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Irwin Altman and Joseph Ginat
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We dedicate this book to the members of the plural families who participated in the project. Their openness, sincerity, and friendship will always be remembered and appreciated.

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Foreword

This volume is the work of research scientists of uncommon talents and experience. Irwin Altman, the senior author, is a social-environmental psychologist of international reputation, the author and editor of numerous books and specialized research papers, and the recipient of many scholarly honors. Joseph Ginat, an anthropologist, has published extensively and is well known for his work on Israeli-Arab family, political, and cultural relations. Together they have produced a remarkable volume of research that is at once objective and sympathetic. They have achieved an understanding of their subject while observing it from the outside and at the same time experiencing it almost intimately from the inside. The degree of confidence and trust established with the men and women whom they studied – at times yielding surprising disclosures – is a testament to the honesty and integrity of the authors as well as the humanity of their participants.

Much that has been written about Mormonism and the Mormon people has been seriously flawed by the bias of its authors. If not apologetic or propagandistic, it has been pejorative or judgmental. For more than a century from the Mormon beginnings in the 1830s, attempts to treat the Mormons, their history, beliefs, and practices, dispassionately and without prejudice were few and far between. This was especially true of Mormon polygamy, which was practiced secretly in the early years but flourished openly after 1852 until its official church prohibition in 1890 and 1904. Yet despite the church interdiction and legal proscription by both state and national laws, polygamy thrives today in various enclaves of dissident Mormons that have no affiliation with the mainline Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Altman and Ginat are not the first serious scholars to give attention to Mormon polygamy, but their subject is not the history of the institution or its past character. Rather the contemporary practice of polygamy is what concerns them, specifically the familial relationships involved. Their extensive observation and analysis of human relations and their general research into sociopsychological problems have provided them with insights, per-

spectives, and methods that make their work distinctive and give it exceptional value.

There are scholarly accounts of the demographics of Mormon polygamy, such as those of Stanley Ivins and George Smith, to say nothing of the extensive materials in church histories or the excellent historical study by Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*. And in his *Religion and Sexuality*, Lawrence Foster has provided a valuable comparative sociological analysis. But where these studies are about *polygamy*, the Altman–Ginat work is an intimate study of *polygamists*, their attitudes and behavior in their familial relations. This work has more in common with *A Mormon Mother* by Annie Clark Tanner, the classic true story of a polygamous wife, or the firsthand accounts of life in polygamous families that can be gleaned from the pioneer journals of both men and women. It has some affinities with the anecdotal information provided by journals and interviews with children and other relatives of polygamists found in Kimball Young's *Isn't One Wife Enough?* But these are accounts of polygamy as it was practiced in the past under circumstances quite different from those of the present. Altman and Ginat study the present and treat their subject as a living institution that thrives despite its conflict with the civil law and with the will of a church that had hoped to stamp polygamy out – to say nothing of the moral pressures from a society fully committed to monogamy.

The authors' objectives and research methodology, as well as their techniques for ensuring their informants' anonymity, are spelled out in their introduction, but there is nothing stilted or labored about the study. The family groups appear in undisguised relations and their members as candid and sincere individuals – no mean accomplishment in a scholarly study into such a humanly sensitive field. It is one thing to examine the past as a historian; it is quite another to understand and appreciate the living present as a scientist or social philosopher. This work has all the color and excitement of a good novel, combining the sensitivity of the artist and the sane, reliable information of the scientist.

This volume is not only a rich vein of information for students of the social and psychological factors in human relations, lively reading for the lay person, and a pool of inspiration for fiction and drama. It is also a valuable source for future historians of religion, morality, and social institutions. Here one can enter into a surprising and fascinating world that is little understood, defies conventional Western morality, and is therefore usually kept at least semisecret and out-of-bounds not only for the general public but also for the serious student.

Sterling M. McMurrin

Preface and acknowledgments

Our work on this book began quite coincidentally and accidentally. In 1986 Gloria and Irwin Altman were in Israel attending a conference, having also previously arranged to spend some social time with Dalia and Joseph Ginat. The Ginats and Altmans had been casual acquaintances in Utah in the 1970s, during the time that Joseph was completing his Ph.D. in anthropology and Irwin was a faculty member in psychology at the University of Utah. Over the course of many social occasions when the Ginats hosted the Altmans in Israel, we decided to collaborate on a study of family life among Mormon fundamentalists who espoused and practiced polygamy. During his years in Utah, Joseph had become acquainted with members of fundamentalist groups, many of whom he and Dalia visited in their homes and communities, and several of whom spent time with the Ginats in Israel.

