California State University
at Northridge

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

OF

AN ALTERNATE FAMILY STRUCTURE:
MULTILATERAL MARRIAGE

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in
Home Economics
by
Jerilyn Marie Lewis

July, 1972
The thesis of Jerilyn Marie Lewis is approved:

California State University
at Northridge
July, 1972
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Helen Lewis, for her typing and loving interest and concern during this study.
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The author wishes to express sincere appreciation and gratitude to her committee chairman, Dr. Richard F. Campbell, Professor of Home Economics, for his advice, encouragement, and patient guidance throughout this study.

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ABSTRACT

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY
OF
AN ALTERNATE FAMILY STRUCTURE:
MULTILATERAL MARRIAGE
by
Jerilyn Marie Lewis
Master of Science in Home Economics
July, 1972

The purpose of this study is to explore multilateral marriage as a possible successful alternative to the contemporary family system.

A multilateral marriage consists of three or more individuals all of whom regard themselves as married to each other. Descending from the realm of theoretical possibility, multilateral marriage is a new marital entity practiced on a very small scale. Nevertheless, the fact that it is practiced on any scale is of profound significance for the future of marriage and family relations.

The participants discussed in this study include members of the Multilateral Relations Study Project, the clients of Dr. Herb Seal, and various groups the investigator had personally contacted or researched through literature in the field.
Potential benefits and problems of multilateral marriage are described and analyzed, including jealousy, sex, children, integration into a family unit, and some aspects of the structure and dynamics of the group.

The study concludes that multilateral marriage is an incredibly complex and difficult form of marriage, but one offering unprecedented potentials for satisfaction and growth. Most respondents indicated a serious commitment to striving for vital, authentic, truly egalitarian relationships. While the sexual variety afforded by the relationship was important, perhaps reflecting an intrinsic human propensity for a variety of sexual partners, the respondents perceived the enhanced opportunities for a diversity of deep, interpersonal relationships and the concomitant potential for growth as the central pragmatic benefit of their multilateral marriages.

Seeking these ideals, it is likely that some individuals will always favor some kind of multilateral involvement, most in theory, but some in practice. One must conclude, however, that although multilateral marriage is a promising growth oriented form of marriage, it is feasible for only those few persons highly motivated to deal with its structural and emotional complexity. It is unlikely that multilateral marriage will replace monogamy in the foreseeable future or even that a majority will opt for it over the present marital system.

In view of the psychological stakes, the emotional cost of dysfunctional models, and the growth and happiness possible in successful ones, it is evident that much more intensive research is necessary in the area of multilateral marriage.
Freedom is the right to choose, the right to create for oneself the alternatives of choice. Without the possibility of choice and the exercise of choice, a man is not a man but a member, an instrument, a thing.

Thomas Jefferson
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

There is much agreement today that American society is in transition, and considerable disagreement as to where this process may or should lead. Among the social frameworks seemingly caught on the crest of this wave of transition are the institutions of marriage and the family. The major purpose of this study is to explore multilateral marriage as a possible successful alternative model to the contemporary family system.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are to describe the individuals involved in multilateral marriage with respect to the following areas:

1. Acquiring an understanding of how and why the participants had become involved in multilateral marriage;

2. Identifying factors which might contribute to success or failure in multilateral marriage;

3. Identifying problems unique to group relationships and methods utilized in their resolution.
Background and Significance of the Study

Never before in the history of Western Civilization has the institution of marriage and family come under the scrutiny it has today. Never before have so many people questioned the cultural and theological heritage of monogamy and set out in search of alternatives. The American family of the 1970's is entering an unprecedented era of change initiated by a radical reappraisal of the family and its functioning.

Divorce today is so much a part of the social fabric that many sociologists refer to the burgeoning phenomenon as the "divorce culture." Vance Packard in his book, The Sexual Wilderness, summarizes a recent survey: "In other words, a marriage made in the U. S. in the late 1960's has about a fifty-fifty chance of remaining even nominally intact." (94:19)

Neubeck observed:

That marriage should serve all the needs of the spouses is built into our marital expectations, yet anyone who examines this proposition realistically is struck with its impossibility. (74:21)

Paradoxically, the high divorce rate can be viewed both as a symptom of the failure of monogamy and an indication of its success. A large majority of men and women remarry within four years after their divorce, according to Dr. Bernard Steinsor in his book, When Parents Divorce. (81:23) He further asserts that:
Divorce has become an expression of the increasing personal freedom afforded the average citizen... It is a fact that the average citizen continues to pursue personal freedom within the framework of marriage. (81:23)

Serial monogamy or progressive monogamy today is so widespread that it may well prove to be an alternative structure for the familial system. Alpenfels writes that "society must contend with the inescapable fact that serial monogamy is now practiced by all social classes, both sexes, and all ages." (1:73)

However, it is obvious that serial monogamy as practiced in this culture leaves much to be desired. Robert Libby has stated:

To expect that all should enter monogamous marriage, with romantic expectations of marital bliss in a totally exclusive relationship, is to anticipate human beings who are socialized to fit the same "mold" and be happy about it. The reality is far from the expectation. Rather than happiness many are disillusioned and caged as animals in a zoo. (67:28)

Caldwallader is even stronger in his views of "the untenable idolatry of universal monogamy." He claims:

Contemporary marriage is a wretched institution. It spells the end of voluntary affection of love freely given and joyously received. Beautiful romances are transmuted into dull marriages; eventually the relationship becomes constricting, corrosive, grinding, and destructive. The beautiful love affair becomes a bitter contract. (16:68)

The term "traditional monogamy" refers to the publicly sanctioned marital arrangement involving marriage to one person at a time, the centrality of the nuclear family, the restriction of all overt sexual acts (nearly all sexually-tinged relationships and heterosexual
relations of any depth) to one person before and after marriage, expectation of a lifetime contract, and a vivid sense of failure if termination is necessary. John Cuber and Peggy Harroff, in The Significant Americans, have called this "the monolithic code." (94:19)

All working societies are structured around such codes or ideals, regardless of how far individuals may depart from the norms or whether or not they accept the source of such "ideals." (94:19)

How does a change in the code or ideal come about? Roy and Roy (94:21) feel that when the proportion of the populace living in conflict with their own interpretation of the "monolithic code" and "getting away with it" nearly reaches a majority, then new ideals will evolve for the social system to remain in equilibrium. It currently appears that the ideal of "traditional monogamy" is in the process of being altered by men and women continuously to meet their rapidly changing needs and life styles.

There are many conflict-producing elements of change in the current environment which are tending to erode the monogamous institution. Some of the most important include:

1. The sexual revolution has made it more difficult for monogamy to retain its monopoly on sex;
2. There has been an increase in the number and variety of men-women contacts after marriage which makes infidelity more likely;
3. The means for terminating an undesirable marriage are so painful that adultery may be an easier alternative than divorce;
4. Traditional monogamy does not deal humanely with the unmarried, the widowed, or the divorced. (94:21)

Because of this, exploration of alternatives to the contemporar y isolated nuclear family with its surface monogamy has been growing. The most compelling reply to the question, "but what do alternatives have to teach us?" is simply that they exist; that the range of genuinely viable options in marriage and family living is as rich as the range of human personality and behavior; and that no individual should need to waive his right to choose or to design.

Many of the alternative family living patterns, including multilateral marriage, are found to differ from the cultural norm in one or more of three key dimensions.

First, most alternative life styles include some element of accretion or aggregation, and thus differ in size from the nuclear family. In the opinion of the Constantines:

The signs of the times that an increasing number of women, children, and even men, are finding the isolation of the modern nuclear family intolerable are too diverse to be enumerated. Communes, cooperatives, cluster families, intimate networks, multilateral marriage, and other forms of extended and expanded families are, in part, responses to the family having dropped below critical mass in important aspects. (23:2)

Second, as a rule, contemporary alternatives are more temporary than the idealized monogamous relationship, and not always by design. In recognition that settings change, needs change, and even people change, many alternatives are structured by intent on a more renewable basis. In observing the lifespan of multilateral marriages, for example, numerous factors must be taken into account, not the
least of which is that many conventional marriages do not last a lifetime and many of those which do, should not. Indeed, in all likelihood, the future of even conventional marriage will be characterized by a series of distinct relationships, none of which may properly be judged a failure simply because it was not lifelong. Shorter durations may be expected to be especially characteristic of the experimental forms, not so much because they do not work, but because goals may be higher and barriers to dissolution lower, if not non-existent. (23:2)

And finally, while size and duration may represent significant departures, they do not threaten the American self-image as do the sexual aspects of alternatives. Many, though not all, of the current explorations make explicit provision for some form of multiple sexual involvement, openly integrating into the family situation that which is clandestine, insulated, and denied in the cultural norm, for the cultural norm is extramarital involvement. (23:3)

Writing about the changing relations of the sexes in 1927, Judge Lindsey's outlook seems refreshingly frank and relevant today:

What many other persons would call the "moral law," I regard not moral at all. In fact, I think it often cruel, unjust, savage, and ignoble. Take, for instance, the value we place on chastity in women. This is part of our "moral law"... It even insists on an "immaculate conception" in order to make sure that its particular chief deity, a man-god, should be free from this taint. And then, by a special magic, it excepts married women from the general rule. They have had sex relations, but they are chaste and pure--even a loveless marriage--all by virtue of a bit of magic called a wedding ceremony... our conception of what should be the relations of the sexes, particularly in marriage, will have to be revised and put upon a genuinely ethical basis before we can have
a right to call the thing moral. As it stands, I think our
code of sex morality is Immorality with a big "I." It is a
lie more immoral than all the adultery ever committed.
If you don't believe it, make a review of the mess called
Modern Marriage and Divorce. (102:1)

The experimentation with new modes of married and family
togetherness and the emergence of alternative structures express a
strong need to bring greater health and optimum functioning to a
framework of interpersonal relationships formerly regarded as
"frozen" and not amenable to change. The concept of alternative
marital structures has been explored by Herbert A. Otto in his new
book, The Family in Search of a Future. (80) Otto contends that:

The functionality of our major institutions can be assessed
by asking "To what extent is the institution contributing to
the development, actualization, and fulfillment of human
potential?" (80:4)

To increase the functionality of marriage, Otto advised taking a
pluralistic approach to marital structures. He claims:

This is most appropriate, for we are a pluralistic society
with pluralistic needs. In this time of change and accel­
erated social evolution, we should encourage innovation
and experimentation in the development of new forms of
social and communal living. (80:8)

The alternative model which is the focus of this research
project is multilateral marriage. Through a larger "community of
intimates," it is a potential means of providing the size and diversity
fundamentally lacking in autonomous nuclear families. A multi­
lateral marriage consists of three or more individuals all of whom
regard themselves as married to each other. Operationally this
involves a common residence, marital sexual involvement, and a
mutual, equalitarian commitment to each other (which functions psychologically as much as the commitment of legal marriage does). As a functioning social entity rather than a theoretical possibility, it is a new form of marriage being practiced on a very small scale. Nevertheless, its actual practice on any scale is of profound significance for the future of marriage and family relations. The Constantines have stated:

It is new partly because of our unique position to history. Personal fulfillment and meaningful interpersonal relations are transcending other goals that motivate individuals. More and more of our time and energies are freed from pursuit of the more basic needs. We are becoming concerned with the quality of aliveness and not merely the quantity of living. (22:44)

Unfortunately, research is very sparse in this area and lacks depth or breadth. With the exception of the Multilateral Relationships Study Project, which is the only on-going research effort at this time, the pioneers of this new form of human relationships have had to rely on novels and arm-chair speculation to guide their experiments. If multilateral marriage is to become a possible alternative to the contemporary family system, the need for a sensitive recognition by professionals in the field is profound. Herbert Otto concurs with the Constantines in relating research to the need for understanding and social engineering. He states:

It is only with the advent of modern anthropological research and sociological theory that man has recognized his institutions, not as eternal verities, but as defined ways of being social. For the first time, he is now free to examine such institutions as marriage and the family with a certain amount of objectivity and to restructure
these institutions, not in blind compliance to social pressures and economic sanctions, but in full consciousness of his needs and potentials. (80:9)

A responsible and widespread dialogue about multilateral marriage is a vital part of this process and should not be neglected if multilateral marriage is going to emerge as a viable alternate lifestyle. Herein lies the "raison d'être" for this research paper.

Limitations of the Study

The findings and conclusions reached in this study are limited in their application.

One of the main limitations was the lack of a societal precedent and involvement in this process to serve as a guideline. In studying innovations, which will always originate as cultural deviance, both legalistic definitions and those relying on social constructs will fail. Hence, a function of this study is to explore a relatively new phenomenon, that is, it may serve as a basis for studies from which researchers can draw in the future to help build a clearer, multidimensional picture of individuals involved in multilateral marriage.

Another limitation involved the type of sample from which the data was obtained. Due to the fact that multilateral marriage is a relatively new form of marriage being practiced on a very small scale, there was a limitation on the size of the sample.

The lack of factual data and the rarity of multilateral marriage were further compounded by the problem that most participants in such deviant forms of family structure were understandably very reluctant and cautious in their disclosures. Indeed, the generally
hostile feelings toward multilateral marriage (in Dr. Kilgo's words "it raises strong feelings among all who hear it, contemplate it, attempt it, or study it" (63:14)) could pose a threat to the economic existence of the average suburban couple who openly admitted that they were sexually involved with another couple. Hence, the methods open for collecting data were anticipated as a limitation.

Finally, the interpretation of the data was limited by the ability of the researcher and also by the historical time at which the research was done. Experimental forms can be incredibly complex and difficult. Conclusions drawn from the study are based upon source material, present day references, and the current state of society.

