

How Communication is Used in Polyamorous Relationships

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A Phenomenological Study of the Use of Communication to Maintain a Polyamorous
Relationship

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Abstract

This paper explores the phenomenological lived experience of what it is like to participate in a polyamorous relationship. The question proposed is how do polyamorous individuals use communication to negotiate rules and boundaries as well as manage and prevent feeling of jealousy and betrayal? The objective is to assist polyamorous individuals, and the clinicians working alongside them, specifically in negotiating their relationship through communication. The design is a semi-structured interview of 12 individuals residing in Vancouver, Canada, and surrounding areas. Major themes that emerged were the process of working through jealousy, the dual nature of rules, as well as suggestions for clinicians in helpful ways to work with the population. It appears that polyamory has led to an increase in relationship and overall satisfaction for these participants. They attribute this to their ability to learn and improve their ability to communicate their own feelings, needs and desires to their partner. This helped them maneuver and work through challenging experiences of opening up and feelings of jealousy and betrayal.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Your partner never belongs to you. At best, they are on loan with an option to renew. – Esther

Perel

“Can love be plural? Is possessiveness intrinsic to love or is it merely a vestige of patriarchy? Can jealousy be transcended? Can commitment and freedom coexist?” (Perel, 2017, p. 262). The 21st century has been marked by ever-changing understandings and practices of intimate and family relationships. One evolving area is changes in the definition of what constitutes a “normal” romantic relationship. One such variation is polyamory, a practice that raises questions regarding the nature of fidelity and infidelity, that is of growing interest and research. Polyamory is a relationship style that has seen a growing interest in recent years. The term comes from the Greek “poly” meaning many and the Latin “amory” meaning love and refers to relationships characterized by openness to having multiple intimate partners (Klesse, 2011).

While polyamory has in fact been practiced for many years, popular awareness of this contemporary relationship style is still coming to light (Robinson, 2013). Trailing even farther behind is academic knowledge that includes relatively little research that explores the personal and clinical implications of this sexual identity, relationship configuration, and lifestyle. While current rates are hard to find, it is estimated that 2-5% of the US population is polyamorous (Boutilier, 2015). Due to the increasing popularity of this type of relationships, clinical knowledge must also be increased to allow for more accurate and helpful support from clinicians and helping professionals.

In a society with a long history of desiring to control out-of-the-norm sexual behaviour, individuals practicing this form of relationship face misunderstandings, judgments, and discrimination. With the additions of multiple sexual and romantic partners, new considerations must be evaluated. Being in a relationship that defies traditional rules requires a new process of communication. However, for every challenge there are benefits: in pushing back against society's relationship standards, one obtains sexual freedom, and is opened up to infinite possibilities for love.

Nature of the Study

The question explored in this research is how do polyamorous individuals use communication to negotiate rules and boundaries as well as manage and prevent feelings of jealousy and betrayal? The objective of this research will be to provide a rich description of the experience of communication within a polyamorous relationship. The purpose being to assist polyamorous individuals, and the clinicians working alongside them, specifically in negotiating their relationship through communication.

One assumption of this work is that primary relationships will require an initial negotiation, as well as a continuous process of communication to maintain the unique boundaries of their relationship. Another is that their primary relationship takes precedent over their secondary in some form due to primary relationships generally describing longer-term partnerships. Another assumption is that just as infidelity occurs in monogamous relationships, many polyamorous relationships will be characterized by a breach of rules and feelings of betrayal. In addition, while feelings of jealous may be managed or adapted into feelings of compersion, they are still present in primary partnerships.

The method of this research is to use semi-structured, open-ended questions to explore the lived experience of polyamorous individuals residing in a contemporary urban environment and the surrounding area. The interviewing of people in primary relationships will explore how partners use communication as a tool to begin, maintain, and repair their polyamorous relationship.

The aim of this research is to provide therapists with much needed information about negotiating a polyamorous relationship to enable them to provide the most beneficial support to partners. In addition, it is assumed that the research will contribute to eliminating judgment and misunderstanding regarding this relational practice. This work can be a tool to assist therapists in helping clients navigate the transition to a polyamorous relationship, assuming the importance of setting up communication to clarify boundaries and repair boundary transgressions.

Scholarly Context

Where an individual's needs used to be met by an entire village, the expectation of this burden has now shifted to the primary romantic partner. The polyamory relationship style is based on the belief that one person should not be required to meet all the needs of their partner. The desire of polyamorous individuals is that with this freedom they will be able to get more of their needs met, and their primary relationships will not suffer from this pressure.

