

# Open and Closed Families

by Colin Ward



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## Loose Cannons...

Love Relationships, Jealousy,  
Rejection and Liberation

by Adam Bregman

# *Domineering Men Beware!!!*

*Whoever Sows  
Misery,  
Reaps Rage!*



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*In choosing a partner we try both to retain the relationships we have enjoyed in childhood, and to recoup ourselves for fantasies which have been denied us. Mate-selection accordingly becomes for many an attempt to cast a particular part in a fantasy production of their own, and since both parties have the same intention but rarely quite the same fantasies, the result may well be a duel of rival producers. There are men, as Stanley Spencer said of himself, who need two complementary wives, and women who need two complementary husbands, or at least two complementary love objects. If we insist first that this is immoral or 'unfaithful', and second that should it occur there is an obligation on each love-object to insist on exclusive rights, we merely add unnecessary difficulties to a problem which might have presented none, or at least presented fewer, if anyone were permitted to solve it in their own way.*

**ALEX COMFORT, *Sex in Society***

One essentially anarchist revolution that has advanced enormously in our own day is the sexual revolution. It is anarchist precisely because it involves denying the authority of the regulations laid down by the state and by various religious enterprises over the activities of the individual. And we can claim that it has advanced, not because of the 'breakdown' of the family that moralists (quite erroneously) see all around them, but because in Western

society more and more people have decided to conduct their sexual lives as they see best. Those who have prophesied dreadful consequences as a result of the greater sexual freedom which the young assert – unwanted babies, venereal disease and so on – are usually the very same people who seek the fulfilment of their prophesies by opposing the free availability to the young of contraception and the removal of the stigma and mystification that surround venereal disease.

The official code on sexual matters was bequeathed to the state by the Christian Church, and has been harder and harder to justify with the decline of the beliefs on which it was based. Anarchists, from Emma Goldman to Alex Comfort, have observed the connection between political and sexual repression and, although those who think sexual liberation is necessarily going to lead to political and economic liberation are probably optimistic, it certainly makes people happier. That there is no immutable basis for sexual codes can be seen from the wide varieties in accepted behaviour and in legislation on sexual matters at different periods and in different countries. Male homosexuality became a 'problem' only because it was the subject of legislation. Female homosexuality was no problem because its existence was ignored by (male) legislators. The legal anomalies are sometimes hilarious: 'Who can explain just why anal intercourse is legal in Scotland between male and female, but illegal between male and male? Why is anal intercourse illegal in England between male and female, yet okay between males if both are over 21?'<sup>1</sup>

The more the law is tinkered with in the effort to make it more rational the more absurdities are revealed. Does this mean that there are no rational codes for sexual behaviour? Of course not: they simply get buried in the irrationalities or devalued through association with irrelevant prohibitions. Alex Comfort, who sees sex as 'the healthiest and most important human sport' suggests that 'the actual content of sexual behaviour probably changes much less between cultures than the individual's capacity to enjoy it without guilt'. He enunciated two moral injunctions or commandments on sexual behaviour: 'Thou shalt not exploit another person's feelings,' and 'Thou shalt under no circumstances cause the birth of an unwanted child.'<sup>2</sup> His reference to 'commandments' led Professor Maurice Carstairs to tease him with the question why, as an anarchist, Comfort was prescribing rules? – to which he replied that a philosophy of freedom demanded higher standards of personal responsibility than a belief in authority. The lack of ordinary prudence and chivalry which could often be observed in adolescent behaviour today was, he suggested, precisely the result of prescribing a code of chastity which did not make sense instead of principles which are

freely to do the things you dream of doing will liberate yourself from pain and alienation. I can not say and will never say that I am free of the intense emotions tied to love and relationships that possess everyone. I can say I am happier when I express my desires freely and I can accept jealousy and rejection as real and never something to make all-important. One of the most liberating things I can do is laugh loud and real loud in the middle of the most uncomfortable emotional predicament or in an act of extreme passion and see most clearly the great humour and horror in the emotions and relationships that so often encompass and possess us.



totally depressed surrounded in what displeases you. The latter is what most of the people I know do. They will passively submit to anything that falls in to their routine, as long as it is a comfortable part of their schedule. They will complain or internalise their complaints, but always continue to walk the same paths and will usually end up blowing up a long ways down the line. Too much passive acceptance, toilsome routine following and not enough new, mental stimulation produce the emotional basket cases that are many of the people I know.

Class is a big factor in who can be with who. Not just rich, middle class and poor, although that is a big factor, but class differences that have to do with clicks, fashion, popularity and most importantly, image. Real emotions are hidden behind a veil of acceptable correct behaviour. This kind of conformity rears its head in almost every group.

