CONSIDERATION OF FAMILY SUPPORT GROUPS
FOR STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: A HISTORY OF FAMILY SUPPORT GROUPS

A personal experience in the life of this writer led to the
conviction that the establishment of family support groups can be an
effective way to strengthen families. Investigation of the literature
revealed a number of viable models for strengthening and enriching
families. It is the purpose of this report to consider the history and
development of some of the commonly used models in an effort to determine
even more effective methods for helping families become stronger,
particularly those feeling a sense of isolation or alienation.

Family specialists are greatly concerned with the high rate of
family disintegration over the past two or three decades. As early
as the 1950's, clinicians and researchers began experimenting with
ways to improve personal communication and develop human potential.
Sensitivity groups were organized but were generally directed toward
personal growth rather than toward the growth and strengthening of
families.

In the 1960's over two hundred Growth Centers developed as a
result of the human potentialities movement (Otto, 1976). These
centers, like the sensitivity groups, were established primarily to
increase the personal potential of individuals rather than to strengthen
families, but endeavors to develop personal potential led naturally into
an effort to promote growth and develop potential not only within the
individual but also between individuals.

At first the concern for families was focused primarily on the marriage relationship. In 1961 David and Vera Mace began marriage enrichment groups with the Society of Friends and Herbert Otto began research with family groups in an effort to find effective ways to strengthen families. As information regarding families began to emerge, it became obvious that the nuclear family was not the pillar of strength it had been assumed to be (Otto, 1976). A major factor in the weakening of the family appeared to be the loss of the close proximity of the extended family.

As family research and family group experimentation continued in the 1970's, the concept of the family cluster emerged. Frederick Stoller (1970) discussed the trend toward socially isolated families. According to Otto (1976), Stoller was the first to suggest the concept of the family cluster. He proposed that three or four families should meet together on a regular basis as a family support group to "explore their living arrangements, to exchange intimacies, to provide services for one another, and to develop new and more realistic, and more exciting systems of values and attitudes" (Stoller, 1970, p. 159). Simultaneously, in 1970, Margaret Sawin and Otto developed models based on propositions similar to those of Stoller's. Each, independent of the other, called her/his model the family cluster model. The models were similar in that each model consisted of three, four, or five families which met regularly as a family support group. Sawin's model, however, focused on religious nurturing and religious education, while Otto's was designed for fostering personal growth and self-actualization and for strengthening

families. Although Sawin's model developed from a need for more effective religious education, it proved also to meet the same needs for which Otto's model was devised. The two models will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Current literature suggests there are reasons other than the lack of nearby extended family which have resulted in a weakening of the nuclear family. As supportive as an extended family can be, it, too, can have detrimental effects on the nuclear family. Interference by members of the older generation of the extended family, for example, can sometimes place considerable strain on a marriage, on parent-child relationships, or on both.

What are additional pressures present day society places on the family which may cause collapse? The changing role of the family in the last hundred years has been a factor in family break-up. Families need no longer serve as an economic unit which means the individual member's survival is not nearly so threatened by divorce as it has been in the past (Cox, 1978). Families may have been more enduring because they had to be to survive, not necessarily because they were happier or wiser than today's families.

Sawin (1979) noted a more recent change has been that of the role of women, who are no longer confined to homemaking and child care. With the new freedom provided her by dependable birth control methods and greatly increased career opportunities, a woman is less inclined to make a long time commitment to one man. The confusion over sex role identification for both sexes has put further strain on the family. Both

husband and wife find themselves blazing new trails and can no longer rely on the guidelines set by their own parents.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1975) there is another reason why couples can no longer fall easily into the patterns set by their own parents. The children in today's family are not the same as the children of a few decades ago. Since children are no longer needed to work for the family's survival, they have more leisure time and are far more influenced by factors outside the family, especially their peers and the mass media. Often, the only adult contacts they have are with their parents and teachers and a few family friends. Even adult family friends may be little more than acquaintances to them because they are more often left with a caretaker than taken along to be a part of the family group. Sawin (1979) saw the mass media as alienating factors among family members in that it has a tremendous impact on every member's education. Children are educated to the attitudes and values presented by the television rather than to those held by the adults in the nuclear and extended family. Not only is parental influence weakened by the effect of the mass media, but parents themselves become confused with the vast array of new and changing values presented. Keniston (1977) believed, as a result of such confusion, couples become less confident in both their parental roles and their roles as spouses.

As Bronfenbrenner (1975) has indicated, our society's fast pace of living causes further alienation between family members. Both adults and children tend to follow very busy schedules. Individual agendas rarely coincide. Individuals generally spend much more time with their

peers than with family members. Communication breaks down very easily
when members of the same household know one another less well than they
know their peers. Such a life-style does not provide the emotional
nuturance which developed much more readily in families of the past
who spent most of their time together, either in work or recreation.

Once family specialists realized that the family had changed and
was no longer what it was assumed to be, it became necessary to change
the focus of the research. Being aware that the family unit has a
strong impact on individual development and discovering the family
to be less strong than in the past led to greater emphasis on the
individual as a family member. If the family was becoming increasingly
less functional, it made sense to first help the family, then concen-
trate on personal development. From this new way of viewing the family
emerged the concept of viewing the family as a system. Rather than
focusing on individual growth with the assumption that the family would
aid in that development, emphasis shifted toward helping the family as a
whole. Strengthening the individual required first strengthening the
family unit.

By the time therapists and researchers began looking at the
individual as part of a family system, the whole family scene had begun
to change. Not only had the majority of extended families become
fragmented by a mobile society, but also the number of intact nuclear
families rapidly began to decrease, (Masnick & Bane, 1980). Maggie Kuhn,
founder of the Gray Panters and a member of a chosen age-integrated
"family", stated in a testimony before a committee of the White House

Conference on Families in 1980, that Census Bureau Statistics show only 16% of American families fit the traditional nuclear concept of the family (Kuhn, 1980).

Single-parent families resulting from divorce face even more pressures from society than do modern intact families. Single-parent families especially need the support and nurturance of a larger family group. In the past, when communities were smaller and more closely knit, single-parent families were more readily accepted into community life, but such families were much fewer and most often the result of death, not divorce. Smith's (1980) study of the social consequences of single-parenthood indicated that single parents must cope with loneliness and the lack of social support. He noted that even though remarriage often occurs within a short time, it is dangerous to view single-parenthood as transitory. Such a viewpoint could lead to a tendency to overlook the needs of single-parent families whether the condition is short-term or long-term. Both parent and child in a single-parent home who suffer from social isolation might benefit from a family support group containing complete nuclear families.

American families, whether intact nuclear units, single-parent units, or any of a multitude of other kinds of units in which persons live with and in relation to other persons, need to be supported, enriched and strengthened. Sawin and others are effectively meeting such needs for many families in this country and throughout the world. She estimates that there are five or six thousand families now using her

cluster family model. Most of these are church families with whom the model is currently working very effectively (Sawin, 1980). The challenge is to find an equally effective way to meet the needs of non-church families.

CHAPTER II

MODELS OF FAMILY SUPPORT GROUPS

Margaret Sawin (1979) presented a comprehensive description of the kinds of family group models currently in use. She refers to all the models she described as "family enrichment groups". Her choice of the term enrichment came from the fact that the models were designed primarily for functioning families to enable them to grow and become stronger through interaction with groups of families who provide both support and enrichment. In view of the fact that so many of today's families, though basically well, are either somewhat isolated or single-parent families, or both, it is this writer's preference to refer to family groups as family support groups. Although all family group models can be described as supportive, enriching and growth producing, supportiveness must come first. It is only by being nutured and by nuturing others that persons can enrich one another and help one another to grow. However, since the contents of this chapter are drawn primarily from Sawin (1979), her terminology will be used. The concepts "family enrichment groups" and "family support groups" will be used interchangeably.

There are a variety of family enrichment models in use across the country. Sawin (1979) divided them into four categories: 1) Family Growth Groups, 2) Family Skill Models, 3) Family-Based Models for Religious Indoctrination, and 4) Family-Based Models for Recreation and Socializing.

Family Growth Groups consist of several families who interact with one another within a framework of mutual support. Interaction of the members within each family is equally important. The philosophical basis for the model is that individuals and families, as systems, grow under the influence of the group.

