students toward survivors of crime was supported. In two activities, in particular (i.e. the Jaycee Dugard and Victim Impact Statement), students reported greater agreement with understanding what it *feels* like to be a victim of violence. In other words, these activities brought the students out of their own shoes and placed them—albeit for a moment—in the shoes of someone who actually experienced crime. The qualitative findings underscore our quantitative findings on these two activities as well as students noted they “had to think about what happened to her [Jaycee]” and “it made me think about what it would be like to be a victim.” To be clear, we believe all these activities fostered a sense of

empathy toward survivors of violence, but the connection to that objective is clearest in the above-mentioned activities.

Our second research hypothesis was that students' understanding of the ramifications survivors of interpersonal violence experience would increase following these activities. Again, while all the activities presented here were designed to increase students' understanding of victimization—including the aftermath of violence—the clearest indications that lead us to support our second hypothesis were in the results from the "Drawing a Victim," "Media Project," and "Why Doesn't She Just Leave" activities. In the aforementioned activities, students reported greater understanding of the various backgrounds of victims, and the unique challenges victims often encounter when trying to escape violent situations. Again, qualitative findings underscore the gains students made within the classroom with comments such as "this assignment changed the way I view DV forever!" and "I have to admit, I used to say why doesn't she just leave? Now I see THIS is why she just doesn't leave ..."

Taking into account these findings, we believe the active learning exercises assessed in this study can aid students in both understanding IPA and developing a sense of empathy. While students who have experienced family violence may easily relate and accept information presented about abuse, instructors may encounter varied levels of resistance from those whom have not been personally touched by violence. Indeed, as Murphy-Geiss (2008) notes, "... trying to understand the lives of people involved in domestic violence can be like crossing into another world." Moreover, in the confrontation of these sensitive topics, students may fallback to powerful ideologies surrounding gender relations like women no longer experience oppression or discrimination (Grauerholz, 2007). Thus, the onus is on educators to help move students out of their comfort zones and confront these topics through innovative teaching practices like active learning in order to ultimately dispel harmful victim-blaming beliefs (Latshaw, 2015).

Our study, while noteworthy and necessary to expand pedagogical tools, is not without limitations however. One such limitation is we were unable to assess change in terms of a pre-test and post-test design. Given time constraints, we were simply not able to secure the necessary approvals before the semester commenced. Thus, we only have quantitative data derived from Likert scales, but do intend to conduct pre-tests and post-tests assessments in future studies centered on this topic. Secondly, because our data were gathered from students who were either majoring or minoring in criminal justice, one could argue that these individuals were already highly interested in victimology and the dynamics of victimization. Thus, it is important to consider one's audience before using any of these activities in the classroom as each class has its own dynamic. Finally, given our data are cross-sectional, we are unable to investigate whether the understanding and feelings reported here because of these activities will have a *lasting* impact on the students. Aside from these minor limitations, our study does provide faculty with several additional active learning exercises to utilize in courses.

Implications and Conclusion

Although many have utilized and praised active learning within the classroom (Grauerholz, 2007; Greek, 1995; Leshowitz et al., 1999; Michael, 2006; Murphy-Geiss, 2008; Robinson, 2000; Strangfeld, 2013; Sutherland & Bonwell, 1996; Van Auken, 2011), a dearth of information regarding its utilization in classrooms that attract future law enforcement (e.g. criminal justice, criminology) and social services personnel exists. Active learning within these classrooms is vastly important as scholars have noted these innovative practices can help bring students out of their comfort zones, challenge harmful ideologies, and promote critical thinking skills in the face of controversial topics (Grauerholz, 2007; Robinson, 2000). By innovating within the classroom in terms of teaching style and approach, educators can work toward the reduction of victim blaming attitudes students may carry with them into the workplace. Therefore, the utmost important implication of this study is for educators to consider utilizing active learning in the classroom—particularly when the subject of the course centers on violence and survivors of violence. Encouraging students to “see what life is like in someone else’s shoes”—and particularly a survivor’s shoes—has a lasting effect on both that individual student and survivors of violence they (unfortunately) will likely encounter one day.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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