

# Victimology with Dr. Callie Rennison

## Ologies Podcast

### March 26, 2019

Oh heeey, it's that person who almost accidentally took your latte when it came ready at the coffee shop and then made that age-old dad joke, "Heh, see what happens when I don't have my coffee," Alie Ward, back with another episode of *Ologies*. So, this is a subject that absolutely zero people have asked me to do, which is why I'm doing it. I also want to note right up top, I loved doing this interview, I *hated* making this episode. I cried several times just writing it, researching it. To destress, I Googled pictures of ferrets who have blackheads on their tails because that's apparently a thing. Did you know that was a thing? Anyway, it was gross, but it was a welcome diversion comparatively.

But the topic and the work of this episode are so important. What this ologist is doing is saving lives and rebuilding ones that have been torn to tatters, so if this is your first-ever episode of *Ologies*, just, warning: this one's not funny. Like, probably at all. All the other ones have weird sound effects and jokes about turtle dicks, and knowledge plus some buffoonery. This one's a bit serious.

I'm skipping the usual business. Thank you for your reviews, I read them all. Thank you to all the patrons who support the podcast. We're going straight in.

So, victimology. Yes, it is an ology. It's just not one that you hear about much. Etymologists think that 'victim' comes from the Latin word for 'occasion', and initially it meant "a living creature killed and offered as a sacrifice to God or to supernatural powers." In the 1600s and 1700s, the meaning of 'victim' morphed into someone who was just killed, or hurt, or oppressed.

So victimology is the study of the psychological effects and the experience of victims of crime. So you might think, "How is that not criminology?" And just like all cacti are succulents, not all succulents are cacti, victimology is part of criminology, but criminology itself looks at the crime. It looks at the causes and the consequences, the management, looks at the criminal acts. The word 'crime' comes from the root word for judgment. And often we see a headline, a mugshot, maybe some kind of stoic courtroom plea, or some closed-circuit TV frames, even, unfathomably, livestreamed footage of a bloodbath. There's plenty of information on killers and there's a thirst to know why they do what they do and how we can avoid their surprise attack, the fate of maybe landing in their crosshairs.

But what about the fallen? What about the survivors? What about the people we see only maybe in some smiling photo that was grabbed off their Instagram? Or whose stories are never told because they're kept as secrets for decades? That's what victimology looks at. Who gets hurt? Why? And what can help them?

A little context. In 2017, a criminal justice major posted a photo from a textbook written by this ologist, and it inspired the *Vox* essay entitled, victoriously, "I'm the professor who made Brock Turner the 'textbook definition' of a rapist." That's right. Next to a paragraph defining rape is Brock Turner's mugshot, detailing his actions and his shockingly short three-month prison sentence. And at the end of the article, this ologist's bio mentioned she was the previous year's recipient of the Bonnie S. Fisher Victimology Career Award from the Division of Victimology in the American Society of Criminology. And immediately I added her to my spreadsheet of dream guests. So a year later, on a trip to Colorado, we met up in my hotel.

Now, I did this interview *months* ago and I've been holding it because I try to space out the heavier episodes. This, without a doubt, is the heaviest. It makes the surgical oncology and apocalypse episodes seem just like an afternoon game of checkers.

And people love true crime. But does anyone want to hear about true trauma, and true recovery, and true advocacy? I don't know. I don't know. Maybe by the time we're done hearing about this professor's work, you might be applying to transfer to her school. But, content warning, of course: we discuss sexual violence, abuse, homicide, trauma, in her utmost informed and respectful way, but it can be hard to hear. We settled in to talk about the media distortions of crime victims, the unexpected path to her PhD, the glories of math and stats, statistics on all kinds of different groups, and who's getting hurt, and what to do to help them.

So breathe deep, and get ready for the real scoop with professor, researcher, author, speaker, and Victimologist, Dr. Callie Rennison.

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**Dr. Callie Rennison:** Is that okay?

**Alie Ward:** Yeah, no, that's great. And so you are a victimologist.

**Callie:** Yes.

**Alie:** How long have you been a victimologist?

**Callie:** Oh gosh, it's probably been, at this point, about 20 years. I got into it, like a lot of things in my life, I stumbled into it accidentally and then found I loved it. So, I started when I went to the Department of Justice and started working with a big data set that deals with victimization and it's where I learned everything, and started answering questions, and digging, and being curious.

**Alie:** And can you describe what the difference is between criminology and victimology? Because I hadn't heard of victimology until I started doing some research and found you, and I was like, "Whaaat is this? Tell me everything."

**Callie:** Right. Well, I wouldn't say they're different as much as that it's a subset of criminology, so depending on who I'm talking to, I might tell them I'm a criminologist or that I'm a victimologist. And all that means is that I'm looking at criminal offending incidents, interaction with the criminal justice system. My focus is more on the person who's been victimized, not on the offender. Like, a really common interaction I'll have is somebody will go, "Oh, you're a criminologist, like *CSI*?" and, "Oh, my favorite serial killer is this person" – which I think's a little weird, you should *not* have a favorite serial killer – and then I'll tell them, "No, I'm really focused not on the offender, I'm focused on the people who are harmed."

**Alie:** Right. I feel like that is very unique these days in terms of the way that we interact with crime.

**Callie:** Right, right.

**Alie:** Can you tell me a little bit about your background that led you to criminal justice?

**Callie:** Yeah. Again, accidents, stumbling in the dark. My PhD is in political science, and I was drawn to that because of the quantitative elements of it, gathering data, analyzing data, answering questions, and when I graduated with my PhD, I ended up taking a job at the Department of Justice, dealing with victimization, and I had... I've never... To this day, I've never taken a class [*laughs*] in criminology or victimology, but I started answering, I think,

questions that normal people have. I mean, I was raised in Texas, and there was a certain idea about how we saw crimes, offenders, and if people thought about victims, what they thought about victims. And so, I just started answering basic questions, thinking I knew the answer, and what I pretty much found is everything I thought I knew was wrong.  
[“Surprise!”]

**Alie:** Really?

**Callie:** Yes. So I wanted to write reports, hopefully for other people like me, to understand who is more likely to be victimized. When I give talks, a lot of times I start with a pop quiz and I’ll put up ten true/false questions and most people get them all wrong.

**Alie:** What kind of questions? And what kinds of things really shocked you when you started digging into it?

**Callie:** Oh, I think... I mean, I held onto a lot of stereotypes, like who’s victimized more? Well, older people, clearly. That’s not true. And who’s victimized more? Well, women, clearly. And that’s also not true. Specific *types* of violence, yes, women are more likely to experience, but overall violence? No. That’s men. I’d see something written about young, black, urban males, for example, and it’s always written about their offenses, but very little written about the fact that they’re victimized at some of the highest rates. And so that was a part of what I wanted to do with my work is to bring this to people’s attention, about who is being victimized? And that’s what I continue to try to do.

**Alie:** Why do you think that we are focused on certain victims and not others? As a culture, at least, as a media culture?

**Callie:** It’s our culture, and I think it’s still messed up and it’s still dominated by a lot of incorrect stereotypes. I mean, one of the things that I always think about is blaming the victim, and you’ll hear a lot of people say, “Don’t blame the victim.” And I agree, *don’t* blame the victim. But let’s not kid ourselves either. We blame the victim a lot. We blame young black men who are killed for doing nothing, except being black, walking down the street. But if you blame, say, a white, beautiful person for being harmed, then people really get upset.

So I wish as a society we would start viewing all victims the same. These are all people who are, like, violently attacked and it wasn’t their fault at all, and I wish we could have that compassion for all types of people, regardless of age, or race, or ethnicity, or other types of lifestyle, but we’re just not there as a society yet.

**Aside:** So, quick aside. The field of victimology came about in the 1940s/1950s as a way to study how victims partly brought this shit on themselves, and one article I read said that the pioneers in the field back then – who, by total coincidence, I’m sure, were all white men (like, what are the odds of that?) – they were just kickin’ around theories about how people who suffered wounds and losses brought it on themselves by, say, having an alive body to kill.

Now, women were sometimes held responsible for misunderstandings that evolved into sexual assaults. Now, these theories, thank god, began to be dismantled in the 1970s. Victimology became less about blaming people and more about crime prevention, victims advocacy, recovery.

And as long as we’re here looking at time capsules of historical and modern-day horrors, let’s have a look at that definition of rape. So, before 2012, the FBI defined rape as “the carnal knowledge of a female, forcibly and against her will.” So in the eyes of the law, until a

few years ago, it was penises only, and men couldn't be raped. Now, in 2013, the FBI expanded that, removed the word "forcibly," because, hello, drugged, date rape, etc., and it now reads – and this is not easy to hear; it shouldn't be – it reads, "The penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus, with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without consent of the victim."

Now, in communicating how vital it is that all 50 states recognize and adhere to this expanded definition, Callie has noted historically, rape has been treated as a crime against a man's property, his women. It initially was never considered a crime against the actual person who was the victim.

Over time, the definition of rape has expanded to include marital rape, non-consensual penetration between married individuals, and Callie says that it was only in the 1970s that marital rape exceptions were removed from the law. So we put human beings on the moon, we had color television sets, and disco, and Camaros, and yet there was nothing illegal about raping your spouse.

Callie notes that the laser focus on women as victims sexually is also tragically neglectful.

