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CULTURE- BUZZBOX- Open marriage: An alternative approach to 'forever'

by **MARISSA D'ORAZIO**, published July 17, 2008



Jenny Block
Photo courtesy Jenny Block

"It was weird that it wasn't weird."

That's how Jenny Block, author of *Open: Love, Sex, and Life in an Open Marriage*, describes the first sexual encounter she and her husband had with a mutual friend as part of their open marriage. According to Block, the friend was "a younger, hilarious, intelligent woman," and their relationship lasted for years.

Although Block, a Dallas resident, discovered her bisexuality in her twenties, she always thought that it would eventually translate into her finding one man to be with for the rest of her life. But three years into her marriage, she had a six-month affair with a woman that led her to wonder if that dream could actually become reality.

"I had a lot of questions," she says. "I kept saying, 'But you still love him.' I did some research and found out that a lot of people are doing marriage in their own way."

Block's husband, Christopher, was not initially enthusiastic about the idea of an open marriage. "He thought I was a crazy person at first," she says. "He was wondering if the truth was that I didn't want to be with him at all."

But after many philosophical talks, he was persuaded to accept her point of view and agreed to an "open marriage," which she defines as, "when two people are married but allowed to have other partners. It might just mean sex, but for us, it's a relationship." That led to their affair with their mutual friend.

Block denies the common perception-- that she and her husband are swingers. Swingers, she explains, focus primarily on sexual relationships and leave love out of the picture. Block practices something called polyamory-- meaning that she is allowed to love more than one person.

Claiming, in fact, to be "boring and average," in the book Block explores "how a nice girl like me can come to a place like this."

"I find that it's hard to explain yourself without sounding like you're defending yourself," she says. In writing the book, she adds, "I didn't want to sound like I was suggesting it for everyone. All I was doing was sharing one girl's story."

Block and her husband have been married 11 years and have a nine-year-old daughter, Emily. Jenny Block says Christopher and her girlfriend of almost two years, Jemma, get along "very, very well. That's part of what makes this work," she adds.

Christopher is not currently in a relationship outside the marriage, and has not been since that first arrangement with their friend. According to Block, "He prefers having the freedom to have another relationship without actually having one."

Block says he can go into a bar, watch a basketball game, and buy a girl a drink without having to worry that she will storm in demanding an explanation.

Block says that in their relationship, Christopher is the "traditional guy" while "Jemma is my best friend. The only difference is that we have sex." Christopher is not part of that sexual relationship.

Block says that the whole "you complete me" mentality of relationships is damaging. She says that too often people unrealistically expect their partner to be "everything" for them.

Block says that as a mother, being in an open marriage has made her, "hypersensitive and hyperaware to make sure I'm doing everything right."

"It doesn't affect my daughter in the way people imagine it would," she says of the relationship with Jemma. "It's the same as any parent's sex life-- no one shows their sex toys and adult movies to their kids."

Block refers to the Kinsey scale of sexuality, which ranges from completely homosexual to completely heterosexual, and on which most individuals fall somewhere in between. She says the same range can apply to marriages with monogamy on one end and an open marriage on the other.

Most people have the desire to fall in between the two, she believes. "I don't think monogamy is biological," she says. "It's very hard for people to do something not in their biology."

"It's really easy for people who don't know us to say we're weirdos," she says, "but our family and friends find it hard to argue with the happy, healthy, easygoing relationship we have."

Jenny Block reads from and discusses her book at WriterHouse on Dale Avenue Friday, July 18, at 7pm.

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