

1-1-1989

## Becoming an EX: The Process of Role Exit

Katherin Williams

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/csr>

---

### Recommended Citation

Williams, Katherin (1989) "Becoming an EX: The Process of Role Exit," *Clinical Sociology Review*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1, Article 26.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/csr/vol7/iss1/26>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@WayneState. It has been accepted for inclusion in Clinical Sociology Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@WayneState.

components: time, emotional involvement, level of sexual involvement, and sexual orientation. Following a conceptual elaboration of these components, he outlines a set of specific therapeutic considerations. It is a well-integrated statement indicating the complications (ethical and practical) in dealing with the problem at both the individual and couple levels.

William Miller gives an excellent but brief explication of the social psychological impact of rape on the victim, the victim's partner, and the relationship. In his therapeutic directives he notes why and how balance of individual and conjoint sessions can be maintained.

Weeks talks about inhibited sexual desire as the discrepancy in levels of desire expressed by the couple. Individual, couple interaction, and intergenerational issues are shown to impact on this problem. Each area is addressed through setting therapeutic goals and procedures. He skillfully demonstrates the systemic nature of the problem and its resolution.

The central assumption of Goldberg's insightful work on hypersexuality is that labeling this type of sexual behavior is a problem in a couple process. He points out the importance of age and gender status as pivotal criteria for judging a person's level of sexual activity. Although he makes a strong case for the "social definition" being an etiological part of the problem, he lists and discusses other contributing factors ranging from drugs to physical and mental health. He proposes that couple therapy is most effective for treating this sexual problem.

Finally, marital and sexual counseling of elderly couples is discussed by Stone. Because this is an ever-increasing segment of the clinical population, the author defines aging as a normal human process which in no way precludes an active sexual relationship for the couple. A major part of his work is the discussion the age-specific sexual problems and therapeutic suggestions for counseling elderly couples.

The editors of this book have accomplished what they set out to do in creating an integrated set of readings that conceptually and substantively "fit together." The chapters are well-written and parsimonious; the authors use case studies very effectively for illustration and clarification. I think this is a good book for use in academic training of both graduate students and clinicians. It is a significant contribution to the literature in the field.

**Becoming an EX: The Process of Role Exit**, edited by Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988. 247 pp.

*Katherine Williams*

Anyone who has ever played the "Who Am I?" game recognizes the centrality of major social roles—spouse, parent, doctor, woman, man, etc.—to

our concept of self. One of the hallmarks of modern society is the increasing frequency with which people move into and out of these major roles. Sociological theory has emphasized socialization *into* major social roles. However, the process and the consequences for self of role *exit* has received little attention. Ebaugh defines role exit as "the process of disengagement from a role that is central to one's self identity and the re-establishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's ex-role." *Becoming an EX* is a qualitative study of this process.

Helen Fuchs Rose Ebaugh is an ex-nun whose interest in role exit grew from her own experiences and those of her sisters who left the convent in large numbers during the 1970s. The aim of this slim volume is to extend role theory by focusing on the process of role exit as a generic social process. A grounded theory approach to role analysis provides the framework for the research. Because of its clarity of style, this book may attract an audience beyond the academy. While the primary emphasis is on theory development, the book will be equally at home in the classroom, the practitioner's office, or in guiding further socialization research. All major research decisions and the reasons for them are clearly presented and the jargon that sometimes clouds academic sociological writing is happily absent here.

Exits can be made from any role. They may be chosen or thrust upon us. Voluntary exits from major social roles were chosen as the focus of this research in order to enhance the possibility of identifying the change process. The descriptions of the role exit process come from in-depth interviews with ex-nuns, those changing occupational and marital roles, and finally transsexuals (perhaps the most extreme example of role exit).

The process for these major role exits falls into four stages: doubts about role commitment, seeking and evaluating alternatives, decision to exit, and, finally, creating and adapting to the ex-role. The author devotes a chapter to each of these stages. Components of the stages are identified as are factors that may facilitate or impede movement toward the next stage. The author points out how the negative reactions of significant others can either halt the doubting process or cause the individual to seek out more supportive listeners. On the other hand, positive support of first doubts can increase the speed with which the individual moves on to exploring alternatives. Positive social support during the alternative exploration stage often results in the realization that there is freedom of choice and speeds the selection of a specific alternative. Negative social support interrupts or retards that process. Chapter summaries of the first three stages provide diagrams of movement through each stage. These are not structural equation models but rather visual guides through the stage of the process.

Each element is illustrated with case material taken from interviews. One of the strengths of this book is the detail and richness of information that can

only be provided by in-depth interviewing. The author is particularly sensitive to her subjects. She points out in an appendix that information interviews can have a therapeutic effect on subjects. She further reminds us that research-oriented interviewers are often ill-equipped to deal with emotional reactions of subjects brought about by the subject matter of the interviews. This is an important lesson for those who train field interviewers.

A short epilogue entitled "Applied Settings" suggests some of the ways this information could be used in practice settings. This acknowledgment of practical applicability is refreshing. However, this is a "suggestion only" and not a "how to" chapter. Fortunately, the book is so clearly written that most practitioners, especially those working with individuals who are experiencing major life changes, will have little difficulty adapting the material to their own work.

One of the ongoing issues for clinical sociology and sociological practice in general is that of closing the gap between sociological knowledge and its application. Sociology has its roots in the practical application of sociological knowledge and insight to the problems of everyday life. As the field developed, seeking scientific legitimacy, it grew away from these roots and lost touch with practical uses for the information base it was building. *Becoming an EX* helps to close this gap. This book provides both significant theoretical development and useful information and insights which have direct applicability to practice. The practitioner will find this book useful since "ex-hood" is frequently an issue in clinical cases. Those who have experienced role exit may find this book relevant to their own journeys.