**Callie:** And almost like we have to – and this is super crude – but protect the vagina at all costs. When we look at violence against women, it's so often focused on, say, rape and sexual assault and intimate partner violence, which is really important, because that's been ignored and continues to be, I think, minimized. But women are also robbed, they're assaulted, they're shot, and they're killed. I'd like for us to do a better job at looking at the full person, no matter who they are.

**Alie:** Was there anything in particular that drew you to this? Did you have family that were in criminal justice, did you see friends victimized at all?

**Callie:** You know, at the time I would say no, but it's very interesting, the household I was raised in was very rules-oriented, and I have a brother and a sister, and I think we've all continued to be very rules-oriented and, you know, *right* and *wrong*. My brother is an FBI agent, he got into it after I did. At the same time, we were kind of on different paths, so our paths cross professionally every now and then.

And as far as families, I mean, I don't know that you could talk to anybody who doesn't have some of this in their families, especially intimate partner violence. You know, that clearly has happened in my family. Not with my immediate family, but with the grandparent level and cousins. You know, when you're dealing with rape and sexual assault, you can't throw a rock without hitting somebody who's experienced that. So, yeah, I think it's all around us and I think a part of it is – and especially as I've gotten older – I'm tired of us pretending it doesn't happen, making the people who experience it kind of keep quiet and internalize blame and shame, and I think we need to say, "This happens a lot, the victims aren't to blame. We should be able to speak up without being worried about how people perceive us."

**Aside:** Quick side note: according to stats from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, over 10 million people yearly experience some form of intimate partner violence. Now, if there's any good news, it's that a 2014 study using the Bureau of Criminal Justice statistics showed that violent victimization by intimate partner violence was down, significantly, from 2005. And from 1993 to 2017, the rate of violent victimization in general declined 74%. Although there was a slight uptick the past two years.

But getting back to Callie's history. Her academic path took her from a bachelor's in psychology and two masters' in sociology and political science to a PhD in political science. It's far from the tailoring career that she once considered.

**Alie:** A dressmaker?

**Callie:** A dressmaker. Thank god, I'd be totally unemployed. *both laugh*]

**Alie:** And so, going to your scholastic background, were your family, were they PhDs, were they academics at all?

**Callie:** No, not at all. My dad dropped out of high school and went into the Navy, my mom did finish high school. And while my parents encouraged us to go to college, the fact is, if you haven't gone, you don't really get it. How do you do it? How do you choose it? How do you know what to take? And I had no intention to go to college. I graduated high school early, walked away, saying, "I will never write another paper again as long as I live." And I remember the exact date and where I was when I thought that.

**Aside:** She says it was December 14, 1981, her last day of high school. She was walking through the parking lot and thought, "I will never write another paper as long as I live." She later joked that the universe must've had some other plans for her, because:

**Callie:** Pretty soon, I realized I wanted to take some math classes, because in high school girls were pointed toward non-math things, like home ec – which was a waste of time for me – so I wanted to take some math and I wanted to take some Spanish classes, so I went to the community college and ended up getting a community college degree. And then I ended up in bachelor's, and then just kind of stumbled into a master's, and another, and a PhD.

But I really think an important point and something that I think about a lot when I deal with students today is that even in college, I don't think I "got it." I didn't get that I could study something that I loved and could make a career out of. I thought I was getting a degree that then would help me in my job since I worked my way through college, and I know it sounds bizarre, but it made sense then. And as I was getting ready to complete my bachelor's degree, one of my professors, a sociology professor at the University of Houston – his name's Jon Lorence and he's still there – asked me, "What are you going to do with your degree?" And I said, as people in my position would say, "Well, I'll try to get a better job." And he said, "You would be wasting your talents if you didn't consider graduate school." *angelic choir*]

And it really was, I'd never even considered it. I don't think I really understood it existed. And that simple question made me think, "Oh, maybe I could do this." And so I signed up for a master's and, I mean, that led me on my way. And it truly is – in my intro book, I acknowledge this, and I dedicate the book to somebody who totally changed the trajectory of my life – and it's something that I hope I can do to some of my students when I recognize great talent or curiosity.

I mean, the smartest people don't finish school, the most curious do and the most tenacious do, so I hope that I can do that to some students, too. I think if you follow what you love, it takes you to where you need to be. So that's certainly been my case.

**Alie:** Did you ever think you would be Dr. Rennison?

**Callie:** No. Mm-mm.

**Alie:** *laughs*] Really?

**Callie:** *Never. Never!* And you know, it's fine when people call me Dr. Rennison, but I'm a pretty casual, comfortable person. If you guys could see me, you'd know that. *both laugh]*

**Aside:** Dr. Rennison, by the way, has a very easy way about her. She's so casual and so warm. She arrived in comfortable, Colorado fleece, her long hair loose, and about her academic and career path, she advised anyone with a passion and a curiosity to put their nose to the grindstone, get busy, work hard, and they can do it, too.

**Alie:** And what is your day-to-day work like as a victimologist? Are you digging into data, are you giving talks, are you teaching, are you doing interviews? What is that job like?

**Callie:** Yes. *both laugh]*

**Alie:** All of the above?

**Callie:** So many things. Every day is really very different. I'll get people sometimes say, "Hey, what day is a good day of the week to do something?" and I'm like, "It is different every single week." I might be working with students on theses or dissertations, I might be preparing for a talk, I might be writing a book chapter, putting together a couple more books. So doing a lot of writing, dealing with data, doing analysis...yeah. It is all over the place. That I can switch gears every day and address deadlines is something that I thrive under.

**Alie:** When people look at victims of certain types of violence or certain types of assault, do you find that certain victims all, kind of, respond the same way depending on what they've been through?

**Callie:** No, I think there's a little bit of a stereotype about that, too, which I wish we could break up.

**Aside:** She notes the myth and a misconception that:

**Callie:** "All rape victims need to be completely devastated, sobbing, and acting that way," when, in fact, a lot are not. And so if they're not, people start doubting them, and that's not right. A great analogy I heard many years ago that I repeated is that it's like going to a funeral. You go to a funeral, and you've got the widest variety of responses. Your crazy uncle's over there laughing, this one's over here sobbing, that one over there is, you know, looking at their phone. Everybody handles it really differently and I think we have to get better as a society at realizing that so that when somebody's not responding in the way we think they should, that doesn't mean that we should doubt their experience. It's just how they have to deal with it.

I think some people are impacted more deeply or differently than others, but it doesn't mean that, "Oh, well it was no big deal to them." It's violence, right? We don't have these sorts of questions when you take a big population of people who have been hit over the head with a weapon. We're not doubting some of them. But when it comes to some types of violence, and again that's like violence women predominantly experience, there's a lot more doubt wrapped around it. I think society keeps forgetting that this isn't, say, sex gone bad or a relationship gone bad. This is *violence*. Somebody was violently attacked. Period.

**Alie:** Do you think that people of color and women do tend to get doubted more than others when it comes to being victims of crime?

**Callie:** Absolutely. The criminal justice system, although it is a lot better than it used to be and I think it's continuing to make strides to get better, yeah, there are really big problems with this, and this has kind of been my big deal this last year, doing a lot of talks about rape and

sexual assault, is that we have got to believe people. I love the Me Too movement because it's giving people the opportunity to step up and say, "Me, too," where the criminal justice system has failed them.

The CJ system is very different for people of color compared to whites, and it's different for men and for women. There's zero doubt. Zero doubt.

**Aside:** According to a 2017 study on violence victimizations that excluded homicides, men and women were statistically about even, but people of color had higher instances of being victims. And though we tend to hear more about white women being victims of homicide, according to one long-ranging report, spanning 1980 to 2008, white women were 35 times less likely to be the victims of a homicide than a young black man. But those just aren't the stories we hear about.

And according to several studies, what draws us to some narratives is a build of tension and a release, in a safe environment, and the desire to learn how to escape or prevent a situation we might find ourselves in. So what happens, by the way, with such an active news cycle and social media, when we do hear about violence inflicted on others? How much keeps us rightfully aware and how much is too much?

**Alie:** How do you feel about people maybe absorbing the traumas that they hear about and being affected by other people's victimization and trauma? How are people compartmentalizing that, or how should we, or should we not compartmentalize that?

**Callie:** Yeah, no, that's a great question. Definitely... Even the positive elements of Me Too are hurting some people, right? Hearing a lot of these things said in public might be triggering certain people. And the way that they've handled their experience or that they've been able to tuck it away and learn to live with it, having people at the highest offices of this nation saying certain things, and then seeing a large population – a disturbingly large proportion of our population being okay with it, and somehow thinking it's a joke – that's really harmful to people who have lived through this sort of violence.

I wish we could be a little more sensitive to it. And this isn't about being a snowflake, right? This is about people who've gone through really terrible events and we need to think about that. And before you make it a joke... I mean, we don't go to a party and make a joke about suicide. Chances are, somebody at that party has had a family member who's done this. Sexual violence, intimate partner violence – and I mean for men and women because it's not like only women experience this – we have to be a little bit more sensitive to those traumas.

**Aside:** Now remember, until 2013, the FBI didn't acknowledge that men could even be raped. And in the 2011 National Gender Discrimination Survey, transgender and gender non-conforming people reported higher rates of harassment, physical assault, and sexual violence in a variety of settings.

