

UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL ATTACKS. By D. J. West, C. Roy and F. L. Nichol. Heineman Educational Books, Exeter, N.H. Pp. 178. 1978. \$25.95.

Because of the misleading title of this book (as well as the merely suggestive value of its contents), it is with mixed feelings that I introduce it to the readers of this periodical. It is misleading because the title implies a study of the ordinary range of sexual offenders — homophiliac and heterophiliac types who commit a widely varying assortment of offenses ranging from exhibitionism to violent crimes against children. Actually the study is limited to only males of adult years who committed aggressive sexual assaults constituting legal rape on minors under 16 years of age.

The authors make no pretense at presenting rigorous epidemiologic data, but, without a comprehensive survey of the literature or reference to any control group, they simply and eloquently summarize the group therapy narrative accounts of these unhappy conflict-driven rapists. Some of these showed the aggressive, antisocial and criminal habits of sociopaths. Others seemed to be predominantly neurotic.

The therapeutic task for these patients was twofold: to achieve greater understanding through discussing intimate details of life experiences such as childhood lacks and traumas as well as sexual history, including sexual violence; and secondly, to learn to cope with immediate realities in a responsible and disciplined way. Since there was no provision for follow-up there was no way to evaluate success. The narrative accounts emphasize the profound feelings of inadequacy and impotence that tend to characterize these men and show the compensatory nature of their irrational, compulsive behavior both in the degrading cruel sexual assaults on young girls, as well as the high level of aggression in their life style — fast, reckless living, excessive drinking, excessive debts, sexual promiscuity and preoccupation with pornographic materials and fantasy. Most of the men were married, some several times, and all had tense, poor relationships with their wives. There is insufficient data to differentiate the rapists from a similar group with the same characteristics who have never even attempted a sexual offense of any kind.

The book suggests a compassionate portrait of a horrifying and violent part of our society, with a cautious hope for rehabilitation of a carefully selected segment of this group, but inadequate data either to explain or to lend substance to any hope.

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