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Family Life
(BRITISH—COLOR)

London, Nov. 22.

MGM-EMI release (UK only) of Nat Cohen presentation of Anglo-EMI (Kestrel Film) production. Directed by Ken Loach. Screenplay, David Mercer; camera (Technicolor), Charles Stewart; editor, Roy Watts; art director, William McCrow. Reviewed at London Film Fest, Nov. 20, '71. Running Time: 105 MINS.

Girl Sandy Ratcliff
Father Bill Dean
Mother Grace Cave

Director Ken Loach has succeeded in creating a disturbing and provocative film about a girl sinking into schizophrenia. It skirts clinical treatment but overcomes it by incisive insights into character as well as the family and psychiatric aspects involved in this timely and timeless tale.

(Another "Family Life," a Film Polski release by Krystof Zanussi was shown recently at N.Y. Film Fest.—Ed.)

The themes of generation gap, youthful needs and differences in psychological attitudes today also add lucid and firm backgrounding to this essentially personal drama. There is a point of view which could lead to pros and cons in medical as well as critical attitudes. These could focus interest on this unusual film which should find its audiences in all stratas if carefully handled.

There is a firm point of view in this film on the environmental and social causes of the girl's breakdown. But David Mercer's succinct screenplay, Loach's probing direction and the sensitive acting ward off the pitfalls of self consciousness, didactics and schematics.

The parents, who have made firm middleclass lives for themselves, live on their prejudices and belief in the need of curing any rebelliousness in their children. One daughter has broken away but a younger one is still at home and uncomfortable but still unable to cut loose from the repressive hold of her well-meaning but overbearing parents.

When she gets pregnant there is parental outrage and a carefully-planned abortion. But the girl loses job after job and is finally locked out one night when she comes home late, driven there by her student boyfriend. Her growing withdrawal from life has her parents seeking psychiatric help. She first is put in a group headed by a more progressive doctor whose precepts seem to indicate that it is society that is sick and the so-called mentally sick are in healthy revolt against it, though usually not helped by current methods.

He uses group therapy but there is a sidelight of his being forced out of the hospital with the more conventional ways of shock treatment substituted that only aggravate the girl's condition and finally

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into practically a catatonic case, put on show at the end before a class studying psychiatry for a shattering windup.

Sandy Ratcliff is effective as the weak but striving girl who is finally beaten by a system and misunderstanding. The parents are not ogres but too wrapped up in their smugness and ways to see what they are doing to their own daughter. They reveal some of their own insecurities and needs but a haplessness in the face of their daughter's breakdown.

Originally a tv film, it has been effectively broadened without losing its intimacy. There are long talky scenes but they're revealing and effective. Perhaps the scenes of the hospital psychiatric bickerings are somewhat slight but it is the girl's case that is the thing and that gets deep, revealing and finally moving treatment.

No doubt there will be controversy on the film but the clash of set and new ways is there as well as new attitudes towards mental problems that are current yet dramatically valid and absorbing. Bill Dean and Grace Cave as the parents are well drawn and, if ruthless in their set ways, also human, not just heavies in this dramatic and concerned film about human adaptation.

School and more tv usage are there and film also denotes that this subject can have more potency treated dramatically than in the various cinema verite films that have dealt with this theme with real characters, such as "Warrendale," "Other Voices," etc. It may be a watershed film on the new attitudes towards this theme of youthful and human problems.

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