Now, a 2018 report found that of 22 transgender people killed in the United States that year, the vast majority were young transgender women of color, which is why, over time, factors like representation and inclusion literally saves lives. So what can help someone feel safer and what can help someone heal?

**Alie:** When it comes to being victims of a crime or feeling just victimized in general, have your studies revealed anything about what can prevent someone from being in a situation where they might be vulnerable or help someone heal from a situation where they've felt preyed upon?

**Callie:** Yeah, I mean, some of the work I've done... but it's a large body of work, I'm just like a little drip in the bucket. And yeah, I mean, we know a lot of things. One of the things that I do a lot of talking about has to do with initial disclosures. We know – and I'm just going to take sexual violence again as an example – that when people are sexually victimized, they do generally tell somebody. Do they tell the police? Not so often. This last year, I think the number was 22% of rapes and sexual assaults were reported to the police. This is not where people generally go.

But they'll go to, say, a friend, or a family member, and how that first person responds to that disclosure is key to how that person deals with it and what they do from there on. If I came to somebody and said, "I've been sexually victimized," and they're like, "Are you sure? Maybe it was a misunderstanding," or – and these are all things I've heard people say – "Well, you know, you're single, what did you expect?" Those are really terrible. And what the person who's been victimized internalizes is, "Never tell anybody else about this." And then they're left to deal with it on their own.

And while some people can deal with this on their own, I find that a lot of other people can't, and that's why we know that some of the responses to this can be PTSD, or eating disorders, or depression and suicide, in some cases. I think people have to be really careful that when somebody comes to you and discloses any sort of victimization, to stop, to listen, to say things like, "You didn't deserve this. How can I help you? Thank you for trusting me." That's what we need to get better as a society at doing. And I think we're getting there, but we have a long way to go.

**Aside:** Callie says that if someone discloses, a good strategy is to acknowledge it, to accept it, and to let them know they're not to blame for it, and to find out what they want to do, but don't try to take control. Let the person who's gone through it drive the boat, she says, on the next step. Just be there to help and support. And the next question, I feel like she must get a lot, so I asked it.

**Alie:** And what about preventing yourself from becoming a victim? I feel like that's... *sighs*] I hate thinking about that because you don't have control a lot. I mean, I myself was mugged by two guys with knives in my 20s. It was obviously a very surprising event. *"That's an understatement."*]

And it impacted me greatly for years, in ways that I didn't even fully, really understand. And I did some things in the moment that helped my survival, but in terms of preventing it, I was walking down the street in the middle of the day. But when it comes to crime statistics or victim statistics, is there... Do people ask you that? Like, "What can I do so this doesn't happen?" And there an answer to that?

**Callie:** Yeah, that's another really great question. And that's kind of where we've been focused for a long time and now we're seeing a really great shift to more, like, "Don't be rapey. This is the bigger problem. Don't be rapey and then rape doesn't happen." Things like that. But it is really true. We do a lot of things in all of our lives to try to minimize bad things happening, so there are certain things that we can do, but can you make yourself victim-proof? Absolutely not. Absolutely *not*. You know, you see people who are victimized when they're months old, and elderly people, and people who are at home, and people who are out. I mean, women are more likely to be victimized in their own homes than anywhere else.

So, there's nothing you can do to make yourself totally safe, but I think that just thinking about it, trying not to put yourself in situations that could possibly be dangerous. But again,



if somebody's victimized, then the last thing I want to do is say, "Well, you know, you probably shouldn't have done that." That's not true. Because people who commit offenses, they're not dumb. And one of the things I'll talk to a lot of students about is, they're surprised to find out sexual violence rarely occurs with a weapon. It's about 7%-ish, it's single digits, which is shocking because if you watch television, they all have knives, you know? That's pretty uncommon in reality.

But I'll ask students, "What is it that offenders use?" And the answer is confidence and trust. And they'll do something like, "Hey, let's run up to my room and get something," and once you're alone, then there's trouble. So, no, you can't really totally protect yourself, but I also don't want people to think, "Oh my gosh, I'm doomed every day." Just be aware of your surroundings. The same things you do to try not to be robbed, or not to be swindled, or something. It's sort of the same thing.

**Alie:** And what about for African American men? What do you think systemically could change to prevent them from being victims of crime?

**Callie:** Yeah, that's super tough. I mean, one of the things that we know in the field of victimology is one of the key characteristics that increases risk of victimization is income, socioeconomic status. Poor people are victimized at far, far higher rates than people with more resources. So, it'd be nice if I could say, "Be richer," but that's not that easy, as we know. It's just really challenging.

I don't know. It's easy to say, "If you hang around people who are committing offenses, your risk of being offended against is greater," but when we're in a neighborhood, when we don't have the opportunity to move or leave, or we're around certain people, our risk is higher. I don't feel like I have a good answer, I'm sad to say.

I mean, education is one of those things tied to victimization risk. It's income, it's education. This is when I talk to kids at community colleges and just say, "You have to go on and get your degree." There's a lot of talk these last couple of years about degrees not being important and I could not disagree more. They are important. And for anything, your victimization risk goes down. Education matters. It opens doors. It gives you opportunities.

**Alie:** And in those communities where there is violent crime against people of color, do you find that reporting also goes down, or is there less reporting if it might be within a community, or if it might be, maybe, violence that someone they're familiar with?

**Callie:** Yeah, it's really wild when you look at the numbers, because it's very complex. For example, one of the things that shocked me most when I got into the field is seeing that when there's violence committed against African Americans, it's actually more likely to be reported to the police than when it's committed against white people. That makes no sense to me. And I still am trying to figure this out.

And some people say, "Well, it's the avenue they have to make it stop, so they might make calls." But I think too, given some interactions in the CJ system and people of color, they're going to be less likely to contact the police. We saw this happen, actually, with domestic violence, things when we had mandatory reporting. It used to be that you called the police, somebody would get arrested, sometimes nobody would and that was wrong. But now police might come and then there's a mandatory arrest, and so what have we found? That a lot of women, especially, won't call the police, because they might very well be the ones who got arrested, and that's a problem.

**Alie:** It's also what we're seeing with the Black Lives Matter movement and violence against people of color, knowing that they are more likely to experience violence but also more likely to endure repercussions maybe of a criminal justice system that is weighed against them. It's like, what do you do?

**Callie:** Right. Yeah. I don't know. I mean, there's a great book that was written years ago, looking at gangs in the Chicago area, and I thought one of the cool elements of this book was that it didn't only focus on gangs as the bad things they did (and certainly gangs do bad things). But also because the criminal justice system had abandoned this complete area, it's almost like this little microcosm society, so the gang took on the policing parts of it. So, I think sometimes you get some of that that happens in some smaller areas, where, "Yes, maybe we don't call the police, but we'll take care of it ourselves," which ends up looking like more violence sometimes. But I mean, we have to do what we have to do, and I think, again, blaming a group for doing something like that when structures of greater society have abandoned them, that's not really fair. That's not fair to do to them.

**Alie:** Of course not.

**Callie:** I was also going to mention too, one of the – and I wish I had many more hours in the day, but – looking at Asian Americans and their victimization rates. Their numbers, year after year after year, they're really low. I mean, *really, really* low.

And one of the things my data can't capture is the influence of, say, culture. So the question is, "Is it really that low, or is there something culturally about this community – and of course this is a large generalization – that they *really* won't call the police and report it, or even tell a field rep who's gathering data about it?" We can gather the data as good as we can, but then there are cultural elements about who's going to tell us what about that and how much does that drive these different rates. It's an interesting puzzle.

**Alie:** Right. I mean, if you were trying to quantify car crashes or butterflies, that data would be so much more straightforward, but because it depends on divulging really painful information that has repercussions, that's got to be so frustrating for you.

**Callie:** I mean, you probably know people who've been victimized who've never told the police. Maybe you're the only person they've ever told. I've definitely – there are people that have experienced things who've never revealed, that never will reveal it. I find it interesting sometimes people criticize the research, because, you know, "Well, you can't possibly capture it all." You're absolutely right. And the only way I could actually do that would be pretty unethical, right? Like, sodium pentothal and make them talk. *laughs*] That's not going to happen. The best we can do is try to establish some rapport, ask questions in a sensitive way, and deal with it.

But there are still going to be people who are like, "Nope, not sharing," especially, I think, there's some generational elements of it, right? You look at some senior citizens, I know some that I see experiencing intimate partner violence and they won't do anything about it because their fear of not being a couple is far greater than their fear of being abused. It's so tragic. And I think younger people are a little less likely to tolerate that. We've done a good job about educating and letting people know that, "No, people don't get to hit you, or belittle you, or entrap you by hiding your money," things like that.

So it is still really scary, and it's still scary the first time anybody discloses, right? How is that person going to respond? Is it worth it? I don't know. Again, I really love the Me Too movement for the people who choose to say something, that they can say it and see an

entire world saying, “Yes, me too,” and they realize they’re not alone, and they’re not the only ones, and they weren’t to blame. I just think it’s one of the most positive movements.

