

BOOK REVIEWS

FACE TO FACE TO FACE: AN EXPERIMENT IN INTIMACY. Edited by Gordon Clanton and Chris Downing. New York: Dutton, 1975. \$7.95.

Reviewer: ROBERT BLOOD, *University of Michigan*

Face to Face to Face is an account of a group marriage of one man and two women who lived together for a period of six months. The triad was composed of a couple who had been married for four years and a newcomer who entered their preexisting household and whose departure left that household intact. The book consists chiefly of the diaries of the three participants, to which the editors have appended their own commentaries. In addition to portraying the complexities involved in transforming a dyad into a triad and back again, the book portrays the effect on the triad of the affectional and sexual involvements in which each of the three participated with outsiders during the course of the group marriage. The book therefore represents a case study both in the dynamics of group marriage and the dynamics of external involvement and the compound interrelationships of these two sets of dynamics.

Although all three participants were ideologically committed to sexual sharing, all three experienced feelings of jealousy toward each of their partners. All three were ideologically committed to openness to outside sexual relationships, but the expectations were unclear. This uncertainty of personnel and program left all

three participants more prone to react jealously when they found themselves left out of such activities. The intensity of the commitment to the triadic household presumably magnified the sense of disloyalty to the group when individual members of the household turned their energies elsewhere.

The journals present a detailed picture of the downs as well as the ups of living together. Conflicts were compounded by the complexities of three-way communication. Flaws in the communication process were highlighted by the multilateral ramifications of communication failures. Living together was an intense learning experience for all three participants, but when the learner is handicapped by emotional blocks or is not fully aware of what is happening in interpersonal processes, learning suffers. Early in the experience, one of the participants remarked that having a third person in the household provides a built-in marriage counselor. One of the troubles with a live-in marriage counselor is that s/he may offer her/his services unasked and unwanted so that this becomes a further source of friction. In this group, it was the man who most often pressured the others into "growing." The women each felt needs for privacy and breathing space in the face of his pressure and the intensity of group living.

As troubles within the group marriage developed, it became apparent to all three participants that their busy schedules prevented them from having the time to cope adequately with problems. Living together with unresolved conflicts became an accelerating cause of tension and a psychological burden. Much of the time the tone was heavy and serious, rather than light-hearted and joyous. Group marriages are often compared with marathon encounter groups in their seriousness and intensity. Encounter groups ordinarily have a built-in ending date and are apt to end with feelings of nostalgia at "having" to part. Group marriages, like ordinary marriages, end only in divorce, which is almost always a painful process.

In an epilogue, the editors record about the next three years' experience after the end of the group marriage. The "other woman" entered into a cohabiting arrangement with another man and felt that with growing maturity she might be more ready to experience another group marriage in the future. The primary couple, after several years, gradually evolved into another triad

as a woman boarder/employee became sexually and affectionally involved with both husband and wife. The development of this new triadic relationship was less programmed, more natural, and more viable than the first experiment. The first round started because the other woman needed a place to live and the established couple invited her to join them. The second experiment evolved out of the experience of sharing the same house, resembling the way ordinary marriages evolve from simple friendships and association toward increased involvement and commitment. The auspicious nature of this second experiment suggests that Clanton and Downing might publish a sequel to *Face to Face to Face* reporting the history of this second experiment and comparing it with the first. In any case, their book is an invaluable contribution to the literature because of its detailed picture of the complexities of interaction when three people choose to live together as marriage partners.

ALTERNATIVE LIFE STYLES. By Herb Seal. Printed in Hamilton, New Zealand, 1975. Distributed through Family Synergy, P.O. Box 30103, Terminal Annex, L.A. Cal. 90030. \$9.25.

Reviewer: ROGER W. LIBBY, *University of New Hampshire*

Herb Seal is a pioneering experiential social psychologist who has sought out experiments in intimacy through various group-living arrangements. These lifestyles are dealt with in depth from Seal's personal experiences while living with or visiting 72 communes. Seal "scales" alternative lifestyle interactional processes based on degrees of commitment (p. 2), beginning with the autonomous individual who is defined as freewheeling and noninvolved (an "ideal type" which admittedly fits very few) to group marriage, which is seen as three or more persons who consider themselves married to each other. There is a need for further explication of this scale, as no theoretical basis for the scale is offered. "Autonomous" people are confused with those who at times cohabit, and distinctions between points on the Likert Scale (e.g., between an autonomous person and a divorced person) are not clear. Subcategories of divorced people with and without children would have helped clarify such lifestyle differences.

The strengths of the book include Seal's fascinating personal insights and case studies of various group-living situations. He often is explicit about the process of development, change, and at times the dissolution of particular communes or other alternatives. His typology of various kinds of communes is especially informative. Most of the book reads like a personal diary or journal, and yet the volume is well documented up to about late 1972 (including a bibliography), when the book was completed. A major shortcoming is that the book is already dated in terms of emerging alternative lifestyles. Justice is not done to singlehood, cohabitation, sexually open marriage, compartmentalized marriage, and various homosexual and bisexual lifestyles.

