



Emotional Trials: Moral Dilemmas of Women Criminal Defense Attorneys (Northeastern Series on Gender, Crime, and Law)

Cynthia Siemsen

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Women criminal defense attorneys routinely handle cases that would grossly offend the sensibilities of the ordinary woman or man. Often asked to use their gender as a strategy to strengthen the defense, they struggle with myriad moral and ideological conflicts inherent in representing men accused of such violent crimes against women as rape, domestic abuse, and child molestation. This groundbreaking work explores how women attorneys manage those conflicts, how they use ideologies in defense of their work, and how they cope with the emotional stress of their professional lives. Drawing on extensive interviews and ethnographic research, Cynthia Siemsen presents thirteen provocative case studies to illustrate the unique interplay between ideology and emotion in women whose public defense work often puts them in the position of "betraying" their gender. Skillfully blending together the words of criminal attorneys themselves with a solid theoretical framework, she explores the ways in which women's perspectives about their identities, roles, and emotions evolve through three distinct stages: early, mid-career, and seasoned attorney. Siemsen argues convincingly that the stresses of public defense work, including dealing with such burdens as California's stringently enforced three-strikes law, create much more conflict for women than intrinsic contradictions between feminist beliefs and professional ideologies. The longer a woman practices law, the author finds, the better she becomes at managing her emotions by strictly adhering to the constitutional ideal of protecting individual rights. An appendix, "Ambivalent Identities: Men of Color Who Prosecute Their 'Own,'" offers a comparative viewpoint of the experiences of African American male prosecutors. This insightful volume offers a unique lens through which to view the work lives of women criminal defense attorneys and sheds new light on how they resolve and survive the moral dilemmas and emotional stress of their jobs.



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