Definition of Terms

Before proceeding with a review of literature, some discussion of the semantics related to the subject of multilateral marriage will be included. In studying innovations, which will always originate as cultural deviance, both legalistic definitions and those relying on social constructs will fail. The following list has therefore been compiled with the help of the Constantines (25) to serve as a guide to contemporary jargon for the otherwise isolated professionals in the marriage and family field.

The terms marked with an asterisk (*) indicate new terminology with no single, precise, previously accepted definition.

**Bigamy** - Marriage to two spouses simultaneously, usually only if certified marriage in both cases.

*Co-husband* - One of two or more men in a multiperson marriage.
**Co-marital** - Intimate relations which are open, shared, mutually consensual, that is, a part of or adjunct to a marriage. (Roy and Roy (95))

**Communal marriage** - Marriage in which there is theoretical sexual access by all members of a community to all members (or a large specified subset) of the opposite sex, but not necessarily including a specific commitment or bond in all cases; often used synonymously with group marriage (see free access commune and tribal marriage).

**Complex marriage** - The term for a form of communal marriage practiced by the Oneida Community.

**Consensual adultery** - Extramarital relations by mutual consent. (Robert Libby (67))

**Corporate family (or marriage)** - Euphemism originated by Robert Rimmer (88) for a group marriage of two or three couples.

**Co-wife** - One of two or more women in a multiperson marriage.

**Cyclic monogamy** - Proposed term for Neubeck's (74) structure in which distinct periods are spent with each of several spouses in rotation; (compare serial monogamy).

**Dyadic marriage** - A conventional two-person relationship.

**Exogamous commune** - A commune with internal sexual or marital relations prohibited or proscribed, that is, with an incest taboo.

**Expanded family** - Any form of family that expands the nuclear family through inclusion of people and relationships by selection rather than by blood relationship, for example, group marriage, intimate network, and line marriage; "lateral" expansion as opposed to the "vertical" expansion of the extended family.
Extended family - A network of individuals related by blood or marriage. Marriages within the extended family may be of any form but are usually implied to be monogamous.

Extramarital - Intimate relations (sexual or otherwise) outside a marriage; (see consensual adultery).

Free access commune - A commune with theoretical sexual access by all members to all members (or a large specified subset) of the opposite sex, without a marital commitment; (see communal marriages).

Group marriage - Any marriage of two or more men and two or more women; multilateral marriage.

*Group sex - Sexual interaction among three or more people at once; any sexual activity in which more than two people are present. (Bartell (8))

*Intimate network - A group of nuclear families separately domiciled, but joined by a network of co-marital relations. (Stoller (104))

*Line marriage - A form of multilateral marriage in which new, younger partners are continually added to the conjugal unit. (Heinlein (50))

Menage à trois - A "household of three," usually a dyad plus one paramour; should be distinguished from a three-person multilateral marriage.

Monogamy - One mate (at a time); (see serial monogamy).

*Multilateral marriage - A multiperson marriage in which all participants are married to at least two other participants; usually all participants are married to all others. (Constantine and Constantine (25))
*Multiple marriage* - A group marriage composed of legally married couples only; (used informally by Rimmer and others as alternate for corporate marriage).

*Open-ended marriage* - Co-marital relations as used by Mazur (71).

*Pair-bond* - Borrowed from ethology, the relationship, which, irrespective of marital state, takes precedence over other relationships; preferred by some participants in alternative structures to references to "spouse" or "marriage" (see primary bond).

*Primary bond* - Preferable to pair-bond, as all conditions (primacy, permanence) of the ethological definition are not met in humans.

*Serial or progressive monogamy* - Describes a succession of monogamous relationships of varying duration terminated by mutual agreement and/or divorce.

*Swinging* - Preferred term among adherents of social mate exchange. "willingness to swap sexual partners with another couple with whom they are not acquainted, and/or to go to a swinging party and be willing for both partners to have sexual intercourse with strangers." (Symonds (106))

*Tribal marriage* - A form of marriage in which all members of a social group theoretically have sexual access to all members (or a large specified subset) of the opposite sex; currently often used synonymously with communal marriage. Tribal marriage is typically hierarchically structured around a permanent family leader with one remaining a member of the tribe despite geographic remoteness. (Downing (39))
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This thesis is essentially a review of literature; therefore, only a brief review of authors referred to later in the thesis is cited at this point.

In reviewing the literature, it becomes evident that interest in alternatives to traditional monogamy is increasing. In 1967 the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association included a symposium on "Alternate Models for the American Family Structure." In 1969 Life ran an article on multilateral marriage in Denmark and in the spring of 1972 featured a special issue on new forms of the cherished institution, "The Marriage Experiments." Appleton-Century-Crofts published psychologist Herbert Otto's collection of alternate models for the American family structure, The Family in Search of a Future, and the National Council on Family Relations ran a theme section on "Polygyny, Polyandry, Group Marriage, and other Variations." Another recently published book by Michael Gordon, The Nuclear Family in Crisis: The Search for an Alternative, provides insights into the communal family life in historical, cross-cultural, and contemporary perspectives. The inspirations for this book grew out of the realization by Professor Gordon that many of his students showed great interest in communal families, and no
longer unquestionably assumed they would ultimately form nuclear families. It also contains an excellent report on multilateral marriage by Larry and Joan Constantine. (45) Another book which explores the nature of contemporary life styles in the United States which are characterized by intimate interaction is *Intimate Life Styles: Marriage and its Alternatives* by Jack and Joan Delora. (37)

While it is not known what portion of marriages are significantly departing from the traditional monogamous model, indications are that non-conventional structures are becoming a sizeable minority. The Breedloves (29:1) statistically estimated that some six to nine million individuals have regularly exchanged partners with the knowledge and consent of their spouses. Kafka and Ryder (60:1) found in a National Institute of Mental Health survey of two thousand upper middle class young marrieds, that approximately three percent had unconventional marital patterns with explicit prior agreement on the inclusion of co-marital involvement. Not only were these spouses non-possessive toward each other, but they encouraged the free expression of affection and stressed the present rather than the future. Relationships which were more open and intimate than monogamous were sought. (These marriages were termed "open-ended" by Reverend Ronald Mazur (71) in a plenary address at the 1970 annual meeting of the National Council on Family Relations.) In the more conventional areas, we know from Kinsey's studies (64:585) that more than half of all males have been involved extramaritally. Johnson's study (58:455) with a non-volunteer sample suggests that, controlling for opportunity, about two-thirds of the males and fifty-six percent of the females have been extramaritally involved. A
Psychology Today reader survey (7:43) found twenty-five percent of the respondents interested in multilateral marriage at some level. These findings are probably somewhat indicative of the attitudes and behavior of a young, liberal, highly educated population.

There is a rich body of fiction on multilateral marriage, largely dealing with utopian proposals in terms of positive benefits. Robert H. Rimmer, a popular utopian novelist, anticipated and stimulated today's new multiperson experimentation through a number of fictional treatments. His books include: The Rebellion of Yale Marratt (89), Proposition 31 (90), You and I Searching for Tomorrow (92), and Thursday, My Love. (93) Other fictional accounts include Robert Heinlein's Stranger in a Strange Land (51) and The Moon is a Harsh Mistress. (50) Rimmer's earlier novel, The Harrad Experiment (88), led to the establishment of The Harrad Letter, a newsletter for people interested in multilateral marriage.

Albert Ellis, in an article entitled "Group Marriage: A Possible Alternative" (41), reviews the early literature on multilateral marriage and discusses and identifies several of the major difficulties and advantages of such structures. While the article contains some insights into the concepts of multilateral marriage, there appears to be a lack of definition and precision throughout, with terms such as "crashing," "promiscuity," "mate-swapping," etc. at times being treated as multilateral marriage.

A book which further reviews the early literature on multilateral marriage (group marriage) is Kamilaroi and Kurnai: Group Marriage and Relationships by Fison and Howitt. (43) It provides an
overview of last century's debate on whether group marriage was ever a reality.

Reverend A. S. Henriksen (53), in an address delivered to the Pacific Unitarian Church, presented a fair, realistic picture of multilateral marriage based on an informal meeting of members of two multilateral marriages. The author was able to isolate a number of balances, trade-offs, and sacrifices necessary in a multilateral marriage. He appeared to have a very non-judgmental approach.

Another address, "What about Group Marriage?" (66), presented by Hy Levy to the Young Single Parent's Club in Los Angeles, provides definitions and information both "pro" and "con" about multilateral marriage. Hy Levy is one of the founding members of Family Synergy, an organization dedicated to the belief of expanded family.

The legal aspects of multilateral marriage have been carefully summarized by Gary Solis in a paper entitled "Multilateral Marriage and California Law." (102) He discusses the legal statute of multilateral marriage and points out the peculiar state of legally married vs. single participants in multilateral marriages. His conclusion: "The Man can get you any time he wants (including under the Mann Act)." (102:13)

While interest and speculation is high, very little actual research has been published about multilateral marriage, especially research designed to explore the rationales for multilateral marriage. The Multilateral Relationship Study Project with Larry and Joan Constantine is the only full-scale investigation at this time.
Constantines have presented and published several sociological studies, many of which comprise the main body of the thesis.

A brief review of the studies includes: "Multilateral Marriage, an Alternate Family Structure in Practice" (19), an early definition of their study project with a discussion of key aspects based on contact with a small number of people; "The Pragmatics of Multilateral Marriage" (20), an informal discussion based on the first year of study with concrete though tentative conclusions on successfully forming and continuing a multilateral marriage; "Where Marriage is Going" (22), a concise summary of multilateral marriage and a prognosis; "Personal Growth in Multilateral Marriage" (24), a discussion of the relationship between growth in self-actualization and multilateral marriage participation, including requirements for growth and potential facilitory effects; "Sexual Aspects of Multilateral Relationships" (26), a view of sex as motivation for participation, and sexual problems in multilateral marriage; "Dissolution of Marriage in a Non-Conventional Context" (21), a case study analysis of dissolution patterns in multilateral marriages which have broken up; "The Group Marriage" (30), a sociological overview of early study results; "Emotional Health of Participants in a 'Deviant' Family Form" (31), an analysis of the results of a personality inventory, indicating deviance is not pathology; and, "Counseling Implications of Co-Marital and Multilateral Marriages" (29), a discussion of the key problems in multilateral and open-ended dyadic marriages from the perspective of family service professionals.

Working closely with the Constantines has been Angie Hunt (55), a child psychologist. She has just completed the first research
Neither aggression, responsibility, or work and play habits are affected by the multilateral situation. They seem to be independent factors. However, the multilateral structure does seem to relate to independence in children, a close identification with a biological parent, and a positive sense of self. (55:31)

Because so little research has been done, extreme caution must be used in generalizing from research to date. It is evident that more systematic and unbiased studies of the realities of alternative experiences is imperative. A case in point is an interesting article which appeared in the March issue of the *Journal of Sexual Behavior*, entitled "Can Group Marriage Work? - The Prognosis Doesn't Look Good" by Reese D. Kilgo, PhD, Assit. Professor of Education and Sociology, University of Alabama. (63:8) It is actually more like six articles, because in addition to Dr. Kilgo's article, there are comments upon it by Robert H. Rimmer; Herbert L. Smith, PhD, Department of Sociology, Western Michigan University; George R. Bach, Lecturer, University of California, Los Angeles; Larry and Joan Constantine, of the Multilateral Relationships Study Project; and David Smith, M.D., Founder and Medical Director of the Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic. Although a great deal of information is contained in the article and comments, the amount of misinformation and bias is almost equal. The article demonstrated how much misunderstanding of multilateral marriage exists even among some professionals in the field. (The idea that multilateral marriage is principally a phenomenon of youth rebelling against the
establishment, and the inability to distinguish between multilateral marriage and communes were among the most glaring examples.)

The purpose of this study is to substitute an understanding of the actual phenomenon for the surfeit of conjecture and argument.

The investigator would like to make special mention of the bibliography. It is intended as a tool of access. Included therein are selected items in certain distinct but related areas based on relevance and significance. Thus some citations on communes (Holloway (54)), (Downing (39)), (Kanter (61)), (Margolies (69)); social mate-swapping (Bell (10)), (Bartell (8)), (Breedlove (14)), (Denfeld and Gordon (38)), (O'Neil and O'Neil (77)), (Smith and Smith (98)), (Symonds (106) (108)), (Varni (112)); extramarital relations (Cuber and Harroff (34)), (Ellis (41)), (Johnson (57) (58)), (Libby (67)), (Neubeck (74) (75)), (Roy and Roy (94) (95)), (Whitehurst (116)); and ambisexuality (Mathews (70)), as well as a few broader references on human sexuality (O'Neil and O'Neil (77)) and family studies (Kafka and Ryder (60)), (Nimkoff (76)), (Stoller (104)), have been included where they bear directly on the study of multilateral marriage or its place in a larger perspective.
CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

This exploratory study will examine a particular area of human experience, multilateral marriage, in an attempt to clarify why some individuals have chosen to reject the safety and security of traditional marriage and live as they do, and what they hope to achieve by doing so.

As a first step toward exploring multilateral marriage, the investigator contacted the Multilateral Relationships Study Project (MRSP), which investigates cases of contemporary marital "deviance" focusing on multilateral marriage. Established in May, 1969 by Larry and Joan Constantine, the Study Project has spent substantial time observing families living in this marital style, interviewing them formally and informally, conducting taped, semi-structured individual interviews, administering several questionnaires, batteries of standard psychometric tests, and some special instruments of their own design (see "Methodology of the Study of Multilateral Relations" (28)). The research design is based on gathering data to assist in meeting the needs of participants, potential participants in new family forms, and of professionals who counsel the family. Exhaustive correspondence with the Constantines has provided the investigator with much of the source material, including published and unpublished results of their studies.
Because of the great difficulty in locating people involved in multilateral marriage, as well as the time-consuming effort to get behind the "public facade," the Constantines advised that the investigator contact Dr. Herb Seal in the Los Angeles area, a psychologist who was currently counselling on a "preventative medicine" basis, eight multilateral marriages, and co-counselling seven others. He agreed to relate his findings and insights on the dynamics of multilateral marriage to the investigator. This was accomplished through a series of taped interviews with Dr. Seal. His views were compared—and contrasted—with those of the Constantines.