Societal expectation of relationships includes a strong belief in sexual and emotional fidelity, which is satisfied in monogamous relationships (Grunt-Mejer & Campbell, 2016). Polyamory, however, violates both of these norms. This view of having multiple intimate partners goes against pervasive hetero-monogamous beliefs that have dominated not only our culture, but many others, for centuries. This alternative style has been characterized by a

questioning of unconscious beliefs about how relationships function as well as adopting a sex-positive attitude.

Polyamorous individuals use communication as a foundational skill to conduct and managing relationships. Communication in interpersonal relationships is defined as the exchange of verbal as well as non-verbal messages between at least two members of a relationship, this relationship communication can range from vital messages to mundane interactions (Guerrero, Andersen & Afifi, 2017). One ideological aspect of this relationship style is maintaining “radical honesty”, a term coined by Blanton in 1994 to describe the core truth of identity, histories and desires, not just the outward appearance (as cited in Zhu, 2018).). This means going to a new level of communication that the couple may not have experienced before, conveying deep insecurities and desires. To enable this open communication, agreements, rules, and levels of information shared need to be negotiated by the couple (Balzarini, 2017). Communication is an essential part of protecting the primary relationship while maintaining secondary relationships (Balzarini, 2017). These new practices of disclosure are a way in which intimate knowledge and closeness is fostered between partners (Klesse, 2011). In addition, it was found that intimacy through self-disclosure and talking has a larger impact on developing and maintaining trust than simple physical intimacy (Giddens, 2013). Therefore, trust is a huge factor in both building initial intimacy, and negotiating the ongoing relationship.

Past research on polyamory has explored themes such as attitudes (Grunt-Mejer & Campbell, 2016), identity (Barker, 2005), language (Ritchie & Barker, 2006), and jealousy (Deri, 2011). Some research has been done in the area of communication in polyamorous relationships, however; it has mostly focused on the relationship between communication and sexual/emotional satisfaction (Yoo, Bartle-Haring, Day, & Gangamma, 2014; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005).

Research has also examined the implications for counselling individuals in polyamorous relationships (Henrich, & Trawinski, 2016; Weitzman, Davidson, Phillips, & Fleckenstein, 2009; Baumgartner, 2009). Not included in these limited topics is how communication is used to develop rules or agreements when foraging this new way of participating in relationships.

Definitions

A new style of relationships calls for a new language to discuss it. The following are terms used to describe concepts specific to consensual nonmonogamy and polyamory.

Monogamy, also known as pair-bonding, is when two people form emotional and sexual bonds – this form is idealized in human society (Uz, 2016).

Consensual Nonmonogamy refers to intimate romantic relationships that are not exclusive either emotionally or sexually. These relationships are conducted consensually and ethically. This is an umbrella term that is used for swinging, open relationships, and polyamory.

Polyamory involves being open to having multiple and concurrent sexual-romantic relationships in which all members involved have full knowledge and consent (Kleinplatz & Diamond, 2014). It is different from other types of consensual non-monogamy in that partners are not only informed of other connections, but also consent to this extra-dyadic involvement, unlike infidelity. There is also a romantic component, opposed to just sex, differentiating it from swinging. It also differs from polygamy, which is based on religion, in that all members of the relationship are open to finding additional partners or lovers, rather than just one partner acquiring multiple spouses (Sheff, 2005).

Primary/Secondary Model is one form of polyamorous relationship expression in which there is a main relationship in which each partner is open to additional partners. This contrasts with other forms such as a V-relationship, where one individual has two partners at the same time who are

not involved with each other. Another is a triadic relationship or a poly family, where all partners are involved with each other (Kleinplatz & Diamond, 2014). While these are some of the more common configurations, many more options are possible and the relationship structure may evolve over time depending on the members.

Primary Relationships often present as a couple being either married, living together, or demonstrating a similar level of commitment. Primary relationships differ from secondary relationships in that they have more acceptance by society, higher investment and commitment by partners, and less secrecy in labeling this relationship publicly (Balzarini, 2017).

Secondary Relationships are ones in which are generally allocated less time and the priority comes second to primary relationships (Balzarini, 2017).

Jealousy is a reaction when a person's relationship is threatened by a real or imagined threat. Associated emotions are fear, sadness, envy, and betrayal (Deri, 2011).

Compersion is referred to as an alternative to feelings of jealousy. Furthermore, it is not only the absence of jealous feelings but feeling joy, happiness, or excitement at their partner's other relationships (Aumer, Bellew, Ito, Hatfield & Heck, 2014). At the extreme, this can present as feeling sexual arousal from their partner's emotional and sexual pleasure derived from other relationships.

New Relationship Energy (NRE) is described as the beginning stages of a relationship, frequently labeled the honeymoon period, that is characterized by intense infatuation (Deri, 2011).

