

The study of alternative lifestyles received serious social science attention during the social turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s, peaking by the mid-1970s and declining thereafter. Pioneering meetings such as those held by the Groves Conference on Marriage and the Family examined these nontraditional family forms and personal living arrangements. Many of these lifestyles, such as cohabitation and stepfamilies, eventually became mainstream topics of scholarly research. However, those on the fringes, specifically, swinging, group marriages, and communes, have been largely ignored over the past two decades. Explanations ranged from a lack of research funding and academic reward to the assumption that fear of AIDS curtailed these behaviors. This neglect presently continues in spite of the evidence that swinging and communal life may be as prominent, and even more so, than in the past four decades. Attempts are made to explain this inconsistency.

Alternative Lifestyles Revisited, or Whatever Happened to Swingers, Group Marriages, and Communes?

ROGER H. RUBIN
University of Maryland

The late 1960s and early 1970s was a period of intense reexamination of interpersonal relationships, marriage, and family life. The social turmoil of the Vietnam War and movements demanding civil rights, Black power, women's liberation, and gay recognition served as catalysts for the public emergence of what became popularly known as *alternative lifestyles*. This national exploration was further fueled by rising divorce rates and a sexual revolution among women, raising challenging questions about the meaning of marriage, family life, gender roles, and sexuality.

The term *alternative lifestyles* included a variety of nontraditional family forms and personal living arrangements including singlehood, non-marital heterosexual cohabitation, single-parent families, stepfamilies, dual career/work families, gay and lesbian relationships, open marriages and multiple relationships, and communes. Although many of these lifestyles became mainstream topics for family science, those on the fringes have been largely ignored over the past two decades. Specifically, I refer to swinging or comarital sex, the consenting of married couples to sexually

Author's Note: Thanks to Steven Boggs, Mariana Falconier, and Andrew Smith for their assistance.

JOURNAL OF FAMILY ISSUES, Vol. 22 No. 6, September 2001 711-726
© 2001 Sage Publications

exchanging partners (Buunk & Van Driel, 1989); group marriages; and communes.

The reasons for the scholarly neglect of these lifestyles are numerous. The appearance of AIDS may have led to the assumption that these lifestyles had disappeared. A lack of research funding and limited academic rewards for examining personal and family choices that are often viewed as being at odds with achieving status, acceptance, and success in contemporary society may be another explanation. Also, mass media attention shifted to lifestyles that seemed to be rapidly becoming a part of the American family scene, such as cohabitation, single parenthood, stepfamilies, and dual-partner working families. Homosexuality also became somewhat more tolerated, and public debate about homosexuality became commonplace, ranging from military policies to issues regarding civil unions and same-sex marriage.

This article turns its attention to the periphery of the alternative lifestyle discussion. An examination of what occurred in the past two decades leads me to conclude that much can be learned about contemporary family life by examining the extremes. The continued practice of these behaviors suggests that they fulfill ongoing purposes and functions that defy the disdain often directed at them by religious and social institutions as well as by clinicians, educators, researchers, and policy makers.

THE STUDY OF ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLES

Within academic circles, the study of alternative lifestyles is linked to several significant events. The 1971 Groves Conference on Marriage and the Family, with its annual meeting theme, "The Future of Marriage and Parenthood," was perhaps the first organized attempt by family scholars to begin cataloging the sweeping changes surrounding late-20th-century American family life. The need was apparent to 1971 attendee Robert Whitehurst, who pointed out that we did not have good terminology and there existed a shortage of data on almost everything related to alternative lifestyles. Discussions included whether "the family" had a viable future, what future parenthood would look like, and perhaps most significantly, an attempt to identify new interpersonal lifestyles. Lifestyle seminars included male and female homosexuality, college student cohabitation, the affiliative family, androgyny, mate swapping, group marriage, and communal living.

Intellectual debate was capped by presentations from some of the foremost family scholars of the time. Jessie Bernard distinguished marriage

from lifestyle by emphasizing the specific socially framed parameters of marriage versus the greater freedom of establishing any form of household arrangement in a lifestyle. Rustom Roy (Roy & Roy, 1968) elaborated on his book *Honest Sex: A Revolutionary New Sex Guide for the Now Generation of Christians* written with his wife, Della. They argued that traditional monogamy was obsolete and that loving one's neighbor should be taken literally as traditional monogamy isolates individuals and families and does not facilitate the development of meaningful personal relationships. They not only challenged so-called biblical rules and treated the idea of one exclusive sex partner as an absurdity when universally applied, they even urged the legalization of bigamy.