The investigator attended and taped lectures given by Dr. Seal on multilateral marriage at the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of California at Riverside, and the University of Southern California. This information was later utilized as part of the data for the present study.

Dr. Seal introduced the investigator to a recently founded Los Angeles organization, Family Synergy, dedicated to the belief that people can live fuller and more rewarding lives, and realize more of their potential by living in families larger than the nuclear family. Over a six month period, the investigator attended several of their meetings and outings to gather information through discussion and exchange of ideas about multilateral marriage. The investigator met Hy Levy (66), Carolyn Symonds (105), Reverend Henriken (52), and numerous other people interested in and/or participating in this alternate life style. The meetings and discussions were also taped wherever possible to afford the investigator with as much objective evidence as this type of study would allow.
Two alternate life style conferences held in the Los Angeles area provided opportunities to collect further data. The first, "The Third Annual Elysium Alternatives Life Style Symposium," was sponsored by the Elysium Institute and featured people living in intentional communities, rural and urban communes, cooperative houses, and expanded families, including two multilateral marriages. During the symposium, people told how they had become involved with their multilateral marriages, their expectations and disappointments, their problems, and how they evaluated their multilateral relationships. Participants gave some enlightening answers to specific questions posed by the investigator during the question and answer period.

The second conference, entitled "The Community of Alternatives," was sponsored by the Alternative Futures Communities and The Happy Company. The investigator was especially fortunate to attend this conference because it featured Robert H. Rimmer, a popular utopian novelist whose writings have introduced many people to the concept of multilateral marriage. Through a short, informal, taped interview, the researcher obtained some of his more recent views on multilateral marriages.

Because the conventional journals have been all but silent on alternative family living styles in contemporary America, they were used as secondary source materials. The investigator utilized the libraries of the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of Southern California, the California State University at Northridge, and Los Angeles City. These primarily provided sources
from certain distinct but related areas which were relevant and significant to the study of multilateral marriage and/or its place in the larger perspective.

"In-group" publications from The Modern Utopian, the Harrad Newsletter, and the Family Synergy Newsletter, were also helpful in supplying supplementary data.

Because little research has been published about multilateral marriages, especially research designed to explore the rationales for such structures, the investigator was very careful to qualify any generalization from the limited research to date. All sources mentioned above were analyzed for accuracy and authenticity.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

An Historical Perspective

An historical variation of the current phenomenon, multilateral marriage, is group marriage, a form of marriage which, according to Albert Ellis (41:85), a well-known researcher and author, has been "reasonably common" throughout human history.

In its strictest form, it consisted of a relatively small number of adults, from about four to fifteen, living together, sharing labor, goods and services, bearing and raising their children in common, and engaging in promiscuous sex relations, so that every female in the group had intercourse, at one time or another, with every male in the group. In its looser form, it consisted of communal or tribal marriage, where a larger group of adults, say, up to several hundred individuals, lived in a single cooperative community and had theoretical sexual access to all other members of the same community, although actually, in a year's time, a particular member of this sexual-economic cooperative might have engaged in intercourse and potentially procreated with only a few other members of the large group. (41:85)

According to Ellis, large scale or tribal forms of group marriage are rare in human annals. Many mythical ones have been reported over the years, but authentic instances, such as that of the
perfectionist Oneida Community, which lasted for thirty years during the middle of the nineteenth century, have seldom been proven to exist. (41:85)

The anthropological and sociological literature of the late nineteenth century was preoccupied with the question of whether primitive man generally lived in a state of group marriage. Westermarck noted that:

It is often said that the human race must have originally lived in a state of promiscuity, where individual marriage did not exist, where all the men in a horde or tribe had indiscriminate access to all the women, and where the children born of these unions belonged to the community at large. This opinion has been expressed by Bachofen, McLennan, Morgan, Lord Avebury, Giraud-Teulon, Lippert, Kohler, Post, Wilken, Kropotkin, Wilutzky, Bloch, and many others. (41:86)

Among those cited by Westermarck, Lord Avebury testified:

My position was that no such institution (as Marriage) existed amongst our primitive ancestors, and that they lived in a state of what, for want of a better term, I propose to call "communal marriage." This has been admitted by some high authorities, but questioned by others, who do not seem, however, to be always consistent, and while denying it in some passages, appear to admit it in others. (41:86)

Iwan Bloch was, if anything, even stronger in his belief that monogamous or even polygamous marriage, as we know these forms of family relationships, did not exist among early man:

Whoever knows the nature of the sexual impulse, whoever has arrived at a clear understanding regarding the cares of human evolution, and finally, whoever has studied the conditions that even now prevail among primitive peoples
and among modern civilized races in the matter of sexual relations, can have no doubt whatever that in the beginnings of human development a state of sexual promiscuity did actually prevail. (41:86)

On the other hand, many authorities have violently disputed the notion that group marriage was a general pattern in early human history. Author James Todd notes that:

On the whole, the evidence is inconclusive for the former universality of group marriage. I do not consider it necessary to assure that the race passed through this stage in the evolution of familial forms. Our own conclusion is that group marriage has not yet been sufficiently established to build extensively upon... We should be prepared to find in primitive society a varying condition of promiscuity and fixity in the marriage relation, which we might briefly term intermittent promiscuity. (41:87)

Edward Westermarck thoroughly investigated the hypothesis that early man regularly and universally practiced tribal promiscuity or large scale group marriage. His findings and conclusions have been generally accepted as dealing the death blow to this quaint hypothesis.

It is not, of course, impossible that among some peoples the intercourse between sexes may have been almost promiscuous. But the hypothesis according to which promiscuity has formed a general stage in the social history of mankind...is in my opinion one of the most un-scientific ever set forth within the whole domain of sociological speculation. (41:88)

In the investigator's opinion, Westermarck was most probably right in this conclusion. It should be noted, however, that he merely stated that tribal promiscuity never seems to have been a general custom among primitive peoples. He did not say that it never existed
at all, and he by no means ruled out the occurrence, many times
during history, of separate instances of small scale group marriage.
As Baber notes:

The human family has not universally gone through a
uniform series of stages in its evolution. There is every
reason to believe that the development of the family was
sometimes random and sometimes opportunistic, as has
been the case in the evolution of many other phases of
culture. (41:88)

Multilateral Marriage as a New Phenomenon

Of central importance to the understanding of this study is the
fact that the investigator is dealing with a new form of marriage, not
a living arrangement, an economic structure, or a specific pattern of
sexual interaction.

The classic characterization of marriage in terms of co-
residence, sexual access, and division of labor, while at least objec-
tive, excludes cases of different residences, fails to differentiate
rights of coitus from rights to children which are sometimes bestowed
on different individuals, and relies on a factor of diminishing con-
temporary significance, namely division of labor. (25:159)

Marriage is a relationship between individuals, one best char-
acterized as involving an emotional bond or commitment. In the final
analysis, what makes two people married to each other is that they
perceive themselves to be married, bonded, or committed. Legal
certification and social sanction are factors which, in most societies,
correlate highly with actual marriage. In this framework it is easy
to interpret such cases as the trial marriage, the long-term affair
described as being "really a marriage," and the legal "marriage" arrangement described by its participants as "not really a marriage at all." (25:159)

The phenomenon under current investigation is multilateral marriage, which is defined in this study as a marriage of at least three individuals, each of whom is "married" to at least two other members of the conjugal unit. This definition can be operationalized by requiring that each member of a group in question, when queried independently, names at least two other members to whom he/she perceives himself/herself to be married, or with whom he/she has a bond or commitment perceived to be essentially analogous to marriage. (25:159)

Multilateral marriage differs from group marriage principally in including certain three-person marriages (triads). Classically, group marriage has been defined as a marriage between two or more men and two or more women. The two terms, however, are often used interchangeably in the informal context.

In this study, the concept of multilateral marriage is viewed as new and specific, and can be contrasted with other related but not identical concepts. It is often confused with the more publicized forms of contemporary "deviance" in marital living arrangements.

For example, an "expanded family" is any form of family which expands the nuclear family through inclusion of people through selection or choice, rather than through blood relationships. Multilateral marriages are one form of expanded family. The expanded family can include many relationships and groups both living together and
living in separate dwellings, or even cities. (People in a multilateral marriage generally share the same dwelling, except for fairly limited time periods. However, this is not an absolute requirement.)

"Extended family" is an old and fairly common term. In 360 B.C. Plato wrote "...of these guardians, no one man and one woman are to set up house together privately: wives are to be held in common by all, so too are the children..." (85:156) An extended family is a nuclear family plus other individuals (or nuclear families) related by blood or marriage. Marriages within the extended family may take any form, but they are usually implied to be monogamous. The term "extended family" is often confused with, and used in place of, the term "expanded family." But the two are very different.

Multilateral marriage can be contrasted with the historical kind of "polygamous" marriage. In a polygamous marriage, one person of one sex is married to each of two or more people of the opposite sex. By contrast, in a multilateral marriage involving the same sex ratios, the members of the more numerous sex have mutual bonds fully equivalent to those with the member of the other sex. Historically, neither polygyny nor polyandry has constituted multilateral marriage because, in addition, the universal norm has been subservient or inferior status for the more numerous sex.

Uncritical observers often tend to classify all non-monogamous sex as "wife swapping" in a thinly disguised value judgment. Social mate exchange or "swinging," as its adherents prefer to call it, is absolutely distinguishable from multilateral marriage. Numerous investigators, among them Bell (10), Denfeld and Gordon (33), and Symonds (98) have stated that swingers are conventional and
conforming in nearly every aspect of their life style, except the pattern of co-marital sexual involvement. The sexual element is highly compartmentalized with the remainder of the marriage, perhaps even being over conventionalized in compensation. (26:221) The prevailing ethos is one in which sexual involvement is isolated, limited to a physical experience, and void of any interpersonal involvement outside the dyadic marriage. (It should be noted that not all swingers eschew interpersonal relations for purely sexual activities. Symonds (108:11) found that a small minority of "utopian" or ideological swingers seek stable close relationships.)

As a rule, participants in multilateral marriage are much more liberal in areas other than their sexual ethic. Functionally, multilateral marriage appears to represent much more of a total life style commitment than an isolated departure. The Constantines (26:208) have found that the important elements in a multilateral marriage are the close relationships between partners, the expanded family, and the growth through interpersonal process. It is not specifically or predominantly a sexual experience.

Interestingly, many of the multilateral marriage respondents have reported having swinging or mate-swapping experiences. (26:208)

Interviews revealed that nearly all had sought contacts with people with similar interests in establishing close, stable relationships, and were disappointed by the swingers' emphasis on gymnastics. This suggests that the "utopian" or ideological swingers are indeed a population from which multilateral marriages might emerge.

Most respondents conclude, however, that swinging is not a productive way to work towards a multilateral relationship. (26:208)
The Oneida Community (19:159) had a form of multilateral marriage called "complex marriage" in which all males were married to all women. This too is a different phenomenon in that the marriage bonds were not regarded as wholly voluntary. Members of the community by birth or by dependency were also considered so married, and attempts within the community to form special relationships were strongly discouraged.

The Oneida structure was part of a "utopian community" or "commune." Such communes have a long history both here and abroad, but again differ from multilateral marriage in several relevant dimensions. The size of communities generally extends well beyond the point where real interpersonal intimacy among all members can be sustained. The resultant group is considered less cohesive, more informal, and amorphous. Dynamically, the differences are even more pronounced. Membership in communities may fluctuate substantially (one year to complete turnover may be typical (97)); it is not always possible to identify who is "in" and who is "out"; and the criteria for acceptance into or rejection from, are not well-defined. Where well-defined, entrance is frequently predicated on mere desire or on majority acceptance—these are not hallmarks of a marriage.

The "tribal marriage" (39:122) is a close affiliate of the communal marriage. A "tribe" is typically a hierarchy with a permanent family leader at the top. Tribal membership may be more formal and ritualized and somewhat divorced from actual group living. An individual retains his tribal membership despite geographic remoteness.
The Respondents

Certain sociological and psychological aspects of the context in which multilateral marriages form and dissolve are important to understanding this novel form of marriage.

The participants discussed in this study include members of the MRSP, the clients of Dr. Herb Seal, and various groups the investigator has personally contacted or has knowledge of. Researchers of this phenomenon estimate that there may be fewer than a hundred, and almost certainly less than a thousand multilateral marriages in the United States today. (30:206) The Constantines are studying seventeen groups comprised of approximately sixty-four adults and thirty-five children. In every case, the children are integrated into the expanded relationship being fully aware of their parent's involvement. Dr. Herb Seal counsels, or co-counsels, fifteen multilateral marriages consisting of approximately ninety people.

The respondents cited in this study reside in all regions of the United States, with the majority concentrated in California and New England.

Multilateral marriage is not distinctively a young person's phenomenon. The age of participants in the study ranges from twenty-two to sixty, with two distinct clusters, one in their mid-twenties and the other in their mid-thirties. Seal notes, however, that in the emerging Family Synergy groups, the age range is broadening.
The evidence would indicate that multilateral marriage is primarily a middle class phenomenon. As one indicator of socio-economic status, the median individual income in the MRSP groups is $6,000 per annum for employed individuals. The mean total for group income was $15,000 per annum, ranging from $9,000 to $340,000. (26:206)

The respondents showed such diversity of occupation that it was rare to find two of them in the same occupational category.