Gender roles are explicitly laid out for you so you don't have to think or choose. Your parents and the rest of the world most likely ingrained them in your brain from early on. Males are supposed to be masculine and in charge. Females are supposed to be passive and accepting. Males want to get laid. They think with their dicks. Females are manipulative. They tease men and fuck with their emotions. Men who sleep around a lot are studs. Women who sleep around a lot are whores. Both parties are supposed to be virtuous and true once they decide to commit to a relationship. Men are supposed to drive and pay. Women are supposed to look pretty and put out. No one should ever get involved with their lover's close friends. Private lives should remain private. Homosexuality is still taboo, but now relatively permitted as long as it stays far away. All of the above is well accepted and all of it is complete bullshit. Men and women should be able to do whatever they want with their sexuality. They should not have to hide it. They should be able to freely express it non-coercively anywhere they please. Sex, even with AIDS killing off thousands, should not be used as a tool for more repression. Bringing everything out in the open and exposing it for what it is, can only help to kill off the disease. Hiding away behind mis-truths and ignorance is very comfortable and has never helped to cure anything. Sex can be fun, safe, gender bending and openly free. Variety can only add to happiness. Monogamous (I've used the word monogamy several times. I am not limiting the meaning of the word to strictly pertain to sexual intercourse. I'm using it to mean the restraint of any kind of relationship that might be deemed inappropriate by a possessive lover.) relationships or lengthy loneliness can only detract from life and repress desires. The act of sexual intercourse will not by itself significantly emotionally liberate anyone.

Only accepting oneself for what you are while continuing to change the act

'immediately intelligible and acceptable to any sensible youngster'.

You certainly don't have to be an anarchist to see the modern nuclear family as a straitjacket answer to the functional needs of home-making and child-rearing which imposes intolerable strains on many of the people trapped in it. Edmund Leach remarked that 'far from being the basis of the good society, the family, with its narrow privacy and tawdry secrets, is the source of all our discontents'.<sup>3</sup> David Cooper called it 'the ultimate and most lethal gas chamber in our society', and Jacquetta Hawkes said that 'it is a form making fearful demands on the human beings caught up in it; heavily weighted for loneliness, excessive demands, strain and failure'.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously it suits some of us as the best working arrangement but our society makes no provision for the others, whose numbers you can assess by asking yourself the question: 'How many happy families do I know?'

Consider the case of John Citizen. On the strength of a few happy evenings in the discotheque, he and Mary make a contract with the state and/or some religious enterprise to live together for life and are given a licence to copulate. Assuming that they surmount the problems of finding somewhere to live and raise a family, look at them a few years later. He, struggling home from work each day, sees himself caught in a trap. She feels the same, the lonely single-handed housewife, chained to the sink and the nappy-bucket. And the kids too, increasingly as the years go by, feel trapped. Why can't Mum and Dad just leave us alone? There is no need to go on with the saga because you know it all backward.

In terms of the happiness and fulfilment of the individuals involved, the modern family is an improvement on its nineteenth-century predecessor or on the various institutional alternatives dreamed up by authoritarian utopians and we might very well argue that today there is nothing to prevent people from living however they like but, in fact, everything about our society, from the advertisements on television to the laws of inheritance, is based on the assumption of the tight little consumer unit of the nuclear family. Housing is an obvious example: municipal housing makes no provision for non-standard units and in the private sector no loans or mortgages are available for communes.

The rich can avoid the trap by the simple expedient of paying other people to run their households and rear their children. But for the ordinary family the system makes demands which very many people cannot meet. We accept it because it is universal. Indeed the only examples that Dr. Leach could cite where children 'grow up in larger, more relaxed domestic groups centred on the community rather than on mother's kitchen' were the Israeli kibbutz or the Chinese commune, so ubiquitous has the pattern become.

But changes are coming: the women's liberation movement is one reminder that the price of the nuclear family is the subjugation of women. The communes or joint households that some young people are setting up are no doubt partly a reflection of the need to share inflated rents but are much more a reaction against what they see as the stultifying rigid nature of the small family unit.

The mystique of biological parenthood results in some couples living in desperate unhappiness because of their infertility while others have children who are neglected and unwanted. It also gives rise to the common situation of parents clinging to their children because they have sunk so much of their emotional capital in them while the children desperately want to get away from their possessive love. 'A secure home', writes John Hartwell, 'often means a stifling atmosphere where human relationships are turned into a parody and where signs of creativity are crushed as evidence of deviancy.'<sup>5</sup> We are very far from the kind of community in which children could choose which of the local parent-figures they would like to attach themselves to but a number of interesting suggestions are in the air, all aiming at loosening family ties in the interests of both parents and children. There is the idea of Paul and Jean Ritter of a neighbourhood 'children's house' serving twenty-five to forty families,<sup>6</sup> there is Paul Goodman's notion of a Youth House on the analogy of this institution in some 'primitive' cultures, and there is Teddy Gold's suggested Multiple Family Housing Unit.<sup>7</sup> These ideas are not based on any rejection of our responsibility towards the young; they involve sharing this responsibility throughout the community and accepting the principle that, as Kropotkin put it, *all* children are *our* children. They also imply giving children themselves responsibilities not only for themselves but to the community, which is exactly what our family structure fails to do.