**Aside:** So, side note. While the hashtag #MeToo began trending in October of 2017 following Harvey Weinstein’s sexual abuse allegations, the Me Too movement actually started over ten years earlier by Bronx-born political activist Tarana Burke, and she says, “The Me Too movement started in the deepest, darkest place in my soul.” She was working in a youth camp and a young girl named Heaven pulled her aside and began to disclose to her horrifying abuse done by her mother’s boyfriend, and Tarana felt unequipped to handle the disclosure. She shuffled her off to another worker, and she’s written that she will never forget the look on that young girl’s face. She says, “I’ll never forget the look, because I think about her all the time. The shock of being rejected, the pain of opening a wound, only to have it abruptly forced closed again. It was all on her face.” She says, “I couldn’t even bring myself to whisper, ‘Me, too.’”

Now the Justice Department statistics show that around 40% of Black women report being the victims of coercive sexual contact before the age of consent, but for every Black woman who reports her rape, it suggested that at least 15 do not. Tarana Burke now runs Just Be Inc., which is a youth organization focused on the health, well-being, and wholeness of young women of color, and she was named *Time*’s Person of the Year in 2017 for being instrumental as a silence breaker.

**Alie:** Do you find in your life that a lot of people confide in you?

**Callie:** Oh gosh, yeah. I have a girlfriend, and we’ll travel sometimes, and some of the early travels, I finally realized I had to say something because people would be like, “What do you do?” “I’m a criminologist, I’m a researcher, I’m a victimologist, I look at a lot of violence against women” – I look at a lot of things but violence against women gets a lot more attention. And immediately, total strangers will tell me about rapes they’ve experienced or domestic violence they’ve experienced, or are experiencing. And I realized a recent trip to Arizona with my friend, she’s not accustomed to this and I finally had to say, “Hey, I apologize. This is, like, my every day.”

Every time you teach a class, you’re going to get multiple disclosures. It’s a part of it. Which is a kind of interesting thing about my work, the reality in my work, my research, we do the best we can to measure this stuff, right? We have estimates of rape and sexual assault, or intimate partner violence, or robbery, or any of these things. But they’re the best estimates we have. But in reality, I often say, “Find me somebody, especially a woman aged 50, who *hasn’t* experienced sexual harassment and sexual assault.” It’s unusual. It is ubiquitous, no matter what the rates say. The rates are as good as we can do, but they’re imperfect.

**Alie:** How do you handle those disclosures? Do you feel like you’re pretty well equipped, or do you compartmentalize, or do you ever just have a day where you’re like, “Whew, I’ve got a lot on my shoulders”?

**Callie:** Kind of the same thing, listening to them because they... I think they found somebody they think is safe to disclose to, so they can unload this, you know? And the most recent one was a woman – I’m going to guess she was 70 years old – and we came together in a completely different context, and I got the feeling she’d never told anybody about this, and some of this happened when she was a child. So I listen and do exactly what I said earlier, in terms of, you know, “Thanks for trusting me with this,” and, “You didn’t deserve that,” and, “I’m

really sorry you've had to live with that." And then, depending on the situation, I'll often say, "Do you want some resources? I can get you some information for some resources."

There's a lot of 1-800 numbers and other things, and today with the internet, it's pretty easy to find a good resource. But I just want to make sure that they don't need more than just to talk about it, and I'll sit and talk about it. But it is fascinating. And people in my field, they'll all tell you the same thing, that they do it. You know, you're on a plane and the next thing you know, you've got somebody disclosing and things like that, and I think I'm pretty good at it – probably I should knock on wood. I'll leave today and get a disclosure that really jacks me up or something. *laughs*] Because it can happen, yeah.

**Aside:** I asked Callie about resources that would be like first aid for victims and she mentioned that there are 800 numbers suited to different situations, so I looked and on the Department of Justice's website, I found a list including Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline, National Domestic Violence Hotline, National Runaway Safeline, National Human Trafficking Hotline, Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN), and I'll put a link to these and others in the show notes.

**Callie:** I have a lot of bizarre beliefs, but one of them is, age 30, we should all be required to go see a counselor or psychologist, because we can all benefit from it, *laughs*] and there should be no shame in that either, right? But to go to talk to somebody, and to get it out, and work through stuff, I think's really key.

What I totally believe is that carrying it inside of us all this time is never beneficial. It's never beneficial. Ever. So we've got to be able to get it out and have people hear us, have people help us, and learn to be okay, you know, with all of it.

**Alie:** And why do you think victims blame themselves? Do you think that we or they are trying to make sense of what has happened and trying to put the control back in their own hands? Why do we find ways to say, "I must have invited this. This must be my fault somehow"?

**Callie:** You know, that might be a part of it for some, but I think it's because society blames them. You tell certain people, or you hear judges say things on the stand about, "What were you wearing? Why were you out? Why were you alone? How much did you have to drink?" So I think, unfortunately, society's first response is always a very blaming sort of deal and then it's internalized.

What I see a lot of is, I think, people trying to make themselves feel safe, right? If I say – and this is not something I personally would say – "Well, I would never have worn a skirt like that," I think that's the person thinking, "Well, I can prevent it from happening to me. You weren't smart enough to do that." And that's just wrong, because there's some great exhibits that go around – I think last time I heard about it was in Kansas – where all it is are the clothes that sexual assault and rape victims were wearing when they were assaulted. And, you know, they're up on the wall, and what do you see? You see sweatpants, you see pajamas, you see all kinds of things. So this notion that what you wear brought it on is just wrong. But I think society still will say that.

**Aside:** This exhibit, by the way, is called, "What Wear You Wearing?" created by the director of Kansas University's Sexual Assault Prevention and Education Center, Jen Brockman, and Dr. Mary A. Wyandt-Hiebert of a rape education center. Now, next to one casual outfit is a story of a survivor, who says, "I missed a couple of days of work after it happened. When I told my boss, she asked me this question: 'What were you wearing?' And

I said, 'A t-shirt and jeans, bitch. What do you wear to a basketball game?' And I walked out and never came back."

Callie says that people internalize these judgments and we've got to just keep fighting back against that and call them out because nobody has asked to be victimized, she says. *Nobody*. Callie also told me that she taught a criminal justice course titled, "Murder in America," and she says that it was admittedly named that way to draw students to take it, but her secret goal was to make sure none of them left with a favorite serial killer anymore.

**Callie:** I mean, reading the details, and making it very clear that there are victims, right? It's not all about this weirdo, it's about victims who were skinned, and tortured, and I mean, just awful. And you could talk to a few of my students who to this day can't eat a pot roast because of a particular movie that I showed them. *laughs*] But I was very happy to know that when they left, they *got* it. It's like, walking around with a shirt with Ed Gein on it, or Ted Bundy, that's not cool. They killed and tortured people.

From a criminal justice/criminology standpoint, in terms of universities and getting majors, it's very beneficial, because everybody wants to be a CSI investigator or forensic scientist, so it's great to get... maybe it sends people to college and they learn neat things. But, yeah, it's gross. It's awful. These are human beings. They have mothers and fathers, these people have sisters and brothers, and you know, they might've been the person to cure cancer and all of that's lost. But they're not deemed as valuable somehow. It is really, really disturbing.

Something that I've been trying to figure out the best way to say it, okay, so you've got people who are, like, really obsessed, and the serial killers and what they do, and they know everything about them. Their victims are people. And I try to frame it as somebody who's been torturing animals, they keep taking kittens and skinning them and making this... And very quickly, people will be like, "Oh my god, that is *horrible*." So why is it we can see the horror of it when we're dealing with animals – and yay, I'm glad we can – but when it comes to people-victims, it's different.

**Aside:** Apart from the obvious post-traumatic stress disorder, there are so many more insidious and lasting effects of violence and victimization, on not just the person who experienced it, but those around them, too. Fallout from violence can be multigenerational, can be very emotional, and can also be practical and financial.

**Callie:** If you have somebody in your family who was maybe murdered, you can also get that assistance, which is needed, because a lot of times, say, a parent is murdered, people lose jobs, homes get foreclosed, just all kinds of terrible things. So it tries to help bridge it, but it's definitely not enough. I'm sure you could talk to anybody who's been through that and say, "Yeah, it was a drop in the bucket. It was useful, but I need so much more."

**Alie:** And now, what kind of people do you find are drawn to study victimology, as opposed to maybe just criminology, or what people are drawn to this subset? What are they passionate about?

**Callie:** I've never been asked that question. It's really good, so I'm trying to do this scan of all the people I work with who I think... I mean, I think one thing clearly they all have in common, even if there's some disagreements about part of it, I think kind of what I've said is just this passion for people who've been victimized and taking care of them. I mean, the history of the criminal justice system is one that we didn't really even include victims in.

**Alie:** OOF!

**Aside:** I'm sorry for my guttural groans here.

**Callie:** They were treated... and I've got an introduction to criminal justice textbook, and I talk about this. At best, they were treated as a witness. They were never treated as anything more than that, and that's changed over the last few decades. Is it great? No. But we're headed in the right direction. So I think a lot of people who are just passionate about taking care of people who've been harmed and caring about it. And a lot of these people who work in this area have experienced it themselves or have very close family members who have, but not all. So I think it's just compassionate people who want to make a difference and want to make it better.

I mean, when my grandma was younger and in not-the-best-situation in her marriage, she had nowhere to go. As a woman, how's she going to leave with children? How's she going to own a home, get a job, get a credit card, or do anything? She had to just live with it.

**Aside:** Just a quick reminder that up until 1974, it was perfectly legal to deny a woman a credit card unless she was married and could have her husband cosign. 1974. That era when raping your wife was also still plenty legal.

