

THERAPY FOR ALL THE FAMILY

A Family in Therapy

By Peter McCallum and Moshe Lang
McPhee Gribble/Penguin, \$14.95
291 pages, paperback

IN COMPILING *A Family in Therapy*, Peter McCallum and Moshe Lang have put together a "good read". No doubt some might call the book voyeuristic, but to this reader it was the pursuit of the mystery, looking for "the answer"; a seeking to know "what comes next" and "how will it end?"; that led to a complete reading of the book in one sitting.

On the advice of a psychiatrist, who is confronted first with Lorraine, wife and mother, then Donna, daughter and sister, attempting suicide through over-doses of Lorraine's prescription pills, Lorraine, Jack, Donna and Ernie Black attend sessions with family therapist Moshe Lang.

With the acquiescence of the participants, the sessions are videotaped. These video mem-

Jocelyne Scutt on resolving a real-life crisis

ories form the basis of the book, together with a running commentary (understood to be written by Lang and McCallum in concert) through the typed transcripts of the sessions.

A Family in Therapy concludes with a short summary by the authors of their views of what the videotapes mean in the context of family therapy generally, and with the Black family in particular, and commentaries by five other professionals, including psychologists, psychiatrists and another family therapist.

The psychiatrist initially refers Lorraine, Ernie, Donna and Jack to family therapy as he sees this as a possible "solution" to an unusual situation: it is rare that two people within one family should, in such a short time span, seek suicide as a way out of personal dilemmas. Here, the two female members of the family alone seek oblivion, or at least cry

out for help in a way that cannot be ignored. Possibly the family dynamic underpins these attempted suicides.

In the family sessions, "ganging up" between Lorraine and Donna as mother and daughter, and women together, is juxtaposed against the male camaraderie existing between Jack and Ernie as father and son, boys, men and mates. As therapist, Lang detects a dependence by Lorraine on her daughter, whereby she uses Donna as support, confidante, "marriage therapist" and communicator between herself and her husband Jack.

On one level, Donna revels in this role. On another, she fights against it, seeking to extricate herself from an emotionally charged position which ought not to be filled by a youthful teenager and early adolescent. The fights erupting between Ernie and Donna as sister and brother, Ernie resorting to real

violence that hurts, are seen by the therapist as a possible acting out of aggression felt by the parents for each other, but not overtly acted on by them.

A Family in Therapy ends on a high note in that the sessions cease with the understanding that the family "saw Moshe

ner, manager of Human Resource Development, NSW Department of Family and Community Services, raises political and economic questions about the personal family context, and about the family in its interaction with the public world.

Dr Norma Grieve, Reader in the Department of Psychology at Melbourne University, questions the strategy of keeping

"they will no longer be bound by the joint project of child rearing". Could it be, she asks, that family therapy, "in focusing on the system, assumes that individuals' (particularly parents') sacrifices are justified for the sake of maintaining the system and, in any case, in their own best interests in the long term?"

A Family in Therapy is likely to become a cult book. Hopefully it will go beyond this, to be read from a critical perspective by family therapists and others for an insight into the world of counselling and therapy.

Superficial and dangerous? Ameliorative and perceptive?

Readers will make up their own minds. But none should be bored.

● Jocelyne Scutt's books include *Even in the Best of Homes — Violence in the Family* (Penguin) Australia; and *The Baby Machine — The Commercialisation of Motherhood* (McCulloch Publishing).

'The sessions cease with the understanding that the family saw Lang because life had become intolerable'

(Lang) because life had become intolerable". In collaboration with him, they finished therapy when their goals were achieved.

Not all the commentators are as positive about the outcome as the authors. Eva Lear-

"this family together and helping them to find alternatives to the reciprocal blame that is the outcome of most of the interactions" in the first session.

Dr Grieve wonders what will be the reality for Lorraine and Jack when, in 10 years' time,

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