Family Skill Groups are designed with the belief that family systems can function better when family members learn specific skills pertaining to family communication and interaction. The skills may be taught to families either separately or as family groups. This model would fit into "the family support group" concept only when used with more than one family.

Family-Based Models for Religious Indoctrination are based on the view that religious education is more effectively taught within the emotional context of the family. As with the Family Skills Model, this model may be used with family groups or individual families.

Family-Based Models for Recreation and Socializing are the most loosely constructed models of the four categories listed. They are built on the premise that the support which families give and receive by sharing fun and recreation will strengthen the individual families involved.

Appendix A contains Sawin's (1979) complete list of twenty-eight models of family enrichment groups, including the names and addresses of people and institutions from which more information can be obtained. She noted that this list includes the better known models

and is not intended to be inclusive of all existing models. The models
have been placed in the framework of the categories listed above. For
the purposes of this report, the writer will focus only on those
models which would seem more generally useful in addressing the needs
of functioning, but isolated, non-church families. The models to
be discussed are similar in that each contains all of the following
components:

1) The group meets for an extended period of time which
   allows for the development of relationships between
   families and individuals.

2) Three families or more are included in a group.

3) Each group has leaders or convenors.

4) Each group provides learning experiences in the area of
   human relationships.

5) Each group promotes growth and the development of human
   potential.

6) Each group provides mutual support both among families
   and individuals.

Sawin's Family Cluster Model

Sawin's model, one of the most widely used, is designed for four
or five family units which contract to meet together on a regular basis
over an extended period of time for the purposes of sharing educational
experiences and providing mutual support for one another. The cluster
has two trained leaders who serve as facilitators and provide training
in skills which enhance family relationships. An important aspect of

this model is that is provides families with the opportunity to
share their beliefs and their lives.

Sawin (1979) defined a family as "any person or persons who live
in relationship...i.e., a one-parent family, a couple without children,
a single person, a three-generational family, a nuclear family,
etc." (p. 62).

Sawin's model has been used both in church and non-church com-
munities, but has met with more success in church groups. Sawin
(1980) suggested two reasons for this: (1) it is difficult for
agencies to get funding for programs of a preventive nature and (2)
there is lack of commitment on the part of participating families
in non-church clusters.

Otto's Family Cluster Model

Otto's family cluster model consists of groups of from three to
five families. Its basic thrust is "to strengthen the family, to
foster personal growth and the self-actualizing processes in a
celebrative and life-affirmative way" (Otto, 1976, p. 20). A cluster
meets regularly for a period of time agreed upon by the group. There
are no trained leaders. Leadership is shared by group members. A
cluster usually shares the same values and goals and may share certain
family functions. The model provides a framework in which members
can learn to love themselves in a way which helps them to help and
support others, thereby establishing a community of sharing and caring.
Emphasis is always on the positive aspects of family life and the
potential strength of the family. Otto's model, like Sawin's, meets

with more success in church rather than non-church communities and for the same reasons (Otto, 1980).

The Extended Family

Another model, the extended family, was developed by the First Unitarian Church of Santa Barbara, California. Sawin (1979) classified this model under Family-Based Models for Recreation and Socializing Otto (1976) called it a part of the family cluster movement. It is both. An unspecified number of families meet together to socialize and become involved in activities which are important to each member and each family. The cluster provides the kind of care and support that members of kin-extended families give when they live nearby. There are no leaders, but a group may have a convenor. Each group decides for itself the time, frequency and length of meetings, kinds of programs, etc.

Peoplemaking Through Family Communications

A model based on the theory of Virginia Satir (1972) in her book Peoplemaking was developed by Joseph Roberts and Jan Berry for the National Communication Skills Center. It is called Peoplemaking Through Family Communications. Sawin described it as an experimental learning program of six sessions, each three hours in length. She classifies the model as a family skills model. It consists of six families and one leader who follow a structured program. The program is designed to help families have fun together, to deal with their conflicts, and to develop and grow individually. The model was developed as a project of the National Board of YMCAs. Though the YMCA

is a Christian organization, its outreach is often wider than that of local churches and may be more likely to attract non-church members.

Becoming Us

Becoming Us is another program which might be adapted to non-church groups, though it was developed by Mary Pat Bryger, Patrick Carnes and Herbert Laude for the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ. This model is also a skills model involving the development of values, better communication and more effective problem solving. A group or cluster of families meets five times with a leader from the staff of Becoming Us, Inc. Family members are taught to become more aware of what happens within the family unit. Sawin noted that the model is designed to incorporate religious beliefs where desired. Presumably, the model could be used effectively in non-church communities, also.

Other Models

Two other models bear mentioning, even though they lack some of the components commonly shared by the previously discussed models. These models are designed so they can effectively reach into areas where non-church people are likely to go, or to be, and may offer structure for future models for neighborhood support groups.

One is called the Family Fun Council developed by Ann Kilmer and Herbert Otto. It was planned for use in a local church setting, but could just as well be held at a city park, recreation center, condominium swimming pool, etc. Emphasis is on having fun with one's own family and with other families. The program is loosely structured

and planned for only one day, but new friendships might be made and future family activities might be planned as a result of families spending one enjoyable day together.

The other model is called Family Outings. It has been developed over the years by various groups such as churches and retreat and camping centers. Such groups often meet for longer than one day and may include camps, bicycle or boat trips, backpacking or numerous other activities. Leadership is usually voluntary and informal. There may or may not be planned meetings. If there are, they are usually informal. A Family Outing which lasts for a week-end or several days can provide the time necessary for establishing new relationships which may continue to develop when the outing is over for those who discover they have common interests which they enjoy sharing.

As was noted, family specialists are faced with a two-fold problem in their efforts to establish family support groups in non-church communities: 1) the commitment level of such families is very low, and 2) little funding is available to agencies for programs of a preventive nature. It is the hope of this writer, as a family life educator, that funds will become increasingly more available for programs aimed at the prevention of family stress. Models are ready and waiting for implementation. As for the problem of commitment, it may be possible, with adequate funds, to educate isolated American families to the value of family enrichment and mutual support among families. Raising families' levels of awareness in this way might result in raising, also, their levels of motivation and commitment to a family support group.

CHAPTER III

A NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION OF THE FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP

TO WHICH THE WRITER BELONGS

My daughter and I belong to a family support group which is known as the Leavenworth Street Gang. We did not deliberately name our group. One of the members simply began referring to us by that name, and it was quickly accepted by all the others. We are a core group of seven members who live in four separate households. The Leavenworth Street Gang is a good name for us not only because we all originally lived on Leavenworth Street, but also because other families on our block are sometimes included in our activities and therefore can easily be a part of "the gang".

One household consists of Tony and Lynn. They are a young married couple who are expecting a child. Tony was a fulltime professor of physiology in the School of Veterinary Medicine until deciding to enter Veterinary School himself. Now he is a student as well as continuing his duties as a professor on a halftime basis. Lynn was an undergraduate in Animal Science until Tony decided to return to school. She is currently working as a dental assistant with plans to continue her college education part-time.

Another family unit consists of Beth and her ten-year-old daughter, Maria. Beth is in her early thirties. She has been divorced for two years, following a fifteen-year marriage. She is a graduate student working toward a master's degree in fine arts.

Tom is a single person. I am classifying him as a family unit, using Sawin's definitions of family units as explained in Chapter II. He is an upperclassman, originally in architecture, who is considering changing to fine arts. For a year he lived in Lynn's and Tony's basement apartment. He has since moved to another apartment, out of the neighborhood, but continues to be an integral part of our group.

Finally, there are my daughter, Emily, and myself. Emily is twelve-years-old. I am in my forties. I have been divorced for three years after having been married for twenty-one years. I am a graduate student in Family and Child Development studying for the master's degree.

There are others who are marginal to our group such as my two grown sons, Tom's close friends, and Beth's good male friend.

Physical proximity obviously was instrumental in bringing our group together. Lynn and Tony live next door to Emily and myself, and Beth and Maria live directly across the street. Another factor which has promoted our close relationships is our common involvement in the university.