Most of these groups are of recent origin, dating from about six months to five years. The investigator does know of one multilateral marriage which has lasted twenty-three years. The median duration for dissolved groups on which returns from the Constantines are available is sixteen months; for extant groups, twenty-nine months. (25:160)

The investigator wishes to avoid the connotations of "success" and "failure" which might derive from considerations of longevity. In this framework, the success of any marriage is validly measured only in terms of its contribution to the happiness and self-realization of family members. Longevity cannot serve as an accurate indicator of success for any form of marriage.

The most common conjugal units found in multilateral marriage are the tetrad (four adult members) and the triad (three adult members). The largest conjugal unit studied herein consists of seven adult members. Unit size may reflect very fundamental processes
of formation. Threesomes formed by adding a single man or woman to a couple appear to be the easiest to form. This is true of triads of two men and one woman or triads of two women and one man. If the group can overcome the triad norm to establish an even one-for-one ratio of males to females, the new arrangement may have far greater potential for stability. (20:34)

However, the majority of participants entered were couples married for seven to ten years on the average. Those who entered as singles may have suffered some handicap, perhaps because they lacked the informing experience of a deeply significant, on-going relationship. Though a couple will have much to undo and unlearn, there is much that they have learned about loving and living with another which will serve them well.

A recurrent query, especially from professional quarters, concerns the emotional health of participants in multilateral marriage. Behind the question is the unstated hypothesis that one must be "sick" to "act out" an "adolescent fantasy" of multiple conjugal partners. A substudy of the MRSP (31) determined the emotional health of participants in a "deviant" family form using Shostrum's Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) and the Minnesota Multi-phasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). Results from this study indicate that besides being highly inner-directed and self-supportive, these individuals, more so than the general population, are flexible in applying their values and principles. They are sensitive to their own needs and feelings and freely express those needs and feelings in behavior. They show an unusually high capacity for warm interpersonal relationships. Retrospectively, this makes a great deal of sense for
people who, against the values of their culture, have entered into committed multiple intimate relationships. As Larry Constantine notes: "Not all participants, of course, reveal this combination, but as a group they are anything but a pathologic population." (31:6)

Rationales for the New Structure

The motivations for the formation of multilateral marriages can be studied from a number of perspectives. In the broad sociological sense, the nuclearization and increasing isolation of the contemporary family, the growing interest in self-realization, and greater opportunity for individual definitions of alternative life styles are certainly factors. The problems and limitations of the conventional monogamous marriage have been widely discussed in this context. ((94) (71) (24))

In asking why individuals would choose to enter multilateral marriages, the public arguments offered by respondents may be as important as the private ones, the surface reasons as interesting as the underlying causes. How the individual perceives the origins of his involvement says much of the individual and the multilateral marriage.

Public Pronouncements

Public justifications, that is, the readiest answers and reasons given on casual acquaintance, most often make reference to "community" or to "extended family." Those individuals who are primarily interested in gaining a sense of the brotherhood of man, and in loving and living cooperatively with a "community of intimates"
feel they may partially achieve their goal by participating in multilateral marriage. In this kind of situation, they can devote themselves to a larger segment of humanity in a more highly personalized way.

Multilateral marriages are built on multilateral relationships, which provide a number of adults to share problems, to communicate, to feel cared about, and to care about. It provides a need fulfillment. (26:212) If a woman has an interest in art, for example, and her husband does not, her co-husband (or co-wife) might share this interest. This provides a way of sharing these good feelings within the family. Similarly, bad feelings, crises, and conflicts can be made easier to bear when they can be shared with people who truly care about each other. Even the death of a spouse, or of a parent, can be made less difficult when there are other family members to turn to.

Other public pronouncements espouse the broadening and enhancement of love relationships for individuals. For a long time, people were aware that love was not a limited commodity. In the extended family many people were loved without stigma or blame, or feelings that they were cheating their mate, or being cheated. As the mobile, nuclear family became more common, people became more isolated from this idea. They began to believe that they should love only one person (other than their parents), and receive all their adult love from this person. In the opinion of Hy Levy (66), this is the highest-risk manner of living, and the least likely to be fulfilling. While not everyone can accept the concept that loving many people is
beneficial, many people are aware of their desire to live more fully, to extend their feelings, and to love more than they do.

Pragmatic benefits are also inured by participants in multilateral marriage. There is a broader economic base from which to work, and better conservation of capital. The participants can share expenses for a larger house and collaborate in shopping, cooking, cleaning, babysitting, and other household tasks; they can arrange more easily for social contacts and outlets; they can work together on their own estate, and can own fewer consumer products or appliances. They can maintain a good measure of economic security, even if some adult members are temporarily out of work, and enjoy many other benefits that would not be readily available to a single couple and their children.

One of these, in the classical sense, involves specialization of labor. The work can be divided more efficiently so that the participants can perform the functions they want, or the functions they do best. On the other hand, de-specialization of labor may also be facilitated advantageously in the multilateral marriage situation. Classical sex roles may be rotated or exchanged. "House-husbands" (or _hemman_ as they are referred to in Denmark) can raise children while wives pursue careers. Less child-rearing responsibility rests on any given pair of shoulders. (19:162)

Children also benefit from multilateral marriages. They seem to thrive on the enriched environment and the multiplicity of adult models to emulate, as well as from the increased opportunity for love and attention. (55:49)
Another area generally included in the public pronouncements is that of security. Conflict and crises, death and taxes may all prove more bearable to the individual who can rely on the immediate and intimate psychic support of his several "intimates." There exists the opportunity in the group to share both problems and joys in a community of trust.

The general public can identify positively with all the foregoing benefits and values facilitated by the effectively structured and functioning multilateral marriage. The sexual dimension, however, which is often publically de-emphasized, poses conflicts that the majority of people find most threatening. The marked de-emphasis of sex is probably a reasonably protective mechanism (103:19) considering the shock often unleashed by talk of open multi-person sexual involvement as an integral part of a family structure.

Private Level

In deeper investigations, nevertheless, sex emerges as fairly central to participation in multilateral marriages. (30:209) It does not appear to be a driving force for initial entry, but is frequently discussed as a retrospective benefit. (30:209)

The question of why may be taken as an inquiry into the general sexual and marital propensities of humans. It would appear that both men and women, given the opportunity, prefer sexual intercourse with a number of different partners. Not only is polygamy the norm in more than twice as many cultures as monogamy (76:17) but breaches of fidelity are the rule rather than the exception in most monogamous cultures. Reported differences in actual polysexual
propensity in men and women may be adequately explained by differences in opportunity and socialization. (30:209) Johnson (58:455) has found, using careful techniques on a non-volunteer suburban population, that just over two-thirds of men and fifty-six percent of women had a high potential for extramarital involvement, given the opportunity.

A multilateral marriage provides for sex with a variety of partners without sacrificing the interpersonal dimension. Even a happy extramarital affair based on deep affection most often has the disadvantage of conflict with the spouse's wishes and must remain clandestine and unshared. Here is a critical distinction. An affair has the potential to separate spouses, for it creates experiences and feelings which are not or cannot be shared, or if finally shared, may inflict pain. The essence of multilateral marriage is sharing and acceptance of all forms of intimacy. It has been noted that in many of the three-person situations (triads) the couple's common involvement with a third party has strengthened their own relationship. (97)

It is important in this context, to understand the phenomenological differences between sexual variety and a variety of sexual partners. Larry and Joan Constantine express this distinction in a strongly worded but accurate statement: "The phrase 'They're all the same in the dark' is only true for anaethetised blind deaf-mute retardates copulating with strangers." (19:161) It is possible for intimacy, including sexual intimacy, to be unique and have a unique unduplicatable effect on the participants for each unique combination.
The researcher does not imply that the desire for sexual variety per se constitutes a sound motive for entering a multilateral marriage. Where this has been the case, the multilateral marriages have frequently not lasted long. (26:209) The point stands that the availability of shared, non-destructive, and enjoyable variety for all members is a very valid advantage of this marital style.

At this level of intimacy, considerations of personal growth, self-discovery, and self-realization assume paramount importance. Many respondents cite personal growth toward self-actualization as a primary reason for participation in multilateral marriage. They seek expanded intimacy as a primary means to achieving self-growth.

An entire constellation of positively directed growth concepts center around the self. Ultimately at the heart of these is self-knowledge and self-insight. Jourard (59:30) has asserted that only through self-disclosure do we come to know (and love) ourselves.

The person(s) to whom one discloses functions acts like a mirror. Self-disclosure by one person facilitates the same by the other. When people with different propensities to disclose interact, disclosure by the less prone moves closer to the level of the person more prone to disclose, while the latter continues undiminished. While freshness of perception is important to discovery, trust and respect for the person giving feedback may be essential for its reflected content to affect the other.

Two other factors are also operative—duration and numbers. In the words of one respondent: "When two women who know me well and whom I love and trust both keep telling me something which differs from what I believe about myself, I damn well
better listen!" This is essentially different than a dyadic marriage in which there is only "your perception versus mine." (24:19)

Further, the participants' perception of their groups as almost infinitely supportive, is extremely important. The collective, multifaceted support of the group can rally to the aid of anyone at the slightest cry for emotional help.

While the ability to extend love to and receive love from more than one person is one crucial aspect of personal growth, the multiple meaningful relationships engendered by multilateral marriage encourage growth in many other areas as well.

Every human being is unique, and every combination of two human beings creates further uniqueness. In each relationship, different aspects of the multidimensional creature called "I" emerge and flourish. Where friends may affect each other only in surface structure, the intimate contact of the multilateral marriage affects the core of each. The amount of risk involved, of course, is equally magnified. (19:160)

Another facet of personal growth is honesty. The notion that one can lie, put up a front, or "play games," undetected is often dispelled as more people are included. Games which may not be recognized by one's spouse (or even by oneself) are frequently identified when other people are involved. Hence, the group ethics encourage honesty with oneself and with others. This pressure may not be as easy to live with, but it is a path towards personal growth. (66:5)

Therefore, multilateral marriage can foster personal growth, which offers a possibility of reaching and sustaining a level of
direction, honesty, and intimacy which may not be possible to attain elsewhere. In a functioning multilateral marriage one finds intensity and maximal duration of interaction. Above all, the multilateral marriage is a group, with the multiplicity of viewpoints and sources of feedback characteristic of groups. The functioning multilateral marriage is unique in that all the feedback comes from persons with whom the individual has the closest relationship attainable. Trust is a **sine qua non** of marriage; it is not "built" hastily through being passed around a circle. At the present time, the rarity of multilateral marriage makes neither objective measurement nor systematic enhancement of this growth possible. (24:20)

**Deeper Reasons**

A vital question frequently asked concerns whether multilateral marriage participation may be motivated by deep-seated pathology in personality or in prior marriages. It is important in answering this to establish a broader notion of health than is usually available. In particular, conceptualizations of pathology based on acts which are simply labeled "sick" are clearly inadequate. If one begins by defining multi-person sex as pathological, then one will be unable to differentiate healthy and unhealthy reasons behind the act. As Ellis (42:153) and others have pointed out, extramarital and co-marital sex are not intrinsically unhealthy in their effects on individuals and marriages. This analysis should be extended to other elements of sexual and marital behavior. (30:210)

Evaluated as far as current methods allow, previously married participants who enter into multilateral marriages as couples have
had at least normally healthy marriages. (30:210) On a whole, they realize the limitations in their relationships and evidence constructive efforts to improve these aspects.

In summary, it appears that individuals enter a multilateral marriage because they want to build a stronger, more secure, more vital, more cohesive, more productive family, one that provides an enlarged framework for personal growth and an enriched environment for the nurture of their children. The participants view the multilateral structure as potentially providing exactly the size and diversity they feel is fundamentally lacking in autonomous, nuclear monogamy.

As Albert Ellis has noted:

Multilateral marriage tends to add an experimental quality to human existence that is likely to be absent or reduced in monogamic mating. Under monogamy (or, for that matter, polygamy) a woman tends to marry at an early age and to have long-term relations with one man and a few children for the rest of her life. Her intense and deep encounters with other human beings, therefore, tend to be quite limited: by the time she dies, it is questionable whether she has ever truly lived. If this same woman participates for a number of years in a multilateral marriage, it is almost certain that she will have multi-faceted sex, love, childrearing, and other human relations that she would otherwise never have had, and that she may thereby know herself as a person much better and develop along several fulfilling lines that she easily could have failed to know. And the same thing goes, though perhaps to a lesser degree, for the average male in our society, who today only has one or two monogamous marital experiences. (41:96)

Problems and Potentials

The investigator has decided to focus on the problems and strengths in multilateral marriages as the framework for discussion. As detractors often point out, the problems of conventional marriages
must be multiplied in multilateral marriages because of the larger number of persons. Often overlooked is the fact that the means for resolution of problems might be concomitantly multiplied. The key questions involve what effects these problems produce in actual experience. These are questions which can be given only tentative answers.

Jealousy

Operationally, what most distinguishes multilateral marriage from a conventional dyadic one, is the potential for and the necessity to deal with jealousy, possessiveness, and competition as an intrinsic part of group functioning.

One of the most valuable insights to emerge from researchers in this area is the recognition that jealousy is a convenient labeling by others of a cluster of behavioral cues, most often something which expresses ownership or control over the "object person," or anger or violence directed at the "rival." Consequently one tends to equate jealousy with possessiveness. What the person really experiences is: desire to possess another person, desire to control another person (which is different than owning), fear of or the threat of loss of another (real or imagined). There may be an actual or threatened loss of status (because of ownership or identification); there may be envy; there may be the desire for exclusivity. (24:18)

In this culture, a fairly strong value judgment is placed on jealousy. For most, it is a desirable manifestation of deep affection, sometimes invoked as a proof of a real relationship. In contrast, a
minority derides and devalues jealousy as "un-cool," a proof of immaturity. Both evaluations may be too monolithic to accommodate.