We originally planned a small-scale study of relationships between husbands and wives, and between wives, in modern plural families. But once begun, the project grew and grew, our interest and commitment mounted, our relationships with fundamentalist families deepened, and the work expanded into a decade-long effort. This book is the story of what we learned and also reflects the intellectual perspectives, collegiality, and close personal relationships of the Altmans and Ginats with one another, and with the families who participated in the work.

There are several reasons for studying polygamous families in contemporary society. First, as a social-environmental psychologist, and an anthropologist, we are interested in family and close interpersonal relationships among friends, lovers, partners, and spouses – how these relationships are managed; how they play out in the context of family and kin, neighbors and communities; and how they vary and are similar across cultures.

Second, our work on close relationships is guided by a transactional philosophical perspective, which emphasizes sensitivity to the holistic nature of interpersonal bonds, the importance of social and physical settings and influences on relationships, the dynamic and changing character of

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close affiliations, and the need to study close bonds throughout their life history. A transactional perspective seemed to be an appropriate framework for studying contemporary plural family life.

Third, we live in an age of diverse and newly emerging forms of family and close personal relationships, many of which are not well understood by scholars or citizens alike. With high rates of divorce, the single-marriage nuclear family is less prevalent than ever before. Instead, we see serial marriages, blended families with partners and children from earlier marriages, single-parent households (usually headed by women), same-gender relationships openly functioning as families, new immigrant groups living in extended family arrangements, elderly group living, and so on.

Mormon fundamentalists practicing polygamy represent still another type of family lifestyle now on the scene in contemporary society. Although polygamy is illegal and has been renounced by the main Mormon church since 1890, there are somewhere between 20,000 and 50,000 members of Mormon fundamentalist families in the western United States, Mexico, and Canada who condone and practice polygamy in accordance with 19th-century Mormon religious beliefs. Indeed, a growing number of fundamentalists continue the practice in spite of a history of hostility and condemnation by American society, and in the face of legislation and potential prosecution by local, state, and federal governments.

In the long run we wish to understand how close relationships in all their diversity, including polygamous bonds, are similar and different from one another. What makes for their success or failure? What are their dynamics? In particular, polygamous relationships among Mormon fundamentalists have some unique challenges that may shed light on features of close relationships in general. As contemporary Americans, Mormon fundamentalists, many of whom are converts to the fundamental religious belief system, hold fast to the ideal of each husband–wife dyad being a special and distinctive relationship. But they also believe that the whole plural family – all wives and the husband – should be a unified communal family. Our question is how do they achieve a viable interplay of these seemingly contradictory *dyadic* and *communal* ideals? Thus we wish to explore their successes and failures in the face of pressures from society as a whole, and the lack of experience of many participants with plural family life. We also examine how they cope with their challenging lifestyle in many aspects of day-to-day living – such as courting, weddings, adjustment to a new marriage, living arrangements, decorating practices, management of budgets and resources, and celebrations.

To our knowledge this is the first broad analysis of psychological and anthropological aspects of life in modern Mormon plural families. Although there are several analyses of plural family life among 19th-century

Mormons and a number of historical, journalistic, and partial analyses of contemporary fundamentalism, we believe that the present work provides a unique perspective on life in modern plural families.

This book is based on interviews and observations of plural families and fundamentalist communities from 1987 to 1992. During those years we worked collaboratively with about 100 members of approximately two dozen families over the course of some 200 interviews and observations. Our participants were members of two large groups of fundamentalists, one centered in a rural town and region and the other headquartered in and around a large metropolitan area. To place our analysis in context, we have also drawn on archival and ethnographic material describing polygamy in other world cultures and among 19th-century Mormons.

The book is organized as follows: chapter 1 presents an overview of the religious underpinnings of present-day Mormon fundamentalists, followed by our conceptual approach and goals. The first section of the book describes the history of the Mormon religion, its early practice of polygamy, and the eventual rejection of plural marriages by the Mormon church (chapter 2); the rise of fundamentalism and the renewed practice of polygamy in this century (chapter 3); and the groups and communities with whom we worked (chapter 4).

The second section of the book (chapters 5–9) presents the results of our interviews and observations on the *early phases of close relationships* in modern plural families, including the decision to add a new wife to a family, courtship, weddings, honeymoons, and initial adjustments by wives and husbands to a new marriage.