Our group began much the same way as other typical neighborhood groups develop across the country. Why, then, have we become a family support group and not remained merely neighbors? I believe we grew to be a family support group because of a sense of isolation each unit felt. The reasons for feeling isolated varied as did the degree to which each unit felt isolated.

One can not objectively describe one's own family or family group members and their interactions with one another. I will attempt to bring some objectivity to my effort to describe mine by incorporating in this chapter not only my perception of the group but also the perceptions of each of the other members. In order to ascertain how each of the other members perceived the group, I considered questioning each one directly. I discarded this idea for fear our group would lose some of its spontaneity. An even more important consideration was the possibility that such an intervention might interfere with the natural, evolving growth of the group. I decided to use, as a source, a video-taped panel discussion which was made of our group when they appeared in front of a class I was teaching in Family Relationships and Sex Roles. A typescript of that discussion has been included as Appendix B.

First, I will describe the group as I see it. Then I will present viewpoints which each of the members stated during the panel discussion.

As mentioned previously, the degree of need for support varies among the family units. Emily and I (and one of my sons who was still living at home immediately after my divorce) have been one of the families most in need of support. We felt a definite sense of isolation from the nuclear families which had made up our social milieu before the divorce. Being less than a complete nuclear family had a decidedly negative effect on our family's social life. Our family was no longer the same as all the families we knew. We felt

less than whole. Not only did we now lack a father and husband, but we no longer had our older brother and older son at home. While I felt my parenting skills to be competent as a mother, I could not also be a father to my children. Then, when my second son reached college age, he moved out of our home which left Emily with no siblings as well as no father in the house.

Tony often plays the father role with Emily by helping her with her homework, encouraging her to read instead of watching television, etc. He also is often the big brother who will join her in recreational activities such as swimming and horseback riding, or he will work with her doing chores around the neighborhood such as yard work and car washing. Lynn, who is a few years younger than Tony, is perhaps more often big sister to Emily than parent. She is a good listener and is especially supportive when Emily comes to her with the concerns she has as a twelve-year-old. Both Tony and Lynn have developed a relation-ship with Emily in which she feels free to openly discuss her problems. When she and I have misunderstandings or disagreements, she goes to Lynn's and Tony's house for sympathy or to vent her anger.

Beth's relationship to Emily is very much like that of an aunt's, as is mine with Maria. Sometimes on a Saturday Beth will take both girls with her to her art studio. She has taught Emily how to do many variations of art work. She is also a gourmet cook and has greatly broadened Emily's culinary horizons.

Tom's *family-of-orientation* consists of nine children. He is one of the middle children and has proved to be an expert big brother to the

girls. For Emily, he fills the gap her big brothers' departure has left. For Maria, he provides some idea of what it is like to have a sibling. Tom is also an accomplished Jack-of-all-trades who paints houses and does numerous other kinds of jobs to support himself in school. He and Tony painted Tony's and Lynn's house last year, and he has done countless maintenance jobs for Beth and me.

The first summer we were a family group, we ate meals together quite frequently. We live in a neighborhood of older houses which have front porches. People came out often to sit on the porch in the late afternoon or light up an outdoor grill for cooking dinner. With no forethought at all we would end up all eating around the same table. When fall came, our dinner gatherings were not quite so frequent, but we looked forward from one member's birthday to the next so we could have special surprise dinners. Other special meals were planned to introduce other friends to our family group. We also continued to have meals together spontaneously, if less frequently, than during the summer.

At the end of our first summer together, we planned a party for the entire block. The party was a big success with most of the neighbors attending, but it was especially meaningful for the seven of us. Sharing the work and fun of planning the party was a growing experience for us. Our relationships increased both in openness and intimacy. The sense of loyalty we felt as a group at that time was evident in the fact that we felt a kind of betrayal by one of the group, Tony. He is a pilot. He had been asked by some veterinarians if he would fly them to western

Kansas on that particular Saturday. Naturally, he felt it was important for him to take them, but the rest of the group was really disappointed to think he would miss the party which we had been planning for so long. Emily described our reaction this way: "Tony was supposed to come to the block party, but he couldn't make it. So everyone was kind of joking around, saying they were mad at him. So we made him a hat that said 'Dunce' on it, a pointy hat and we gave it to him."

The fall of that year, I became aware that our group was similar in some ways to cluster families described by Sawin and Otto. I brought this to the attention of the group by reading to them a description by Cox (1978, p. 335): "A cluster family is an artifically contrived family group that meets for companionship, recreation, and other meaningful experiences, but the members do not actually live together." Tom's reaction was indignant. He pointed out that we were not artificially contrived.

When spring came, I decided to ask the group to appear as a panel before my class, primarily to demonstrate to them how families who felt some sense of isolation could come together, but I was also interested in getting their reactions to us as a family support group. More will be said about the students' reactions in the final chapter. It was as a result of the panel discussion, I think, that the members of the Leavenworth Street Gang thought through their respective roles and relationships.

Beth used her art media to help explain the significance of her membership in the group. She works with metals mostly. Much of her

work consists of abstractions of expressions of maleness and femaleness. She showed some of her pieces and explained how she uses her art to work through her own identity as a female. As a female, and as a mother, she finds support from our group in many ways. She explained how others in the group helped her as a parent by re-inforcing the values she is teaching Maria, by the caretaking of Maria, and by enriching hers and Maria's lives through shared experiences. Beth commented that she tries to relate to her daughter not only as a mother but also as a person. She added that she tries to relate to Emily in the same way. See Appendix B for further elaboration on the relationships between the children and adults in our group.

During the panel discussion ten-year-old Maria attempted to explain the perimeters of our group. She mentioned other family units who attended the block party, emphasizing that they are friends and neighbors, but not a part of our family support group. She said she really misses members of our group when that are gone: "I feel really rotten. I get so bored because they are the only people I ever really play with, even though there are a lot of kids on our block." Maria also shared with the class another way she has been enriched by being a part of the family group. She told how Lynn acquired six baby chicks at Easter time and is letting the girls help in their upbringing.

Maria refers to Emily as her best friend. Each girl has her own school friends, but they do spend more time together than with any other special friend. Emily sometimes goes with Maria and Beth to spend a week-end with Maria's grandparents. I see the girls as behaving

more like sisters than friends. Maria is eager to do all the things Emily does, and looks forward to getting some of Emily's outgrown clothes. Emily sometimes has the need to withdraw awhile from being with a "little sister." Though the girls have a very close relationship, they do pursue some different interests with other friends.

When a member of the class asked the girls how they were disciplined within the group, Emily replied that she didn't mind being disciplined by any of the adult group members. Both girls, however, consider their own mothers as the ultimate authority. Lynn's reaction to the question of discipline and guidance was that between the younger girls and the rest of us there is a mutual respect. She sees the girls as being much more aware of what is happening in the world than she was at their ages. She, like Beth, views the girls as persons in their own right, not just children.

Lynn likes the close proximity of the four family units because "sharing an hour, a meal or an activity takes very little time or planning." She sees our family group as different from a nuclear family in that each member tends to be more individualistic and, perhaps, more accepting of one another as unique persons. She feels, in our age of high mobility, support groups are really needed. She describes us as a group of family units who have opened up to one another and invited each other into our lives. When asked how she and Tony felt about being the only married couple in the group, she explained that they had had previous experiences in which they shared their lives with single people (see Appendix B). She feels

it would be very limiting to socialize only with other couples. Lynn was also asked if the women in our group had typical social inhibitions about allowing the other women to see their households when they were messy. She explained that that might be so to a degree, but shared some experiences we have had in helping one another clean when guests or visiting relatives are expected.

Tony was unable to participate in the panel discussion. A later conversation with him revealed that he likes the practical kinds of help we give one another such as sharing a lawnmower, buying grass seed together, etc. He also enjoys playing table games which are more fun with a family-sized group. He described our group as "special," an alliance which formed as the result of the needs of each family unit and out of our close proximity to one another. He noted that we have a "higher level of dialogue than people who are just neighbors." Tony is the one who first called our group "The Leavenworth Street Gang."

