

Dunn

## Courting Disaster

Intimate Stalking, Culture and Criminal Justice

This work is a wide-ranging and sensitive examination of the lived experience of intimate stalking victimization. It explores how it feels and what it means to be stalked by a former intimate and how this situation creates dilemmas for victims and their advocates. What is it like to try to become a "victim" in the eyes of the law and then to remain one, when almost anything a woman does to manage the violent emotions of an ex-husband or ex-boyfriend can backfire and discredit her claims? The author draws upon a broad array of rich data, including a survey of college women, courtroom testimony, prosecutors' case files, interviews with victims and observations in a prosecutor's office and a stalking survivor's support group to illustrate the difficulties women face as they work to cope with danger - and to negotiate the hazardous terrain of legal systems - simultaneously. For some victims, Dunn shows, prosecution processes are more traumatic than the events that brought them to seek legal help and her analysis of the historical, cultural and gendered frameworks in which stalking victimization and prosecution takes place accounts for the additional trauma. Definitions of situations and identities are contested rather than given in these arenas where lives and self-concepts rest in the balance. The ways in which we socially construct and confer meaning upon intimate violence and its victims profoundly shape what happens to ordinary women facing extraordinary circumstances. "Courting Disaster" illuminates what we can learn from their experience, whether we are working in these arenas or theorizing about how they do, and sometimes do not, work.

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