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Book Review: All Out! An Autobiography

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work. Bruun and Ziff discuss marriage within a 21st-century cultural context. Nothing is missing here and the authors touch on even the stickiest of interpersonal issues: parenting, money, and sex. Ziff writes, “Our role as clinicians in premarital education and counseling is to guide couples to better understand themselves and to thereby make informed decisions about the marriage they are contemplating” (p. 2).

As premarital counseling is a relatively new field, the authors included a background chapter on the development of the field and a brief discussion on the history of marriage. This chapter shares how the history of marriage was fraught with myths which the authors promptly dispelled. For each myth, the authors presented the actuality. Every type and form of marriage we see today existed previously in time, including prenuptial agreements, arranged marriages, divorce, and polygamy. There is, indeed, nothing new under the sun. In light of these findings, the authors do not assert that any one form of marriage is better than another and they are critical of counselors and therapists supporting an idealized, rather than a realistic, personalized model of marriage. It is this fluidity that is necessary for clinicians to best guide the couple in their relationship, as opposed to holding to an antiquated model of marriage that may not have worked as well as it is remembered. The gap between the ideal and the realized is the space in which clinicians are to work, according to Bruun and Ziff, focusing the couples on the strengths of their relationship, and their power and ability to marry well, on their own terms.

Bruun and Ziff are passionate for marriages to succeed; they repeatedly emphasize the “need to *prevent* serious problems *before* marriages take place” (p. 12), and they show us, as clinicians, how best to guide our couples. This guidance most often takes the form of asking the correct questions, so that each member of the couple can assess if marriage is indeed the next, best step, or if both members of the couple would be better served by dissolving the relationship. Instead of the traditional definition of marriage as successful if it is stable and endures over time, the authors ascribe to a more contemporary understanding of marital success which includes improvement and satisfaction.

Satisfaction is possible within the marital context when each spouse has a good understanding of the other and when the couple can work together on common goals. Leading couples to that point (and beyond) is the clinician’s job. Bruun and Ziff detail the questions clinicians might ask the couple to understand who they are as individuals within their relationship. For each type of couple that presents to counseling (first marriage, previously married and/or blending families, anxious couples, etc.) the authors provide a clinical example and their suggested structure for working with such a couple.

The heart of this text covers the common premarital problems, individual factors that predict a satisfying marriage, and couple predictors for a satisfying marriage. Problems such as race and ethnicity, gender, or finances, are handled by Bruun in a historically and culturally appropriate way. She encourages clinicians to not assume an understanding of the person or persons within the couple based on a label, given the diversity of beliefs, cultural

practices, and values. Whether working with the problem the couple has identified or gently debating whether to broach other issues brought to light within the premarital counseling and education process, Bruun includes helpful points for counselors and therapists to encourage the couples’ effective communication and setting and maintenance of healthy boundaries. The individual and couple predictors provide a point of departure for clinicians, helping the couple to move forward, as prepared as possible, into life as they have imagined. The chapter on eight premarital stages serves as a compass, helping both the couple and the clinician to examine the pace and progress of the relationship.

Bruun and Ziff close their book with a proposal about how to “redesign” marriage and a charge to clinicians to track the couples with whom they work for research purposes. We still need to know: what is the long-term effect of premarital education and counseling? Are the couples who participated in premarital counseling experiencing successful marriages? *Marrying Well: The Clinician’s Guide to Premarital Counseling* is an easy read and very practical. Bruun and Ziff have accomplished a resource appropriate for professionals and advanced students alike.

All Out! An Autobiography. (2010). Albert Ellis, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 668 pp., \$32.00, ISBN 978-1-59102-452-1.

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I believe it was St. Thomas Aquinas who created the argument from motion that basically asserts the following:

1. There are some things in motion.
2. Everything that is in motion is put into motion by something other than itself.
3. No series of things moving or things moved could go back to infinity therefore there must be a prime or first mover.
4. We call the prime or first mover God.

Ok—so sometime after this first movement took place, we flash forward a few millennia to let’s just say for kicks it was Christmas day 1912 . . . a great day for a little Jewish kid from Pittsburgh to be conceived. A man sees his attractive wife, becomes aroused, seduces her, and conceives their child or one might say . . . puts the proverbial bun in the oven. Nine months later, on September 27, 1913, Albert Ellis, the father of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) is born. Ellis may have had a difficult time accepting that he was not the prime mover, but as Forest Gump might have said, “Rational is as Rational does,” and I would like to think if I had the opportunity to sit with Dr. Ellis and have a cup of coffee, that we may have eventually come to an agreement that he was not. In Ellis’s autobiography, *All Out*, Ellis’s wit, intellect, convictions,

and passion, jump off the pages and into your heart and mind as if he were sitting with you in the parlor sharing tales about his time on earth well spent! Ellis believed that his life work in REBT was so significant that he made no secret of the fact that the books he wrote since 1957 were written with the purpose of selling his belief system to other professionals and the public in general (p. 15). In reality (forgive the irony) as full of certainty as Albert Ellis was about many things, according to his wife Debbie, he was “quite humble—incredibly so!”