Yet Seal's emphasis on communes is not misplaced, as we are likely to see a rebirth of communes and other expanded families, which will include group marriages. The emergence of *Communities: A Journal of Cooperative Living*, this journal, and a plethora of alternative lifestyle groups not in existence when Seal listed such groups in an appendix make this reviewer suspect that economic, housing, intimacy, and child-rearing needs (among other reasons) will support a trend to increased experiments in group living. Other trends are even more pronounced now than at the time of writing: later age of marriage, higher divorce rates, increased proportions of singles, the Women's Liberation Movement, the Alternative Life Styles Movement, and other social movements. Some open partnerships or open marriages will also serve the social and sexual needs not currently being satisfied in most monogamous pair bonds. Similarly, the inclusion of single people into a larger definition of "family" is likely to support the choice of singlehood as an alternative lifestyle rather than a stage toward marriage, remarriage, or some other form of cohabitation.

I would like to see a revision and extension of this book which would reflect more recent developments. It would be highly interesting for Seal to follow up the 72 communes he originally visited to see how they have developed or dissolved.

Although not a textbook, *Alternative Life Styles* should provide many useful insights for professors teaching courses dealing with the dynamics of intimacy, marriage and the family, and alternative lifestyles.

SEXUAL SCRIPTS: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE SEXUALITY. By Judith Long Laws and Pepper Schwartz. Hinsdale, Illinois: The Dryden Press, 1977. 243 pp. \$7.95.

Reviewer: TERESA DONATI MARCIANO, *Fairleigh Dickinson University*

This readable and much-needed book demonstrates once again that the discovery of the "obvious" has become a revolutionary and liberating pursuit. Laws and Schwartz (along with Mary Parlee and Jennifer James, each of whom contributed a chapter) set out to place studies of female sexuality in a feminist perspective. By asking questions or stating findings in logical though nontraditional ways, "accepted" interpretations become questionable as their sexism is revealed. Drawing upon Berger and Luckmann's social-psychological framework for the exploration of learned "realities," the authors trace the learning of sexual scripts which all too often reinforce patterns of sexual dominance and subordination. The ways in which language frames and reflects our categories of thought, for example, are illustrated at many points in the book. An instance of this is Laws' discussion of the term "foreplay": though it denotes a period of total sensory satisfaction and often of female orgasm, its usage conveys a "prelude" to the "main event" of intercourse, i.e., male ejaculation/orgasm. Parlee, in her excellent chapter relating the cultural, psychological, and biological, offers a critique of questionnaire language. Negative findings (e.g., on the "menstrual syndrome" and postpartum depression) are structured by assumptions built into the language in which questions are framed. That chapter in particular should galvanize many researchers to examine and redesign studies of biological-cultural links. The "power of naming"—that is, structuring identity or constructing reality through language—discussed in the conclusion, pulls together the findings of the prior chapters.

I do have criticisms, though this might be better phrased as "questions to think about," because they are not intended to detract from the wide reading this book merits. The first of these is that when an author departs from a feminist presentation of study findings into the polemical, it is noticeable and jarring precisely because there is so much power and persuasiveness with-

out the "oughts." In Chapter Two, for example, there is a caution against "clitoral imperialism" which seems gratuitous if not presumptuous. There seems so long a way to go before clitoral-penile equality is achieved, that an "imperialistic" extreme is at the very least premature. While some women may manifest this attitude, the authors' own weight of evidence is that the total sexual situation, rather than a monomaniacal pursuit of clitoral pleasure, is the predominant female orientation. In addition, the discussion of contraception does not emphasize the fact that women have been the often-unwitting test victims of contraceptive technology, that it has been directed toward placing most of the contraceptive burden on the female, and that it has been used to the detriment of female freedom to refuse intercourse. Laws discusses this problem in her section on the "buyers' market" (i.e., the male ability to demand sex), but its direct link to contraception could have been highlighted more adequately. The added fact is that while contraception created the buyers' market, the ideology of "free sex" operates among many of the young without the contraception itself. Teenage parents who have borne illegitimate children in such large numbers are testimony to this.

While the limitations of space do not permit all of the questions they raise to be discussed here, one overarching question must be asked. That is whether economic conditions are not at the heart of present and future sexual "scripting." Those learned "realities" seem to be constructed at least as much in the marketplace as anywhere else. While Schwartz and James deal with economic factors to some extent, leverage to shape unscripted areas and to change scripts which are no longer authentic seem strongly tied to the financial independence women have.

While women's studies courses would find this an excellent text, I hope it will also have wide general readership. Its clear language and smooth style, as well as its good organization, should make it a popular book in and out of academe.