CHAPTER IV

COMPARISONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Leavenworth Street Gang does not fit any of the established
models of family enrichment groups as outlined by Sawin (1979)
primarily because it is not artificially contrived. We are functioning,
however, in line with two of her categories: Family-Based Groups for
Recreation and Socialization and Family Growth Groups. We met in the
beginning for fun and companionship but quickly developed into a group
that is growing together.

We are much like the Extended Family Model, which is described
in Chapter II. We are made up of groups of families who socialize
together and participate in activities which are important to each
of us. As a result, we have become a caring group which provides
it's members with the same kind of support an extended family provides.
We are also similar in many ways to Otto's Family Cluster Model as
described in Chapter II. We consist of from three to five families,
and we meet regularly in a climate of intimate sharing and caring.
We do this for the purpose of actualizing individual and family
potential, although this is an implicit rather than an explicit goal.
This becomes clear when reading the transcript of our panel discussion
(Appendix B). Also, we share similar goals and values. Though we are
not specific about family functions and services, we do often share
them, as is revealed in the typescript. Leadership in the group is
shared, though we seldom have a real "leader." Sometimes one person

will take the initiative for carrying through a project, sometimes another. Even the children have been known to take major responsibility for an event when the adults are all too busy, such as at final test time at the university.

I believe the reader, having read this far, does not need to be convinced that our group functions very well as a family support group. Certainly, a reading of the typescript in Appendix B should remove all doubt. We are an ongoing group which has lasted for a year-and-a-half and shows promise of ever deepening relationships.

I was recently informed that I will have to have minor surgery which will require a two-day stay in the hospital. Both Lynn and Beth immediately offered to care for Emily during that time. Emily saw this as a problem, feeling if she accepted an invitation from one, she would hurt the other's feelings. Her resolution was to plan to stay in one home for one day and go to the other for the second day. How nice to have that kind of problem rather than trying to find someone to care for Emily.

I may have seemed to paint a picture of us as a perfect family support group. Of course, we are not. Sometimes there are misunderstandings, but almost always we can be open enough with one another to avoid crises developing. In fact, there have been only two crises of which I am aware. One was between only three members of the group who handled it without coming to the rest of us. The other was discussed among all group members. It was eventually resolved but not without great effort and sensitivity, particularly on the part of

one of our members. Meeting the crisis was a growing experience which definitely puts our group into Sawin's category of Family Growth Groups.

Following the class period during which our group presented a panel discussion, I asked my students for their reactions to the group. Reactions ranged from enthusiastic praise of our group as a family support group to the questioning by one student as to whether our group is any different from a "bunch of neighborly neighbors." Another student commented that she saw no difference in our group and the kinds of groups which develop in dormitories. Certainly, strong support groups are to be seen in many facets of our society. The issue is not whether the Leavenworth Street Gang is a unique support group, but whether its existence has implications for helping to alleviate the isolation and alienation felt by a significant number of families in our country.

In the typescript (Appendix B), a student describes her experience of taking a census of families in a poor neighborhood. She commented that many of the parents, especially those who were single parents, felt isolated. Each felt overwhelmed with his or her responsibilities but felt as if he or she was the only one having a hard time. She said the level of trust between neighbors was extremely low. She though using a model similar to our family support group could be very helpful to such families.

On the other hand, it is the opinion of Otto (1980) that such models are not very feasible outside a church community. His

experience has indicated that the motivational level of non-church
families is too low for them to be willing to commit themselves to a
family support group. He has found that these families generally are
not motivated until after the Humpty-Dumpty Syndrome has set in.
In other words, these families can only be reached after they have
begun to fall apart and the need for therapy has arisen. Evidently,
many American families do not understand the value of family enrichment.
Otto suggests that many families can only be approached in terms of
immediate tangible benefits. For instance, it might be possible to
start a family group purely on the grounds that there would be an
exchange of caretaking of children. Such a plan might seem of value
to many families who would not be willing to invest themselves in a
group merely for enrichment. This is an approach that merits
experimentation and further study.

As was previously mentioned, Sawin (1980) also found her model
worked much more effectively in church communities. In addition to
lack of motivation on the part of non-church families, Sawin noted
that very little funding is available for agencies to use for pre-
ventive programs in communities-at-large.

In the sight of the findings of Otto and Sawin, the success of
the Leavenworth Street Gang as a family support group appears rather
remarkable and not entirely explainable. One important fact emerges.
Several family units can form a family support group on their own,
one that is similar to others that have been more or less artificially
contrived. It seems significant, also, that our group has functioned

without any kind of external motivation, such as church commitment, which most other projects of a similar nature seem to need. Internal motivation has been high enough to allow us to do our own facilitating and settling of crises whenever necessary. We learned that families do not grow together in a completely carefree manner and that the coaching of members is sometimes necessary. It is clear that persons with facilitative ability are essential to the growth and longevity of family support groups, whether such persons are from within or without the group.

On the basis of my experience as a part of the Leavenworth Street Gang, I would like to recommend that Family Life Education, as a profession, consider the preparation of a television program which would depict a family cluster group similar to ours. It would seem important to feature a group which began spontaneously but to demonstrate, also, how well other planned groups function. This could best be accomplished as a dramatization by professional actors with a possible introduction and/or conclusion in which the members of an actual family support group briefly share some of their experiences. In addition to the promotional and public information value, such a production also could be made available to interested organizations to be used as part of the teaching in a workshop on family support groups. It is conceivable that such a program might be developed into a serialized drama for either commercial or educational television.

Bronfenbrenner (1967) and many others have long decried the effect the mass media have on our children and on our family life by helping

create alienation between generations. Perhaps if we could reach people where they are - in front of the television set - we could begin to make headway toward strengthening families and strengthening relationships between families.

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    Structure. In Otto, Herbert A. (Ed.), <u>The Family in Search of a</u>

    <u>Future.</u> New York: Appleton-Century Crafts, 1970.

APPENDIX A

ADDRESSES

A. Family Growth Groups

1. The Family Cluster, developed by Margaret Sawin
   Family Clustering, Inc.
   P.O. Box 18074
   Rochester, NY 14618

2. The Family Cluster, developed by Herbert Otto -- described in
   the book, The Family Cluster: A Multi-Base Alternative which
   can be obtained from:
   Holistic Press
   160 South Robertson Blvd.
   Beverly Hills, CA 90211
   Dr. Herbert Otto can be reached at:
   1006 S. Marjan
   Anaheim, Calif. 92806

3. The Family Actualization Model, developed by Anne Lee Kreml
   Ms. Anne Lee Kreml
   Nebraska Conference of the United Church of Christ
   2055 E. Street
   Lincoln, NE 68510

4. The Family Camp, developed by Ed Branch
   Mr. Ed Branch
   The Hyphen Consultants, Ltd.
   10022 103rd Street
   Edmonton, Alberta
   Canada

5. The One-Parent Family Camp
   Five Oaks Christian Workers Centre
   Box 216
   Paris, Ontario N3L 3E7
   Canada

6. Family Weekend, developed by Ted Bowman
   Family and Children's Service
   301 S. Brevard Street
   Charlotte, NC 28202
   Ted Bowman can be reached at Family and Children's Services
   414 S. Eighth Street, Minneapolis, MN 55404.

7. Family Enrichment Weekend, developed by Carl Clarke,
   Russell Wilson, and June Wilson
   Rev. Russell Wilson
   Morningside College
   Sioux City, IA 51106

*Reproduced from: Sawin, Margaret M. Family Enrichment with Family
Clusters. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1979.

