

Book Reviews

Canadian Journal of Family and Youth, 7(1), 2015, pp 195-198
ISSN 1718-9748 © University of Alberta
<http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index/php/cjfy>

Langton, Jerry. 2008. Rage: The True Story of Sibling Murder. North York: John Wiley & Sons

Reviewed by: Reiss Kruger, MacEwan University

In his book Rage: The True Story of Sibling Murder, Jerry Langton covers a range of topics relating to the events of November, 2003 in Toronto Ontario. With it not being an academic paper, nor any kind of argumentative work, Mr. Langton needed only to describe the events and expand upon details as they presented themselves. Given the nature of the brutal and senseless murder of a 12 year old boy by his 16 year old brother, the book – almost by necessity – turned into an exposé on the topics of psychopathy, sociopathy, and alienation/acceptance amongst young people.¹

The fact that this book was not written in an academic style is both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, the book is incredibly accessible, with the usual jargon-laden walls of dense text that typify academic works being notably absent in this work. On the other hand, it has enough literary flourish to keep one interested until the book has been fully read. Mr. Langton's book also contains chapters that lay a foundation of knowledge for those who do not happen to be experts in the subject of the Goth subculture. This adds to the accessibility of his book, as one does not need any tangible prior knowledge to read and understand the event as he has recorded it.

This accessibility, however, can also be seen as a weakness, particularly for those who have acquired some level of knowledge about the subculture. These readers might find the book

¹ It should be noted that many of the names within the book have been changed due to the Youth Criminal Justice Act and as such, I have no capacity to reference the true names of those involved and will stick to the pseudonyms presented by Mr. Langton.

unsatisfying in its level of detailed subject matter. For example, someone who knows nothing about the Goth subculture might be fascinated by Mr. Langton's brief summary of the evolution of said community, whereas someone who has any level of working knowledge about the Goth community might find that his summary adds nothing to their understanding. While this is a problem that is on the reader, not the author; the author can only add certain information to cover as many audience-bases as possible before alienating a larger audience.

General format issues aside, Mr. Langton's chapter about the origins of the Goth community (pp. 31-65) seems to be a segue bordering on the unnecessary. While it is useful to briefly go over the ancient origin of the word 'Goth', the Ostrogoths and Visigoths and other ancient Goth clans (pp. 31-41) are so far removed from the modern day Goth community (as Mr. Langton clearly explains) that much of it seems like filler. Another difficulty with Mr. Langton's writing style is the manner in which he takes issue with real or perceived logical flaws. His criticisms sometimes border on *ignoratio elenchi*; *non sequitur*, or more specifically a straw man fallacy. For example, his undermining of the Goths that he interviewed (pp. 61-63) by recording his criticisms in the book and not in the actual interview (allowing for rebuttle/correction) is problematic.

Mr. Langton does a better job when he deals with the forces that were exerted on the children involved in this horrific event. By cataloguing the interpersonal events leading up to the murder, and the personalities involved (pp. 1-30), Langton gives us an appreciable insight into all the factors involved in this complicated social event. Of particular interest to those of a more academic bent, he makes a well-informed distinction (backed up by classic examples) between psychopaths and sociopaths (p. 81). By using the illustrative examples of Seung-Hui Cho (as an archetypal sociopath) and Ted Bundy (as an archetypal psychopath), Langton clearly

Book Reviews

differentiates the two and makes it clear to readers who have not been educated in the topics of personality and behavioural disorders (pp. 82-91).

It is in this explanation of the differences between the two that Langton makes a very clear distinction “of what differentiates a psychopath from a sociopath—his or her ability to mimic the outward signs of being a caring person” (p. 91). These and other easily understood distinctions are points deserving of praise, as Langton astutely translates what might otherwise be complicated academic jargon into intelligible – and still accurate – laymen’s terms. He also draws attention to the important program developed by Robert Hare and then rejected by the Canadian government because of a political ‘priority shift’. The program was “based on appealing to the psychopath’s all-important sense of self-interest—as in, look what your actions have done, they’ve gotten you in jail, so it must have been the wrong plan” (p. 93). This gives the audience access to alternatives to the way many political systems approach mental health (by deviantizing it but not putting any effort into mitigating damages to and from vulnerable/at risk populations).

Langton also highlights in his book the generation gap caused by the advent of technologies such as the internet, and how these gaps in understanding can cause potentially devastating results, such as during the trial when the simple Google searches of a young journalist drastically effected the proceedings (pp. 126-134). This, when taken in light of the girls involved knowing that the police tend not to believe children without hard evidence (p. 16) shows what I shall call an ‘one-way upwards understanding’ between generations. By this, I mean that the younger generation seems to have an easier time in understanding the social context within which older generations lived and thus how they act and view the world. This relationship does not appear to be reciprocal, as is shown with the multiple examples of judges

Book Reviews

and politicians who didn't understand what the internet was, let alone its value (pp. 163-4). This raises interesting questions worthy of further sociological study.

Throughout his book, Jerry Langton explores the subject matter to a degree not available in most standard print media, and for that he should be applauded. In touching upon subject matter often left out of most news - such as psychopathy, teen alienation, and generational gaps in understanding - in ways that don't simply alienate or 'Other' the reader from the subject matter - or vice versa - Langton introduces a wide audience to many important issues of our time in an easily accessible way. Although he at times strays from the path of pertinent information, this can be forgiven as his main target is not an academic audience, and by bridging the gap between academic and non-academic audiences he helps dispel ignorance around very serious issues. I would recommend this book to family and friends - both academic and not - in equal measure, and I take this as a sign of a good book.