Duane Denfield and Gordon (1970), who coined the expression *the family that swings together, clings together*, described the more positive aspects of mate swapping while recognizing that studies of dropouts from swinging had not yet been conducted. The limited ability of architects to understand social and behavioral research and design living spaces conducive to communal lifestyles was criticized by George Trieschman, who condemned the lack of a humanistic architecture. Robert Ryder commented that the term *commune* was almost meaningless as the variety of communal arrangements made them almost impossible to operationally define. Ryder raised the concern that communes and marriage may suffer from the same idealization, that there is an institutional guarantee of success and happiness. Communes require energy, resources such as money, and charismatic leaders to maintain them. Those based primarily on loving will not last. Ethel Vatter and Sylvia Clavan raised awareness regarding the importance of older people in communes and of older single women adopting families to exchange emotional and material resources. Androgyny was introduced into the Groves discussion by Joy and Howard Osofsky, who defined it as a lifestyle with no sexual differentiation in roles. A plea for longitudinal studies of families came from Margaret Feldman.

Finally, among the issues and questions raised regarding this new area of research was a concern about American society's responses to alternate lifestyles. Would there be a reactionary crackdown from legal and government sources, outright condemnation from religious authorities, and a consensus among nonsympathetic counselors, therapists, and human service professionals that the practitioners of alternative lifestyles were ill? Other prominent participants in this pioneering conference included Eleanor Macklin, Catherine Chilman, David Olson, Marvin Sussman, Carlfred Broderick, Harold Feldman, Gladys Groves, Robert Harper, Lester Kirkendall, David and Vera Mace, Marie Peters, Gerhard Neubeck,

James Ramey, Nena O'Neill, Rose Somerville, and Roger Rubin. These and many other attendees would make contributions over the next 30 years examining the shifting parameters of American family life.

The 1972 Groves conference, "Societal Planning for Family Pluralism," continued the earlier developments in legitimizing the study of the alternative lifestyle movement. Another participant, James Ramey, whose articles on group marriages and communes appeared in such publications as *Journal of Sex Research*, extolled the practical advantages of communal living, particularly in the pooling of resources. For example, fewer automobiles are needed when others can transport you; housing facilities may be of better quality than individuals and separate families could afford; caregiving for children, the disabled, and other dependents increases with more adults present; children have additional adult role models; and collaborative financial investment strategies improve economic circumstances. Ramey described one commune composed of professionals with \$51 million in assets that labeled itself an investment club. Their large housing complex provided day care and a communal dining area. On the downside, Ramey reported the fragility of group ventures that sometimes faltered under the effect of career and personal problems that were due to demands from the broader society.

The efficacy of group experiences for adults and children was questioned by other conference participants, including George and Nena O'Neill (1972), coauthors of the best-selling book, *Open Marriage*. They expressed concern about rearing children age 5 and younger in group situations. They even criticized their own ideas by saying the major weakness in opening the boundaries of permanent monogamous relationships was the inability of individuals to analyze and understand their own relationships. People carry role expectations, especially based on their parents' marriages, into their own marriages, and these expectations are difficult to expel. In an open marriage, marriage should always be the primary relationship, and if extramarital sex does occur, it should be viewed as something feeding into the relationship and not threatening it. In other words, extramarital sex was acceptable only when it filtered back positively into the marriage.

Finally, the conference workshops produced a number of predictions regarding the future course of American family life. Most of these were based on a perceived need for increased intimacy as mass culture grew and became more impersonal.

As the 1970s progressed, practitioners, researchers, and other scholars continued to meet and pursue an agenda of lively debate and discourse over the future of American family life. Among these meetings was "Ad-

ventures in Loving: A Conference on Alternative Lifestyles," held at the University of Maryland in 1975.

Once again, leading authorities on alternative lifestyles, academic experts, writers, and others were brought together. Among the participants was Robert Rimmer, author of the best-selling novels *The Harrad Experiment* (1966) and *Proposition 31* (1968). The *Harrad Experiment* described coeducational housing at a New England university, an unheard-of situation at the time. *Proposition 31* took its name from a California legislative proposal to legalize group marriages. The popularity of these two fictionalized accounts of alternative lifestyles brought to a wide public arena a level of awareness that academic treatises could never capture.

The 1975 conference also featured Larry and Joan Constantine, who had traveled the country interviewing people for their seminal book, *Group Marriage* (Constantine & Constantine, 1973). They concluded that opening boundaries in relationships and increasing people's options was at the crux of the movement toward group marriages and multiple relationships. Another conference participant, James Ramey, founder and director of the Center for the Study of Innovative Lifestyles, described an open marriage as one in which two people were primarily involved with each other although emotional and sexual relationships existed outside the primary relationship. Citing the increasing divorce rates, Ramey saw the exploration of alternative models as a significant step in determining what might bring intellectual, emotional, social, familial, sexual, and career fulfillment. Additional topics explored were monogamy and beyond, relationship choices, multiple commitments, freedom and responsibility, communes, and swinging.