8. Family Enrichment, developed by the Character Research
    Project of Union College
        The Character Research Project
        207 State Street
        Schenectady, NY 12305
            or
        The Association Press
        291 Broadway
        New York, NY 10007

B. Family Skill Models

1. The process model of Virginia Satir
        Ms. Virginia Satir
        P.O. Box 11457
        Palo Alto, CA 94306

2. Peoplemaking Through Family Communication, developed by
    Roberts and Berry
        National Family Communication Skills Center
        3278 Alpine Rd.
        Menlo Park, CA 94205

3. Filial Programs, developed by Bernard Guerney and colleagues
        Division of Individual and Family Studies
        College of Human Development
        Catherine Beecher House
        The Pennsylvania State University
        University Park, PA 16802

4. The Family Enrichment Program, developed by Luciano
    L'Abate and associates -- obtainable from:
        Social Research Laboratories
        P.O. Box 20076, Station N
        Atlanta, GA 30325
    Dr. L'Abate can be reached at:
        Family Studies Center
        Georgia State University, University Plaza
        Atlanta, GA 30303

5. The Community Family Workshop, developed by Laurent Roy
        Mr. Laurent Roy
        The Growth Exchange
        53 Exchange Street
        Portland, ME 04111

6. Family Check-Up, developed by Dawn Simon
        Ms. Dawn Simon
        Family and Child Service for Greater Seattle
        500 Lowman Building
        107 Cherry Street
        Seattle, WA 98104

7. Becoming Us, developed by Brygger, Carnes, and Laube
      Becoming Us, Inc.
      c/o Family Renewal Center
      6515 Barrie Road
      Edina, MN 55435

8. The Family Class/Workshop, developed by Re-Evaluation
   Counseling
      The Re-Evaluation Counseling Communities
      719 Second Avenue N.
      Seattle, WA 98109

9. Family labs, developed by Breidenbach and Hover
      Full Circle
      4833 West 76th Terrace
      Prairie Village, KS 66208

C. Family-Based Models for Religious Indoctrination

   1. Family-Centered Programs, developed by Glenmary Missioners
         Religious Education Center
         Glenmary Home Missioners
         2501 Ashwood Avenue
         Nashville, TN 37212

   2. Families, developed by Maureen Gallagher
         FAMILY Parish Religious Education Program
         Paulish Press
         400 Sette Drive
         Paramus, NJ 07652

   3. Family Learning Teams, developed by Mercedes and Joseph
      Iannone
         Family Learning Teams, Inc.
         P.O. Box 42
         Mt. Vernon, VA 22121

   4. Family Weekend Experience, developed by Jack and Marcia
      Byington
         W. H. Sadlier
         11 Park Place
         New York, NY 10007
              or
         Worldwide Marriage Encounter Resource Community
         567 Morris Avenue
         Elizabeth, NJ 07208

   5. The Mishpacha, developed by Dov Elkins
         Growth Associates
         P.O. Box 8429
         Rochester, NY 14618

6. The Family Havurot, developed by the Reconstructionist
    Jewish Movement -- information obtainable from
    > Dr. Bernard Reisman
    > Philip W. Lown Graduate Center
    > Brandeis University
    > Waltham, MA   02154

7. Operation Family, developed by John and Milly Youngberg
    > Dr. John Youngberg
    > Andrews University
    > Berrien Springs, MI   49104

8. Sunday School Plus, developed by Larry Richards
    > Renewal Research Associates
    > 2026 A West Cactus Road
    > Phoenix, AZ   85029

9. Kits for Parents, developed by David C. Cook Publishing Co.
    > David C. Cook Publishing Co.
    > 850 N. Grove Avenue
    > Elgin, IL   60120

D. Family-Based Models for Recreation and Socializing

1. The Extended Family, developed by the First Unitarian Church
    of Santa Barbara, California
    > The Extended Family
    > The First Unitarian Church
    > 1535 Santa Barbara Street
    > Santa Barbara, CA   93101
    >   or
    > The Unitarian-Universalist Association
    > 25 Beacon Street
    > Boxton, MA   02108

2. The Family Fun Council, developed by Otto and Kilmer
    > Holistic Press
    > 160 South Robertson Blvd.
    > Beverly Hills, CA   90211

APPENDIX B

A PANEL DISCUSSION BY THE

LEAVENWORTH STREET GANG

<u>Carolyn</u>: Here to visit with us this morning is the Leavenworth

Street Gang, a family support group to which my daughter and I belong.

Before each member introduces her or himself, I'd like to tell you a

little bit about our group. I think the fact that we live in close

proximity is important in terms of thinking about different kinds of

family groups. The kinds that are set up artificially often include

families that live in various parts of a city. It just doesn't work

as easily that way. For us, it is just so easy to come home in the

afternoon and yell across the way. Or, for instance, just the other

day I came home from the library and there was a note on the door from

Beth saying "Dinner's ready." I had spent a long day at the library and

really was not in the mood to cook dinner. So Emily and I just went

across the street and ate dinner. Pretty nice!

Mark Twain once said, "God gives us our relatives, but thank God

we can choose our friends." And, in a sense, it seems to me we have

all chosen each other. But we've become very much like relatives,

chosen relatives. It's kind of the best of two worlds, as I see it. I

can talk about this group - I can boast about this group - I feel like

I can more than I could my own natural, nuclear family. You know how

parents are always inclined to boast about their children and try not to.

But I don't feel any qualms at all about boasting about Maria (Beth's

daughter). She's a pretty great kid. This is not just to point to

Maria, but in terms of the whole group, I really can feel a real sense
of pride.

Living in close proximity, it was easy to be aware of each other's
needs. But more than just being willing to help meet other's needs,
we were able to develop an ongoing and deepening sensitivity to those
needs. So we grew very much like a family grows in terms of understanding
one another, anticipating one another's needs - so that we've all put a
lot of input into the group so that we really do feel a real sense of
pride...a real sense of loyality, no different really from any family
clan type thing. This has meant a very deep involvement for all of us. So,
I can be proud and boast without any reservations, as far as I am concerned.

A student: Do you consider your two sons a part of this family group,
since they both live away from home?

Carolyn: I consider them on the fringe, kind of, because, when they
come home, they are a part of it. They are not involved with our every
day-to-day kind of living. We have some others, too, that are an im-
portant part of the group when they are there. Beth has a close friend
who eats with us a lot. He sometimes cooks for us, too. And Tom has a
couple of really close friends at the university who show up for a meal
now and then. Also, they and Tom have had us to their apartment for meals.
These people would be almost like family friends who spend quite a bit of
time with us, if you want to compare it to that kind of situation. But,
basically, the core group, I would say, is the seven of us.

Lynn and Tony, who will be here around twelve, I think, live right
next door to Emily and me, and Beth and Maria live right across the street.

Tom lived in Lynn's and Tony's basement apartment last year and will be moving back there this summer. And, now, he still lives just a couple of blocks away around the corner, we get to see him all the time.

Well, this is supposed to be a panel discussion and I want to let the others talk, but I just want to say a couple of more things. First, I just want to say a little bit more about how we feel as a group about our group. A friend, who is really interested in cluster families asked me if he could come today. And then he found out it conflicted with something else he had to do, and he was debating whether he should cancel this other thing. And then he said, "Well, they might not show up anyway." And, I said, "Well, of course they'll show up!" It hadn't occurred to me that they wouldn't. One way that I knew that they would was we had a block party at the end of the summer which we'll talk more about later. But, though I didn't feel in charge of it - the party was for all the people on the whole city block - afterwards people were coming and thanking me for being in charge, which I never thought I was. Nobody said I was. The only thing I did was get a permit from the police department to block the street off to set up our tables and plan games. The reason I didn't have to feel in charge is because all these people (in the family support group) will do what they say they are going to do. You don't even need anyone to delegate jobs. When they offer to do it, you know it will get done and you can forget about it.

We are just really close, and we are really fortunate. We're fortunate to be living close together and having enough in common, I think, first of all. But, just very quickly, before we go on and give

other people a chance to talk, I want to have you look at your hand-out

sheet and the definition of the family group which is called the cluster

family group. The definition is: "An artificially contrived family group

which meets for companionship, recreation and other meaningful

experiences, but all the members do not actually live together." When I

showed that definition to Tom, he commented that that didn't really

describe us. That's because we weren't artificially contrived. I think

he is going to talk more about that.

Now, I'd like to let each person introduce her or himself and say

a little about her or himself.

Beth: My name is Beth. I'm a graduate student in fine art. In

that area, metals are my speciality. And I teach two design classes

which I really, really enjoy. Maria is my daughter. I have some of my

work here which relates to what you are studying in the class. That is,

six roles. I'm very interested in female imagery. It's very much a part

of my work, so we can talk about that if you would like.

Maria: My name is Maria (Beth's daughter). I'm 9-years-old and in

the fourth grade at Eugene Field.

Emily: My name is Emily (the author's daughter). I'm 12 years old

and a sixth grader at Eugene Field.

