

Book Reviews

Alan R. Rosenberg, Editor

AGAINST OUR WILL: MEN, WOMEN AND RAPE. By Susan Brownmiller. Simon and Schuster. Pp. 472. 1975. \$10.95.

Susan Brownmiller deserves high praise for undertaking the monumental task of tracing the historical background of rape from Biblical times, through the World Wars, Bangladesh, and Vietnam, to the present. Brownmiller describes some interesting concepts about rape in wartime, including its use as an act of revenge, a way of demoralizing the husbands on the front, an extension of the plunder of the enemy's property, and a propaganda tool. The author seems outraged at the stories of rape in war; since death is a part of war, however, it should be no surprise that wanton rape is also. Can there really be "honor" in war?

The conclusion that rape is grossly underreported seems to be well established by the statistics presented; but in spite of the author's attempt "to avoid redundancy and overkill" (p. 99), the first 173 pages seem to involve just those things.

The next section of the book moves on to the more conventional description of the "police - blotter rapist" and related statistics. The analysis of rape through an understanding of the "subculture of violence" is well done. A valid point is made that rape and the way it is viewed by society represent a continuing historic injustice to women.

The statements "That some men rape provides a sufficient threat to keep all women in a constant state of intimidation" (p. 209) and "men who commit rape have served in effect as front-line masculine shock troops" (p. 209) may be true, but there does not seem to be adequate evidence in the manuscript to substantiate them.

The description of the attitude of whites toward blacks in the slaveholding South prior to emancipation seems accurate. As the discussion of interracial rape is brought up to the twentieth century and expanded beyond the borders of the United States, the point is well taken that it is not so much the color of the participants that is at issue as it is men's views of women.

Brownmiller goes on to discuss rape in relation to power. "They [rapists] operate within an institutionalized setting that works to their real advantage and in which a victim has little chance to redress her grievance" (p. 256). This view is well supported in the book. Contrariwise, the suggestion that rape is an institutional conspiracy against women is inadequately supported by the evidence.

In the latter part of the book, Brownmiller mentions the writings of John Updike, Ayn Rand, Sigmund Freud, Helene Deutsch, and Karen Horney, but touches on each only briefly.

Overall, the book is well worth reading. The writing style makes reading easy and the organization of the material is good. One must be cautious in separating out those

conclusions which are supported by convincing data and those which are soapbox oratory. The author would have us believe that rape is a conspiracy of all men using their vast institutional and authoritarian power structures to keep all women subjugated and subordinated. That this polemic is not supported by the evidence presented does not negate the documentary and creative value of the book.

MICHAEL K. SPODAK, M.D.
Baltimore, Maryland

THE DEADLY INNOCENCE: PORTRAITS OF CHILDREN WHO KILL. By Muriel Gardiner. Basic Books Inc. Pp. 190. 1976. \$8.95.

This is a book about children, their families and the society in which they live. What makes these children different from others living and brought up amid multi-generational social, economic, and psychobiological problems is that they have somehow crossed that invisible line that separates most, if not truly all of us who harbor fantasies of murder, from those who actually carry it out.

Muriel Gardiner tells us the stories of ten children. They are not, as Stephen Spender says in the introduction, just case studies. In an easy-to-read narrative style the author quickly puts the reader into the child's life. Subsequently, he finds himself growing up alongside the child, his family and the society around them. Through the author's obvious deep compassion for people and lack of need to blame or assign cause, the reader will find himself in tune with the child's and family's emotions and feelings of love, hate, rejection and frustration, as well as the social pressures enveloping all of them. As these mini-dramas unfold, one senses the ever-increasing inner psychological and emotional pressures created in each of the individuals and with it the terrible sense that the options for solving the dilemmas are narrowing. Then, the irrevocable moment occurs — murder is committed. The lingering tragedy implied so vividly by their earlier lives has fully flowered.

Dr. Gardiner makes no claim that she can explain why these children have committed murder. She fully understands the intricate admixture of biology, psychodynamics, social forces and even chance in the lives of people. She faithfully reports all of the facts available. While she herself is a psychoanalyst, Dr. Gardiner resists the temptation of equating psychoanalytic interpretation with causality or etiology. It is almost as if she were saying to the reader, "Let me tell you a story of some children I have known. Help me to understand how and why these lives came to this point."

This book will make splendid reading even for those mental health, social science and legal-correctional professionals who might feel they have heard all this before. Dr. Gardiner's stories will jolt the reader to a level of "hearing" that perhaps he had never before attained. I can easily see a wider readership than that mentioned above. So engaging and humanistically written, this book would make excellent reading for high school and college students in whose hands will lie some of the future solutions to violence, social deprivation, pervasive psychological handicaps and criminal justice inequities.

ALAN M. LEVY, M.D.
Chief, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
Beth Israel Medical Center

ADOLESCENT SUICIDE. By Jerry Jacobs. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Pp. 160. 1971. \$9.95.

The literature on suicide has become so vast that important contributions are in danger of being lost, at least temporarily, in the deluge. This is especially true if the contribution is not strikingly counter-intuitive, is unsuccessfully articulated, or is