It should be recognized that these were highly controversial topics, often leading to public scrutiny and at times denunciation. After receiving complaints by individuals from the nonuniversity community, the University of Maryland's president had to defend the use of campus facilities for the conference. I was one of the conference organizers, and such criticisms were no surprise to me. In 1974, a U.S. congressman from Maryland, at the behest of several constituents, questioned the appropriateness of three invited speakers, participants in a triadic marriage, to my course, Family Relationships. The speakers were university graduates, and two were married to one another (Rubin, 1978). The congressman's telegram (personal communication, February 28, 1974) to the university administration stated,

The thin line between making a class interesting and pandering villainousness may have been crossed. Certainly that is the view of some of those that

have been exposed to this. The instructor, Dr. Roger Rubin, enjoys great vogue of popularity, but so do the perverters [*sic*] of X-rated movies. While some may tolerate and even be amused by such panty raids [*sic*] and nude runs I do not think that the same tolerance should be extended to courses of instruction and hope that this is not the case in the present instance.

In a follow-up letter to the dean of the College of Human Ecology, the congressman stated, "I really hoped for assurances that this course had not become a circus sideshow of disturbed persons on one side and student voyeurs on the other" (personal communication, March 22, 1974). In spite of such pressures, interest in alternative lifestyles continued, and by today's mass media standards, such criticism seems quaint. However, this kind of pressure helps explain the future cautiousness and the lack of interest and boldness in the academic study of alternative lifestyles.

It was not until 1981 that alternative lifestyles would again become the dominant theme of a Groves conference. The meeting, titled "The Pursuit of Happiness: Progress and Prospects," was the basis for the publication, *Contemporary Families and Alternative Lifestyles: Handbook on Research and Theory* (Macklin & Rubin, 1983). The conference again brought together some of the leading scholars associated with the study of alternative lifestyles, featuring the Constantines, Judith Fischer, Nena O'Neill, Ramey, Whitehurst, Robert Francoeur, Bram Buunk, and Roger Libby. Topics explored included singlehood, nonmarital cohabitation, open and multiple relationships, same-sex intimate relationships, alternative lifestyles in minority ethnic communities, affiliated families and communities, and children and the elderly in alternative lifestyles. Also discussed were the traditional nuclear family, remarriage and stepfamilies, single-parent families, and dual career/worker marriages. Issues surrounding religious reactions to alternative lifestyles as well as implications for teaching, the law, clinical work, and international perspectives were included. Although we did not know it, this was the last major conference on alternative lifestyles.

SWINGING, GROUP MARRIAGES, AND COMMUNES

Of the many alternative lifestyles that captured the interest of family researchers beginning in the 1960s, swinging, group marriages, and some communal arrangements gained the least semblance of public tolerance or acceptance over the next few decades. Perhaps the primary reason was that

they share the common theme of nonexclusivity in sexual partnerships. Such unorthodoxy challenges existing religious, legal, and social rules.

Swinging became the generic term for the sexual exchange of marital partners with other like-minded participants. Among swingers, sex is the defining attraction. Otherwise, they maintain their couple autonomy. Group marriages go beyond swinging by including economic, emotional, housing, and child care relationships. They range from a minimum of three participants, two of whom have to be legally married, to increasing numbers of couples and singles becoming complex family networks. These arrangements differ from traditional polygamous marriage so common to many societies in that they are not legally or socially sanctioned and do not claim mainstream religious support. The fact they sometimes include unmarried people makes this configuration unusual. Members understand that sexual accessibility is expected although not necessarily directed toward every adult. Sometimes group marriages will merge into larger communal arrangements taking on idealistic principles promoting innovative methods for human cooperation.

RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP ON SWINGING, GROUP MARRIAGES, AND COMMUNES

Gilbert Bartell's (1971) book, *Group Sex: An Eyewitness Report on the American Way of Swinging*, stimulated academic interest in a topic that had barely been studied previously. Bartell concluded that swingers were overwhelmingly White, middle class, age 30-something, parents, religiously identified, teachers, salesmen, housewives, politically conservative, and secretive about their activities. Except for religious participation/identification, Jenks (1998) drew a similar profile three decades later. In other words, apparently the more privileged, stable, and ordinary citizen was and is the most likely to swing! This defied conventional wisdom and raised doubts about the facade of American marital life. Bartell's research would be eclipsed a year later with the publication of *Open Marriage* (O'Neill & O'Neill, 1972). The term *open marriage*, through the efforts of the mass media, would become synonymous with acceptable extramarital sexual relationships, a great disservice to the original intent of its anthropologist authors. The focus of their inquiry was to broaden the view of gender roles in intimate male-female relationships. The O'Neills (1972) concluded that rigid, prescribed, gender-based scripts were destructive to the long-term growth and healthy evolution of relationships. They proposed an arrangement in which mutual trust permitted an opening of the

marital relationship to new opportunities for personal fulfillment, including those afforded by opposite-sex members to whom the partners were not committed. This was a proposed alternative to the stagnation, unrealistic self-sacrifice, frustration, and anger that the O'Neills interpreted as a major factor in rising divorce rates. Although their book was more about a married person's going to the opera with an opposite sex friend than it was about extramarital sex, the popular culture's increasing interest in all things sexual identified the O'Neills' treatise as a justification for extramarital sexual activity.

By the early 1970s, an increasing number of books on alternative lifestyles incorporating material on swinging, group marriages, and communes became available. Otto's (1970) edited book, *The Family in Search of a Future*, was partially based on a symposium held at the 1967 annual meeting of the American Psychological Association. Prominent behavioral and social scientists contributed, including Albert Ellis (1970), who wrote about group marriage, claiming it has a long history in human experience. He argued that mate swapping had become the primary example of group marriage in American society, and he predicted that group sex but not group marriage would increase. Swinging would be the claimant to future sexual variety. Perhaps the most widely discussed of the articles was Victor Kassel's (1970) examination of polygyny after age 60. His position was that multiple marriages, especially between a man and several women, would solve many of the social problems of the elderly.

The writings of Bartell and Rustum Roy gained further exposure in compendia such as Hart's (1972) *Marriage: For and Against*, which recognized that many well-respected social scientists were now seriously considering new marriage forms including group marriage and group sex. The publication *Intimate Life Styles*, edited by Joann and Jack DeLora (1972), offered a predominantly college audience direct access to Bartell's (1971) study of group sex among mid-Americans and Denfield and Gordon's (1970) classic study on the sociology of mate swapping. It was also among the first readers to include the works of the Roys (Roy & Roy, 1968) on the need to alter the monogamy paradigm and the pioneering research of the Constantines (Constantine & Constantine, 1973) on multi-lateral marriage (group marriage). The popularity of writings on communal lifestyles was further evidenced in *The Future of the Family*, edited by Louise Kapp Howe (1972). This book attested to the importance of the study of communal life in the family studies field. The academic recognition of controversial lifestyle topics was endorsed again by the publication of a special issue of *The Family Coordinator* (now called *Family Rela-*

tions) in 1972. Edited by Marvin Sussman, several of the articles originated from the 1971 Groves Conference on Marriage and the Family.

Renovating Marriage, edited by Libby and Whitehurst (1973), offered studies generally reconfirming the White, middle-class image of swinging and provided an extensive literature review dating back to one of the earliest studies on wife swapping by Wilson and Myers (1965). A more personal view of expanding the dimensions of the marital bond was found in *The New Intimacy: Open-ended Marriage and Alternative Lifestyles* (Mazur, 1973). Inspired by the work of the Constantines, Libby, Rimmer, and others, Mazur (1973) offered his views and guidelines for living a nonconventional marriage and documented his thesis with the research and thinking of the time. One reader almost totally devoted to swinging, group marriages, and communes was *Beyond Monogamy* (J. R. Smith & Smith, 1974). On the opening page, the Smiths (J. R. Smith & Smith, 1974) quoted the words of Judge Ben Lindsey in his seminal book, *The Companionate Marriage*, that "the couples who mutually agree that adultery is all right are a strange and interesting phenomenon in American life today . . . that it is surely indicative that something extraordinary is happening to one of the most firmly established of our customs." Another example of the fascination in the 1970s with reconstructing marriage was Casler's (1974) book *Is Marriage Necessary?* Casler promoted the idea that much of what people believed about marriage was a myth and that marriage is a potential entrapment for the human psyche. Among the most thoughtful contributors to the 1970s examination of marriage were Anna and Robert Francoeur, who explored sex and marriage within a religious, ethical, biological, evolutionary, and historical context. Their book, *Hot and Cool Sex* (Francoeur & Francoeur, 1974), maintained that societal change had created new ways for men and women to relate sexually. Ultimately, this meant that the hot sex of traditional closed marriage would increasingly be replaced by the cool sex afforded in more open relationships as multilateral opportunities and intimacies increased between the sexes.

