



Why We Harm (Critical Issues in Crime and Society)

Lois Presser

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Criminologists are primarily concerned with the analysis of actions that violate existing laws. But a growing number have begun analyzing crimes as actions that inflict harm, regardless of the applicability of legal sanctions. Even as they question standard definitions of crime as law-breaking, scholars of crime have few theoretical frameworks with which to understand the etiology of harmful action.

In *Why We Harm*, Lois Presser scrutinizes accounts of acts as diverse as genocide, environmental degradation, war, torture, terrorism, homicide, rape, and meat-eating in order to develop an original theoretical framework with which to consider harmful actions and their causes. In doing so, this timely book presents a general theory of harm, revealing the commonalities between actions that impose suffering and cause destruction.

Harm is built on stories in which the targets of harm are reduced to one-dimensional characters—sometimes a dangerous foe, sometimes much more benign, but still a projection of our own concerns and interests. In our stories of harm, we are licensed to do the harmful deed and, at the same time, are powerless to act differently. Chapter by chapter, Presser examines statements made by perpetrators of a wide variety of harmful actions. Appearing vastly different from one another at first glance, Presser identifies the logics they share that motivate, legitimize, and sustain them. From that point, she maps out strategies for reducing harm.

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