Tom: I'm Tom, and I am studying architecture here, off and on. I'm

tending more to the arts lately.

Carolyn: Tom, would you like to explain a little bit why you reacted

as you did to our group being called a cluster family?

Tom: Well, with our whole group here, there is nothing artificial or

contrived about it. Part of the definition, the sharing and the companionship,

and that sort of thing...that's all a part of what our group is, but the feeling that is among us is just so strong, you know, that being artificial is just not there at all. I think we are fortunate that that situation can happen for us.

I lived in Tony's and Lynn's basement apartment for two semesters and I didn't even know Carolyn, and I didn't know Beth at all. The only reason I knew Tony and Lynn was because I lived in the basement of their house. Throughout that next summer things just opened up. We started sharing a lot more and cooking for each other, and just spent more time. From there it's just grown and grown. And I think that is very important and special. I think it was easy for us, because we did live close together. We shared so much with school. We all are related to school in one way or another, so we have a lot of similarities in lifestyle right now. I think that's kept us together. You know, when it comes test time, we all can respond and react to someone else who is having a littler tougher time studying because we are in the same situation, so that makes it very easy.

Carolyn: Beth, since Lynn and Tony won't be here for a little while I wondered if this might be a good time for you to share more with us about your art work.

Beth: These are pocket ornaments. Tom is wearing one and I am wearing one. Last semester was when I did these pieces, and people react to them differently. Well, I guess I should sort of go into the history of them. I consider them female imagery. Some people looked at them and immediately thought they were male. Maybe we should take a vote and see which way they come off.

While I was doing these, I had a week where I just was really cold and I wasn't producing at all. So I took a lot of these --- Tom helped me do all these plexiglass ones, which I call my kitchen art, along with cooking. And so we were making these plexiglass forms in my oven. So it was a bad week and I said all right, let's make lollipops. So we used these plexiglass forms and we made lollipops. We put sticks in them and ribbons on them and took them over to the art department. It was really funny, because a sociology professor got very interested and wanted to know what the reaction would be, and what the age groups were. It was really funny because I got everything from, you know, immediate "slurp!" to, "What is this?" I'd be curious to know your reactions, being outside the art department. I'm used to people questioning my concept, or use of materials or something, but its always nice to get reactions from people who just are looking at it, and that's it. It's a spontaneous reaction that is not related to thinking about art in any way.

There are a couple of more pieces. One is really not female imagery at all. I don't do it all the time. It is just very important for me a good bit of the time. I don't know how much of that comes from what I tend to call my "late blossoming" - because I was married for fifteen years. I really felt I spent ten of that in more or less a mummified state, which I think is very easy for females to do. If you get into any sort of a rut where - there you are - with home and children and the same routine every day. I really felt that my brain just kind of died (chuckles), and I had to operate immediately, or something. I really think that during that time period, I lost my concept of myself as a

female, or maybe during the period in which I grew up, it was never really stressed and I never even really knew what it was until after I was divorced and I had to really stand on my own two feet and decide what I am and who I am. I think I also take a lot of my aggressiveness out on these pieces. I think in some part, probably sexual aggressiveness gets released in these pieces. And, if it's aesthetic at the same time, I've accomplished my purpose. If you have any questions about these, I'll be glad to try to answer them.

Carolyn: Beth, may I pass this, too? (Removes a silver bracelet she is wearing). This is a gift Beth made me at Christmas time. She also made one for Emily. I've enjoyed wearing it a lot. This is another kind of thing that Beth does.

(Maria brings some colorful boxes from a desk.)

Beth: The boxes, the kids and I started. I think the kids had origami at school one day, and I had a box that a friend of mine had made, and it was sort of paper week, so we got started on paper boxes. It's been kind of a group effort, a gang effort. Tom was making boxes, and has come up with a lot of variations. We spent one whole week-end just making boxes. We've given most of them away at this point. It's kind of a nice thing to do to take somebody a pretty box.

Carolyn: I'd like to comment here that one of the really wonderful advantages of being in a close group like this is that Emily gets to share in this kind of thing that I do not have the talent to do with her. We get to share a lot more different experiences with each other than we would if we were just living separate lives in our own little boxes.

Beth: (showing one of Tom's boxes) We decided the square boxes didn't satisfy us really very long, so we're going to some really elaborate boxes.

A student: You mentioned how your artistic expression met some of your aggressive needs, and if you aren't able to get that out, you express your aggression in other ways. That seems like a masculine characteristic. Have you ever thought of it that way?

Beth: Oh, yes! Of course. I think definitely all females have them. Not all of them like to admit it, but I think we have masculine characteristics as well as males have feminine characteristics. The more men learn to cry, the better. You know this whole thing, particularly in my age group that we were raised with, is garbage. You know, how can you really ever relate to a male if you don't know the male characteristics in yourself, and the male doesn't know the feminine characteristics in himself. Yes, I'm very aware that that's masculine.

A student: If I saw these things (art objects) and someone gave them to me objectively and said, "These are masculine ornaments." I would probably say, "Yes, they are." Have you had similar reactions?

Beth: Yes I have. It sort of excites me, because the pieces are designed to be worn by either sex. Really, I think I started out with them in mind for males. There's not much jewelry for males. It's perfect on a sport jacket. That is, the weight of the jacket can maintain the weight of the piece very easily. And they originally were conceived of as male ornaments. But I think males have every bit as much right to decorate themselves as do females. That's what jewelry is. It's the

same thing as clothing and shoes with heels this high. You're decorating

yourself. You are trying to make yourself more attractive. And males have

as much right to decorate themselves as females. With animals, males are

by far the prettiest, in coloration. So why should the human species stay

in the background? More and more of my friends are wearing my jewelry

which I feel good about. I feel they are losing some inhibitions if they

can wear it. I take some gas sometimes, (laughs) but it is always a good

conservation piece, anyway.

A student: Do you involve your daughter in all of your art

work?

Beth: Usually it kind of happens. Some week-ends I have to go up

to the studio and work, and she often goes with me, and so does Emily.

They both enamel. They can use the torch and everything. The first time

I used a torch I was scared to death. My instructor handed me a torch

and I really wanted to just back off. But I think it is very good for

the girls to know how to use these kinds of things. I do have a studio

in my basement. It comes in handy when they need to do something that

involves tools.

Carolyn: (facetiously) You don't think teaching them to use a

torch is too masculine?

Beth: (chuckling) No. Not at all.

A student: By teaching your daughter to do these kinds of things,

do you feel you are filling the father's role?

Beth: No. I hadn't thought about that at all. I tried to relate

to her as a person, mostly and not just as mother. For me, it's very

hard not to relate both to Emily and Maria as just people, despite the fact that they are younger than I am. I think a lot of parents make that mistake. They do treat them just as children, and as their own children, which is even worse, because they are under duress to obey.

A student: When did you feel like you got in a mummified state. In the very beginning, or when you got married or - ?

Beth: Yes, probably at about eighteen (when Beth got married).

A student: Why?

Beth: Insecurities, mostly. I was too chicken to stand on my own two feet. It was a lot easier to let someone else take care of me. I have a father that I love very much, but who was very strict. He made my decisions for me. I never learned to make any. And when I went away to school, it was a very frightening experience, because I wasn't ready to make my own decisions and it was much easier to get married and let my husband make them.

Carolyn: Maria and Emily, I wonder if you could each just tell us a little bit about how you feel about being a part of this Leavenworth Street Gang?

Emily: Well, it's pretty neat. Like when I can't do something with my mom, or she has to study or something, I can do stuff with Beth and Maria, or Tom, or Tony and Lynn. It's not like you're isolated from just going over to your neighbors and asking if they want to do something. You're open and you can say what you want to say or go places with them.

A student: Do you ever look at Tom or Tony as a substitute for a father? Do you go to them if you want to build something and have them help you, or do you go to your mother?

Emily: It would depend on what I was building. Well, I guess so, maybe. Like, if I couldn't go to my mom, then I would go to them.

