

July 2019

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Recommended Citation

Stoneberg, Danielle M. (2019) "Book Review: Journeys: Resilience and Growth for Survivors of Intimate Partner Abuse by Susan L. Miller," *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence*: Vol. 4: Iss. 3, Article 4.

DOI: 10.23860/dignity.2019.04.03.04

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Keywords

intimate partner abuse, survivors, resilience, growth, domestic violence, abuse, victim, minority group, policy

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Acknowledgements

The author thanks Dr. Walter S. DeKeseredy, Anna Deane Carlson Endowed Chair of Social Sciences, Director of the Research Center on Violence, and Professor of Sociology, West Virginia University, USA; Dr. Joseph F. Donnermeyer, Professor Emeritus, School of Environment and Natural Resources, Ohio State University, USA; Dr. Rashi K. Shukla, Professor of Criminal Justice, University of Central Oklahoma, USA; Eric Gilbert; Kenzi Lockwood; Eric Gilbert; Kenzi Lockwood; and Gabrielle Lory for their comments on previous drafts of this book review.

**BOOK REVIEW: JOURNEYS: RESILIENCE AND GROWTH FOR
SURVIVORS OF INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE BY SUSAN L. MILLER**

University of California Press, Oakland, California, 304 pp (2018)

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KEYWORDS

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MUCH RESEARCH has been conducted on the short-term needs of intimate partner violence/abuse (IPV/A) survivors. However, there has been little focus on their long-term needs and the transformations they experience. In response, Susan L. Miller sheds light on the understudied world of the journeys of women who have survived such abuse years after they left the violent relationship. In contrast to previous research, Miller looks at resilience as a journey that occurs throughout a relationship and beyond its end. Her main goal is to examine how resilience emerges in these survivors and is subsequently maintained over time. She poignantly illustrates the resourcefulness and growth of the women despite the myriad of obstacles and challenges they face when moving beyond their abuse. She concludes with a critique of current policies and offers policy recommendations that can better support and assist victims/survivors.

Miller draws from interview data collected from thirty-one IPV/A survivors who were living violence-free lives at the time of the study. While there were variations in the length of their previous violent relationships and how long they had been out of them, all the women were away from abuse for at least five years. Miller was also able to gather data through participant observation at the monthly meetings of a survivors' organization. This multi-methods approach allowed her to see their tenacity and growth to make their victimization something that shaped their identities rather than being the focal point.

To understand the contexts of the survivors' journeys, Miller starts by framing the issues related to IPV/A, such as identity construction and trauma-informed responses. The women labeled themselves as they saw fit, and while they believed they were survivors now, they considered themselves as victims when they were in the violent relationships. Some women struggled with identifying as a victim because their abuse did not fit the idyll of the battered woman.

An important point of Miller's exploration of context is that women belonging to minority groups can have different experiences than their counterparts, which

is not taken into consideration with current policy. These experiences should be taken into consideration when developing policy and responses. This can be achieved through trauma-informed responses and survivor centered analyses to take into account the coping and survival skills and strategies deployed by survivors to maintain safety and survival of themselves and their children.

Miller's thoughtful detail sheds light on women's struggles when leaving a violent relationship, as well as how they grew into their own person post-separation. The reader becomes aware of how the women's resilience ebbs and flows over time as the women are growing and rebounding with obstacles and challenges they encounter. The abusers exploited vulnerabilities to exert power and control over the women and often left them with long-term consequences after exiting the relationship. The women experienced several difficulties and dangers when trying to leave the abusive relationships, such as threats from weapons, economic abuse, and risks for the safety of their children. Despite their limited autonomy, they became resourceful in a number of ways to remain safe and survive. All the while, they had to stay one step ahead of their abusers when preparing to leave. Escapes had to be planned and, in some cases, evidence was collected on the abusers.

The women's narratives show how support systems and social institutions can both help and hurt identities and independence. Before leaving, the women developed psychological readiness through books, professional assistance, support networks, and educational courses. This aided the women through validating their feelings, helping them understand that the victimization was not their fault, and informing them how trauma works. These networks and social institutions of empathy, support, and resources were essential to the women, not only in the short-term of exiting the violence, but long after as well. However, the networks that were meant to offer comfort and assistance did not always do so as some were unreliable or absent. Many women described feeling re-victimized by the criminal justice system. For example, many aspects of the court process were daunting and further compounded by lack of legal assistance and victim blaming attitudes of professionals from which they were seeking help.

Miller relies heavily on the stories told to her by those intimately affected to offer policy recommendations. Survivors were provided with assistance throughout their journeys, but they received less attention and fewer resources over time. Their stories seek to explain how their violent relationships began, the difficulties of trying to end those relationships, and the multiple pathways to survivorship for long-term IPV/A survivors. The narratives are a recognition of Miller's ability to gain the trust of the women, and in turn, their generosity with the knowledge of their trauma, long-term needs, and challenges they encounter when trying to be resilient. *Journeys: Resilience and Growth for Survivors of Intimate Partner Abuse* is a captivating and thought-provoking read, valuable to students, researchers, and policymakers, who will see how the current approaches are not enough to sufficiently aid survivors. As Miller suggests, we are better informed when we learn from the survivors because they are the experts of their situations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author thanks Dr. Walter S. DeKeseredy, Anna Deane Carlson Endowed Chair of Social Sciences, Director of the Research Center on Violence, and Professor of Sociology, West Virginia University, USA; Dr. Joseph F. Donnermeyer, Professor Emeritus, School of

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RECOMMENDED CITATION

Stoneberg, Danielle M. (2019). Book Review: *Journeys: Resilience and growth for survivors of intimate partner abuse*. *Dignity: A Journal of Sexual Exploitation and Violence*. Vol. 4, Issue 3, Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.23860/dignity.2019.04.03.04>
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