So if anyone's ever tempted to ask, "Why didn't they just leave?", we are barely in an era when the law would even allow women that independence and authority over their own life, their own finances, their own body, and we're barely in an era when men are even considered a victim of some of these traumas.

**Callie:** And I'd like us to see that that doesn't happen anymore, that if somebody's in a bad situation that they have the ability to get out of it. And I think that's what everybody – that would probably be the one universal part of it.

**Alie:** Is being able to get out of a bad situation.

**Callie:** Right, right. Like, who wouldn't want that? And it's kind of neat to see, too, that even in my career, taking on and recognizing problems that have always been around – let's say sex trafficking is a great one, or human trafficking more generally – that this is something that happens, it happens in this nation, trying to get people to recognize it, to understand why it's bad. Again, why is that important? Well, it's not good to enslave people. And really working toward changing that.

But I will say this, there aren't enough victimologists. I would hope that we could get more people to go to school, and to study this, and to get engaged, whether they're out as advocates, or in the CJ system with this good frame of mind, or becoming researchers, we need it. A group that I've done several pieces on, but I get frustrated that it won't get traction, is American Indians. And their rates of victimization are the highest. They blow African American rates of victimization out of the water. They're incredibly high.

This is where somebody will usually go, "Yeah, well, tribal lands are problematic." This isn't on tribal lands. These are people who self-identify and are throughout society, and their rates are astronomically higher, and there's so little being done about it. I mean, there are people out there working super hard and passionately, but there's only so many of us. So I keep hoping, you know, it's like, I need some people to grow up and become victimologists and that be their focus because it's a lot of low-hanging fruit, and research, and answers, and help that can be done. I think there's lots of groups like that, too.

**Aside:** I looked into this, and it's gutting how much higher the rates of victimization are. In the 2017 Bureau of Justice statistics, rates for what's defined as serious violent

victimization, i.e. rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, the instance of victimization for those identifying as Indigenous populations – Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, other Pacific Islanders – is over twice that for other groups.

There are two hashtags, #IndigenousWomenRise and #IdleNoMore, that seek to raise awareness about victimization in these groups, and artist Jaime Black has helmed a new Smithsonian exhibit called the REDress Project and it features 35 red dresses hanging outdoors, bright, they're stark against these bare winter trees, they're blowing in the wind, getting soaked by rain against this Washington, DC, backdrop. So if you happen to be in Washington, DC, have a pop over, take a look at that. And when it comes to government authority, what can be done about victimization?

**Alie:** How do you think we can change the way that police officers are trained, or they're... *laughs*] you're like, *whew* – so that they are interacting with victims to be more helpful?

**Callie:** Yeah, I have some strong feelings about this. And I know... Listen, I am not a police basher. I am not. Are there bad policemen? *Oh, yeah.* Oh, yeah, there are. But I think one of the problems is what draws people toward policing. And again, I'm going to go to the media. And I'm going to go to the – and I know this is like really an old people movie now, students don't know what it is anymore – but like *Dirty Harry. Clint Eastwood growling: "Now you know why they call me Dirty Harry."*] Or this "cops kicking people's heads in." That's not what policing's about, and it's never been about that. But if that's what's drawing people into policing, those are the wrong people.

There's a man named August Vollmer who back in the late 1800s and early 1900s – I would fangirl him if he was here, he's dead, though – but he's the father of American policing. And back then, he started the first criminal justice college at Berkeley. He started the American Society of Criminology. He said police officers need to be trained, and they need to be trained as social workers. Because the fact of the matter is that while sometimes physical strength is a part of policing, a lot of it is social work, it's communication, it's de-escalation, it's working with and understanding people, and I don't think there's enough of that still happening.

**Aside:** Callie says that she would love to see the requirement that police officers had more training, or maybe a degree in sociology, criminology, victimology. So now, switching gears, what about people who aren't victims, but play them?

**Alie:** When it comes to power and abuses of power, how are you reacting to the wrong people playing the victim, or using a manipulation to be like, "I'm being victimized"? *clip from The Office: Michael Scott, "This is like the Blair Witch Hunt Project."*] *both laugh*]

How do you as a victimologist deal with seeing the role of victim being twisted and abused like that?

**Callie:** That's really cool because one of the... A lot of times when people ask me what I do, I don't say 'victimologist', because the response I too frequently get is, "Oh my gosh, everybody's a victim these days. Wah, wah, wah." And my response when that's happened is, like, "I know, those people who are murdered and raped, they are big babies." Because it has been co-opted by a group that I don't really understand the need to be that. And it minimizes the true violence and victimization that victims have experienced.

**Aside:** Callie says that despite the nature of her work, she likes to believe that there are no bad people, just people who do bad things. But she concedes there may be a few

exceptions. Now, in terms of how people cope with the aftermath of a violent event, she says different people handle it very differently. She has a girlfriend, she explained:

**Callie:** Her name is Jennifer Schuett, I talk about her in my book, she's been in the news a little bit. When she was eight, she was abducted from her room, and raped, and nearly decapitated, and left for dead in a field.

**Alie:** *Oh my god.*

**Callie:** Twenty years, cold case, and it was finally solved. And Jennifer's really remarkable in that her way of dealing with it is that she's a speaker, she talks about her victimization, talks about being a survivor, and in fact, she would probably slug me in the arm for saying 'victim', because that is a sensitive issue, victim versus survivor. And I use victim because I deal with people who are killed, as well – I can't call them survivors. And Jennifer handles it in a really cool way and I admire her way, but, man, it is not everybody's way.

Other people, to call them out and say, "Can you talk about your victimization?" would be the worst thing I could do. I think everybody has to go at their own speed, their own time, and their own way, and maybe never forgive, or maybe forgive. I mean, there's certain things in my life that I don't know that I would forgive, but have just learned to live with, and I don't let it eat me, or something, and I imagine that's true for a lot of people.

**Alie:** When it comes to victims and survivors, there's more than just the person who experienced the act. I mean, there are... it's multigenerational. If you've got someone who has been murdered, their children, their grandchildren who never met them, are going to be affected, right?

**Callie:** Right, and even just if, I mean, there's some research that shows, say there's a rape that's happened, that a lot of times – or even the murder of a child – that that marriage ends in divorce, that there are other consequences that happen that are pretty big and pretty damning. You know, secondary victim – if you were to see your boyfriend assaulted or something, how traumatic that would be, even if nobody laid a hand on you. The secondary victimization is very real, and that's why in the intro book I'm part of, I say something about, "Nobody is untouched by crime." At a minimum, we as taxpayers are paying money to fund a huge criminal justice system. But just personally, everybody's been touched.

**Alie:** And do you think that the criminal justice system is doing enough to prevent further crimes, or do you think it's just super fucked? Like, our prison system, is it making things worse, is it making anything better?

**Callie:** Yeah, I think it's pretty super fucked.

**Alie:** Okay. *both laugh*]

**Callie:** I mean, we need to do more on the front end, right? We need to do more about economics, we need to do more about education, we need to do more about opportunities. And this whole "pull yourself up by the bootstraps," yeah, that sounds really nice, but if you're living in a city that has no businesses, and no public transportation, and a crappy education system, that's way more challenging versus somebody who is born to wealth, and privilege, and all these things. We're running really different races. So I think the criminal justice system is far more reactive than proactive, and it would be nice to take a lot of that money and put it on the front end to try to prevent offending and victimization.

I mean, the prison complex is dreadful and the new administration is privatizing prisons again. We were actually moving away from that. The state of Kentucky had completely



gotten rid of their contracts, and everybody's moving back toward it again. Why? Because it reduces crime? *No*. It doesn't reduce crime. We know it doesn't. It doesn't help anything except it enriches people who benefit from that. It's the worst.

**Alie:** *agonized sigh*] That's devastating.

**Callie:** It's just sacrificing people for money and it makes me sick.

**Alie:** So where can we get a dose of hope? How can we make things better? What can we do on the front end? I mean, I know that we know that men are victimized as much if not more than women. Probably more perpetrators... male?

**Callie:** Absolutely.

**Alie:** What can we do for the dudes so that they don't lose their minds and victimize people? Like, what's going wrong there?

**Callie:** I think there's a lot of ideas. You know, is it testosterone, is it psychology, is it culture? And it's probably a little bit of all of that. Again, that's not totally my area. But I think that we have to hold people accountable when they're doing stuff, but I think we also have to teach them, right? It's big change we've seen over the last few years about rape. What constitutes rape? This definition's changed over time. Somebody who maybe thinks rape can't happen between married people, has to involve a penis and a vagina, they might be engaged in behavior they think's totally okay when in fact it's not, it's rape, and you'll go to prison for it. Well, you should go to prison for it, often don't.

**Aside:** Brace yourself for some grim math. According to RAINN, out of 1,000 rapes, only 230 get reported to police, 46 of those lead to arrests, nine are prosecuted, and less than five of 1,000 rapes lead to incarceration. So out of 1,000 rapes, 995 rapists walk free. But Callie offers another grain of hope.

**Callie:** One of the neat things that I've seen happen over the last few years is some of the work that I've done that's gotten a little more press dealing with rape and sexual assault, sexual harassment. It used to be that I'd get emails, and some of them would be pretty hateful, and it always had the "hope you get raped" email –

**Alie:** Oh my god!

**Callie:** I know, I'm just like, "Oh, another one! Put it in the folder!" And I don't see that as much. But a really promising change that I do see is that men are writing, and they're writing to say thanks, and they're writing, "I'm glad we're looking at this." And so, I'm seeing it shift a little bit and I always try to really acknowledge the fact that men experience this stuff, too. It's very easy to focus on women because, from the numbers we have, they experience it at higher rates, but I also think there's a lot of good reasons that men don't want to come forward.