In a multilateral marriage, the probability of many jealousy experiences by each participant is very high. This affords frequent opportunities for personal growth. Indeed, growth is required, for continued jealousy can destroy a marriage. One central factor distinguishing multilateral from dyadic marriage is that the "rival" is inside the multilateral marriage. Possessiveness always depersonalizes the "object" of possession. Ownership of others and relating to them as persons—in their personhood—are mutually exclusive.

Control over other persons makes growth difficult. (24:18)

If all jealousy is simply rejected as undesirable or immature, the affect goes underground to interfere with group functioning and the exchange of other feelings. If jealousy is lauded or condoned, growth in important dimensions can be hindered. Thus it is necessary for participants in multilateral marriages to differentiate among various forms of jealousy. Jealousy, if approached properly, becomes an opportunity to discover new information about individuals and their relationships. (24:18)

Jealousy is more likely to appear early in a relationship. In an established, stable relationship, actual loss appears less likely. If the relationship is based on openness and mutual insight, it is more likely that control and ownership can be dealt with directly rather than emerging as "jealousy." Moreover, the deeper and more real the relationship between the jealous person and the "rival," the less likely it is that jealousy will have destructive consequences. (24:18)
Jealousy never completely disappears. The control, ownership, exclusivity, and status-loss forms may be outgrown, but a sufficiently intense stimulus situation can always be threatening. "Time-jealousy" is always present. (24:18) It results from loss of time spent with another person and is especially likely when there is no concurrent involvement for the potentially jealous person. This effect has been noted in swinging too, where latent jealousy is likely to surface when both partners are not swinging simultaneously. (97)

In a study conducted by the Constantines (26:216), eighty percent of their respondents reported jealousy to be a problem at some time during their relationship. They did find, however, that jealous behavior was significantly less of a problem among enduring groups. Over half of their early responses listed jealousy as a major problem, but, significantly, later studies revealed that jealousy had virtually disappeared in the longer established groups. The study also found jealousy to be a function of age: all of their respondents under thirty-one listed it as a problem, but only sixty percent of those over thirty-one regarded jealousy as a problem. This difference suggests that the near absence of jealousy and age may be related in this context, a suggestion supported by interviews and prolonged interaction with groups. (26:216)

How have participants outgrown specific forms of jealousy? A devaluing of possessiveness in itself seems to be beneficial. Often a person can learn that ownership and exclusivity have no real value. Security in the primary relationship is essential. If the potentially jealous person sees little danger of actually losing his partner, he will perceive fewer threats. (24:18)
One such relationship involved a couple and another girl. Though an actual marriage never emerged, the three people became very intimate. The involvement was initiated by the husband and a girl with whom the wife was already close. The wife initially reacted favorably to her husband's sexual expression of his feelings for the girl. Later, the wife felt threatened at times by what she perceived to be her husband's unhealthy preoccupation with their threesome, though her anxiety never gave rise to jealousy or hostility toward the girl. The key in this relationship was sharing and mutuality. Except for the first sexual encounter, both husband and wife participated together in all dimensions of the relationship. Both felt their own two-person relationship had deepened as a result. (97)

Status-loss jealousy may be the most easily handled. Even fairly early in marriage, there have been young couples who perceive the attention of another person directed to their spouse as status-enhancing, as validating their choice in mates. One couple, for example, would frequently start flirtations in public places. The non-flirting spouse would be given a quiet running account while feigning indifference. In itself, this may be regarded as immature ego-gratification. However, it was important as an early positive experience in the development of this couple's capacity to deal with multilateral relations without seeing them as threatening. (24:18)

More intense stimuli are more likely to evoke jealousy. Manipulation of the situation to avoid too much direct confrontation is common. (24:18)

Confrontation, though painful, may be essential to growth. By
involving the jealous party in the jealousy-provoking situation, he becomes aware that he is not being excluded. (24:19)

Finally, the method of asking "What are you experiencing?" when a person seems to behave jealously avoids confusion with intrapsychic experiences unrelated to jealousy. (24:19)

Two couples had spent a weekend with exchanged partners. One husband began to wonder about his wife's experiences, where she was at, how she was changing. Motivated by awareness of the intensity of the experience for him and his own rapidly changing perceptions, he asked for some time with his wife, alone. She, and the others, immediately dismissed this as jealousy (a label accepted by the husband) and thus created and perpetuated a high level of tension... (24:19)

In summary, it appears that with time the majority of multilateral marriage participants outgrow or find effective ways of dealing with jealousy. Moreover, they paradoxically learn from their jealous behavior to avoid its dysfunction in the group context and turn its bitter lessons into constructive insights of themselves and their relationships.

Communication

It is not surprising that multilateral, like dyadic relationships, are often troubled by communication problems.

The multilateral aspects are both advantageous and potentially productive of dysfunctional behavior. Groups can take advantage of the alternate paths of communication between any pair in a multilateral situation. If one path becomes blocked, another is still open. On the other hand, this can be abused and communication through third parties becomes a substitute for direct communication. (29:7)
One multilateral marriage has developed a specific method of dealing with communication problems. They became aware that many of their communication difficulties, especially in decision-making situations and in sensitive areas, such as sleeping arrangements, arose from conscious or unconscious attempts to give what they termed "processed data." A processed statement is one which includes the speaker's attempt to take into account the perceived feelings and opinions of others rather than simply to express the isolated, spontaneous, individual feelings of the speaker. When most responses are processed, the group may never be able to assess or discern the real or "raw data" feelings and thus arrive at consensus, resolution, or understanding. (29:8)

This particular group gained practice in giving raw data in all their decision-making activities. They found it essential to make it absolutely clear that raw data answers would not "be held against anyone." When polling, all were reminded that they could later offer a processed statement, even if contradicting their raw data, which would be accepted as their vote, opinion, or preference. Not being committed to raw data statements made them easier to supply.

Sex

As with dyadic marriages, sex is an important element of the relationship in multilateral marriages. Indeed, the opportunity for sexual variety in a supportive atmosphere of on-going, genuine, interpersonal intimacy, is an important argument for multilateral marriages. However, the mechanics of sex in a group pose more than trifling problems. Several interrelated problem areas which
threaten the stability, well being, and existence of multilateral marriages will each be discussed in turn. These are: group sex, sleeping arrangements, and cohesion.

Group Sex

In this study, group sex is defined as "three or more individuals actively interacting in mutual, overt sexual activities." (26:214) Less than twenty percent of the Constantines' respondents reported group sex to be one of the motivating factors in multilateral involvement. (26:214) Nevertheless, the potential for group sexual activities may be considered characteristic of the multilateral marriages, which establishes almost the only context where this might occur in a deep relational framework.

During the earliest phases of the MRSP, group sex was a relatively rare phenomenon. More recently, there has been a trend toward more group sex as groups endure, and for more new groups to engage in group sex. In other words, the character of multilateral marriage, at least in terms of group sexual activity, may be changing as precedents are set. (26:214)

Although most respondents consider group sex positive and desirable, definite problems can arise. For example, many report that four-person sex tends to become two side-by-side couples, rather than an integrated experience with the group "becoming one." The men may become competitive and tense, trying to out-perform the other, or failing to achieve an erection. In three-person sex, it appears easier for the females to form same-sex bonds and to relate sexually in the group context; for the males it is much more difficult,
probably due to such strong cultural conditioning against almost any non-violent, physical expression of warmth between men. (26:215)

Sleeping Arrangements

Aside from the option of group sex, which has not been the major mode of sexual interaction in most groups, many problems arise involving sleeping arrangements: where, when, how often, and with whom.

The mechanisms by which groups resolve the issues of sexual sharing and sleeping arrangements vary but have certain elements in common. Most multilateral families aspire to natural, spontaneous sexual relations. However, in practice this has been difficult to achieve. Even after possessive jealousy recedes into the background, insecurity is manifest in the difficulty of deciding the sleeping arrangements. (26:215) While three men and three women can be formed into heterosexual couples in only six ways, there are 729 different sets of sexual preferences, clearly the majority of which conflict. Unfortunately, immediate preference for one partner is too easily read as sexual rejection of another, which in our society is tantamount to personal rejection. (A positive sidelight is the fact that the process itself—of deciding sleeping arrangements—has sometimes served as an opportunity for practice and improvement of group decision making. (19:167)

Rotation is a method whereby with an initial decision, the group decides who sleeps with whom for what period of time. This method allows little or no opportunity to show favoritism since the schedule does not usually allow for exceptions. The optimal period of
Cohabitation extends roughly from three days to a week, with longer or shorter periods being perceived as leading to integration problems. (26:218) Rapid switching seems to work against a sense of building unity with a particular partner, while longer periods may leave other dyads out of touch too long to maintain a deep feeling of intimacy with one another. Although rotation seems easier from a purely practical point of view, it has disadvantages which limit its function to an interim solution. While it has been assumed that rotation insures that everyone will be in equal sexual demand, practice has proven that sleeping with someone does not necessarily imply sexual relations. People do express preferences. On a three day schedule, for example, Joe may have sexual relations with Suzie only once, whereas with Mary he may have them three times. As some groups refine their skill at decision-making, they may adopt the more sophisticated method of free choice. The special decision-making process includes learning to present one's unbiased, unprocessed preference first, being able to substitute a processed preference later (that is, a decision taking into account all the variables, including other individual's preferences, etc.), and then deciding as a group. (26:218) Failing to express honest preferences and work toward viable compromises often results from trying to out-guess everyone else and no one ending up satisfied.

It is interesting to note that most groups do not use the term "sleeping with" as a euphemism for sexual intercourse since the concept implies considerably more. Both the sexual act and the joint sleeping promote a sense of intimacy. Sleeping together provides opportunities for private intimate conversation. Thus the sleeping
arrangements may be central to the well being and survival of dyads and group cohesion. What constitutes optimal arrangements even for specific groups is not clear yet, though the tendency to use rotation to alleviate dysfunctional symptoms initially, and then to adopt later a system of free choice, suggests a pattern of progressive adjustment and growth. (26:219)

At least in the idealized multilateral marriage, one would expect very close bonds among members of the same sex, encouraging the possibility of homosexual expression of affection, yet little homosexual activity has been evidenced. (19:167) Some has occurred in the three-way relationships, mostly among women. Several participants have articulated an intellectual appreciation of bisexuality while admitting personal "hang-ups" preventing their own involvement.

Cohesion

The Constantines (26:219) had some respondents who refused to answer questions regarding preferences for sex partners on the grounds that they did and should prefer everyone equally. In interviews with these individuals, it was found that they did hold preferences but were trying to live up to an ideal of equal love, trust and sexual attraction. The Constantines argue that such mistaken idealism can possibly add to group problems.

Evaluating and comparing in specific dimensions are normal and intrinsically human. Thus there will always be a disparity between performance and a perfect equality ideal. It seems that open acknowledgment that preferences exist but are not essential issues is more functional in the multilateral marriage context. (26:219)
In summary, as groups endure, problems seen as specifically sexual diminish, as do problems of jealousy. At the same time, group sexual involvement may become more likely as both an indicator and facilitator of intimacy. In general, groups learn to cope with the problems of a multilateral marriage through maturation and a variety of adaptive mechanisms, such as special frameworks for decision-making.

Integration

*E pluribus unum* describes the complex process by which several individuals or couples become a functioning unit, a family. Clearly, problems exist at many levels centering on issues of life style, location, leisure activities, basic compatibility, surmounting jealousy, and integrating sexually.

The essential difference between the group process and the conventional one-to-one relationship involves numbers. Four people, for example, have twelve relationships to develop contrasted with the two that a couple has. One can predict on the basis of the combinatorial factor alone that integration is enormously more complicated for a multilateral marriage than for a monogamous marriage. One foursome reported that interaction became so intense and complicated that "it made each week seem like about a year's worth of living."

A six-way family reported that they often reached a level of "sensory overload," becoming "bogged down" by the sheer weight of the group dynamics.

Many multi-person relationships have accidentally set up complex feedback loops or cycles which reinforce dysfunctional behavior.
Sometimes members would vainly strive to break these convoluted cycles. Later, some came to feel that their group had become a sort of leaderless marathon-encounter group with no opportunity to "return home." (19:169)

This significant phenomenon has emerged in many groups, several of which have provided the necessary "outside" factor to rupture the closed microcosm by having a "family therapist." (97)

The motivations, personality structure, and prior relationships of potential multilateral marriage participants are critical.

Couples anticipating or participating in the multilateral marriages include both those with basically sound and fulfilling marriages and ones with deficiencies in their relationships marked enough to be externally evident. Those seeking an expanded family to cure marital problems or because their current marriage was unsatisfactory appeared to encounter greater problems of integration. Or perhaps a better way to put it is that many problems of integration could be traced to problems in the prior marriages. (19:170)

This should come as no surprise; individuals seldom escape or cure their problems by marrying. To the contrary, they carry those problems over with them into marriage.

There is some tendency to view all forms of co-marital relations as making up for deficiencies in conventional monogamy and even as offering solutions to problems in the dyadic marriage. While there may be specific areas in which multilateral marriage has greater potential than monogamy, it apparently confers no advantage in the area of resolving marital difficulties of a personal and interpersonal nature. In many ways, the marital situation will either exacerbate or at least make painfully obvious the problems already present. It must be stressed that intrinsic to the structure of multilateral
marriage is a potential for multiplying the difficulties and complications of a dyadic marriage.

Some individuals with apparently sound and fulfilling marriages are nevertheless interested in expanding their relationships. One couple noted that intimate interaction with the "right" people had the effect of facilitating their own individual and corporate growth. Another suggested that a good basic relationship may naturally seek to extend itself and share the benefits with additional people.

