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Book Review: Jolene M. Sanders. *Women in Narcotics Anonymous: Overcoming Shame and Stigma*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 126 pages. \$67.50 (hardcover), ISBN 978-137-44069-3

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Having recently celebrated its 60th anniversary, Narcotics Anonymous (NA) is distinguished among recovery mutual aid societies by its longevity, growth and international dispersion (More than 63,000 meetings in 129 countries), cultural diversification of its membership, its unique conceptualization of the addiction and the recovery processes, and its distinctive culture of recovery (White, Budnick & Pickard, 2011, 2013). For years, references to “12-Step Programs” implicitly assumed that knowledge gained from studies of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) could be indiscriminately applied to NA and other organizations who adapted AA’s Twelve Steps to other addictions and problems of living. More recently, historians and scientists have focused on studying NA in its own right on the assumption that, while greatly influenced by AA, NA has evolved a distinctive set of ideas and practices within its framework of long-term addiction recovery (see White, Budnick & Pickard, 2014). The work of Marc Galanter and colleagues (2013a, 2013b) and Jolene Sanders (2011, 2012) are particularly noteworthy in this emerging scientific study of NA.

Jolene Sanders has made significant contributions to the study of women in AA

(2009, 2010), and she has recently turned her attention to the experience of women in NA (2011, 2012). Her latest contribution, *Women in Narcotics Anonymous* (2014), represents an important milestone in the study of NA and the larger study of addiction recovery among women. The book consists of seven 12-20-page, well-constructed, and well-written chapters that summarize the findings of a survey of 92 women attending women-only and mixed-sex NA meetings in a Mid-Atlantic urban community. The focal points within the findings include the multiplicity of co-occurring challenges facing women as they enter NA, the personal and environmental obstacles to their recovery, stigma and shame as dominating experiential motifs, the healing culture of women’s NA meetings, and how women in NA work the Twelve Steps. The final chapter frames recovery for women in NA as a process through which working the Steps facilitates personal healing and empowerment—a “practical feminism” that leads to self-acceptance and transcendence of stigma and shame.

Women in Narcotics Anonymous will find a most appreciative audience among addiction professionals and other helping

professionals working with addicted women and their families. There is a long history of feminist critiques of 12-Step programs, with many such critiques suggesting that the core ideas and actions imbedded within the Steps represent a process of further disempowerment for women. *Women in Narcotics Anonymous* is important within this history in moving from a critique of ideas to the actual experience of women using this framework of addiction recovery. What is revealing is how women within NA have forged a gendered recovery program that is personally empowering and liberating. There is much within this collective experience reported in this book that sheds light on how addiction treatment and other recovery support organizations can more effectively address the needs of addicted women and their families.

Here's how Sanders concludes *Women in Narcotics Anonymous*:

The active reconstitution of self by a severely marginalized group of women who grew their own recovery environment within NA represents a legitimate form of empowerment for feminists to celebrate. The implicit feminist project of producing gendered space within NA along with the spiritual approach at the core of NA.

Women in Narcotics Anonymous is highly recommended for anyone wanting a deeper understanding of addiction recovery among women and a deeper understanding of Narcotics Anonymous.

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