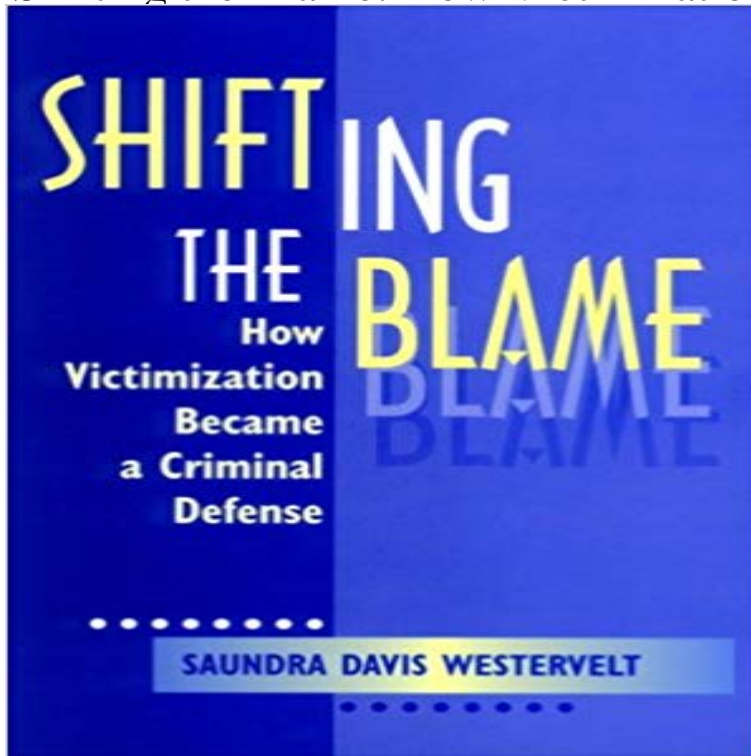


Shifting the Blame: How Victimization Became a Criminal Defense



More than just a study of legal history, *Shifting the Blame* looks at the abuse excuse defense as an indicator of broad social change in cultural understandings of victimization, responsibility, and womanhood. The introduction of victimization as an exculpatory condition within the context of a criminal defense tells the story of a society that has accepted victimization as a new way of explaining and excusing misbehavior. Through case law analysis, the book documents the initial development of the strategy in three different types of cases in the 1970s - rotten social background, brainwashing, and battered women's self-defense cases. Since its initial acceptance in battered women's cases in the early 1980s, the use of the strategy has expanded to a variety of offenders in different types of relationships arguing different defenses. In lively, readable prose, Westervelt examines each form of expansion, revealing that while the expansion of the strategy has been fairly extensive, it has also been limited in some important ways. Her research shows readers that only certain types of victims, particularly victims of physical abuse, have successfully used this defense. *Shifting the Blame* exposes the ways in which the acceptance of this new defense strategy illuminates a cultural shift in understandings of individual responsibility and shows how the law plays a role in defining who can be an acceptable victim. Sandra D. Westervelt is an assistant professor in the Sociology Department at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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