Perhaps more important than the specific reasons given by participants for their interests in multilateral relationships, is the extent to which the entrants realize their actual motivations. One couple with a good prognosis is thoroughly aware of the limitations of their prior marriage, including the husband's inability to provide his wife with the security of an unqualified commitment placing her above all other things in his value structure. She has found an increased sense of security through several love relationships in a multilateral marriage which also preserves the many good satisfactions of her prior dyadic marriage. (19:170)

For a multilateral marriage to succeed, individuals must come to the relationship equipped with certain crucial qualities and abilities functional to any deep and satisfying human interaction: generosity, maturity, the ability to cope with complexity, to control and virtually eliminate jealousy, to realize their true motivations and emotions, to modify their attitudes and behavior toward goals of personal and group growth. Unfortunately, a person who even comes close to meeting this psychological ideal probably does not exist. Despite all
its advantages for personal growth, multilateral marriage promises no panacea. Even as its successes may be higher, its failures will be more spectacular. The ideal promises much but demands even more of the individual's energy and integrity. Indeed, the statistics bear out the sad conclusion that while many are called, few are chosen.

Dynamics of "Opting-in" and "Opting-out"

There are some groups which have existed long enough to change in structure. In one started by a couple, there have been two "divorces" and six "marriages" during a year's time. (19:171) Perhaps Heinlein's (50) "opting-in" and "opting-out" are better terms to use. First consider the formation and growth problem—"opting-in."

The initial problem is locating potential participants and determining compatibility. A frequent lament is that "it's so hard to find the right people." The most common approach amounts to a practice of "dating" among couples. One existing family interested in expansion conducts weekly discussion groups which provide a field of contacts and a pre-screening method. (19:171) Many other initial contacts are more or less random, quite a few being made through the Harrad Letter and its peripheral processes. In Los Angeles there is a new organization, Family Synergy, which holds monthly meetings and numerous outings as a means of providing ways for people interested in the expanded family and multilateral marriage to meet, to become acquainted, and to keep in touch with one another. They have just completed their first edition of the People Directory which will be published quarterly in their newsletter.
Predictably, many relationships never advance beyond the dating stage. However, if the participants feel compatible enough, they usually initiate some form of trial integration. Here one problem frequently encountered is the differential development of relationships. Naturally, some pair-bonds will form somewhat faster than others. This may create subtle (or sometimes not-so-subtle) pressure on the other pair(s) to "keep-up." This is especially true for physical intimacy. If Mary and Don are ready for intercourse and Betty and Pete only feel comfortable holding hands, a strong tension may be created which could pressure Betty and Pete into premature intercourse. This pressure to develop relationships at a pace defined by a "leader" problem seems to occur automatically, and can prove destructive if unchecked. It may take conscious effort or overt action on the part of the group to allow each relationship to develop in its own unique way and at its own pace. One foursome who had experienced some earlier failures circumvented this, to a degree, by arranging for a period of time when each pair could be alone, isolated for a period of intimacy from group pressure.

Obviously, the "opting-in" of new people to an existing structure may create problems. One aspect of this process may serve as an operational criterion for distinguishing multilateral marriage from communes:

Wherever there is commitment and love forming the group, primacy rather than recency must hold as the operative decision criterion. The needs and wishes of those to whom a person is committed must take precedence over those to whom that person could be. We expect then that unanimity be considered necessary and sufficient to accept a new member into a multilateral marriage. For communes, majority or less is the most common criterion. (19:171)
Where "opting-out" has occurred, there has generally been an acknowledgment of unworkability. (19:171) This does not mean, however, that there are no difficulties involved in the "divorce" process itself. For a foursome which broke up after only three months, the traumas were sufficient for one couple to suffer serious interpersonal difficulties in their relationship for more than six months afterward.

Commitment

The problems of commitment bear special treatment. It has been noted by Herb Seal (97) that communes with a religious basis generally last considerably longer than those with social or philosophical ideals as their binding force. An acknowledged commitment by individual participants to their group and to each other as individuals may be a similar dichotomizing factor in multilateral marriages.

Where this commitment is missing, considerable energies may be expended by the group in evaluating continuance or in maintaining the temporary aspects of acknowledged impermanence. Commitment, either by the intention of a permanent arrangement or for a fixed period of time, frees the participants to concentrate on further development on the assumption that the relationship will continue, even if this assumption may, by sufficient circumstances, be re-evaluated and reversed...

It seems increasingly clear that the primary contract in a community is between individual and group rather than between individuals. (19:172)
Structure

Structure may provide an indicator of cohesiveness and stability. A marriage will continue to attract an individual if his participation in a sufficient number of positive relationships insures his complete integration with the group. As noted earlier, multilateral marriage holds up the ideal that each member should deeply love all other members. The important point here is not that this ideal can seldom be achieved in practice (it cannot), but that its achievement is not necessary to a successful multilateral marriage. The Constantines offer examples of marriage structures which promote stability and others which promote instability (see following page).

At the present time, even in the best integrated expanded family, pair-bonds continue to take precedence or play special roles. Thus, while the definition of multilateral marriage is satisfied by the existence of comparable bonds between all pairs, these are not equivalent and some are significantly stronger. Our own respondents expect bonds between previously married pairs to continue to be differentiated...

In general, we have found that the formation of close female-female relationships in the multilateral marriage is achieved more readily and more often than male-male. In several cases, the male-male relationship has been the critical weak point. Not all groups have given equal importance to the same-sex bonds, and in one apparently stable group the men have only a fairly casual level of involvement with each other. (19:173)

Other structural considerations are those of leadership and competition. Skeptics persistently raise two parallel myths regarding these sources of potential conflict: (1) "two women can't live under the same roof," and (2) "two men would always be in competition to head the household." The progressive nuclearization of
THE STRUCTURE OF A MULTILATERAL MARRIAGE

Key

Squares: Men

Circles: Women

Heavy line: primary love relationship (prior marriage)

Light line: love relationship

Pointed arrows: antagonistic relationship

Structures which promote stability.

Structures which promote instability.

*(37:394)*
the American family lends credence to such folklore which can stand as a cultural generalization for the time being, but quickly evaporates as an eternal verity of "human nature" in the face of contrary empirical evidence. Obviously, any relationship depends on the personality structures of the individuals involved and on their assumptions. Assuming that two women cannot share a kitchen would constitute a self-fulfilling prophecy for any woman who tried. Empirical studies of actual relationships have evidenced cases of cooperation and coexistence as well as instances of competition for certain roles. (19:172)

Some groups have worked out a novel ad hoc method for solving or ameliorating problems of competition, a method which gives leadership power to individuals within distinct functional areas. In one group, for example, one individual exercises monetary leadership; another person is the acknowledged public spokesman and correspondent; someone else supervises child care; and still another holds the role of wise-man "guru."

In multilateral marriages, there are some modifications and exchanges of traditional sex roles (as noted in the example above). Generally, participants are highly equalitarian in principle. In practice, the most noticeable change in roles involves increased male responsibility for child-rearing and household tasks. On the whole, however, participants feel their hopes for greater role freedom have been largely unfulfilled. (30:219) Another persistent problem centers on the work no one wants to do. Unpleasant menial jobs often fall on individuals least assertive of their rights or on those with the highest need for order. In our culture, such individuals are more likely to be women than men.
It is intriguing to apply Talmon's analysis (109) of the evolution of sex role differentiation among the Israeli kibbutzim to multilateral marriage. The kibbutzim initially pursued egalitarian ideals of undifferentiated roles with true revolutionary zeal. However, as expansion through recruitment was superseded by internal population growth, not only did roles become increasingly gender differentiated, but also conformed more and more closely to traditional models. Talmon argues that fundamental biological differences favor this differentiation. The investigator agrees that biological differences constitute an intrinsic, unconditioned bias which has, and continues to, determine differential sex roles and the division of labor in general between females who bear children and males who do not. This bias can be overcome in a technological, overpopulated society probably more easily within a multilateral marriage than within a monogamous marriage because of the more efficient division of labor. In her unique reproductive role, biology is destiny for women and this fact must be realistically and humanely dealt with, not dismissed as male chauvinism.

Decisions and Rules

Decision-making poses another major problem area. Communes too, sometimes experience clumsiness and difficulties in even simple decision-making. But whereas majority rule can effectively determine rules in a commune, this impersonal procedure generally proves inadequate in an intimate marriage context. Some groups set up a rotating leadership to provide each person the opportunity to
practice responsible decision-making for the group. This workable method also teaches trust and acceptance to those not making the decision.

The need for many detailed rules, explicitly spelled out, frequently indicate the absence of trust, flexibility, and integration. As such, they may signify unhealthy symptoms rather than legitimate functions.

Many groups start out with a necessary protection of rules and agreements and proceed toward more informality. Operationally, this may distinguish a good marriage; certainly the more rules that abound and are necessary, the less the participants really know of each other...

On the other hand, almost every multilateral marriage seems to need more formal regulations than a dyadic marriage and at the very least, the thoughts, concerns, and fears in such areas should be hashed out by the group. (20:36)

Exposure of Scripts and Contracts

Every dyadic marriage is partly based on "contracts" between spouses to play certain roles relative to each other. As Berne (13) has pointed out, such contracts give rise to "marital scripts," involved sequences of pre-patterned behavior in the interrelationships.

For example, early in their marriage, Ursula might have found it easier to defer to Leo than express her own independent views, a role she most likely learned automatically, without plan or intent. Over time they find many ways to effectively ensure the continuance of these roles, though unaware of the contract itself. Contracts and scripts emerge almost automatically in marriage, and
once established, consistently determine behavior and persistently defy detection by the parties. It usually requires others to expose these contracts, others intimately familiar with the couple in a clinical or personal sense.

The intense, intimate, continued interaction of a multilateral marriage seems to create an effective environment for discovery and productive working out of prior marital contracts. Provided the couple place some premium on reality and authentic disclosure, contracts and scripts will almost inevitably be revealed for what they are. Rejecting prior contracts does not necessarily confer an unmitigated good because they may have fulfilled an important function in the dyadic marriage; if the motivating needs are still operative, then something else—in the group or perhaps in a new contract—must assume the function. New contracts are not necessarily better. Berne's model predicts that serious difficulties (for example, deep despair) can arise when one party unilaterally cancels a contract, a dilemma which plagues multilateral marriage. Differences in trust, motivation to change, and ease with which contracts are explored, almost guarantee action by one party first. This creates a wound in the couple's relationship which may take a long time to heal. Avoidance of painful traumas probably requires everyone's recognition that such contracts serve real purposes, and that new contracts (or the abolition of all contracts) must be negotiated slowly and systematically. (30:217)
Territory and Privacy

The multilateral marriage, while necessarily grounded on openness and joint process, must also accommodate the need for privacy and individual process. In principle, freedom and space for individual expression should be greater in a multi-person than a two-person marriage; in practice, the members can easily lose sight of this need as they become so intensely involved in the group process and in the new dyads that they find little or no time to be alone. Individuals, of course, differ in the need for "alone time," but the group may have to make a deliberate effort to see that time is available, in generous quantities, for this purpose.

Man's territoriality is a topic currently in vogue. Generally, groups who do not provide for individual property and "turf," an area that is the exclusive or primary domain of the individual, eventually experience difficulties. All of the older groups under investigation have eventually provided for such areas. (20:34)

Children

In the spring of 1972, Angie Hunt (55) completed the first research investigation into the effects of multilateral marriage on children.

The study consisted of forty children from twelve multilateral families. The ages of the children ranged from nineteen months to twenty years, with the average being nine. Only one of the children was born after his multilateral family had formed. The other thirty-
nine were born into nuclear families which subsequently entered a multilateral relationship after the birth of their last child.

Hunt investigated three areas: (1) the child's self concept; (2) his relationship with family members; and (3) his relationship with friends and peers. To assess these variables, she used an interview for school age children and high school youth, a standardized questionnaire for school age children, a standardized developmental test for preschoolers, a family rating scale of child-rearing practices, and her own observational notes based on seven constructs for each child. These were compared to standardized norms using Carl Roger's "Personal Adjustment Inventory." (55:4)

Her findings include:

1. The children had a tendency to show a high degree of independent behavior.

2. With the exception of one young man, all of the children identified most closely with one of their biological parents or legal guardian. Generally, identification was strongest with the biological mother.

3. In work and play habits, most children initiated their own creative projects, such as woodworking, gardening, crafts, building models, stringing beads, carpentry, and so on.

4. Responsibilities of the children varied considerably. Only one family had children in summer school and one young man had a part time job. Most of the children had a lot of free time.
5. Aggressive behavior also varied considerably. The type of aggression (physical or verbal) tended to vary from child to child rather than within families.

6. Most of the children had healthy self concepts. They realistically perceived their abilities and limitations. They saw themselves as valuable people. One common strength noted among the high schoolers was the ability to accept differences in themselves and value those differences as unique.

As I reflect on my observations and constructs, I don't think aggression, responsibility, or work and play habits are affected by the multilateral situation. They seem to be independent factors...

The multilateral family structure does seem to relate to independence in the children, a close identification with a biological parent, and a positive sense of self. (55:31)

Because the nuclear family is the most socially acceptable family structure in our society, a nonconventional family has to cope with social pressure. Children in multilateral marriages must face this pressure along with their parents.

Hunt's observations, interviews, and discussions with the children and their parents found that social pressure was not an area of major concern. "Parents talked with their children as issues arose, and in fact, seemed better prepared to deal with outside pressure than problems within the family itself." (55:34)

Multiple adult models in the home do not necessarily insure a healthy environment for growth. Yet, multiple adult models can
benefit children when the multilateral family is operating cohesively by providing more adult resources than the nuclear family.