If a man's been sexually assaulted, or he's been raped, he even faces a few additional hurdles than women do, right? A woman comes forward, you're going to get blamed and shamed, possibly, not believed; where a man, he's going to have his masculinity questioned or his sexuality questioned, and that's really harmful. We shouldn't do that. And I won't be surprised someday, maybe when I'm on my deathbed if I get a lot more years, that those numbers equal out a little bit and we see that men feel more free to come forward and say, "I was raped. I was raped when I was six," or here in school, or in a sports deal. It happens, and I think that they're kept quiet from the patriarchy and this toxic masculinity stuff, that we're not fully letting them be the full people they are, they don't have to prove their

manliness by harming other people, things like that. That would be a fabulous change. It would benefit everybody. It would be great.

**Alie:** Can we do a rapid-fire round?

**Callie:** Oh, goody!

**Alie:** Do you have a minute?

**Callie:** I have all day.

**Aside:** Okay, before we get to Patreon questions, a quick few messages from sponsors of the show who help make *Ologies* possible and who definitely make it possible for us to donate to a charity of the ologist's choosing each week. Now, instead of one, though, we're going to do more than one. I think we're going to do five charities this week.

First up is a donation to RAINN.org, which is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. RAINN created and operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline and carries out programs to prevent sexual violence, to help survivors, and to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

Next, a donation will be made to Tarana Burke's Just Be Inc., which is a youth organization focused on the health, well-being, and wholeness of young women of color. They say, "In the face of media, music, and pop culture that increasingly diminished the importance, worth, and esteem of girls and women, particularly women of color, our organization deals specifically with the range of issues teen and preteen girls are faced with daily. Our programs center around empowerment and guidance for girls as they grow and begin to define themselves."

We'll also be sending a donation to CommonJustice.org, whose mission is to develop and advance solutions to violence that transformed the lives of those harmed and foster racial equity without relying on incarceration.

Also, a donation goes to IWGIA.org. They are a global human rights organization dedicated to promoting, protecting, and defending Indigenous peoples' rights.

And one more, on a personal note. My boyfriend never got a chance to meet his maternal grandmother. She was murdered when his mom was just twelve years old and that loss is very present in their family's lives. And his mom, Christine Mason, grew up to be a speaker and an author, a total badass, a victim's advocate. She wrote a book about her experience called *Indivisible* and she's on the board of an organization called GRIP, Guiding Rage into Power, which works with offenders in the California state prison system, and she is a victim-offender liaison.

Again, her book is called *Indivisible* and I want to thank Christine Mason and their family for giving me much better insight on the ripple effects of violence and changing the way I process stories like their family's and even my own narrative. So another donation will be going to Guiding Rage into Power.

And one of the things that brings Callie great joy is parrots, and she recently lost her parrot Dale, and I know she works with AllParrotsResuce.org, so we're going to be sending them a donation, as well.

Okay, so here are some sponsors who are making those donations and this podcast possible...

*Ad Break]*

All right, and now, your questions.

**Alie:** So Tyler Q wants to know: Are there any truly victimless crimes?

**Callie:** I don't think so. I absolutely don't think so. Right now, we're talking about some white-collar crimes and people go, "That's victimless." No, it's not! People lost stock money, people lost jobs. So, no. Coming to prostitution – and this is a really interesting place, because there's a camp that says adult women can make these choices, if they want to be a prostitute or not, and I do agree with that. However, where do adult prostitutes come from? Often sex-trafficked children. And so if you're a sex-trafficked child, your ability to maybe go on other paths of life has been cut off, so then I struggle with it.

So, no, I personally don't think so, and even if you want to broaden the definition more, say, even that secondary victimization, maybe the individual involved in something is like, "It's not hurting me," but how does it affect a spouse or a child or something? So, no, I don't think there are any victimless crimes.

**Alie:** Jennifer Dorset wants to know: I'm interested in the trauma portion of being victimized and how that can be passed on generationally – think Holocaust, slavery, or even just migration or political upheaval. Do these things affect future generations in a way that's beyond just a culture?

**Callie:** Oh my god, that's such a great question.

**Alie:** I know, Jennifer Dorset!

**Callie:** I wish, Jennifer, I was a smarter person than I am. *laughs*] Well, other than culture, I think absolutely so. Even some things I've read about alcoholics, right? So, say your parent's an alcoholic. The way you're raised is different, and there are problems, but then even if the child of an alcoholic has children, there are consequences there. So I think it's culture but it's also some socialization and maybe some fears and things like that. My best guess, being as smart as I am, I think so. That's a fabulous question. I hope she's in graduate school and pursuing a degree so she can get out there and help us. *laughs*]

**Alie:** *as if over a PA announcement: "Jennifer Dorset, you have been called to action."*] Rachel Casha wants to know: What can we do to stop the criminal from receiving what seems to be praise and glory as well as the media spotlight while the victims and survivors get very little attention, and sometimes even blame?

**Callie:** I feel exactly the same way. In my intro book, I talk a lot about the role of the media, and I'm not a media basher either. I wish the media would focus more on the victim and the consequences of that, and their children. And, yeah, we might show a picture of somebody and say, "And they left behind three kids," but let's hear more and let's talk about what we can do more versus focusing on the offender. So I wish the media would get involved with it more.

**Aside:** Callie noted that when she writes with her colleague, Mary Dodge, that they really try to establish the importance of the victims' experiences. So victimology has come a long way since its finger-pointy, 1940s beginnings.

**Alie:** Anna McDavid and Maria Kumro both wanted to know more a little bit about why victim-blaming is a cultural epidemic, and what's the best way to change victim blaming?

**Callie:** My guess kind of goes back to what I said earlier. I think for a lot of people, if they feel they can blame the victim for what happened to them, then they can falsely protect themselves

from being victimized. I think that's a large part of it, which is just not true at all. And I have seen people who have engaged in victim-blaming and then I've seen them go through victimization, and they struggle almost more because they have to come to grips with their beliefs and to understand, "I was really wrong and have done this damage, too."

I think we just have to keep talking about it, keep being supportive, if somebody comes to you, saying the right thing, getting them help, and saying it. "You are not to blame for this, you did not deserve this." I don't care if you are in a tiny skirt and high heels and a sparkly bra, you don't deserve to be victimized. Any of it.

**Aside:** She said just try your best to be supportive and empathetic like you would be to a friend who might be grieving a death.

**Callie:** It will never be the same. Restorative justice kind of talks about this, which is a great way to look at some of these things, that we're going to try to restore the victim. I love that idea, but I also realize there's no restoration, it's never going to be the same, it's going to be different, and how do you go through life with this different world? It's still got good things, but it's different. I hope that makes sense.

**Alie:** It does. Alyssa Bean and Joyclyn Vincent both had kind of similar questions off that note: How often does revenge and justice help, and does the prominence of vigilantism and revenge fantasy in pop culture have an impact on how real victims think of their situation? Do we see too much of people getting revenge and we think, "Ah, that's what's going to help me"?

**Callie:** Maybe so. And I mean, I'll even admit on some things in my life where I've got some pretty fantastic revenge fantasies. "*Vengeance.*"

But I'm not going to engage in that. For some people, it might make it feel better, but I don't think for most of us it will. I don't think so. But I think you can think about it all you want. *laughs*] If that's helping you, then do that, but you've got to find another healthy way to deal with it, too.

**Aside:** This next question made such an important point and I'm so glad that you asked it, my dear friend.

**Alie:** This is an interesting question from the Lorax, a.k.a. Forrest S. It says: In cases where an actual trauma is not present, what are the most common ways that PTSD can arise? And he says: Personally, growing up gay in a conservative Christian household has led me to quite a battle with PTSD-like symptoms. In non-trauma-based PTSD, what are some of the therapies that have led to the most promising results?

So, if someone maybe doesn't consider themselves a victim, because actual trauma wasn't present, is there still trauma if you've, say, grown up in a household that you didn't feel accepted you?

**Callie:** I would say to think about how you're defining trauma. If you're just thinking about the physical attack, okay, maybe there wasn't a physical attack, but let's look at domestic violence or intimate partner violence. There's the physical part of it, but there's the emotional, there's the psychological, and there are some people that can tell you some of the psychological and emotional abuse is worse than some of the physical. I don't want to say one's better or one's, you know, whatever, because they're all terrible, so I would say there is still trauma there. And again, PTSD isn't my big area, but... I don't know, I would say think a little bit more about it and broaden his idea about what trauma is, and that,

yeah, that is trauma. Not being accepted, being in a household where your parents didn't want you, or accept you, or like you – that's awful. Does it get worse than that? I don't know. That's pretty terrible. So... I'm sorry.

**Alie:** And I imagine in terms of victim statistics, the LGBTQ community has got to be staggering. Are there certain resources or ways you've seen that get any better, any worse?

**Callie:** There's a lot more attention getting drawn there. And let me say this, too: It's not that victimologists haven't thought about it, but it's a data issue. You have to get enough data to work with to do things, and it's hard. We don't have a master list of the LGBTQ community, and over recent years, more and more people are more comfortable coming out. When I did the sexual misconduct survey at my university, you had the option to note that, and many people identified in different ways, but there wasn't enough data to do much with it.