Personal needs and aspirations vary so greatly that it is as fatuous to suggest stereotyped alternatives as it is to recommend universal conformity to the existing pattern. At one end of the scale is the warping of the child by the accident of parenthood, either by possessiveness or by the perpetuation of a family syndrome of inadequacy and incompetence. At the other end is the emotional stultification of the child through a lack of personal attachments in institutional child care. We all know conventional households permeated with casual affection where domestic chores and responsibilities are shared, while we can readily imagine a communal household in which the women were drudges collectively instead of individually and in which a child who was not very attractive or assertive was not so much left alone as neglected. More important than the structure of the family are the expectations that people have of their roles in it. The domestic tyrant of the Victorian fam-

Jealousy is an extension of what you think you have, what you think you need to have and most importantly how you feel about yourself. If you act upon jealousy and attach or hurt someone, because of your own alienation or anger, you are most likely forgetting that neither you nor they can truly own another person in a relationship. If two people are having a relationship of their own volition, it does not necessarily mean that you had nothing with this person, that this person doesn't love you, that this person will never love you again or that this person is trying to spite you. Most likely this person is acting upon their desires that may have little or nothing to do with you. Are you a more unlikable, or undesirable person, because this one person has chosen to leave you and do something else? Generally attempting to get this person back will be futile. If this person does come back, will everything be happy and dandy like it was, or maybe never was, or surely hasn't been for quite a while? Why did the relationship end? It really doesn't matter why it's over, whether they come back or when you will find another lover. What really matters is that this person has become too big a part of your life and your happiness has become dependent on them being there. You are not independent enough to be happy without this person. This can be your lover, your parents or your best friend. It's not healthy to channel so much of yourself into one person, when they inevitably leave you, you will be all the more unhappy. It's very comfortable and easy to get really involved with one person you know so well. It's much harder to take risks in an unfree society and get to know new people, different people and experience rejection.

Rejection is not a personal statement about you, it does not sum up your being or what you're about. It can be the result of a large amount of factors, that may have something to do with you or absolutely nothing to do with you. Rejection and jealousy are emotions that need not be sources of great unhappiness. Nor should they be internalised or cast aside as childish or something to be embarrassed about. Rejection and jealousy are very real, intense emotions. But by looking at them through open eyes and with an open mind, they need not be debilitating. Nor should jealousy or rejection be used as an excuse to cause harm to someone you're probably trying to tell you love.

Your true honest emotions that you want to express should not be repressed. Your point of view on anything regarding love, or your personal relationships is likely to change daily or hourly. Honesty must surely be used with a balance or you might tell everyone you know what you hate about them and be left completely alienated or more likely you might passively accept, everything that goes on around you not to your liking and be left

they let any one person control how they feel about themselves? Will they look at themselves through their own critical eyes or through someone else's? When involved with someone, do they need to control them like a possession? Do they need to know everything about them? Do they ever need to tell them what to do? Can love not be free?

Love cannot be completely free of painful, gut-wrenching emotions. Nor will it ever be. Jealousy, alienation and fear are a reality in a world based on coercion. But they can all be dealt with without retreating into a monogamous, confining relationship or a lonely existence or uncaring attitudes used as a defence against feeling. There is a happy medium although it is not ecstatic or mythical. The true love or extended oneness that lovers endlessly search for can never be found, because it does not exist and it is not reality. It is only a place in the imagination to roam and dream about. But in the hard, cold, dark, scary reality that is life, there is a balance one can find and survive upon that is happy and free, but certainly never free of emotional baggage and pain. No matter what your situation you can find that balance that is happiness, but surely it is easier when you've taken care of your most basic wants and needs. In other words, it's harder to achieve any kind of balance when you're hungry, obsessed or in ill-health.

