A discussion of the origins and subsequent developments of attitudes toward monogamy and its alternatives reveals marked variations and some similarities. A range of specific factors have impinged upon norms of intimacy in various historical periods, e.g., the Medieval Church stressed the ideal of celibacy and derogated monogamy. While external factors such as economics and religion tend to influence lifestyle preferences to produce noncumulative effects, there has been a more recent tendency toward democratization of options. Those patterns most closely associated with elite populations tend to be eventually adopted in an altered fashion by broader sectors of the populace.

MONOGAMY ON TRIAL

AN ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS TO MONOGAMY AND ITS ALTERNATIVES—PART I, THE PREMODERN ERA

ROBERT S. PICKETT
Syracuse University

Life can be described in terms of options and the structure of choices—narrow though they may often be—in some ways constitutes the fabric of man's social and psychological reality.

—Charles Rosenberg

One of the problems concerning the relationship between past and present views on monogamy and its alternatives has been an almost universal reliance upon a misleading stereotype of the family. This stereotype obscures possibilities for comparing and contrasting past and present. When conjuring up the marriage and family life of the past, we envision a cozy hearth with a kind father surrounded by loving cherubs and a doting wife; Grammy and Grandpa benevolently beam in the background. The obvious intent

Author's Note: Special appreciation is due Ms. Molly Laird. Her constructive assistance has been a major factor in the preparation of this article. The chart which appears as Figure 1 is her reconstruction of salient elements contained within the body of the paper.
behind the summoning up of this historical stereotype, known as the "classical family of Western nostalgia" (Goode, 1963: 6) is the casting of aspersions on the "chaos" of contemporary life. The present is depicted as a bleak battleground on which grim opponents carry out the vindication of their own egos (Lederer and Jackson, 1968; Sennett, 1970; Cooper, 1970; Roy and Roy, 1970; Byrne and Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In any case, reasonable assessments of conventional as well as variant patterns tend to be absent from historical comparisons.

Hopefully, the recent creation of the Journal of Family History and the inauguration of this journal, Alternative Lifestyles, will create more knowledge of attitudes and behaviors in past eras. At the outset, we may not gain much precision in terms of the history of internal dynamics of intimate relationships, but, in time, we may be able to determine more clearly the approximate structure and function of marriage and alternatives as they have juxtaposition to one another. We may also be able to determine the extent to which attitudes toward monogamy and alternatives have been constant or whether they have been unique to specific historical eras.

Unfortunately, few scholars have searched through historical sources to determine the origins and development of monogamous marriage and its alternatives. We are even in the dark as to whether or not monogamous marriage was a preferred lifestyle in past epochs. Often, it is assumed that monogamy, by which term I mean a legally sanctioned mating arrangement between one man and one woman, has always been the preferred living arrangement, and that only now have we become aware that it has anachronistic characteristics (Lederer and Jackson, 1968: 23-38; Casler, 1976). In general, critical scholars have taken up the cudgel against monogamy on the grounds that it has been the only sanctioned model for fulfilling human physical and emotional needs. In the introduction to a recent book on alternate