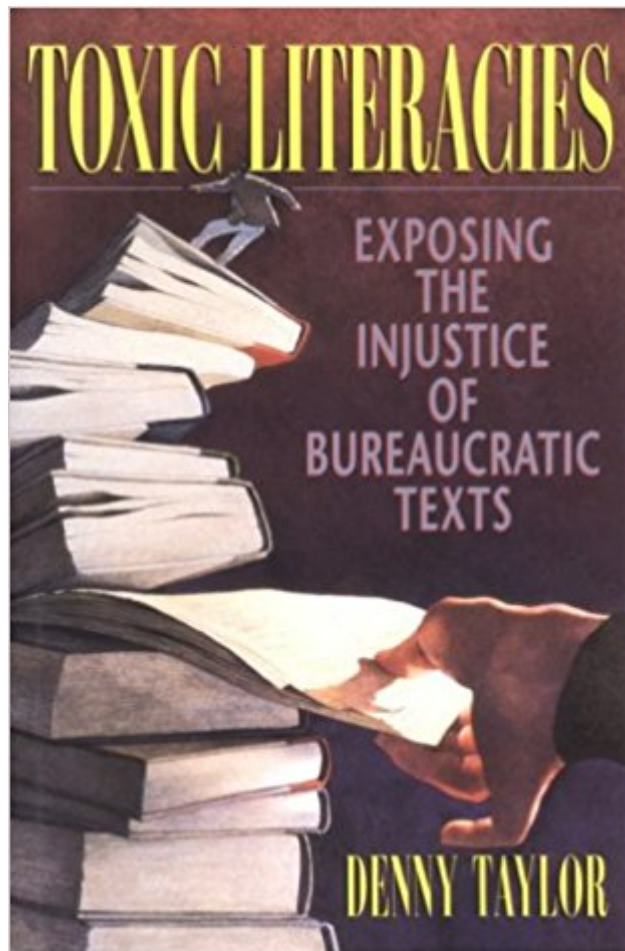




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# Toxic Literacies: Exposing The Injustice Of Bureaucratic Texts



## Synopsis

"Official documentation" hides human rights violations in this country. Men, women, and children are incapacitated by legally sanctioned discriminatory practices that occur through the use of bureaucratic texts such as laws, court transcripts, medical reports, insurance policies, and work orders. Based on a six-year ethnographic study, *Toxic Literacies* tells the story of: Cindy, who spent years in prison for the possession of one gram of heroin Sam, who spent six years on the streets and could not get help from any official agency Laurie, who at twenty-five had cervical cancer and was crippled by radiation because it was cheaper than surgery Kathryn, who, addicted to crack cocaine, pregnant, and living on the streets, was told she could not have any housing assistance until her baby was born. Bureaucratic texts control the lives of men and women-Cindy, Sam, Laurie, Kathryn, people we pass on the street every day-living on the margins of American society. In *Toxic Literacies*, Denny Taylor explains how we allow this to happen and makes a compelling case for it to stop.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Drawing on her fieldwork with the poor, Taylor (Family Literacy), who divides her time between Massachusetts and Arizona, investigates the lives of people who have been marginalized by a social service system that labels them as dysfunctional, lazy or illiterate, then denies them crucial services. The core of this disturbing expose consists of dramatic case histories. Cindy, severely beaten as a child by parents who gave her alcohol and drugs, uses heroin and prescription drugs to obliterate the trauma of abuse. She was sentenced to seven years in prison for possession of one

gram of heroin; her probation officer accused her of bringing toxic waste into the community. Sam, a homeless alcoholic portrayed in official documents as a hopeless case, was denied medical assistance, emergency housing, welfare and disability benefits; he was turned away by prospective employers because of injuries he had sustained while working. Kathryn, a pregnant, homeless recovering alcoholic and crack cocaine addict with a two-year-old daughter, is told she will not receive housing assistance until her baby is born. Reproducing official texts?forms, questionnaires, regulations, work orders, psychiatrists' reports, memorandums?which pigeonhole the often illiterate subjects, Taylor charges that these unfortunates are victims of bureaucratically sanctioned human rights violations. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Powerfully written, *Toxic Literacies* is an important, timely book about the ways the welfare system, the criminal justice system, the health care system, and other bureaucracies use official texts to control our lives. During six years of working closely with men and women living in the margins of society, Denny Taylor learned how official documentation is repeatedly used to hide human rights violations in this country. It's all in the record. Men, women, and children are incapacitated by bureaucratic texts. There is a form for every situation. On paper every official action can be justified.

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