The research that's out there does show that this group does experience victimization in certain ways at higher rates because people see them as out groups or bullied, so they do face some specific things. Imagine being a transgender woman who's been raped, and then having to deal with the criminal justice system and hospital. Nobody can tell me they're going to have the exact same experience as somebody who's not transgender. So yeah, I think there's a whole lot of additional hurdles and issues that they're going to confront, and there are more and more places that are popping up to help.

And maybe Forrest doesn't want to call it trauma, and that's okay. I think that as a victim or survivor, you can call it whatever you want. I think people working in the field, the criminal justice system, need to call it by specific definitions, but as that victim or survivor, if calling it trauma is really uncomfortable, don't do that. But I also wouldn't want somebody to think, "Well, I didn't really experience anything, so I don't know why I'm going through PTSD." Yeah, that's a terrible experience, you did experience that, and I would acknowledge it. Again, it's not all about physical, at all.

**Alie:** You mentioned the word 'bully', and that's the first time that word has come up in this interview, which led me to think about the way that we look at bullying in schools. I feel like when I was going through schools, if you got bullied, it was like, you're shit outta luck and there wasn't really anyone to go to, but I feel like we're becoming much more aware of bullying.

Is bullying getting worse? Are we getting better at calling it out? And what do you think is the best way for kinder-victims who are maybe getting shit on at school?

**Callie:** I don't know about the numbers. I think it would probably be this sort of situation that we're calling it out more and recognizing it, so if there were... My particular data doesn't focus on bullying specifically, but it probably looks like it's gone up, but that's more of recognizing and disclosing, and I am glad schools are dealing with it.

When I just think back on my own personal experiences – so these are just anecdotes – is that the bullies that I know came from families that bully. So this is the one where you find the parent is... this is where they're learning this behavior. And I think sometimes the bullies don't know other ways to interact, and this isn't to minimize what they've done, but I am glad schools are taking care of kids who are being bullied, because... The same thing, I could remember back in school, they'd put us in this big hall called the Mall before they'd let us into classes. Every morning it was the same scenario, same kid being bullied by the same bully, and everyone just sat around and looked at it. It was almost just normal. Whereas today I hope that that gets called out.

**Aside:** Some statistics show that because of increased attention to bullying, the rates may be going down. Now if you have a little one who's getting bullied at school or is having a hard time, having a hard time making friends maybe, look into the app Sit With Us. It was created a few years ago by a then-young teenager Natalie Hampton. It's been downloaded like 100,000 times. It helps kids find a table at school to sit at, and they can specify their interests and find nice, cool, welcoming buddies. Again, it's called Sit With Us, and I am personally hoping that Natalie wins a Nobel Peace Prize or something.

**Alie:** Bader AlShawaf, John Worster, and Jessica Oster all kind of asked: When someone discloses that they've been a victim, what's the best way that we can be supportive without scaring them away or pushing them off?

**Callie:** I think just thanking them for trusting you, not to question. Listen. It's going to be listening first. "Thank you for trusting me with this. What can I do to help you? How can I support you? Can I help you find resources?"

Do not ask who they were out with. There are things that, although well intentioned, come across as blaming. And also not trying to pull control away from them, because again if you've been a victim of violence, that's one of the things people talk about, is "I had no control." So really, you say the words and it doesn't sound like much, but when you're in that experience, it's really terrible, so the last thing that person needs – unless they say it – is for you to go like, "We are going to do A, B, and C," because you have now taken control away from them again. So I think being sensitive about that, and at least my experience is a lot of just listening. People want to share and they want to get it out and process it, so listening and being supportive is key. And then, want resources? Let's go find some.

**Alie:** That's great advice. Maybe ice cream.

**Callie:** Yeah, ice cream is never a bad idea. *laughs*]

**Alie:** Aki wants to know: Is there any truth to victims of abuse as children seeking similar abuse as adults? And Tyler and Rebecca Stefulj both ask: Why do people in abusive relationships often struggle to end the relationship, and people who essentially have been abused at one point in their life continuing to be abused or not being able to leave or feeling like they can leave?

**Callie:** I see that as, kind of, two different things. There is some evidence of people who maybe had been abused as children end up in relationships where they're being abused, and again, I'm going to leave that to psychologists. But there's a little bit of 'what we're familiar with', right? When you're a child in a household and you're being abused, sometimes kids don't even know that that's wrong. That's just what it is. That's normal. And so that's comfortable and normal, and then, it sounds kinda strange, and then they find a relationship that's comfortable and normal. And then maybe they realize differently.

I did some work with Kristin Carbone-Lopez, who was at the University of Missouri-St. Louis (she's since moved on), and we were looking at the movement from abusive relationship, to non-abusive relationship, to no relationship, and we found evidence of a lot of people who were in abusive relationships did move to no relationships, so it does happen.

Why doesn't it happen all the time? It's a resource structural issue. A few things: Say I am in a bad relationship, and I'm being abused, and there's a shelter down the street, but you know what, the shelter doesn't take pets. There's no way I'm leaving my pets behind. Or they don't take male children. Or "He's going to know where I am." Or, "If I miss one more

day at work, I'm going to lose my job." There are a lot of things like that. Or he's kept... and I'm using he/she because I'm using myself as an example; this does go both ways. But if they have all the control of the money and you have nothing, and they don't give you a cell phone, it's not as easy as it seems.

Another thing that I think victims, survivors, recognize is that that period between leaving and getting free is the time most people are killed. Watching a true crime show, for example, you see a woman who ends up murdered and in the beginning, I'm like, "Her husband did it," and everyone's like, "How did you know?" I'm like, "Because that's usually who did it." And that's why. So it isn't just so easy as like, "I'm fed up, I'm getting in my car and driving away and starting over."

Any of us, I would challenge any of us to say, I want you to go today, gather what's most important to you today, and leave and start a new life. Now do that when you've got somebody who might kill you for doing that. It's just not easy. So, advocates are so great and more and more shelters are available, and we're learning about the need to be able to take pets or children, and jobs, but it's still incredibly hard. I think it's almost like how anybody got out is pretty awesome. It's amazing. But I just can't even imagine what it takes. But I hope people try if they feel it's the right thing to do and it's a safe thing to do. But it's not easy.

**Alie:** I'll look up some resources for that, too, and put them in.

**Aside:** I found a great article on a site about, of all things, frugality, called [FemmeFrugality.com](http://FemmeFrugality.com), and they wrote up a great list. For example: If you call 211, it will connect you with a local chapter of a United Way and often they have special services for those who are going through domestic violence. They might even have special funds specifically to help victims get out. The site also recommended Soroptimist. That can help with job training, and may also have financial grants. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence can offer basic financial education. If you're just needing to establish independence, you aren't sure where to start on your own, the National Domestic Violence Hotline is there to chat about everything from finances to an actual exit plan, and I'll put a link to this post from [FemmeFrugality.com](http://FemmeFrugality.com) up at [AlieWard.com/Ologies/Victimology](http://AlieWard.com/Ologies/Victimology). There'll be a link to that in the show notes.

And encouragingly, nearly 20% of intimate partner violence survivors did receive assistance from a victim service agency, so help is out there.

**Alie:** Heather Hutchison asks: I live in Parkland, Florida, and although my kids had already graduated from MSD, I know that they were deeply affected by the recent shooting there, as was I and a lot of the community. How can you cope with the effects of something you were not directly involved with?

**Callie:** That's a really great question. I'm going to answer it in kind of a weird way, and I'm going to go back to the media here. The media has done, I think, a big disservice to the public in terms of school violence. Research is clear: schools are safer than non-schools. Kids are far less likely to be victimized at a school than away from a school. Same with colleges. We talk about campus violence all the time. It's not campus violence we're talking about, we're talking about violence against college students that happens predominantly off-campus.

And I think sloppy use of words and highlighting these really rare, although terrible, terrible events, has led to people being really afraid of colleges and schools. And I give talks on college student victimization, I always have somebody come to me and say, "We're not

sending our daughter to college anymore because it's not safe. We're going to keep her here at home." And to me, that's the worst outcome ever. I've written several pieces, and they're in journals, and I know people don't read journals and stuff, but I'm trying to get it out there a little bit more, for people to understand the true risks.

Again, can you ever be totally risk-free? No. But I'm telling you that risk of victimization is far less at school, whether at the college level or K through 12. It's scary to think that it's so close to home. It's scary to think it could have been your child that's killed. I don't know that we can take that away, though.

**Alie:** But also the media does do a bit of a good job of making us –

**Callie:** Afraid!

**Alie:** – feel that things are scary and that there's danger everywhere.

**Callie:** Right. As I try to tell my students, the media – and again, I love the media in many ways – but there are certain things. They have a job. Their job is to deliver viewers to advertisers. And how do you do that? You do that by keeping them coming back. And how do you keep coming back? Scary stuff. And I'm not saying that I'm not prone to it. Oh my gosh. I remember one time I went on a trip and, again, I don't have a TV at my house and so I was so excited in the hotel room, and I turned on the television and I'm watching the Weather Channel, how pathetic. *clip from 22 Jump Street: Jonah Hill, "Do you like... weather?"*]

And I'm watching it and it's like, "Oh my gosh, it's like Armageddon back home, my god!" So I get on the phone and I call back home and I'm like, "Is it okay there? Because it really looks like it's just all coming apart." And they're like, "Yeah, it's totally fine." I'm like, damn it! They got me! And it did. I continued to go back just to make sure things were fine, and that's what it's about. It's not about educating us generally – this podcast being the exception. *laughs*] "Well, I try."]