The search for alternatives to marriage continued with Duberman's (1974) *Marriage and Its Alternatives*, in which she noted a change in attitude among some experts regarding adultery. Citing the works of David Olson, Larry and Joan Constantine, Ethel Alpenfels, and Rustum and Della Roy among others, Duberman concluded that they believed personal satisfaction had become today's primary relationship goal and that expanded family parameters, sometimes including sexual variety, was the key to success greater than that provided in dyadic relationships. In 1976, Ramey published *Intimate Friendships*, a description of the dramatic

changes he observed in American society. He said the building block of the society was now the individual, who selected at various times over the life cycle to live in different but equally viable and acceptable personal relationships, and that intimate friendships were possible in all kinds of relationships.

The dialogue on sex and intimacy continued in the 1977 publication of *Marriage and Alternatives: Exploring Intimate Relationships*, edited by Libby and Whitehurst. This book continued to challenge the assumption of sexual exclusivity within marriage. Brian Gilmartin's chapter contributed the most extensive study of swinging completed at the time. Most important was his use of a control group for the first time comparing socialization variables such as early relationships with parents and kin, early interest in the opposite sex, and political and religious affiliations. Gilmartin concluded that if partners have a shared perception of their sexual behavior, then no harm will be done to their marriage based solely on their swinging.

Murstein (1978), an eminent psychologist and social historian of romance, dating, and courtship, reported on swinging, group marriages, and communes in his edited book, *Exploring Intimate Life Styles*. He observed that the depersonalization and avoidance of emotional involvement among swingers will relegate it to temporary status in the lives of its practitioners. However, Murstein also concluded that its appeal as a solution to specific needs such as autonomy and high sexual drive would sustain its presence in the culture.

By 1982, the study of swingers, group marriages, and communes was fading. A 1982 special issue of *Marriage and Family Review*, edited by H. Gross and Sussman, titled "Alternatives to Traditional Family Living," did not contain a single reference to swinging or American communal life. Fortunately, sociologist Richard Jenks stands out as an exception to scholarly indifference, publishing multiple articles on swinging in the mid-1980s. Jenks (1985a) reported that swingers and nonswingers differed only in the practice of swinging and not on a variety of more general attitudes and practices. Jenks (1985b) further reported that swingers' liberal attitudes were primarily related to sexual issues—they were more conventional in other social areas. As he attempted to develop a social psychological model of swinging from his research, Jenks (1985c) once again found that swingers were less marginal to the community than predicted. His more recent literature review on swinging serves as a primary source on the topic and a culmination of his earlier work (Jenks, 1998).

Whatever other professional literature exists on swinging was reported almost exclusively in the 1980s. Biblarz and Biblarz (1980) questioned the theoretical and research methodology employed in previous studies, claiming researcher bias and poor empirical techniques. Peabody (1982) examined the psychotherapeutic implications of swinging, open marriage, and group marriages, and Whitehurst (1983) predicted that vast social changes in society would foster increasing opportunities for the growth of choices and pluralism in lifestyles. Bisexuality among swinging married women reported by Dixon (1984) added a new dimension to the study of the consequences of mate swapping. Differences in personality variables among swingers, ex-swingers, and control group members were found by Murstein, Case, and Gunn (1985). Further personality concerns about swingers were raised when the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory was applied by Duckworth and Levitt (1985). Their findings suggested serious emotional disturbances, substance abuse, and major sexual problems among a significant number of swingers.

In the 1990s, one must turn to the popular press for information on swinging. Among the publications reporting on swinging and group sex were *New York, New York* (M. Gross, 1992), *Gentlemen's Quarterly* (Newman, 1993), *New York Times Magazine* (Roth & Heard, 1997), *Rolling Stone* (Anonymous, 1998), *Mademoiselle* (Chen, 1998), *Esquire* (Richardson, 1999), and *Glamour* (Bried, 1999). A *New York Times Magazine* (Rayner, 2000) article on swinging included an interview of Robert McGinley, president of the North American Swing Club Association, who reported that the group has increased from 150 to 310 affiliates in the past 5 years. McGinley claimed swinging had become highly organized and institutionalized. He believes it strengthens marriage and received a bad reputation from the press during the 1960s and 1970s. According to Gould and Zabol (1998), there are about 3 million married, middle-aged, middle-class swingers or *lifestyle practitioners*, as it is now called. This is an increase of almost 1 million since 1990.

