



The Face of Social Suffering: The Life History of a Street Drug Addict

Merrill Singer

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This brief, compelling life story of a drug addict poses and answers questions of broad public concern about social responsibility, illicit drug use, hidden economies, and social inequality. Merrill Singer, a medical anthropologist involved in the public health impact of alcohol and illicit drug use, conducted interviews over a seven-year period with Tony, a street drug addict who grew up in the inner city. Tony learned the ways of using and selling drugs from his father, became an enforcer in a street gang, spent considerable time in prison, committed seemingly heartless, violent acts, and has had to struggle with the knowledge that he suffers from HIV infection. Tony's life story is an insider, personal view of a tumultuous, marginalized world that intertwines closely with the wider social milieu constructed and sustained by the U.S. political economy. Unique to this book is its attempt to understand the forces that contribute to the risky behavior of drug use, even at a time when drug users know about its deadly and damaging connection to diseases like HIV and hepatitis. Tony's story demonstrates that none of us make choices in a vacuum. Further, the book addresses important issues about how structures of social inequality in our society impact the lives and options of those at the bottom of the social ladder.

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