The next sections, on *physical environments* of plural marriages (chapters 10–12), examines living and housing arrangements in polygamous families and the psychological attachments of husbands and wives to their homes (including how they decorate dwellings, establish territories, manage privacy, and so on).

We then portray a few aspects of *everyday life* in plural families in chapters 13–15, including the ways husbands “rotate” among their wives and families, and how families manage their budgets and resources and celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays.

Chapters 16–19 address *social-emotional relationships* between wives, husbands and wives, and parents and children. Here we provide detailed case examples of established, emerging, and dysfunctional plural families.

Chapter 20 summarizes our work, and reflects on the future of contemporary Mormon plural families.

Appendix A presents our research methodology. Appendix B describes demographic features of our participants and families and of 19th-century Mormon polygamous families.

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This work could not have been completed without the assistance, encouragement, and contributions of many people and organizations. To all of them we offer our thanks and appreciation.

Most of all we are grateful to the men, women, and family members who invited us into their homes and communities, who were always gracious and sincere, and who offered us a glimpse into their lives. And we appreciate the support of church and community leaders who made us welcome at a variety of functions in their communities. We will forever remember the goodwill and friendship of all our participants, and we dedicate this book to them.

We also extend our thanks to the many colleagues and anonymous reviewers who commented on earlier drafts of the manuscript or on briefer articles and presentations of this work in other settings. They are too numerous to mention by name, but their advice and support are gratefully acknowledged. We are also indebted to four members of the fundamentalist groups with whom we worked for their careful review of the manuscript. A special word of thanks goes to Philip McBride, Bryn Mawr College, for his comments and expressions of encouragement. We are also grateful to Sterling M. McMurrin for his eloquent and gracious foreword to this book.

As always, our universities and colleagues supported us in many ways. The University of Utah provided financial assistance during earlier phases of the project, and the University Teaching Committee and the university generously granted Irwin Altman a faculty fellowship and sabbatical leave to complete the book. The College of Social and Behavioral Science and Dean Donna Gelfand, and the Department of Psychology and Chairperson Charles Shimp, always provided tangible and intangible support, encouragement, and understanding over the many years of the project. We also extend our thanks to the Jewish-Arab Center at the University of Haifa, and to the University of Haifa Research Authorities, whose assistance and support made it possible for Joseph Ginat to undertake the project.

We were privileged to work with Angela Newman, University of Utah. With extraordinary patience, competence, and goodwill, Angela typed many thousands of pages of field notes, data summaries, and draft manuscript – often from mumbled dictation and nearly illegible scribbles. Without her energy and commitment this project would have been stalled at many critical junctures.

We are also indebted to the Cambridge University Press staff. Our special thanks go to Julia Hough, our editor. At every decision point, her advice and judgment were not only impeccable but always presented with an unusual combination of forthrightness, grace, and civility. We appreciate very much our professional and personal relationship with Julia. Paul Dreifus and the staff at Cambridge were also a pleasure to work with. We

especially acknowledge the assistance of Janis Bolster, production editor, and Vicky Macintyre for her thorough editing of the manuscript.

To our wives, Gloria and Dalia, we express our love, respect, and appreciation, as we have throughout our lives together. They were with us at every point in this work – participating in many trips, visits, and meetings at our and participants’ homes, displaying insights into various aspects of the work, and being accepting and open minded about a different lifestyle.

As social scientists our goal was to describe and understand a unique family lifestyle now on the contemporary scene – and one that will surely continue into the future – and to advance research and theory on close relationships. We approached the task as scholars, intending neither to advocate nor condemn plural family life, and we have tried to present a forthright and balanced analysis. At the same time, we also hope that the ideas and content of the book are useful to the members and families of the fundamentalist groups we studied – by perhaps presenting them with another perspective on the lifestyle they choose to live, identifying the complexities and challenges many families face, and opening up for discussion alternative modes of coping with facets of their everyday lives. Thus we hope that our work has direct and tangible value for those who gave so much to it.

Finally, we aspire to the possibility that our research will help the “world” understand better the motivations, challenges, and complexities of family life in the groups we studied. We live in a time of great change and diversity in lifestyles and, although we each must live according to our own values and beliefs, it is also important to have some understanding of why and how others choose to live. In learning about the lifestyle of others we have an opportunity to avoid, or at least reduce, the animosities, hatreds, and divisiveness that can be so destructive among people who live differently and who often misunderstand one another. Indeed, through knowledge and understanding our very diversity may enrich and enlarge our worldview as a society and civilization.

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