

Book Reviews

THE BATTERED WOMAN. By Lenore E. Walker. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980. Paperback, 259 pp. \$4.95.

Reviewed by Melvin G. Goldzband, MD

In her introduction the author states, "sexism is the real underbelly of human suffering. Men fight with other men to prove that they are not 'sissies' like women. Women show passive faces to the world while struggling to keep their lives together without letting men know how strong they really are for fear of hurting men's masculine image. And men beat up women in order to remain on top of this whole messy heap. Little girls and little boys learn these sex role expectations through early socialization. Unless we strive for equal power relationships between men and women, women will continue to be victims of the kinds of assaults I share with you in this book."

Share she does, but one gets the impression the sharing may be quite superficial and possibly selective. The fragments of stories printed are certainly not in depth, and Walker's premises are simply not demonstrated by them. For example, she describes masochism as a myth, a manifestation of sexist bias against women. She seems not to have heard of it in men. In her stories, she recounts example after example of situations that can only be described as sadomasochistic.

Walker describes the "cycle theory of violence," in which three phases predominate. This is a good, working overview of the *process* of wifebeating, but it does not indicate any but the most superficial motivational dynamics for either party. In her theory, she describes a buildup of tension in the first phase, with the explosion and assault occurring as the second phase. The third phase is that of reconciliation, with promises of more love and better relationships. Walker rationalizes with her victims that many wives go through phases one and two in order to achieve phase three. Although the necessity of repeatedly going through hell to reach bliss seems to represent potential psychopathology, this issue is not addressed as possibly representing disturbance. Instead a syndrome of "learned helplessness" is propounded wherein the women feel less and less able to get out from under their abusive relationships.

All of Walker's material is anecdotal. No statistical data are offered. Nothing allows the presence of any viewpoint other than that of the author, and she has generally ignored other work done in the field of family violence. Most damaging to Walker's thesis, nothing allows the reader to understand why these women developed "learned helplessness" as adults. There are only pejorative allusions to concepts such as dependence or passivity.

The "battered woman's syndrome" has recently been developed as a

defense — with considerable publicity — in murder trials throughout the country. The author, a psychology professor, has appeared more than fifty times as an expert witness in such trials. Battered women go through hell. They deserve better than what they get from their mates. They also deserve better than the superficial pop psychology they get from Professor Walker. □

CONSULTING IN CHILD CUSTODY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE UGLIEST LITIGATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS.
By Melvin G. Goldzband. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1982. xiii + 183 pages. ISBN #0-669-05246-9.

Reviewed by Diane H. Schetky, MD

Goldzband sets out to provide guidelines for mental health professionals participating in child custody proceedings and to allay their anxieties about the legal arena. He makes a plea for our involvement reminding us that "these dreadful cases become more dreadful the more we stay away from them." The book covers the legal framework for child custody decisions and provides badly needed ethical guidelines for participation in these cases. The need for clear communication with attorneys, use of ancillary information, separation of treatment from evaluation, importance of demanding sufficient time in which to arrive at recommendations, and the value of knowing one's judges are all underscored. A transcript of a mock trial is included with footnotes that provide humorous insights into commonly used tactics of attorneys.

The clinical material presented in this book is excellent, however, I cannot say it alleviated my anxiety about participating in these cases. If anything, it made me more aware than ever of the potential pitfalls of custody cases and how our biases and subjective feelings may affect our position in court. Perhaps a modicum of anxiety is necessary to guard us against cockiness and the conviction of the accuracy of our findings.

Goldzband's style is succinct, candid, and very readable. My one complaint is that he is often too succinct. For instance, he makes only brief reference to the written report determining the child's preference and how much weight to give to it, and to countertransference phenomena. Each of these important areas could use further elaboration. The references cited are also skimpy. A minor irritation was his repeated reference to a woman physician he'd examined in a custody case as a "girl." One wonders if this represented unchecked countertransference.

In summary, this is a slim but very practical and provocative book that I would highly recommend to anyone involved in forensic psychiatry. □