Maria: (gesturing toward Emily). Well, this little thing here happens to be my best friend. When either Emily, or the next door neighbors go away and I don't have anybody to play with, I feel really rotten because I get so bored. Because they are the only people I really ever play with. There are a lot of kids on our block, but they're the only people I really every play with. There is something that came up that caused a great stir. That was that this thing (Lynn) that just walked in has some chickens. That's Lynn, and she has some chickens. They're getting really big now. She has the fattest one. They are really fun to play with. They chirp a lot. We pick them up and even put them down on the rug and everything. And so they're really fun to play with.

A student: Is there anything special you like about having the Leavenworth Street Gang just like one big family?

Maria: Well, it's nice because like a lot of times there are big dinners and then you get to stay up late and you don't have to do your homework. And you end up getting into bed late. Well, and then the block party and things that are really fun that everybody does together.

A student: Do you feel like there are so many older people on your block that you have trouble figuring out who to obey? Do you feel like

you have to pay attention to everybody, or just your mom? Do you ever
get confused?

Emily: Well, if Beth wanted me to do something, I wouldn't say
"no". But I guess.... well, I'd like to please everybody. I wouldn't
want to be a brat and say I don't want to do it, because you're not my
mom.

Beth: It is not as if they are small children. There is really not
a discipline problem. There are really very few commands. Things just
sort of happen, and work right, if that makes any sense.

A student: Do you usually agree with Carolyn?

Beth: Yes, we've discussed this, Carolyn and I. And I think, in
part, we were raised quite a bit alike. We have a lot of the same values
for the children, so the girls are a lot alike. So there are really no
disagreements as to what they should do and what they shouldn't do.
We usually agree without even talking about it. It's just an instinctive
kind of agreement.

Carolyn: I think it might be well to mention, that in terms of the
children relating to all the adults, it's certainly comforting in the
sense that Beth and I realize there are other adults in the neighborhood
looking out for them. And these are people that have a more than
ordinary neighborly interest in our two children. For instance, Maria
is our bookworm. She just reads all the time. She goes with me to
Emily's soccer games, but she always takes a book. Andy always was a
bookworm when he was a child and still likes to read a lot, and he's
really concerned that Emily doesn't read enough books. This kind of

interest is really a deep kind of interest in the children by all the adults.

Lynn, do you have your breath enough to introduce yourself now?

Lynn: I'm Lynn, and I am currently working on an animal science degree, very slowly, because I've gone back to work as of last spring when Tony, my husband and best friend, went back to school. I'm working as an assistant for a dentist and still trying to keep active with the university. I was going to add something to the question you had about how we handle discipline, and Beth answered it very well. She said there really aren't that many discipline problems. I'd have to say, between the younger girls and the rest of us there is probably a mutual respect. If you would hear some of the opinions these girls come up with (chuckles) when we're having discussions. I don't think I was ever that aware of things going on in the world when I was that age. It's pretty neat.

Is there anything else you'd like me to talk about?

Carolyn: I though perhaps we might talk about the block party now.

Lynn: Okay. I think I'll let the girls tell about that. (Signs and a picture from the block party are shown)

Maria: There were some people who went to the block party that are members of the Leavenworth Street Gang and others that aren't. But anyway, we all ended up having a great time.

Emily: Tony was supposed to come to the block party, but he couldn't make it, and everyone was sort of joking around about being mad at him. So we made him a hat that said "dunce" on it - a pointy hat - and we gave it to him after the block party.

We had barricades on the street. John had an old car that we used for one and we used some saw horses for the other one. We had some big florescent signs that said, "Block party. Keep out." Or something like that.

Carolyn: Then what happened about one-thirty in the morning?

Emily: (Looks puzzled)

Carolyn: (Laughs) You don't know, because you were asleep. We really had fun. A whole bunch of people on the block came, and it kind of dwindled down and dwindled down until there were just a few of us around midnight. But we were still sitting on the curbs and Emily went sound asleep, just lying on the curb. So Tom had to carry her home, and up the stairs and put her in bed. And then I think after we went to bed, it went on for another hour or two, didn't it? Because Tony was coming back from his trip, and didn't he get in about three that night? Some of the Gang and a few others waited up for him. It was a great party!

Maria: About the time of the party, Tom was moving. Emily and I sort of made up a little song and we sang it that night.

Emily: That night we played a game of hide-and-seek, and the adults were sitting in a circle. There was this one man there, and he was smoking a cigar. There was one girl who was it, and we were all hiding, and I

went and sat in the circle and took his cigar and held it out. Of course, it was dark, so you couldn't really see that well. We were just playing around. I was sitting there and nobody realized that I wasn't an adult. No one could find me.

Maria: It was really funny.

Carolyn: Another thing we like to do is celebrate birthdays, and to try to surprise people. But we've had so many, it's a little bit hard to. We still pretend it's a surprise. Much of the fun, of course, is in the planning.

Beth: Tell them about the one we had for Tony and Tom. That one was very elaborate. We had a sick dog, and everything.

Maria: My mother's friend helped us plan this one. Since Tony is studying to be a veterinarian, we planned to have a sick dog. We had two signs. One said "happy birthday" and the other said, "Beware. Mad Dog." It was pointing to the "mad dog" which was Mother's friend. He was rolling around on the floor, making all these noises, and it was really funny. A lot of people might have just cracked up.

Since Tom was one of the people being celebrated, I will let him talk.

Tom: Carolyn was talking about how we always try to have surprises. And all day in the neighborhood - I'd been living a couple of blocks away. I'd go down to the old neighborhood and everything was so quiet, I couldn't understand where everyone was hiding. Lynn and Tony and I had planned to go to dinner that night at Ric's Cafe because I had kept talking about all the things I heard about it, and I'd never been there.

So Lynn said she made reservations and to come over around five and we'd have a drink and go down there.

It was about five-fifteen when we got the phone call about the mad dog. Tony was supposed to go look at it and see if he could do something for it. So, Tony said, "Well, we'll all walk over." And so we all walked to Beth's to see about this dog. And every one jumped out of the woodwork. And I was totally flabbergasted. They had pulled one over on me that was unbelievable. The thing about it was, Tony was pretty much surprised, *too*, because it was a dual surprise party. And he thought that I was just going to get the surprise of my life and he had no idea that he was in on that, too. So, it all turned out to be pretty exciting.

Carolyn: This makes me think of another birthday story. Last summer I was in summer school and my birthday is in June. Both my sons were out of town, and ~~Elaine,~~ as far as I knew was the only one I knew of that was aware of my birthday. I had to be class from eight-thirty to five, and it was a really rough day. And I was walking home, and I was really feeling sorry for myself, because no one knew it was my birthday.

I walked past Tony and Lynn's front porch and the front porch was full of people. They had the drinks ready, and there were singing "Happy Birthday." It was just such a wonderful surprise. It's those kind of things that make us feel pretty special as a group, I think.

A student: If any of you move away, do you think you might get involved in another family group like this?

Carolyn: I would really try. I'm glad you asked that because I
think that one of the reasons it's necessary to set up these artificial
families is that it is not always easy for some people to move to a new
place and get involved with other families. All these people reached
out to me. You know, really reached out to me. I could very easily
have fallen into thinking, "Well, I'm recently divorced. I don't have
any social life any more. Nobody's interested. Nobody wants an old,
middle-aged divorced woman coming over." I really could have fallen
into that.

Lynn and Tony moved into the neighborhood about that time. They
didn't leave me alone, in a sense. I think they were probably missing
their friends, too, and they wanted to make new friends and so they
really reached out.

I'll never forget the first time Tom invited me for tacos to his
basement apartment. When he first invited me, you know, I thought,
does he really want somebody my age to come eat tacos with him?

And Beth, I think Beth and I kind of - we knew we needed each other,
but I think Beth really was more assertive in terms of just doing it.
She'd know something I was doing was coming up, and she'd always say,
"I'm here. Just send Emily over. No problem." And she was always very
tuned into to what my needs were from the very beginning.

Yes, I certainly would try to be a part of another family group.
And I think that's one reason we are talking about this today. I think
you have to try. You have to work at it. I think a lot of us in the
world kind of live in our little boxes and think a lot of unreal things

about our neighbors, like: "They're not interested in what I do, or they are better than I am, or I'm better than they are, or whatever." We just never take that step. I do think as Tom said, we've been extremely fortunate in that we've all had a lot to share. It doesn't always work that way. One can't just make friends with every neighbor, really. We were really fortunate, in that way.