Albert Ellis seemed motivated to share REBT with the world because it had worked so well for him and the thousands of patients (clients) he had worked with over many decades. As any excellent therapist will share, there is very little they will ask patients to examine in their own lives that the therapist has not been willing to examine in himself (or herself as the case may be!) Ellis begins chronologically, revisiting his childhood. While he does reexamine events as he recalls them, one of the unique twists of Ellis’s autobiography is the detailed way in which he scrutinizes his cognitions, even in his earliest recollections. He examines his beliefs about certain events that occurred in his life, as well as the emotions that were tied to these cognitions, the resulting actions and behaviors that he undertook as a result. Ellis continues by examining the consequences of his beliefs, thoughts, and actions by sharing with the reader his experiences and, subsequently, how these results either confirmed his rationale or how he used the results to modify his rationale and future behavior/behaviors. Ellis shares recollections with the reader when he was as young as 4 years of age beginning to go to school and later moving from Pittsburgh to New York. He seemed enthusiastic about learning of any kind! “And whenever something new came my way, which seemed to happen continually, I thought about it, tried to understand it and figure it out, made some kind of sense of it, and widened my picture of the way the world really was and what I could expect of it . . . I was in my own way, quite a thinker” (p. 24). Ellis seemed to realize that while he could not always control the events that he encountered, it seems early on he had an uncanny understanding that he had a choice as to how he could react to any given event. “I thought about how different people react to similar ‘upsetting’ conditions. Hardly alike! Some were happy, some miserable, others fairly indifferent about the same event. There seemed to be a choice about your feelings. Yes a choice” (p. 36). Thoughts of this deep nature are not in the normal consciousness of most 5-year-old children, yet they were thoughts that young Albert professed to have had at that tender age. When confronted with situations he found distasteful or beyond his control, he began to apply what he learned through his observations. “I began to combat incipient depression in two therapeutic ways: first, I determinedly refused to turn my frustration into a holocaust. Second, I looked for special things I enjoyed, and wholeheartedly threw myself into them until one clicked and became what I later labeled (in *A Guide to Rational Living*) ‘a vital absorbing interest’” (p. 37).

In addition to his devotion to the development and promotion of REBT, one of Ellis’s most vital and absorbing interests

was love. Ellis talks about the importance of love in general; however, he devotes substantial time to relationships with the women that had considerable impact on his life. Fittingly, the most important love of his life was the partner who was with him to the end of his days, Dr. Debbie Joffe Ellis. I will address the significance of this relationship a bit further down the road; however, this review would be incomplete if it did not touch on the humor and angst that Ellis shares with the reader about the lust he felt for older women, nurses, movie stars, and the first love of his life embodied in the “blue-eyed doll” named Ruthie who lived next door to Ellis when they were both only 5 years of age. Through Ruthie, young Albert learned of yearning, lust, exploration of the female form, the potential impermanence of love, true heartache, and the human ability for resilience! A very important little girl!

While Ellis was still a young boy, he had a series of significant health issues that resulted in multiple hospitalizations—the longest of which lasted 10 months. Ellis shares with the reader how he encountered the second love of his life during this period and also began to cultivate games with the other children on the ward that involved them daringly displaying their nudity to one another after the nurses turned the lights out. Ellis asserted that it was these adventurous games that became the basis of one of his most important REBT exercises, Shame-Attacking! Ellis goes into abundant detail as to how he used his Shame-Attacking exercise to help people challenge some of their most irrational fears and beliefs. In many ways, this is the cornerstone of much of Ellis’s work. He would encourage people to do something that they find shameful (not harmful) and challenge their beliefs that they should be ashamed about themselves, which is a highly anxiety producing belief. The exercise would basically help the client desensitize or separate a humiliating act, from their “person.” “When they succeed at this, they just about always make significant inroads into their self-downing and other anxiety creating attitudes and begin to live happier, less disturbed lives. They achieve one of the main goals of REBT: Unconditional Self-Acceptance” (p. 93).

As is the case with most human beings, there are times where admirable and less than admirable qualities seem to be in conflict. When Ellis met his first wife Karyl, he was able to make inroads with her by informing her that his friend, who she was dating at the time, while stating his love for her, was merely using her for sex. The man was simultaneously in the process of trying to reunite with his ex-wife. “Although I was very liberal sexually, I was moralistically opposed to lying to women to get them to give sexual favors” (p. 219). Ellis shared with his readers that he felt this wrong to do and shared the truth with the young appreciative Karyl. They confronted the young man who promptly departed and left Albert and Karyl together. They talked and laughed together through the evening and later that night, Albert lost his virginity to the young woman. Ellis ended up marrying Karyl, but they had the marriage annulled within days. Karyl later remarried, but she continued to rely on Ellis to fulfill many of her emotional needs. She continued to seek his help in many ways, including

pleading with him to father her children. While Ellis felt uncomfortable on many levels, in the end, he consented by rationalizing he was helping someone he cared about. She convinced him by appealing to his logic that his offspring would be superior genetically to the children her new husband would provide. He would find the arrangement sexually pleasurable, and in addition, there was an explicit verbal agreement that neither the husband nor the children would ever know. Ellis stated, "As an adulterer, however, I am fairly blameless for the same reason a business partner might be" (p. 393). The most impressive thing about this part of the story is the way which Ellis shares his thoughts with the reader about his actions, and how they may have affected others including his children. He reviews his cognitions and beliefs he held at the time, the consequences of those beliefs, and admits that he has his flaws and is, in the end, still a work in progress.