**Callie:** But it's about returning viewers to advertisers and that's a way we know is effective.

**Alie:** Keep 'em scared.

**Callie:** Yep.

**Alie:** Claire Biddiscombe, Emily Fiori, and Kayla Pugh asked: Is there a better, more encompassing term for survivor? What are your thoughts on the use of the term survivor instead of victim?

We touched on that. I mean, there are victims who do not survive. For those that do, is there a preferred terminology?

**Callie:** I see it differently. I see some people who say, "I am a victim. Do not call me a survivor." And I see people who are like, "I am a survivor, do not call me a victim," and they find being called a victim is disempowering. They *survived*. As a victimologist, if I'm talking about my research, I deal with people who are murdered and not murdered, and I tend to use the word victim. So again, I try to be sensitive, depending on if I'm talking to a particular person, to use the term that they prefer, but I mean no disrespect if I say victim versus survivor. But yeah, there's no agreement in the field about it, although I would say there's more use of survivor than not.

**Alie:** Kay had a great question: How are victims who don't trust the system to help them – like gender-based violence, survivors, people of color, undocumented folks – expected to heal? So what do you recommend for, maybe, victims who don't trust the system to help them?



**Callie:** I'm not sure that the system is good for healing most anybody. Maybe seeing as good of justice as can come from it, possibly? But I think for getting healing, you've got to use another system, and it's going to be counseling, or psychology, or volunteering, or whatever in your specific situation is good for you, which feeds your soul and helps to heal you. But, man, I don't see the criminal justice system as a place to go to get healed, sadly.

Can they point you to resources? Yeah, they can do that, too. And then the CJ system now, generally, you should have access to a victim advocate if you're navigating the system, but it doesn't make it easy. It's still hard. It's still really challenging.

**Alie:** So it's like two different things, like going to a tire shop for a sandwich.

**Callie:** That's how I kinda see it, right? Yeah.

**Alie:** Okay. That's good to know.

And Katie Chavez and Keith T both had questions about either being trained to become a police officer or being a correctional officer, and they say: As a correctional officer, people I supervise often use their victimization to justify their crimes and minimize their offenses. How can I invoke empathy from them about their victims?

**Callie:** That's a really tough one. I've been in some discussions this last year about the difference in terms like rape and sexual assault, and one of the reasons I'm very passionate about using the word rape when we're talking about a penetration – any orifice, any object, without consent – is for a few reasons. One, to call that sexual assault for many victims, survivors, it minimizes it, because when you say sexual assault to a lot of people, they envision a butt grab, which *is* a sexual assault, but that's very different than a rape.

I want to use the word 'rape' because it acknowledges the actual violence that occurred to that victim, but it also forces the offender to not be able to hide behind, "I only sexually assaulted her," which is heard a lot. It kind of goes to this point that offenders need to understand the damage they did to another human, an autonomous human being that they hurt, and that can be very hard. There's groups out there that work with offenders, or, say, sexual offenders who are trying to go through a re-entry, and that's a part of the goal, is to make them acknowledge it.

**Aside:** Callie says that just booting an offender off-campus or incarcerating someone likely won't solve the problem. They may go on to do it again, just to different people. And this is why therapy for violent individuals benefits more than just the offender.

**Callie:** Punishment has its place, but making sure they don't go do that again is far more important, and this goes back to our prison discussion earlier. Throwing people in prison constantly is A) a taxpayer drain, it pulls away from education and other important social services, and... I mean, punishing isn't enough. Teaching people to do differently and giving them the ability to do differently is far more important. Our country's not there yet. We like to punish. We still do.

**Aside:** Let's lighten things up with a very stupid question.

**Alie:** I always ask this one, too: Are there any movies or any TV shows with victimologists that you're like, "You do a good job," or you're like, "That. Is. Ridiculous. That's not how it works"?

**Callie:** Since I don't have a TV, I don't see. I think all of the things on the TV shows, they create these positions that don't exist. I mean, we see students who come all the time going, "I

wanna be a CSI investigator!" Well, nobody is going to crime scenes, then going into the lab, and looking in micro... you know, nobody is *doing* all that, that's many, many roles. So I think, overall, they're pretty unrealistic. But I will also throw in the caveat that since I don't have a TV, I don't know a lot about what's going on anymore. *laughs*]

**Alie:** There needs to be a new show that's just about victimology, that just deals with victims' stories.

And what's the hardest thing about your job? What just sucks the most, what's difficult, what's hard to work through?

**Callie:** The hardest thing, honestly, is not enough time. There's just not enough time. I had somebody who met me for coffee yesterday because they want me to help on a really important project and I said yes, of course, and then I'm overcommitted, and I'm so busy, and that's the hardest part of it.

So I'm like dead serious when I'm saying that I hope people out there are listening, thinking about, "What do I want to do with my life? I want to make a difference." Go out there, become a criminologist, victimologist, and help us. We need so many more people, so people like me aren't trying to do it all. Because I can't. I can't do it all. And all the other victimologists out there, I think, are equally really just working like crazy, because we care and we want to see change. And it can happen, but we need more of us. Time, if you can give me time, that would be great. *laughs*]

**Aside:** If anyone has discovered a quantum wormhole that allows us to have more time in a day, just please do holler.

**Alie:** What's your favorite thing about your job? What's the most rewarding, most fulfilling? What keeps you going?

**Callie:** I love research because it really is an adventure. Research done right is asking a question, gathering data, and answering it. This notion that research is having an answer and trying to find data to support it, that's not research. That is not a researcher and that's not research. But I love to ask a question and then answer it with the best data I can find, because the answer often is surprising, and the answer always raises other questions. And it's so cool.

To me, I actually envision it's like seeing a bunch of trees and heading into these trees without a path, and wondering where it takes you, and it always takes you somewhere, and it's like, "Wow, this is so cool." And research is that way to me. I like that. And I also like the fact that if I am like, "Oh, I want to focus on such-and-such now," I can do that. I mean, is there a better job than that? *laughs*]

**Alie:** Just getting to be curious, ask questions, find the answer, and then help people along the way.

**Callie:** Absolutely.

**Alie:** What a job. I love this call to action, that if you're interested in this, start looking into victimology as a career.

**Callie:** Absolutely. I mean, I so, so, so, so mean it. And it's something anybody can do. Have some curiosity. I do statistics, some people are like, "Oh my god, that's so scary." Come take my statistics course, it is not scary. It's not scary. You're doing this already, you're just not using the language we use. And I do love to teach stats – that's like the super-nerd that I am

– and I teach it really well, because it's not about math, it's about language and it's about answering questions, and here's the tools to do it. And many of my students are placed in analyst positions around, some in other cities. I love that. And they all come in, some of them crying, even before the semester begins because they're so stressed, and they end up going like, "Wow, I can do this and I love it." Every single person's capable of it. And we need you!

**Alie:** Thank you so much for being on.

**Callie:** Well, thanks for asking, this was super fun.

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So ask smart people maybe stupid, sometimes painful or uncomfortable questions, because those are usually the most important ones.

So to find out more about Dr. Callie Marie Rennison's work, just google her work with University of Denver. To find *Ologies*, you can follow us on [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#) @Ologies. I'm [@AlieWard](#) on [both](#). And for more info on this episode, plus merch and stuff, you can go to [AlieWard.com/Ologies](#).

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Now, if you stick around to the very end, you know I tell you a secret, and this week, my much-more-vulnerable-than-usual secret is that this episode made me look back on comments I've made about crimes or things that were in pop culture in a way that treats them like characters in a story, not people, and I feel really shitty about it. I feel a lot of shame about it. And I also very much understand why people might be drawn to those narratives. But I sincerely hope that Dr. Rennison's work just makes us consider who needs help, who needs advocacy, people are three-dimensional human beings, and what we can all do to make each other feel more cared for.

And also I haven't worn matching socks in at least a week. I just keep pulling ones from the bag of clean, unmatched ones, because guess what, y'all? Boots. Fixes everything.

Okay. Take care. Hug someone. Tell people you love them.

Berbye.

*Transcribed by Katie, your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man.*

### **Some links which may be of use:**

[Hotlines for victims](#)

[Resources \(financial\) to leave an abusive relationship](#)

This week's donations were made to [RAINN.org](#), [Just Be, Inc.](#), [Common Justice](#), [IWGIA](#), [GRIP](#) & [All Parrot Rescue](#)

"[Indivisible](#)" book by Christine Mason

[Dr. Callie Rennison's CV](#)

[I'm the professor who made Brock Turner the "textbook definition" of a rapist](#)

[Victims: college age women vs. non-students](#)

[Intimate partner violence stats](#)

[Transgender violence rates](#)

[Gender discrimination studies](#)

[Tarana Burke, who started the Me Too movement](#)

[Things women were not allowed to do until the 1970s](#)

[Indigenous Women Rise movement](#)

[REDress Project by Jamie Black](#)

[Sit With Us anti-bullying app](#)

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