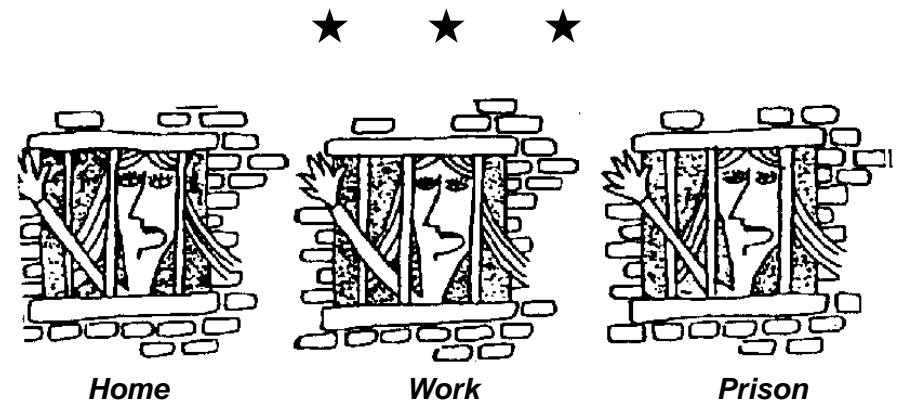
Most people think they need love and sex. Often when they get it, they protect it and treat it like a possession. Love and sex become a property. When their property is taken or tampered with they become jealous, angry or depressed. Having sex or being in love with someone does not imply ownership. We are all relatively free souls in a trapped environment, and we all have multiple desires that can be acted upon or restrained. If desires are always acted upon or always restrained they can only result in unhappiness. Most people I know spend most of their lives restraining themselves, because of commitments they made to their lovers or themselves. The rules they willingly follow usually mirror society's age old rules regarding gender, relationships or love. They are usually handed down from their parents, but are also blitzed at us from every direction from the government, 'concerned' parents who wish to make the rest of the world as disjointed and boring as them and the mass media, which reflects as well as creates images regarding sex, gender and love that people blindly follow and accept as reality. Their reality gives you the freedom to possess and be possessed like any other commodity and live out age old fantasies of love that have always led to war, death and being stuck in the same dead-end routine for the rest of your life. This is the contemporary and age old view of what love is, a rotting corpse in a prison.

Jealousy is a reality. There is no equality yet in our modern society.

ily was able to exercise his tyranny only because the others were prepared to put up with it.

There is an old slogan among progressive educators, *Have 'em, Love 'em and Leave 'em Alone*. This again is not urging neglect, but it does emphasise that half the personal miseries and frustrations of adolescents and of the adults they become are due to the insidious pressures on the individual to do what other people think is appropriate for them. At the same time, the continual extension of the processes of formal education delays even further the granting of real responsibility to the young. Any teacher in further education will tell you of the difference between sixteen-year-olds who are at work and attend part-time vocational courses and those of the same age who are still in full-time education. In those benighted countries where young children are still allowed to work you notice not only the element of exploitation but also the maturity that goes with undertaking functional responsibilities in the real world.

The young are caught in a tender trap: the age of puberty and the age of marriage (since our society does not readily permit experimental alternatives yet) go down while, at the same time, acceptance into the adult world is continually deferred – despite the lowering of the formal age of majority. No wonder many adults appear to be cast in a mould of immaturity. In family life we have not yet developed a genuinely permissive society but simply one in which it is difficult to grow up. On the other hand, the fact that for a minority of young people – a minority which is increasing – the stereotypes of sexual behaviour and sexual roles which confined and oppressed their elders for centuries have simply become irrelevant, will certainly be seen in the future as one of the positive achievements of our age.



*The family passes on its own sickness to us, we're forced into accepting, in some way or other, its values.*



*Domination and submission; living in our father's shadow; listening to our "elders" impose their views on us. The family is the foundation of the State.*

# Loose Cannons...

## Love Relationships, Jealousy, Rejection and Liberation

by Adam Bregman

Love should be free. Nothing has the potential to be more liberating. Here we have the power to take more control of our lives and not be as tied down by clocks and bosses. Yet most of the people I know have relationships that are more disabling, confining and abusive than their jobs or school. I think one reason is that myths prevail about relationships and sex that reflect the thinking of an ancient society. Gender roles are not crossed, boring, monogamous relationships drag on endlessly, lovers feel that their lover's words are written in stone, that all commitments are to be fulfilled and that this relationship dragged them out of the misery and loneliness they had before and without this person, they can only fall back into misery and loneliness.

People do not fit together like puzzle pieces. Love is only as real as two people make it. It will not last forever. It may be ecstatic for a short time and then completely downhill from there, with both lovers trying to salvage what they had forever, until they lose interest or pretend they need to stay together because without one another they could only be lonely.

Happy couples you see smooching as you watch them, feeling alone and jealous, are not necessarily any more in love, happy or emotionally fulfilled than anyone else. Both lovers can be alienated within the relationship and be together for reasons that may have little to do with the love that may have originally brought them together. What really matters is how the individual feels about oneself. Can they feel confident enough about themselves to be relatively happy regardless if they are involved with someone or not? Will