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William G. Wagner
Department of Psychology
The University of Southern Mississippi
Box 5025, Hattiesburg, MS 39406, USA

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The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics. Lundy Bancroft and Jay G. Silverman; Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, 2002, 240 pp.

The impact on children of domestic violence is receiving increased attention. This slim volume by Lundy Bancroft and Jay Silverman should be read by every professional who deals with domestic violence. Bancroft and Silverman are uniquely qualified to write on this subject. They have worked clinically with more than 1,000 abusive men, and have consulted on another 1,000 batterers. As an adjunct to their work with batterers, Bancroft and Silverman interview many battered women. In preparing their book, Bancroft and Silverman drew on the relevant scientific literature as well as their wealth of clinical experience. The book is well written and can be digested in a weekend.

Chapter 1 defines a batterer “as a person who exercises a pattern of coercive control in a partner relationship, punctuated by one or more acts of intimidating physical violence, sexual assault, or credible threat of physical violence.” (p. 3). Bancroft and Silverman provide valuable insights into the thinking and conduct of batterers, writing that “the overarching *behavioral* characteristic of the batterer is the imposition of a pattern of control over his partner. . . . The overarching *attitudinal* characteristic of batterers is entitlement.” (pp. 5, 7). Batterers believe their partners and their children are their property. Family life should revolve around them. Batterers often confuse abuse with love. “Many of our clients see their abusiveness as actually proving their love.” (p. 13). Batterers are selfish, self-centered, and manipulative. They are extremely accomplished liars. Most batterers come across well in public, and they routinely pull the wool over the eyes of professionals.

Under the heading “Misconceptions About Batterers,” Bancroft and Silverman write that substance abuse does not cause domestic violence. Although some batterers benefit from substance abuse treatment, “certain concepts that batterers learn in 12-step programs sometimes become new weapons integrated into their systems of verbal abuse, such as accusing a partner of ‘being in denial’ about their own problems or labeling her ‘codependent.’ ” (p. 20). Bancroft and Silverman write that very few batterers are mentally ill, and traditional psychotherapy is seldom effective. Batterers typically appear “normal” on psychological tests, and no test can detect a batterer. Few batterers are sociopaths.

Two of the most powerful truths revealed by this book are, first, batterers abuse on purpose. They know what they are doing, and they do it intentionally. Second, many abusers are simply bad. They are not

sick. They are not depressed. They are not addicted. They are bad. They deserve neither sympathy nor tolerance. They are not to be trusted, and they require confrontation, not empathy.

Chapter 2 describes the parenting styles of batterers. Bancroft and Silverman write that “Batterers tend to be under-involved and neglectful parents. . . . They demonstrate a limited ability to accept feedback or criticism from family members or to make the kinds of adjustments in parenting decisions that responsible parents are frequently called on to make in order to effectively meet the needs of the children.” (pp. 30, 32). Most batterers are rigid, authoritarian disciplinarians, and because they use intimidation and violence to enforce their rules, they often cross the line from punishment to child abuse. Children of batterers are at increased risk of physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect.

Batterers not only beat their partners, they belittle and denigrate them. Children watch and learn. Bancroft and Silverman write that “among the most common complaints from partners of our clients regarding the batterer’s impact on the family is that the children mimic the batterer’s precise treatment of her. The children may also absorb from the batterer the message that physical violence toward the mother is acceptable, as long as the provocation is deemed adequate. Many teenage and preteen children of battered women assault them physically, particularly boys, illustrating how potent this modeling behavior can be.” (p. 34).

Chapter 3 describes the pervasive impact of a batterer’s conduct on his family. Batterers undermine the mother’s parental capacity and authority, and this undermining often continues after a couple separates. In custody battles, batterers enlist the children as weapons against the mother. “It is common for batterers to threaten to take the children away from the battered woman by proving her to be an unfit mother.” (p. 76).

Chapter 4 is devoted to batterers as incest perpetrators.

The first four chapters lay the foundation for Chapters 5–9, which deal at length with the batterer as a litigant in custody and visitation disputes in family court. These chapters constitute an enormously important contribution to our understanding of the unfair tactics employed by batterers in family court custody proceedings. Bancroft and Silverman write that “batterers seek custody more frequently than do non-battering fathers and can have important advantages over battered women in custody litigation.” (p. 98). Recall that batterers are two-faced. They expose one persona in public and another at home. Child custody evaluators and other professionals involved in custody litigation are often fooled by batterers. Bancroft and Silverman write that “batterers can sometimes exhibit their most charming and humorous behaviors while being observed and thereby elicit a happy, enthusiastic response from their children, who may be hungry for this quality of interaction with their father. Thus, evaluators should be cautious not to overinterpret children’s positive reactions to their battering fathers under supervision.” (p. 37). Batterers know that in custody litigation it can help to be unscrupulous.