In the semantics of group sex, a new term is evidence of its renewed visibility, *polyamory*. Polyamorists are more committed to emotional fulfillment and family building than recreational swingers. Larsen (1998) described polyamory as "an outgrowth of both the group marriage and communal living movements of the 60s and 70s, the still-young polyamory movement espouses the value of committed, loving, relationships with more than one partner" (p. 20). Through its Web site, the Polyamory Society promotes the impression that middle-class professionals, artists,

academics, and the computer literate are solidly representative of its members.

The MTV program "Sex in the 90s: It's a Group Thing" (Cloud, 1999) provided public exposure to polyamory, and according to *Time* magazine (Cloud, 1999), perhaps 250 polyamory support groups exist, the majority available through the Internet. According to Larsen (1998), increasing numbers of young adults are trying out polyamory as an alternative to their parents' failed monogamous marriages. Anapol (1997), a leading proponent, wrote extensively about it in her book *Polyamory: The New Love Without Limits: Secrets of Sustainable Intimate Relationships*.

Advances in communication appear to be contributing to the increase in swinging. In the 1970s, 75% of the swingers found each other through a growing literature, especially swingers' magazines (Gilmartin, 1977). Today, the Internet may have replaced magazines in linking potential participants to one another.

An exception to the decline in the study of communes is the recent comprehensive publication of *Families and Communes: An Examination of Nontraditional Lifestyles* (W. Smith, 1999), which drew many conclusions from the *Communities Directory: A Guide to Cooperative Living* (Fellowship for Intentional Community, 1995), a major resource identifying contemporary communal arrangements. W. Smith (1999) estimated that there are currently 3,000 to 4,000 communes: "These numbers indicate that there probably are close to as many people living communally today as there were in any given year during the period from 1965 to 1975" (p. 107). Although aware of the inherent difficulty in defining a commune, W. Smith maintained the value of studying them lies in the comparison and contrast with the nuclear family. He rejected the idea of Kanter (1973) and others that ultimately communal life and families are incompatible. Rather, W. Smith saw both lifestyles as a search for human connection in a world increasingly devoid of meaningful intimacy.

Communes today remain both urban and rural, and about one third of them are religious or spiritual. Others represent a diverse range of interests including ecological and environmental, health, personal morality, lesbian feminist, peace and human rights, and collective co-ownership. Only 4% focus primarily on family life, but families in various forms remain active and viable in most communal settings. Berry (1992) wrote that contemporary communes do not reject many of the dominant society's values as was truer in the 1960s and 1970s. Rather, they supplement these values with their own idiosyncratic components for self-development.

FAMILY PROFESSIONALS AND THE FUTURE OF ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLES

What is one to conclude from the paucity over the past 20 years of academic interest in conducting research and theorizing about swinging, group marriages, and communes? Considering that Murdock (1949) reported that only 43 of 238 human societies considered monogamy the ideal, the aversion to studying multiple marital relationships seems at odds with reality. However, an examination of three currently popular marriage and family textbooks (Cherlin, 1999; Davidson & Moore, 1996; Olson & DeFrain, 2000) found virtually no mention of these alternative lifestyles. None of these sources indexed the words *swinging*, *group marriages*, or *communes*. It is like a family secret. Everyone is aware of it, but no one acknowledges it.

The present denial in family studies of the existence of sexual mate sharing among married couples limits the debate regarding the parameters of contemporary marriage. The evolution of this denial is illustrated by changes in the journal *Alternative Life Styles: Changing Patterns in Marriage, Family, and Intimacy*, founded in 1978 by Libby. In 1985, the journal became *Lifestyles: A Journal of Changing Patterns*. By 1988, it had been renamed *Lifestyles: Family and Economic Issues*, only to be further transformed in 1992 into the *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, a journal having absolutely nothing to do with alternative lifestyles.

Perhaps also in denial are marriage and family therapists who are not clamoring for information on alternate lifestyles. Why not? Are they not seeing clients who sexually share partners? Do therapists not look for such behavior? Stayton (1985) stated that marital and family therapy training is based on the traditional monogamous, nuclear family model, which inadequately prepares clinicians for dealing with alternative lifestyles such as swinging, group sex, group marriage, and communes.

Health professionals should be knowledgeable about alternative lifestyles, given AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Tevlin (1996) reported that swingers do not consistently practice safe sex. And according to Gould and Zabol (1998), at New Horizon, the world's second largest swing club, condoms, although readily available, may not always be used. However, Larsen (1998) reported that some polyamorists practice "safe sex circles" in which only those who have tested negatively for sexually transmitted diseases participate (she claimed lower disease rates for this group than for those who secretively cheat on their spouses). However, the fear of disease has apparently not inhibited the recent growth of swinging.