Assumptions, Limits, Scope

In this paper, I refer to polyamory as a relationship style. I acknowledge that for many people it fits better as a sexual configuration, sexual identity, and/or lifestyle. Therefore, these

words can be used interchangeably to fit with a person's conceptualization of polyamory. This is also true in regards to the use of the term primary partner. This imposes a hierarchical view that many people do not connect with or outwardly reject. For some it is seen as a way to fit the freedoms of polyamory back into a "couple mold" to better understand. The use of the term "primary partner" in this study was used to search for relationships that were meaningful enough to warrant heavy use of communication in regulating and maintaining that partnership through the transitions and flow from a conventional relationship to one with the special considerations of polyamory. I acknowledge that this may unintentionally value this view of polyamory and deprive research from alternative ways of practicing polyamory. Lastly, I acknowledge the language used in this paper to describe breaches of relationships in regards to the current dominant discourse around infidelity (i.e. "cheating"). I wish to note that my own description and analysis partakes of this dominant practice, but that such usage does not imply a subscription to the implied values of that discourse.

This study uses a small sample of polyamorous individuals residing in one city. Therefore, in no way is this regarded as a representative sample of the polyamorous population worldwide. Since the intent of this work was to explore the subjective experience of a number of polyamorous individuals and since this is a relationship style that can take many forms and be negotiated and experienced in many ways, this study only looked at individuals in primary-secondary relationships at the exclusion of other forms such as V-relationships, triangles, or polyfamilies.

A limit of this work is the source of the sample since participation was based on a voluntary basis. Due to these constraints of the study, caution should be taken in generalizing to a

universal population. The experiences discovered through the interview process and analysis reveal common themes in experiences, but also reveal and highlight differences and variety.

Significance

Similar to individuals in monogamous relationships, polyamorous individuals seek counselling for issues pertaining to their relationships. Unfortunately, due to therapist's lack of knowledge, a tendency to marginalize, and strongly held unconscious or conscious biases, it can be very challenging for this population to find effective and supportive therapeutic help (Henrich & Trawinski, 2016).

The reality is that polyamory remains "eroticized and undertheorized" (Sheff, 2005, p. 252). Therefore, this research aims to increase the availability of information available for clinicians to be used to provide more informed clinical practice. In addition to reducing stigma and increasing the information available, this research will help inform practices for assisting couples negotiating polyamory in their relationship.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

While this style of relationship is not new, information about polyamory is still emerging (Robinson, 2013). Therefore, much is still unknown about the experience of participating in this unconventional relationship type, identity, and lifestyle. Unfortunately, historically, relationships that have fallen outside of the traditional heteronormative monogamous structure have been ignored and delegitimized.

Due to the limited nature of work in this area, not all the research in this chapter is informed by strictly polyamorous literature. In looking for research, some information was pulled from the existing polyamorous research. However, much of the data on communication was taken from research done with monogamous couples. Other research was taken from work with individuals who partake in other forms of consensual nonmonogamy such as swinging and open relationships. While there is some overlap in practice and values among these differing forms, these styles are quite different and based on different principles. Therefore, some considerations are made to ensure their applicability to polyamory.

The Research Problem

Polyamory is a growing practice with little research available to help clinicians navigate this complex and emotion-filled relationship transition. This research sets out to develop an understanding of how polyamorous individuals use communication to negotiate rules and boundaries as well as manage and prevent potentially destructive feelings of jealousy and betrayal. The objective of this research is to be an addition to the growing knowledge base, specifically for helping professionals to better assist individuals negotiating this relationship type. In doing this, the hope is that practitioners to minimize their bias and utilize accurate information to provide the much-needed support.

By shedding light on how these normally implicit arrangements in traditional relationships must be made explicit when opening up a relationship, therapists can collaborate with clients to avoid painful and potentially destructive emotions such as jealousy, betrayal and a loss of trust between partners. This review will outline the current knowledge of polyamory beginning with the history of the practice and then examine the topics of communication, infidelity, and jealousy in relation to polyamory.

Much of the scholarly research has explored how polyamory is internally interpreted and expressed for the individual or about creating a space in society for this unconventional relationship. Past research has looked at communication and its relationship to emotional and sexual satisfaction, the experience of jealousy and how to personally manage it. Little research has focused on practical aspects of this transition, and what does exist comes from non-academic how-to books.

All work around infidelity has been dominated by monogamous populations, at the detriment of this topic being explored scholarly with polyamorous individuals. Wosick-Correa (2008) found that infidelity for polyamorists is not defined in the traditional sense as having an emotional or sexual extra-dyadic involvement, but by breaking relationship rules (as cited in Deri, 2011). This is an area of polyamory that has been underexplored, yet holds significant implications for couples coming up against this naturally occurring process.