Among the reasons batterers seek custody are a desire to retaliate against a spouse who dared challenge the batterer’s authority by ending the relationship, a desire for revenge, a desire for vindication through a court ruling awarding custody to the batterer, a desire to avoid paying child support, and a desire to force the woman to return. Many batterers have distorted views of themselves and their partners. Bancroft and Silverman write that “we find it nearly universal among batterers to have little sense of the seriousness of their own abusiveness and of its effects on their children.” (p. 114). As well, batterers hold low opinions of their partners. Thus, some batterers genuinely believe they are the better parent.

Bancroft and Silverman outline batterers’ advantages in custody litigation. First, “there is a general reluctance among family courts in the United States and abroad to consider a man’s battering as a reflection on his parenting or as a factor in determining custody.” (p. 115). Second, the effects of domestic violence

can place the woman at a disadvantage. Batterers often systematically undermine their partner's authority over children. In addition, chronic domestic violence takes a toll on women. "Custody evaluators may observe that the mother has trouble controlling her children and may conclude that she lacks parenting skills. At the same time, batterers often can perform well under observation, and children may appear relaxed and comfortable with the batterer in the presence of the evaluator. Children often behave better in the batterer's care, partly because of conscious or unconscious fear of him." (p. 116). Third, the batterer may manipulate what the children say to custody evaluators or the judge. Although such coaching is improper, remember that many batterers are bad men. They'll do what it takes to win, ethics and fairness be damned. Fourth, in many families, the batterer has a distinct economic advantage. It is common for batterers to use protracted litigation to send former partners to the poor house. Fifth, the poor quality of custody evaluations often redound to the benefit of batterers. Bancroft and Silverman write that "we find the overall quality of custody evaluation to be of concern. . . . Evaluators often do not grasp the basic dynamics of domestic violence. . . . Evaluators can be heavily influenced by their personal experience of the alleged batterer, can allow themselves to be manipulated by him, and can allow their concern for the hurt feelings that he expresses to override concern regarding the available evidence of his abusiveness. Evaluators regularly fail to investigate allegations of abuse, dismissing them on the basis of their impressions of the parties or of psychological test results." (p. 119).

Chapter 7 contains a detailed "guide to assessing risk to children from batterers." Chapter 8 offers insights into whether batterers' claims that they have reformed are real. Chapter 9 synthesizes earlier material and makes suggestions to improve the response to domestic violence that impacts children.

This short review can do little more than scratch the surface of the insights collected in this important book. I strongly urge you to study this volume cover to cover.

John E.B. Myers

McGeorge School of Law, University of the Pacific
3200 5th Avenue, Sacramento, CA 95817, USA

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Blanche Neige, les sept nains . . . et autres maltraitances: La croissance empêchée. Danielle Rapoport et Anne Roubergue-Schlumberger. Collection "Naître, grandir, devenir," Editions Belin, 2003, 239 pp.

C'est sans doute par l'intermédiaire de ses chefs d'oeuvre que Walt Disney a pu en partie résoudre les séquelles que tout enfant maltraité doit gérer dans sa vie d'adulte et apparaître ainsi comme un exemple de résilience.

Les auteurs de ce livre «Blanche-Neige, les sept nains . . . et autres maltraitances» se sont inspiré du conte pour présenter l'histoire de sept enfants auxquels s'ajoute une huitième petite fille, présentant des troubles de croissance, reçus dans une consultation hospitalière à Paris. C'est donc à partir de leur expérience de Médecin Pédiatre et Psychologue oeuvrant dans cette équipe pluridisciplinaire de protection de l'enfance, que A. Roubergue et D. Rapoport ont écrit ce livre.

Le point commun de ces enfants est d'être "des petits nains transitoires." Les auteurs s'attachent à attirer l'attention sur les effets redoutables, en terme de développement physique, intellectuel et émotionnel provoqués par les carences affectives et éducatives et les négligences, et présentent à travers l'histoire singulière de chacun de ces enfants les réponses qui ont été proposées.