Swinging, group marriages, and communes may remain on the periphery of study and tolerance because they threaten the cultural image of what marriage is supposed to be. Other forms of alternative lifestyles do not attribute the basis for their existence to the concept of multiple sexual partners. However, this avoidance may no longer be possible. The current debate on same-sex marriage has set the stage for the broader discussion over which relationships should be legally recognized. Some ask if legalized polygamy will be the next step after gay marriage, noting that religious, social, and biological arguments for and against such marriages can be brought forth just as they are concerning homosexual couples. According to *Newsweek* magazine, between 20,000 and 50,000 people in Mormon splinter groups already live in polygamous families (Murr, 2000). All of this is ammunition for the culture war over the family. Liberals and conservatives argue over whether all lifestyles should be accorded equal status and recognition. Are some superior to others or just different? Recently, Waite and Gallagher (2000) strongly implied that monogamous marriage is the preferred option, leading to better emotional and physical health. Alternative lifestyle advocates argue that providing options strengthens marital relationships.

W. Smith (1999) stated that "studying alternative families can give us insights into our own families and the status quo" (p. 134). The recognition of this provides the intellectual justification for continuing study on the least popular of the alternative lifestyles, swinging, group marriages, and communes. Scholars such as those attending the Groves Conference on Marriage and the Family keep renewing this quest. The 2000 Groves conference, "Considering the Past, Contemplating the Future: Family Diversity in the New Millennium," reconnects with the Groves meetings of 1971, 1972, and 1981 and the 1975 University of Maryland conference in reestablishing the importance of studying that with which we may be least comfortable.

REFERENCES

- Anapol, D. (1997). *Polyamory: The new love without limits: Secrets of sustainable intimate relationships*. San Rafael, CA: IntiNet Resource Center.
- Anonymous. (1998, August 20). Hot sport. *Rolling Stone*, 793, 82.
- Bartell, G. (1971). *Group sex: An eyewitness report on the American way of swinging*. New York: Wyden.
- Berry, B.J.L. (1992). *America's utopian experiments: Communal havens from longwave crises*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

- Biblarz, A., & Biblarz, D. N. (1980). Alternative sociology for alternative life styles: A methodological critique of studies of swinging. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 8, 137-144.
- Bried, E. (1999, November). The Kink-o-meter. *Glamour*, 97, 82.
- Buunk, B., & van Driel, B. (1989). *Variant lifestyles and relationships*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Casler, L. (1974). *Is marriage necessary?* New York: Popular Library.
- Chen, D. (1998, November). What goes on at a swinger's club? *Mademoiselle*, 104, 167-170.
- Cherlin, A. J. (1999). *Public and private families* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Cloud, J. (1999, November 15). Henry & Mary & Janet & . . . *Time*, 155, 90-91.
- Constantine, L., & Constantine, J. M. (1973). *Group marriage*. New York: Collier Books.
- Davidson, K. J., & Moore, N. B. (1996). *Marriage and family*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- DeLora, J. S., & DeLora, J. R. (Eds.). (1972). *Intimate life styles*. Pacific Palisades, CA: Goodyear.
- Denfield, D., & Gordon, M. (1970). The sociology of mate swapping: Or the family that swings together clings together. *Journal of Sex Research*, 6, 85-100.
- Dixon, J. K. (1984). The commencement of bisexual activity in swinging married women over age thirty. *Journal of Sex Research*, 20, 71-90.
- Duberman, L. (1974). *Marriage and its alternatives*. New York: Praeger.
- Duckworth, J., & Levitt, E. E. (1985). Personality analysis of a swingers club. *Lifestyles*, 8, 35-45.
- Ellis, A. (1970). Group marriage: A possible alternative? In H. A. Otto (Ed.), *The family in search of a future* (pp. 85-97). Norwalk, CT: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Fellowship for Intentional Community. (1995). *Communities directory: A guide to cooperative living*. Langley, WA: Author.
- Francoeur, A. K., & Francoeur, R. T. (1974). *Hot and cool sex*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Gilmartin, B. (1977). Swinging: Who gets involved and how? In R. W. Libby & R. N. Whitehurst (Eds.), *Marriage and alternatives* (pp. 161-185). Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.
- Gould, T., & Zabol, M. (1998). The other swing revival. *Saturday Night*, 113, 48-58.
- Gross, H., & Sussman, M. B. (Eds.). (1982). Alternatives to traditional family living [Special issue 2]. *Marriage and Family Review*, 5(2).
- Gross, M. (1992, June 8). Sex in the 90s. *New York, New York*, 25, 34-43.
- Hart, H. H. (Ed.). (1972). *Marriage: For and against*. New York: Hart.
- Howe, L. K. (Ed.). (1972). *The future of the family*. New York: Touchstone.
- Jenks, R. J. (1985a). A comparative study of swingers and nonswingers: Attitudes and beliefs. *Lifestyles*, 7, 5-20.
- Jenks, R. J. (1985b). Swinging: A replication and test of a theory. *Journal of Sex Research*, 21, 199-205.
- Jenks, R. J. (1985c). Swinging: A test of two theories and a proposed new model. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 14, 517-527.
- Jenks, R. J. (1998). Swinging: A review of the literature. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 27, 507-521.
- Kanter, R. M. (Ed.). (1973). *Communes: Creating and managing the collective life*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Kassel, V. (1970). Polygyny after sixty. In H. A. Otto (Ed.), *The family in search of a future* (pp. 137-143). Norwalk, CT: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Larsen, E. (1998, November/December). Poly sex for beginners. *Utne Reader*, 90, 20-21.
- Libby, R. W., & Whitehurst, R. N. (Eds.). (1973). *Renovating marriage*. Danville, CA: Consensus.