After the annulment to his first wife Karyl, Ellis went on to have a multitude of sexual relationships as he continued his prodigious professional work load. Ellis continued to write about and develop REBT. The institute named after him became famous. He trained and mentored many therapists and continued to see clients well into his nineties. He shared the emotions he experienced on September 11, in a most touching and heartfelt way—how he worked through those emotions and continued to help his clients. He was 88 years old and his client schedule that week consisted of 23 half-hour appointments, 17 full-hour sessions, and 4 one-hour groups. He worked relentlessly with clients, continued to write journal articles, entire books about REBT, and all this while he simultaneously worked on his autobiography.

During his remaining years, Albert Ellis was to experience, as Dickens once wrote, the best of times and the worst of times. The institute began to experience severe financial hardship exacerbated by the damage done to the Stock Market post September 11. As time moved forward, other individuals took on responsibilities at the Albert Ellis Institute. Unfortunately, some of these people would eventually betray the trust that Ellis had put in them by wresting control of the institute from the man who had started it all. When these political events occurred at an institute that was dedicated to his life's work, it was a devastating blow to Ellis.

Albert had met Debbie Joffe a few years earlier in the late eighties on a trip to Australia. As always, Al was out in the world promoting REBT with his typical zeal and enthusiasm! As their professional relationship developed, so did their genuine fondness and admiration for each other. Debbie shared with this writer, "We became increasingly close as the relationship grew, and we enjoyed a remarkable friendship, but the intimacy came after I moved to New York in the early 2000s." Debbie showed Albert Ellis a kind of unconditional love that he did not know existed before she came into his life. She would go on to become the most significant person in Ellis's later years and the

most substantial love of his life. It is somewhat ironic, rational person that he was, that Ellis wrote the following: "I have never experienced or seen a love as unconditional or honest, without any expectations or needs from me, as is Debbie's love for me. She loves me more than she loves her self, which I think is quite nutty and I tell her that" (p. 233). Eventually, Ellis and Debbie Joffe made it official and married on November 15, 2004, a day which Albert Ellis described as the best day of his life. The fight with the board of trustees grew increasingly bitter. It seemed that the institute was not presenting REBT in the fashion Al wanted it done. One might deduce from reading Ellis's autobiography that he felt there was never a meaningful attempt at reconciliation. Though many long-time supporters wrote e-mails of encouragement, there was hardly any real financial support in terms of practical grassroots backing. Ellis continued to fight legally as best he could, yet it was not enough. Eventually, he was removed from the board and stopped from teaching and working at the Albert Ellis Institute (AEI). The Institute that bore Ellis's proud name was no longer his.

In the final chapter of the book, Debbie Joffe Ellis shared, in a most poignant way, the story of Ellis's pain with his failing health and loss of the institute. She shares the depth of their love for each other, and how he resolutely stayed true to his values, despite the toll that the fight with the board took on him. To help him accept a situation that he had no control over, he used the same REBT principles and techniques himself that he so fervently taught to others. As he had realized at age 5, we may not be able to control certain events that occur, but we have a choice as to how we will respond to them. We have a choice! "Al hardly ever complained—he simply accepted the circumstances—and kept going" (p. 560). And in the end, that is a boiled down version of much of what Albert Ellis taught us. REBT teaches us that if we are anxious, depressed, or experiencing an inordinate amount of resentment, to examine our beliefs as to why we feel something should, ought, or must be a particular way, dispute those beliefs, deal with what is, and to keep on going.

Albert Ellis certainly went all out in his life. He lived well, he loved sensuously and fully, he worked hard, and left a body of work that will survive long past the time he spent with us during the blink of an eye he lived on this planet. When he was 92 years old, Ellis participated in a question and answer session moderated by Dr. Daniel Eckstein. At the end of the session, Dr. Eckstein shared some words that I feel are most appropriate to share with the reader of this article as this review winds down. "Let me just say, Samuel Johnson once said, 'A horsefly can always bite a horse and make him wince, but a horsefly is always a horsefly and a horse is always a horse'. We've had a magnificent steed—I didn't say stud, Albert—we've had a magnificent steed. And I think, Albert, this has been your finest hour. On behalf of so many of us, thanks for all the memories" (p. 557). Read the book. I think you will like it!