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## What's a 'throuple'? 'House Hunters' episode puts polyamory on the radar

Viewers of HGTV's popular real estate show watched in shock and awe as a polyamorous "throuple" searched for a new home in Colorado.



Angelica, Lori and Brian, a "throuple" looking for a new home on HGTV's "House Hunters." HGTV

Feb. 15, 2020, 6:57 AM +08

**By Tim Fitzsimons**

Viewers of HGTV's popular show "House Hunters" this week watched in shock – with a bit of awe – as a polyamorous "throuple" searched for a new home in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

"Buying a house together as a throuple will signify our next big step as a family of five, rather than all four of them plus me," said Angelica, referring to her partners Lori and Brian and their two biological children. "I didn't plan on being in a relationship with a married couple, but it just happened very naturally, organically."

During Wednesday's episode, Brian revealed the trio tied the knot, so to speak, a few weeks ago in Aruba.

"In this country, of course, you can only be married to one other individual, so we joined with Angelica in a commitment ceremony," Brian explained, adding that he always knew his legal wife, Lori, was bisexual. "This has nothing to do with church and state; it's a commitment between the three of us. We are all equals in this relationship."

By Thursday, "HGTV House Hunters" and "polyamorous throuple relationship" were trending search terms as viewers reacted to the [triad](#) with a mix of amazement, confusion and horror.

"Oh my god. A throuple on House Hunters," queer author Roxane Gay wrote in a Twitter thread. "Great episode!!!! Educational." Gay added on the thread that her partner, Debbie Millman, said "no" to a throuple "very very fast."

A number of Twitter users questioned the practicality of the polyamorous homebuyers.

“The throuple on hgtv wants a room that fits all three of them and three sinks in the master bathroom,” [one woman wrote](#). “Aint no body have a move in ready house with THREE SINKS.”

“Life is wild and so are triple sink vanities,” [tweeted Katherine Cuellar](#), who said she attended high school with throuple member Angelica.

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Others said that they saw something of themselves in the throuple. “I think a lot about how in the hell I would ever find a house that would suit the family I envision myself someday having so this House Hunters throuple thing is pretty dope actually,” [tweeted Kat Veldt](#). “It's cool that people are talking about housing for families that aren't traditional nuclear structures. Love to see it.”

However, not everyone found the episode enlightening. Conservative Princeton University law professor Robert P. George, who wrote a book in 2012 decrying same-sex marriage, saw the throuple storyline as vindication of his past predictions.

“The normalization of polyamory rolls down the track, just as I and others predicted it would,” George [tweeted](#), calling it “a simple unfolding of the logic of social liberalism.”

Regardless of viewers' personal opinions about polyamorous relationships, the episode caught their attention.

“I was legit about to change the channel until I heard throuple,” [another Twitter user wrote](#). “You have my FULL attention now lol [#HouseHunters](#).”



### [Gaby Dunn on embracing her polyamorous bisexuality and why she loves 'The Bachelor'](#)

AUG. 16, 2019 05:42

At least one viewer, however, flagged the precariousness of Angelica's financial and legal situation, since she, unlike Brian and Lori, has no legal status in the relationship.

“Unfortunately, if something were to happen, only one of those women has a legally recognized relationship, so they might in their heads think they are equal, but that third one is going to be left out in some way,” Ed Stein, a law professor at Cardozo Law School, told NBC News. “She lacks legal protections in the case of death or divorce or other problems, and that's why there's a need to do something to protect her.”

Stein has for decades studied nontraditional relationship structures and how they relate to family law. Decades ago, these beyond-the-legal-pale relationships were gay partnerships, but after same-sex marriage was legalized across the U.S. in 2015, Stein turned his focus to other legally unrecognized relationships, like throuples.

Consensual nonmonogamy, which includes polyamory, is not uncommon, according to [a 2016 study out of Indiana University published in the Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy](#), which found that over 20 percent of the several thousand U.S. adults surveyed reported having at some point in their lives experienced this nontraditional romantic arrangement. That finding held steady across age, education level, income, religion, region, political affiliation and race, but not gender and sexual orientation: Men and LGBTQ people were likelier to have experienced consensual nonmonogamy. Gay dating apps like Scruff even give users the option of selecting “polyamorous” as their relationship status.

The U.S. has had a long-standing opposition to plural relationships, according to Stein, and he said this is, at least in part, because marriage was once a “deeply gendered institution” in which a woman became the de facto legal charge of her husband upon marriage. Many midcentury American women could not open a bank account, serve on a jury

or even obtain birth control pills without their husband's permission.

Thanks to decades of work by women's rights activists, Stein said, the gendered nature of marriage is “for the most part gone.” Women (and men) can now equally obtain no-fault divorces and share custody of children. And so, Stein added, there is good reason to reexamine the gendered assumptions that lead us to presume a healthy relationship can only consist of two people.

Indeed, custody disputes have raised the legal implications of multiple-party relationships in states like California, where Stein said judges have ruled that more than two parties – two biological parents and step parents, for instance – were legal guardians for children.

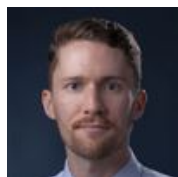
“The law does kind of catch up with reality, and family law is about people living their lives, and when enough people are living their lives that way with men and women in equal relationships, and women in the workforce, the law kind of catches up,” Stein said.

In his dissent in the [Obergefell v. Hodges case that legalized gay marriage](#), Chief Justice John Roberts predicted that the legalization of same-sex marriage could lead to polygamy.

“Indeed, from the standpoint of history and tradition, a leap from opposite-sex marriage to same-sex marriage is much greater than one from a two-person union to plural unions, which have deep roots in some cultures around the world,” Roberts stated. “If the majority is willing to take the big leap, it is hard to see how it can say no to the shorter one.”

Stein said he agrees with Roberts and George. “Once you start to break away from traditional ‘things have always been this way,’ it leads us to ask ‘What is the role of marriage?’”

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