
Although Susan Stefan does not specifically identify a readership, it is clear that she intends her work to be used as a resource for advocating for people with mental disabilities. Thus, readers who would have the greatest interest in *Hollow Promises* and her companion volume, *Unequal Rights*, would include professional advocates such as lawyers and expert witnesses. Expert witnesses would include social workers, rehabilitation counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists who have specializations in physical and mental disabilities. Since Stefan writes with vividness, clarity, and practicality, persons with mental impairments and average intellectual ability will benefit greatly from this volume. In fact, I suspect that persons with mental disabilities would read Stefan’s work with the greatest intensity.

Although Stefan’s advocacy work is thoughtful and well described, this book is depressing. Her words best illustrate this point and provide an appropriate summary (page 195):

> The ADA [the Americans with Disabilities Act] failed to provide people with mental disabilities the kind of protection from discrimination that Congress envisioned. It has proven to be a hollow promise, and people with mental disabilities remain better off concealing their condition from employers and colleagues at work.

Her statement is accurate, but she still writes with an optimistic flair.

Stefan’s chapters present case law and provide the final disposition of each lawsuit. In fact, I see this monograph as a book of case studies followed by an interpretation and an advocacy statement. Unfortunately, the outcome for most of
the cases is quite dismal. Here is a good example of her vivid ability to present a case:

... Consider the case of a young man with mental retardation who had worked at Lucky Stores for 5 years and had been accustomed to asking whether he had enough money for his lunch. One day, he was told he was 27 cents short, but he took his salad to the parking lot and ate it anyway, whereupon he was promptly fired, apparently at the behest of a new manager. If his conduct were framed as stealing, the plaintiff would lose the case because theft is obviously not a manifestation of mental retardation. If his conduct were framed as failing to pay for a salad because of an inability to do the mathematics involved in comparing the cost of the salad to the money in his pocket, the plaintiff wins ... Stefan uses powerful language to describe her attitude toward the courts' understanding of the Americans with Disabilities Act in general and of mental disabilities in particular. Thus Stefan prepares the reader for the negative outcome. Sadly, she does not get inside the heads of the defense, the judge or the jury. As a result, the book rarely offers a basis for strategy-building to enhance an advocate's position to provide a positive outcome for the mentally disabled client.

Many of the case summaries include a Catch 22 element. That is, if an employee states he has a mental disability and requests accommodation, most frequently courts have supported the defendant and the employee has been fired. If the employee elects not to report a disability, no accommodations will be made. Based on the wide range of court decisions, Stefan concludes that employees are best protected by hiding their disability. Is there hope for change? Yes, we find hope in two divergent thoughts.

First, Stefan suggests that ADA mental illness cases can best be perceived as sexual harassment litigation of 20 years ago. Thanks to the work of lawyers like Alba Conte (author of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: Law and Practice; see The Journal of Psychiatry and Law 28:44, pages 735–738), the outcome of sexual-harassment litigation has greatly
changed in favor of the plaintiff. Thus, if mental-illness plaintiffs follow the same path as sexual-harassment plaintiffs, positive changes may ensue. Second, change that would most benefit persons with mental disabilities can emerge only from the hard work of lawyers and expert witnesses who provide convincing arguments to the judges. A necessary condition for convincing arguments can emerge only from in-depth knowledge of ADA and the intricacies and dynamics of mental disorders. Stefan’s work provides the spearhead for this effort. Generally speaking, lawyers who have represented plaintiffs with mental illnesses have demonstrated a lack of in-depth knowledge of mental illness. Yet energetic expert witnesses with specialties in a specific mental illness are readily available (see The Encyclopedia of Associations).

I can identify two weaknesses within the pages of this monograph. Because of her stylistic approach of being an advocate, Stefan’s work is not objective. With this lack of objectivity, the author does not provide the judge’s and the defendant’s viewpoints. An analysis of the thought processes of the defense and the judge is critically important for the plaintiff to win cases. For example, the work of Conte (Sexual Harassment in the Workplace) manifests this objective quality, which could be one reason for the advancement of sexual harassment litigation. Second, and less important, Stefan does not organize or provide a summary of the final dispositions from differing jurisdictions. I think organizing case commentaries in this manner would be of great assistance in strategizing for both the plaintiff’s lawyer and the expert witness.

Stefan’s volumes are critically important for lawyers and expert witnesses. Anyone involved with or concerned about ADA should read her work. In addition, academic libraries with degree-granting programs in social work, law, psychology, and rehabilitation, or any academic program whose graduates have the potential to become advocates or
expert witnesses, should have Stefan's work available. Last but perhaps most important, persons with mental disabilities should have access to her books. So major public libraries may want to purchase them for their collections.