BOOK REVIEWS


Reviewed by Patricia MacKenzie, University of Victoria

This short volume has value as a supplementary text to university level courses in social work, addiction studies, women’s studies, sociology and psychology. Written in a pleasing narrative style, this text compellingly recounts one woman’s experience with addiction, incarceration and community re-integration. This is done by blending verbatim excerpts from transcripts, statistical data, and academic commentary. It is Tammy’s voice (from the verbatim excerpts) that sets this volume apart from other, more academically grounded texts on the topic of women, addictions, sexual violence, and the criminal justice system. As the third book in Raphael’s trilogy about women’s experience with various types of marginalization, Freeing Tammy presents a powerful picture of the intersection of the personal with the political in matters related to women’s experiences with the legal system.

Although based on the experiences of one woman with the American justice system, the text claims (quite justifiably) to provide a universal message of how women may be victimized before, during, and after their experiences with the criminal justice system. The author acknowledges the inherent difficulty in doing this when she states, “I have tried to order and make sense of Tammy’s life without destroying its complexity; I hope in this way to make some contribution to a better understanding of the linkages between childhood sexual assault and domestic violence with women’s drug addiction and crime” (p. 5). In this ordering of Tammy’s life, Raphael interprets the various phases of Tammy’s journey and presents these phases in the 10 chapters of the book. While she may be criticized for taking license with the story and creating an provocative set of titles for each chapter, the overall effect is significant. The author weaves her own thoughts, observations, and research concerning women and the criminal justice system in the USA with Tammy’s story, thereby adding depth to the text. Raphael’s commentary is well supported by references to recent statistics and relevant literature.

The text makes a strong emotional impact and many parts of it are extremely challenging to read. The epilogue points out that Tammy’s survival and relative success at the end of the journey is more a matter of good fortune than the ability of anyone within the formal helping system to make a difference in her life. This is a very important message for those in these helping professions. Freeing Tammy would be a good choice for any college or university level program to include as a supplementary text.

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