A student: I took a census for my church in one of the poorer areas of town, and I would like to see community services encouraged in this area. A lot of those people were very distrustful of their neighbors. There was a high crime rate. They didn't know their neighbors, and they didn't care to. And if, I think, if there were more things like this, it would be easier for them to think well of each other and feel better themselves. I talked to several mothers who were raising children by themselves, and they felt very sorry for themselves. They felt they were the only ones doing it. I think it would be good for them to be exposed to how other people live.

Carolyn: Yes, I think we are talking about the business of preventing the Humpty-Dumpty Syndrome happening, as is described on your handout sheet. Dr. Margaret Sawin uses this term in referring to family breakdown. She makes the point that it should be much easier to keep Humpty-Dumpty together in the first place, rather than try to put him back together after he falls off the wall. Family support groups might be a way of doing this.

A student: If there were some other people who wanted to join your group, would you accept them as well as you accepted the others, or would it take a long time?

Carolyn: I think it would be the same as any kind of development
of a friendship. It takes time. Certainly we would be friendly and
we would invite them. If they seemed compatible and they enjoyed the
relationship and we did, too, there certainly isn't any reason why our
group couldn't grow larger.

Tom: You had asked earlier, also, if someone moved away if it
would be possible to find another group. I guess I've been real
fortunate. I'm from a large family of nine kids, and we had a lot of
children in the neighborhood. At that time in my life, it was the kids
that ran around together, and we had our group. The parents of us never
really got together much. As I grew older there, I became really close
to a family that had lived across the street from me in Wichita. I
adopted them, more or less, as another family. I did more things
with them at that time (than my own family). In a sense, it was the type
of family that we have now, on a smaller scale. I don't think there is
any limitation on how many people you'd allow. Because, with the group
we have, if we get together and eat and then have our friends over, we
have quite a number of people and that never seems to bother us. We
just get chairs from across there, and more chairs from across there,
and everyone gets around. To bring people in - if they want that - is
fine and it can be done.

It's a growing experience. We didn't happen over night. We lived
in the same neighborhood for awhile before we began to open up to each
other. It seems the more we do together the more we grow. Like the
block party. It seemed that all of us really seemed to open up in a

way that we hadn't allowed before. We get to know each other better every time we do that. There's no (special) number.

A student: I'm interested in when you finally decided you were a cluster family. How long were you in close proximity before that came about? And, in addition to that, how many people in your block are not part of this family, and did not even attend the block party?

Tom: I don't think we said,"Today we're a cluster family." Initially, something like the block party would be planned so that everyone could get together. And with some of the other things - like if someone were extremely busy and they didn't want to cook, the invitations were just going around, you know. It's not every time that we eat that we are all together, all the time. Sometimes we're not, because people have their own life styles and may be busy with other things. The closeness just develops.

A student: About how long have you been together?

Tom: Oh, I don't know. It's been a year and a half, probably. In all that time it just continually grows.

Carolyn: The terminology might not apply particularly to the Leavenworth Street Gang since we are not artificially contrived. But, I, being in Family and Child Development, was the one that first got the "light bulb" one day, that we were a cluster family, more or less. I think, when I actually said that was when I had invited a graduate student from New Zealand to come over and be a part of the group one night for dinner. I felt like I couldn't just say that I wanted her to come meet my neighbors. I wanted to say more than that. It didn't seem

like enough. She knows the terminology, so I said, "Well, we are kind of like a cluster family." As I recall that night, I think I did introduce you as my cluster family. So, I guess if there was a point in time, that was it.

Lynn: I think the unique and really neat thing about this group is that we can get together without a lot of pre-planning. Even if you have a lot going on in your day, and even if you've got to go in and study that evening, it's not like you have to set aside a big chunk of time and drive across town and make a big deal about getting together with people. They're always there, and we can get together to share an hour. You know, share our lives, share our experiences and then be off and doing our own work or whatever we need to be doing. I think, also, maybe a little difference in this group, in comparing it to a family, is that we're all individuals. You know, in a family I think you tend to be more uniform. And we're just accepting each other as individuals. And I think that is a really beautiful part of it.

In this day and age, with people being so mobile, there's a need for this type of group. Everyone needs to feel like some one is there, and someone cares. It takes time to build a relationship like that. It's worth it if you are willing to put in a little bit of effort and open up to people, and kind of invite them into your lives. I think that's essentially what we have done. It's just been a really good experience.

When I first came to Manhattan, I was really missing my family. I'm from Wisconsin and I'm from a large family. We're very close.

And I thought, "How do I get involved with people?" And I didn't know if the neighbors really knew who we were. I decided to get involved with Big Brothers/Big Sisters because I thought this would be a way to get involved with people. I went to one of their first meetings. When I came home, here was little Emily bobbling around in her front yard, and I thought, "I have this right next door! Why don't I take advantage of getting involved with whatever Emily is doing?" I didn't know Maria at the time, but it wasn't long after that that I got to know her. It's just been really a good experience.

A student: Do you feel out of place, being married?

Lynn: No. I can honestly say, no I don't because the relationship that Tony and I have - is - well, before we got married, we were involved in a living situation where he was living in the upstairs with four guys and I was living in the downstairs with four girlfriends. And we would get together for evening meals. We were very open to - you know, it wasn't like our relationship had to be a closed kind of thing.

Certainly, we need time to be alone so that we can interact personally. But I think that experience probably opened me to just not feeling like we had to be a couple and we had to do things with other couples. Because I like to look at other people as individuals and not be put into a situation where we can only interact with other couples. I think that's very limiting. There are so many individuals in the world. You know, people that are single. I think you'd really be cutting yourself out from having a nice relationship with them. So, there wasn't any problem.

A student: Do you think your family group has broken through a lot a lot of social inhibitions? Whereas you might not want another woman to come into your house if it wasn't spic and span, but you don't mind if one of the women in your cluster family or other members of the group come in?

Lynn: Do you mean, do I mind if Carolyn and Beth come into my house and see that it is a mess?

A student: Yes, if they come in your kitchen and you have dirty dishes or whatever. My perception is, my experience is, that women are very uptight about this. My wife is. When her family comes, we have to clean house for about two weeks.

Lynn: I guess I still get a little - as a matter of fact, about three weeks ago, my parents and parents-in-law were coming to visit within a week's span. In fact, I got a call from my parents-in-law, and they said, "We'll be there tomorrow afternoon." I about went crazy. I called Carolyn and Emily over and just yelled "Help!" And they came over and helped me scrub and everything. Had it been my own parents, I probably wouldn't have been upset. You know, the mother-in-law with the white glove test.

Carolyn: Lynn mentioned how Emily and I helped here. Really, it was very minimal help. Maybe a little moral support. Before I gave a party for the graduate students in January - I have a really big house - and I decided I'd better clean the upstairs, too, because there are seventy-two graduate students in Family and Child Development. I had enough time to get the downstairs clean to my satisfaction, but it was

about an hour before time for the party, and I didn't have the upstairs
clean. So Lynn came over and she vacuumed the whole upstairs. This is
just an example of all different kinds of ways we help--like Beth leaving
a note for me that she had fixed our dinner. Or Tom painting Emily's
room or helping Beth with maintenance on her house or yard. Or Tony
putting a new battery in my car.

Well, it looks as if the class period is over. Thank you all for
coming. I know it took quite a lot of planning and effort for some of
you, which is a testimonial in itself to our caring for one another.

CONSIDERATION OF FAMILY SUPPORT GROUPS
FOR STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

by

· by

CAROLYN ADAIR BARKLEY

B. S., Kansas State University, 1955

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Family and Child Development

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1980

The purpose of this report is to consider the history and development of some of the most commonly used models of family support groups in an effort to determine effective methods for helping isolated families. Detailed description is provided of one spontaneously formed family support group called the Leavenworth Street Gang. This group is compared to established models in an attempt to gain insight into the problem of motivating non-church families to participate in family support groups.

It is suggested that families with a low motivational level might be responsive to television dramatizations of the effective ways family support groups can function. Ideally, such programs would be aired on both commercial and educational networks and would be serialized. They would also be made available to interested organizations to be shown in conjunction with a workshop on family support groups.