One foursome has an artistic and musical father, an athletic father, a mother who takes them places often, and a mother very concerned about education. While I was in their home the children were involved in planting a garden, making arts and crafts projects for an art fair, body painting, swimming, etc. The resources available to these children are remarkable. (55:36)

Child-rearing practices should be a major consideration for people interested in forming a family together. In all but one of the six dissolved groups visited by Hunt, child rearing was mentioned as an area of conflict leading to the dissolution. "Conflicts involving child-rearing practices of the adult family members seemed more predominant than conflicts involving social pressure, or even jealousy." (55:41)

Different philosophies and practices of child-rearing can easily subvert a multilateral marriage because they are so often overlooked. Child-rearing styles often reflect personality and therefore constitute a major interpersonal concern. Since the successful development of their children's personalities and skills is of major concern to parents, the tolerance for differences in child-rearing styles is less than the tolerance displayed in other areas of living. Women in multilateral families have observed how much more difficult it was for them to share the love and warmth in the mother-child relationship than in the wife-husband relationship. (55:41)

Hunt asked thirty-two of the children what kind of family structure they would want to live in when they became adults. Thirteen
wanted a nuclear family structure, ten wanted a multilateral family, seven were undecided, and two said they didn't want to be a part of any family. (55:45)

When the parents were asked if they would eventually like to see their children enter a multilateral marriage, the parents generally responded by indicating they wanted the best for their children, and that the children would have to decide what was best for themselves. (55:47)

The multilateral family does complicate the lives of children, but it offers them a greater potential for growth. The Constantines affirmed this observation in a presentation: "The children seem to be the biggest benefactors from the multilateral involvement." (55:48)

Hunt, however, disagrees.

Almost every woman I talked with commented on her own growth as a result of the multilateral marriage. She no longer identifies herself as Fred's wife and Sue's mother, but a unique individual who cares and is cared for by more than one person!...

Children benefit indirectly from their mother's growth and benefit directly in a number of ways, though it isn't as outstanding to me as the growth of the women. Children have an increased number of supportive and growth producing relationships. Not only do they have the new awareness cross parents and sibling bring but they have new depths as combinations of people and ideas merge. There is almost always some one willing to spend time with them without burdening one person, yet there is also the complexity of conflict (especially in areas concerning child rearing practices) that lead to frustration. (55:48)

The investigator concludes that children who have experienced living in variant family forms are fortunate in their knowledge of freely chosen alternatives to the norm impersonally sanctioned by
society. Children who have privileged insights into the difficulties and rewards of group living, as well as those of the nuclear family, are in a better position to make an intelligent, self-directed decision about their own life styles.

California Law

Margo Esposito-Reyla, a leader of the sexual freedom movement, addressed herself to the problem of illegal sexual activity:

We have not had any trouble with the police, at least in the San Francisco Bay area. What we could get in trouble with the police for are nudity, certain sex acts, and adultery. However, nudity in private in the Bay Area is not illegal; "occasional adultery" in the State of California is not illegal; and the outdated oral sex laws aren't being enforced. We also protect ourselves by not allowing illegal substances and minors at our parties. (102:9)

Although the statement concisely summarizes the legal consequences of violating statutes prohibiting certain heterosexual activities, California law provides enforcement agencies with other potent weapons to prosecute multilateral marriage participants. The unlucky multilateral marriage which becomes the target of a district attorney or county counsel could be in line for a severe jail sentence or fine.

Legal Marriage

According to California Law (Civil Code sec. 4100), marriage is "...a personal relationship arising out of a civil contract, to which the consent of the parties capable of making that contract is
necessary...followed by the issuance of a license and solemnization..." It comes as no surprise that multilateral marriage cannot be legally recognized within this definition. The law effectively rules out "celestial" marriage, rite of domesticity, or what have you. Without a validly obtained license (Civil Code sec. 4201) and a ceremony of some sort (Civil Code sec. 4206), it is not a legal marriage. (102:10)

**Bigamy**

"Every person having a husband or wife living, who marries any other person...is guilty of bigamy." (Penal Code sec. 281) The law does not distinguish between bigamy, polygamy, polygyny, and polyandry. Under California law, a person who has more than one living spouse is a party to a bigamous relationship. (102:10)

**Common Law Marriage**

In common law an agreement between the parties to be husband and wife constitutes a valid marriage, no other ceremony being necessary. In California, however, such an arrangement is not legally valid and the parties are not considered married. (Civil Code sec. 4213) An exception is that California will recognize as valid common law marriages formed in other states, when the parties move to this state. But recognition of common law marriage does not constitute recognition of plural common law marriage, prohibited under bigamy statutes. (102:11)
Adultery and Fornication

Adultery is the voluntary sexual intercourse of a married person with someone other than his/her spouse. Fornication is the voluntary sexual intercourse between unmarried persons. Neither adultery nor fornication are crimes in California. But there is still another category of voluntary bisexual relationship which is prohibited by statute.

Adulterous Cohabitation

"Every person who lives in a state of cohabitation and adultery is guilty of a misdemeanor..." (Penal Code sec. 269a) In effect, this is adultery codified, with the added provision that the adultery be continuous rather than "occasional." (102:12)

The message for multilateral marriages is clear: If a person is single, in the legal sense of the word, California cannot prosecute him for fornication or adultery, or adulterous cohabitation. If he enters a group union and he is legally married, he is liable under the law for adulterous cohabitation, which carries a maximum fine of one year in the county jail, and/or a fine of $1,000. (Penal Code sec. 269a) (102:12)

It is true that there is a disputable presumption that a man and woman deporting themselves as husband and wife are legally married. (Evidence Code sec. 1314) But this would not be true of a group union. In any case, this presumption does not arise on a mere showing that the parties have lived together as man and wife; it must
further be shown "...that by their conduct to each other and to the world they established a common, uniform, and undivided repute that they were married..." (102:12)

The investigator knows of no arrests or prosecutions involving the participants of a multilateral marriage, but the relatively "clear" record may be attributed to the fact that most groups have not advertised their existence and habits. Since the "crime" has no victim, no one complains. Confrontations with the law are usually brought about by external hostility to the marriage group, neighbors who report nudity or marijuana use observed "usually with great interest" at the private residence of a group, or a disgruntled ex-member informing overzealous police of violations of archaic and virtually uninforced statutes.

**Prognosis for Change in the Law**

The following exchange is taken from the transcript of the California Assembly Interim Committee on Judiciary-Proceedings on Domestic Relations. (102:15) A reading of the entire record makes it painfully clear how grudgingly anyone other than the programmed speakers are allowed to be heard.

Mr. Halliburton (an unscheduled witness): "...Well, let me give this recommendation and I will be through. I think there ought to be some sort of a two-year trial marriage with sex, but with strict birth control, for men and women who wish it, in which they could get married and stay married for two years and break—with the man not having to pay more than $50..."

At the present time there is absolutely no way I or any other single male can placate his basic sex drive within the framework of society without violating all ethics, all laws, without
risking jail sentences and without violating his moral conscience. It is the only society in the history of the world where this is true..."

Chairman Willson: "Mr. Halliburton, I think you had better conclude your remarks. You are getting to us. Thank you very much."

Exit Mr. Halliburton, who proposed a change in the laws. (102:15)

Summary of the Problems

The problems facing those in multilateral marriage can best be summed up by the one word "complexity." All groups in close contact face the complex interactions of distinct life styles, the involved interplay of personalities, the problems of multiperson decision-making, and coping with conflicting needs and desires. Communes and other forms of intentional communities suffer the vicissitudes of complexity, but multilateral marriage compounds complexity by insisting on the kind of deep, intimate interaction that might never surface in more superficial or casual relationships.

All the mechanics of living become more complicated. Money, discipline, food, personality conflicts, all are multiplied in terms of problem potential. Fortunately, tradition, formal rules, and habit set in to reduce the level of complexity, although the reduction is only partial. Seemingly trivial aspects of life style assume crucial importance in multilateral relationships. What may appear surface elements—brand of toothpaste, preferences in meat, which side of the bed to sleep on—emerge as persistent, ingrained, often intensely personal foci of conflict. These infinitely varied combinations of conflicting patterns have to be resolved some way in every marriage.

Needless to say, toothpaste can cause more dissension among six
"newly-weds" than between two. "Significant trifles" tend to loom larger with groups composed exclusively of previously married couples. Furthermore, there is a tendency to resist further accommodation, consciously or unconsciously, after having effected adjustments and compromises in the prior marriage.

Perhaps the goal is to transform complexity from weakness into strength. Thus, alternate paths of communication can be facilitated, the supportive potential of a many-person family can be promoted, and use of the group process to facilitate growth and handle difficult decision-making functions can be encouraged. There are also many new options in terms of restructuring the multilateral situation for specific ends.

There are two areas in which groups could make it easier on themselves. One is having fun together. It may seem a small thing, but groups frequently become so deeply involved in the integration process, in on-going encounter, and in dealing with personal and interpersonal difficulties, that little or no allowance is made for fun. Recreational and non-purposive activities with outside friends is most important. These activities not only provide pleasant relief from the "marathon encounter" of the group process, but provide necessary breaks in the group's preoccupation with turning excessively inward to form a microcosm.

It also seems valuable to make as much of positive potentials as possible. People most readily reveal problems and deficiencies which are personal and interpersonal. What needs most attention is self and self-love, and open, frequent, generous verbal and non-verbal expressions of love, affection, approval, support, and trust. To
facilitate personal and group growth, all should perceive and reinforce individual and group strengths and assets.

It is now apparent that many participants, especially those in short-lived experiments, became involved through fascination with the form more than through a relationship with specific people. Of course, this phenomenon is hardly unique to unconventional marriages; "falling in love with love" is very old and very common. An early commitment to a "trial multilateral marriage" is common and frequently the would-be spouses hardly know each other. Short acquaintance is only partially mitigated by the fact that many potential participants, at least superficially, share some philosophical and value orientation in their interest in alternatives and liberal marital/sexual ethic. Many participants cited early sexual involvement as complicating the process. (21:5)

Multilateral marriages often dissolve because the partners were incompatible with respect to basic personality traits.

We have yet to find any fundamental invalidity in the multilateral model, although complexity is an inevitable concomitant. Especially, the fact of multilateral sexual involvement has in no case been central, and, even where a problem, has been largely symptomatic. (21:5)

Experiences which lead to the dissolution of a multilateral marriage can be highly traumatic for the previously married dyads. Because a multilateral marriage is often an enforced, prolonged marathon encounter, the intensity of interpersonal interaction exceeds that of the average marriage many fold, and consequently the process tends to reveal otherwise unseen individual and marital pathology. A
couple may have made superior marital adjustment, but if it is founded on role stereotypes, inequitable consideration, or traditional dominance-submission patterns, these will emerge and prove unsatisfactory. In other words, it is possible that a couple with a satisfactory marriage which would continue in a conventional context, could find themselves unable to cope with elements revealed in a multilateral context. Couples whose scripts and games are exposed often have great difficulty creating game-free relationships or establishing new and better interactions.

Even where multilateral marriages dissolve, it is difficult to evaluate the dissolution as a failure when the majority of the participants, objectively and in their own interpretation, value the experience in a positive sense, feel that they have grown, and would, given the right people, probably try it again. (21:6)

Almost without exception, it appears that the mechanics of dissolution, the financial issues, property settlements, provision for the children, timing, and other details—things which hold the spotlight in the arena of legal divorce—have been handled with efficiency and maturity by the participants themselves. The concerns of society about property and children turn out to be paper dragons.

In concluding, the investigator has tried to focus on some of the problem areas within multilateral marriage. Guarded pessimism may be justified in light of the fact that these difficulties have been so neglected by the Utopian speculation which dominates most of what has been written or said about multilateral marriage.

However, multilateral marriage can generate warmth and love of a depth and on a scale almost unimagined in human relations. The
opportunities to give and receive love, to find security and yet to
grow, are unparalleled. Even the failures have had their successes.
Out of defeats have come remarkable insights and lasting bonds.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Chapter I

The major purpose of this study was to explore multilateral marriage as a possible successful alternative model to the contemporary family system.

The experimentation with new modes of married and family togetherness and the emergence of alternative structures express a strong need to bring greater health and optimum functioning to a framework of interpersonal relationships formerly regarded as "frozen" and not amenable to change.

The alternative model which is the focus of this research project is multilateral marriage. Through a larger "community of intimates," it is a potential means of providing the size and diversity fundamentally lacking in autonomous nuclear families. A multilateral marriage consists of three or more individuals all of whom regard themselves as married to each other. Operationally this involves a common residence, marital sexual involvement, and a mutual equalitarian commitment to each other which functions psychologically much like the commitment of legal marriage. As a functioning social entity rather than a theoretical possibility, it is a new form of
marriage being practiced on a very small scale.

Unfortunately, research is sparse in this area and lacks depth or breadth. If multilateral marriage is to become a possible alternative to the contemporary family system, the need for a sensitive recognition by professionals in the field is profound.

One of the main limitations in this study was the lack of a societal precedent and involvement in this process to serve as a guideline. Another limitation involved the type of sample from which the data was obtained. The lack of factual data and the rarity of multilateral marriage were further compounded by the problem that most participants in such deviant forms of family structure were understandably very reluctant and cautious in their disclosures.

Chapter II

In reviewing the literature, it becomes evident that interest in alternatives to traditional monogamy is increasing. There is a rich body of fiction on multilateral marriage, largely dealing with utopian proposals in terms of positive benefits. Robert H. Rimmer, a popular utopian novelist, anticipated and stimulated today's new multiperson experimentation through his writings. Others include Albert Ellis, Fison and Howitt, Reverend Henriksen, Hy Levy, and Gary Solis.