- Libby, R. W., & Whitehurst, R. N. (Eds.). (1977). *Marriage and alternatives: Exploring intimate relationships*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.
- Macklin, E. D., & Rubin, R. H. (Eds.). (1983). *Contemporary families and alternative life-styles: Handbook on research and theory*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Mazur, R. (1973). *The new intimacy: Open-ended marriage and alternative lifestyles*. Boston: Beacon.
- Murdock, G. P. (1949). *Social structure*. New York: Macmillan.
- Murr, A. (2000, November 13). Strange days in Utah. *Newsweek*, 136, 74.
- Murstein, B. (Ed.). (1978). *Exploring intimate life styles*. New York: Springer.
- Murstein, B., Case, D., & Gunn, S. P. (1985). Personality correlates of ex-swingers. *Life-styles*, 8, 21-34.
- Newman, J. (1993, October). Strange bedfellows. *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, 63, 161-167.
- Olson, D. H., & DeFrain, J. (2000). *Marriage and the family* (3rd ed.). Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.
- O'Neill, N., & O'Neill, G. (1972). *Open marriage*. New York: M. Evans.
- Otto, H. A. (Ed.). (1970). *The family in search of a future*. Norwalk, CT: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Peabody, S. A. (1982). Alternative life styles to monogamous marriage: Variants of normal behavior in psychotherapy clients. *Family Relations*, 31, 425-434.
- Ramey, J. (1972). Emerging patterns of innovative behavior in marriage. In M. Sussman (Ed.), *Non-traditional family forms in the 1970s* (pp. 67-88). Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations.
- Ramey, J. (1976). *Intimate friendships*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Rayner, R. (2000, April 9). Back in the swing. *New York Times Magazine*, 149, 42-43.
- Richardson, J. H. (1999, May). Scenes from a (group) marriage. *Esquire*, 131, 112-120.
- Rimmer, R. H. (1966). *The Harrad experiment*. New York: Bantam.
- Rimmer, R. H. (1968). *Proposition 31*. New York: Signet.
- Roth, M., & Heard, A. (1997, February 16). They call it polyluv. *New York Times Magazine*, 146, 12.
- Roy, R., & Roy, D. (1968). *Honest sex: A revolutionary new sex guide for the now generation of Christians*. New York: Signet.
- Rubin, R. H. (with Carol, Duane, & Charlotte). (1978). A triadic relationship. In B. Murstein (Ed.), *Exploring intimate life styles* (pp. 147-162). New York: Springer.
- Smith, J. R., & Smith, L. G. (Eds.). (1974). *Beyond monogamy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Smith, W. L. (1999). *Families and communes: An examination of nontraditional lifestyles*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stayton, W. R. (1985). Alternative lifestyles: Marital options. In D. C. Goldberg (Ed.), *Contemporary marriage: Special issues in couples therapy* (pp. 241-260). Belmont, CA: Dorsey.
- Sussman, M. (Ed.). (1972). *Non-traditional family forms in the 1970s*. Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations.
- Tevlin, J. (1996, March 13). The swing set. *Twin Cities Reader*, 22, 12-17.
- Waite, L. J., & Gallagher, M. (2000). *The case for marriage*. New York: Doubleday.
- Whitehurst, R. (1983). Sexual behavior in and out of marriage. *Marriage and Family Review*, 6, 115-124.
- Wilson, T.J.B., & Myers, E. (1965). *Wife swapping: A complete 8 year survey of morals in North America*. New York: Volitant.