"In-group" publications include The Modern Utopian, the Harrad Newsletter, and the Family Synergy Newsletter.

The Multilateral Relationship Study Project with Larry and Joan Constantine is the only full-scale research investigation at this
The Constantines have presented and published several sociological studies, many of which comprise the main body of the thesis.

Working closely with the Constantines has been Angie Hunt, a child psychologist, who has just completed the first research report on the effects of multilateral marriage on children.

Chapter III

As a first step toward exploring multilateral marriage, the investigator contacted the Multilateral Relationships Study Project (MRSP), which investigates cases of contemporary marital 'deviance' focusing on multilateral marriage. Exhaustive correspondence with the Constantines provided the investigator with much of the source material, including published and unpublished results of their studies.

The investigator next contacted Dr. Herb Seal, a psychologist counselling fifteen multilateral marriages in the Los Angeles area. He related his findings and insights on the dynamics of multilateral marriage to the investigator.

Over a six month period, the investigator attended several Family Synergy meetings to gather information through discussion and exchange of ideas about multilateral marriage.

Two alternate life style conferences held in the Los Angeles area provided opportunities to collect further data. Participants gave some enlightening answers to specific questions posed by the investigator.
Chapter IV

In this study, the concept of multilateral marriage was viewed as new and specific, and contrasted with other related but not identical concepts. It is often confused with the more publicized forms of contemporary "deviance" in marital living arrangements.

Certain sociological and psychological aspects of the context in which multilateral marriages form and dissolve were important to understanding this novel form of marriage.

The participants discussed in this study included members of the Multilateral Relationships Study Project, the clients of Dr. Herb Seal, and various groups the investigator had personally contacted or had knowledge of. Researchers of this phenomenon estimate that there may be fewer than a hundred, and almost certainly less than a thousand multilateral marriages in the United States today.

The respondents cited in this study resided in all regions of the United States, with the majority concentrated in California and New England.

Multilateral marriage is not distinctively a young person's phenomenon. The age of participants in the study ranged from twenty-two to sixty, with two distinct clusters, one in their mid-twenties and the other in their mid-thirties.

The evidence indicated that multilateral marriage is primarily a middle class phenomenon. The respondents showed such diversity of occupation that it was rare to find two of them in the same occupational category. Most of these groups were of recent origin, dating from about six months to five years.
The most common conjugal units found in multilateral marriage were the tetrad (four adult members) and the triad (three adult members).

A study of the emotional health of participants (31) indicated they were highly inner-directed and self-supportive, sensitive to their own needs and feelings, and showed an unusually high capacity for warm interpersonal relationships. Retrospectively, these qualities helped individuals who opposed cultural norms to commit themselves to multiple intimate relationships.

The motivations for the formation of multilateral marriages are many. It appears that individuals enter a multilateral marriage because they want to build a stronger, more secure, more vital, more cohesive, more productive family, one that provides an enlarged framework for personal growth and an enriched environment for the nurture of their children. The participants view the multilateral structure as potentially providing exactly the size and diversity they feel is fundamentally lacking in autonomous, nuclear monogamy.

However, as detractors often point out, the problems of conventional marriage must be multiplied in multilateral marriages because of the larger number of persons. The key questions involve what effects these problems produce in actual experience.

It appears that with time the majority of multilateral marriage participants outgrow or find effective ways of dealing with jealousy. Moreover, they paradoxically learn from their jealous behavior to avoid its dysfunction in the group context, and turn its bitter lessons into constructive insights into themselves and their relationships.
The multilateral aspects are both advantageous and potentially productive of dysfunctional behavior. Groups can take advantage of the alternate paths of communication between any pair in a multilateral situation. If one path becomes blocked, another is still open. On the other hand, this can be abused and communication through third parties becomes a substitute for direct communication.

As groups endure, problems seen as specifically sexual diminish, as do problems of jealousy. At the same time, group sexual involvement may become more likely as both an indicator and facilitator of intimacy. In general, groups learn to cope with the problems of a multilateral marriage through maturation and a variety of adaptive mechanisms, such as special frameworks for decision-making.

For a multilateral marriage to succeed, individuals must come to the relationship equipped with certain crucial qualities and abilities functional to any deep and satisfying human interaction: generosity, maturity, the ability to cope with complexity, to control and virtually eliminate jealousy, to realize their true motivations and emotions, to modify their attitudes and behavior toward goals of personal and group growth.

The pressure to develop relationships at a pace defined by a "leader" seems to occur automatically, and can prove destructive if unchecked. It may take conscious effort or overt action on the part of the group to allow each relationship to develop in its own unique way and at its own pace.

An acknowledged commitment by individual participants to their group and to each other as individuals may be a dichotomizing factor
in multilateral marriages. The primary contract in a community is between individual and group rather than between individuals.

Structure may provide an indicator of cohesiveness and stability. A marriage will continue to attract an individual if his participation in a sufficient number of positive relationships insures his complete integration with the group.

In multilateral marriages, there are some modifications and exchanges of traditional sex roles. Generally, participants are highly equalitarian in principle. In practice, the most noticeable change in roles involves increased male responsibility for child rearing and household tasks. On the whole, however, participants feel their hopes for greater role freedom have been largely unfulfilled.

Some groups set up a rotating leadership to provide each person the opportunity to practice responsible decision-making for the group. This workable method also teaches trust and acceptance to those not making the decision. The need for many detailed rules, explicitly spelled out, frequently indicate the absence of trust, flexibility, and integration. As such, they may signify unhealthy symptoms rather than legitimate functions.

The intense, intimate, continued interaction of a multilateral marriage seems to create an effective environment for discovery and productive working out of prior marital contracts. Provided the couple place some premium on reality and authentic disclosure, contracts and scripts will almost inevitably be revealed for what they are.

The multilateral marriage, while necessarily grounded on openness and joint process, must also accommodate the need for
privacy and individual process. In principle, freedom and space for individual expression should be greater in a multi-person than a two-person marriage; in practice, the members can easily lose sight of this need as they become so intensely involved in the group process and in the new dyads that they find little or no time to be alone. Generally, groups who do not provide for individual property eventually experience difficulties.

Multiple adult models in the home do not necessarily insure a healthy environment for growth of children. Yet, multiple adult models can benefit children when the multilateral family is operating cohesively by providing more adult resources than the nuclear family.

One specific outcome is all but universal. Women begin to discover their separate existence and grow in independence of their husbands through the expanded family situation. The improving sense of self and self-worth is generally tied intricately to their relationships with the cohusband and the uncompromising dynamics of the group.

Although legal statutes specifically directed against multilateral marriages are comparatively rare, in most states multilateral marriage participants would be violating more than one law. For the most part, these are archaic statutes fallen into disuse (and misuse). The danger is from discriminatory application, and in essence, should anyone desire legal retribution on participants, it would be readily achieved.
Multilateral marriage is an incredibly complex and difficult form of marriage, but one holding unprecedented potentials for satisfaction and growth. Most respondents strive for vital, authentic, truly equalitarian relationships. While the sexual aspects of the relationship are important, perhaps even reflecting intrinsic human propensities for a variety of sexual partners, the central pragmatic benefits perceived by the respondents are the enhanced opportunities for deep, interpersonal relationships and the concomitant potential for growth.

Thirsting after these ideals, it is likely that some individuals will always favor some kind of multilateral marriage, most in theory, but some in practice. There is no reason why people should be denied the right to practice alternative life styles since they do not interfere with the rights of others to engage in monogamy or various other types of marriage.

One must conclude, however, that although multilateral marriage is a promising growth-oriented form of marriage, it is feasible for only those few persons highly motivated to deal with its structural and emotional complexity. It is highly unlikely that multilateral marriage will ever fully replace monogamy, or that a majority of couples will choose it instead of our present marital system.

It is unrealistic to expect that all individuals should find a single structure fulfilling; it is reasonable to expect that the availability of alternate family structures could provide a broader base for the individual's growth and happiness. In America and much of the

Conclusions
world today, pluralism is evident in almost every aspect of civilization except in the single most important area of interpersonal relationships. Ironically, a society which will accept hooking up naked couples to electrodes to study them copulating, in the name of science, cannot accept two middle class families experimenting in the dynamics of group living.

The first and most important change in society's view of marriage must be the acceptance of a variety of valid behavior patterns. The education of our children and of society must point to ways in which, depending on the situation, it is right and proper to make this or that change. Indeed, we could characterize our era as the era of "situational monogamy." Traditional monogamy can still be upheld as the ideal in many circumstances, but, in specific situations, modifications are not only permitted but necessary.

The modification of traditional monogamy to include many of the benefits of multilateral marriage, while avoiding its greatest challenges, will probably hold much greater mass appeal than multilateral marriage itself. Modifications could include, for example, a variety of sexual and intellectual partners, stability and security, multi-person emotional support—while avoiding actually living together in the complexity of continuous group interaction. Monogamy and multilateral marriage may ultimately achieve an optimal compromise with some sacrifices for an emerging majority for whom the confines of strict monogamy is intolerable.

It has been said:
No company survives on its fundamental research laboratory alone, although many cannot survive long without one. Each needs also a development group that keeps making the minor changes to its existing products in order to eliminate defects in design and to meet the competition or the change in customer needs. So too with marriage.

While "far out" research must proceed on new patterns, we must simultaneously be concerned with the changes that can modify traditional monogamy to meet its present customers' needs much more effectively—that is to say humanely. (94:23)

If we are to learn from alternative family life styles, certain attitudes are essential. We must support and encourage more systematic and unbiased study of alternative life styles. The universal requirement of education is that it broaden rather than limit. The challenge for family life education is both clear and monumental.

1. We must stop perpetuating the myth that there is but one viable option, without giving even singlehood legitimate status.

2. We must inform young people of the enormous range of alternatives open to them and provide them with the basis for rational choices of what might be most fulfilling for them, not most congruent with the teacher's own prejudices.

3. We must admit that even conventional marriages are not all founded on the same basis, that most of them do not conform to our cultural myths.

4. We must abolish stereotypes of fidelity and nonfidelity, marital and extramarital, heterosexual and homosexual.

If we can recognize the positive value of a pluralistic approach to marriage and cultivate objectivity, our children will not joke
bitterly about "getting hooked" or "being trapped." They will be able to choose a form of marriage uniquely suited to their own individual needs and temperaments.

As Herbert Otto aptly concludes:

What will destroy us is not change, but our inability to change—both as individuals and as a social system. It is only by welcoming innovations, experimentation, and change that a society based on man's capacity to love can come into being. (80:9)

Recommendations for Further Study

The dearth of research on multilateral marriage prompted the investigator's thesis title: An Exploratory Study of Multilateral Marriage. However, in view of the psychological stakes, the emotional cost of wrong models, and the growth and happiness possible in the right ones, it is evident that much more intensive study is needed.

Robert Libby has stated:

The ability to not only accept but to socially engineer change in marital styles remains as a task to be undertaken by social and political scientists. This will necessitate not only change in attitudes about marriage and about sex, but it will entail a change in traditional conceptions about the roles of the social scientist, as well as the use of new theoretical and methodological developments. For example, participant-observation studies may provide some new perceptions about emerging styles of "marriage" and the co-marital and extramarital relationships which are involved in these marriages. To understand (let alone guide) social change, social scientists will have to commit themselves to the study of interpersonal relationships. Family sociologists will have to bury the traditional approach of ratifying the family of yesteryear, and replace the worship of monogamous marriage with an open view of emergent structures to suit a wide variety of personality needs and life
styles. This will mean that more objective and sensitive theoretical frameworks and methodologies will have to be employed by social scientists. (67:28)

Multilateral marriage suggests many hitherto unexplored areas of study: stratification, structure, roles, settlement of disputes, living and sleeping arrangements, authority and decision-making, education of newcomers, education of children.

Further research could examine specific attitudes toward children, including attitudes toward conception and parentage, desire for place and method of childbirth, type of education desired for the child, child-rearing philosophies and activities available to the child. What preparation does the child have for handling conflict between society in general and the multilateral family in particular? Is the child accepted as a "voting" member of the family?

Research might look into what happens when an individual experiment in alternative family structures fails. What are the effects, short-term and long-term, on the children and the conjugal participants? What are the economic and emotional costs?

A recurrent question concerns the degree of adjustment in prior marriages. Many people are convinced that couples entering multilateral marriage must have unsatisfactory marriages, perhaps even serious pathology. The contention could be investigated further, perhaps using the Burgess-Wallin Marital Adjustment Form, which has been widely used as a predictive instrument.

A specific breakdown for further depth research might include the following areas.
| **Historical:** | motivation for entry into multilateral relationships; previous experience (marital, nonmarital, extramarital, group); initiator(s) of current situation, of past involvement; individual expectations and needs in group relationships; additions and drop-outs in current situation. |
| **Structural:** | mechanism of expansion; mechanism of "divorces"; relationship to children; children of parties not married to each other (legally or previously); leadership and organizational structure; identification of aspects of most/least integrated; economic structure, money problems; sleeping arrangements and exchange of partners. |
| **Functional:** | nature of commitment; assumptions of permanence; major integrational problems; high points and benefits cited; routine functioning; satisfaction with overall situation. |

These are a few areas suggested for further research by this initial exploratory study. As further research is accomplished, more subjects for research will undoubtedly become available.
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APPENDIX

ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATIONS

Multilateral Relations Study Project
23 Mohegan Road
Acton, Massachusetts 01720

Family Synergy
P. O. Box 30103
Terminal Annex
Los Angeles, California 90030

Harrad West
P. O. Box 1264
Berkeley, California 94701

Harrad
P. O. Box 841
Boston, Massachusetts 02103

Future Families of the World
6218 58th Avenue
Riverdale, Maryland 20840