In addition, much of the current literature falls under the popular advice category and relatively little research is academically based. Therefore, this literature review is based on the current information known in the field from different disciplines. As mentioned, the work done on guiding people into opening their relationship up to polyamory is largely in this pop-culture such as *The Ethical Slut* (Easton & Liszt, 1997).

History

Marriages today do not resemble the traditional unions characteristic of the times hundreds of years ago, or even more recently. Historically, marriage was seen as an agreement between families to promote economic and political gains. Coontz (2006), a marriage and family historian, describes marriage as a system that created stability and organization in society akin to governments. This was done by acting as an institution that set up political, economic, and military alliances. In addition, it laid out clear expectation of gender roles, sexual relations, and property inheritance. The medieval family was characterized by more relaxed boundaries between the household and the larger society as well as the fluidity of the role of parent, servant, neighbours, which were less clearly defined (Cox, 1993). The consideration taken by two families when entering a union were size of dowry, the helpfulness of particular in-laws, and the proximity of their soon-to-be joined land. Furthermore, for classes that owned property, suitability of a union was usually a collective decision determined by close kin to protect interests of land and lineage, which took precedent over individual happiness or romantic love.

By the mid-seventeenth century, personal autonomy and happiness had increased in importance (Cox, 1993). In addition, the divide between the family and their servants continued to grow, as did the gap in proximity of houses to the rest of society, increasing the privacy of the family. A shift in expectation was that children would become more reliant on their parents for their emotional needs, as opposed to other members of the community. In the eighteenth century, a new idea was adopted as a reason for marriage: love (Coontz, 2006).

This sentimentalization of marriage based on the concept of “love” in the nineteenth century and the later sexualization of it in the twentieth century created a context for a new representation of marriage in western society (Coontz, 2006). While many cultures today still

abide by this traditional framework of relationships, the western world had adopted this revolutionary new marriage system. In contrast to the traditional practicalities of unions, now partners are expected to take on a greater variety of roles such as fulfilling recreational needs, being a confidant to safely express emotions, as well as mutually satisfy their partner's sexual needs (Cox, 1993). This new approach to intimate partnerships is now based on affection and companionship, effectively restructuring what we look for in a partner, how we conduct relationships, and the meaning it holds for us when these relationships end.

Since this shift, people have struggled to find a balance between achieving happiness in marriage while also maintaining the limits that would keep them from leaving a partnership where expectations of love had fallen short (Coontz, 2006). This emphasis on being with a partner who meets these expectations of love, happiness, and satisfaction often leads people to end relationships that they may have previously stayed in. In the past, the decision to leave an unhappy relationship may have come with barriers such as financial dependence and societal shame and judgment. This acted to limit the relationship forms that women in particular could practice due to the economic tie to the men who supported them and their children (Cox, 1993). The contemporary demand for happiness in relationships motivated other social rights movements: the right to divorce, women's equality to promote financial independence, and the decriminalization of homosexuality.

This trend, marked by greater acceptance of alternative lifestyles and marital forms, has been tied to the increase of industrialization and affluence (Cox, 1993). With affluence came increased education and an introduction to new ideas, mobility that provided greater contact with more people and ways of being, and the rise of mass media, which has spread new ideas around various lifestyles more rapidly. The affluence marked by the western countries has allowed

individuals today to have more choices available than those given in their grandparents' generation, where roles were customarily more clearly laid out and choices were limited. The results that followed were that the decision not to marry became less disgraceful; having children became a more conscious choice; and the decision to do either began to be pushed back until individuals were more established in their lives and careers (Cox, 1993). Furthermore, there was a growing acceptance to leaving a marriage in which one was no longer satisfied. Rates of cohabitation rose.

Before this new idea of marriage, love was occasionally found within marriages as something that grew over time, but often was sought outside of it, in secret affairs. Marriage was traditionally not considered the appropriate outlet for love, due to the perception that it was mundane and unexciting, which fueled interest and excitement for the allure of adultery (Cox, 1993). However, basing marriage on love did not eliminate the searching for needs to be met outside the primary partnership. Instead, the revelation of an affair took on a new meaning. An affair, which once might have at worst constituted an embarrassment and at best been an expected part of the relationship, has now shifted to an attachment injury and deep betrayal that leaves partners questioning their relationships and, more significantly, their self-identity. Infidelity can cause significant distress and trauma and the recovery for a couple can be a long and painful process, if not the catalyst for the end of the relationship.

Until the 1950's, sex that occurred outside the primary relationship was deemed "cheating" (Baumgartner, 2009). The 1960's sexual liberation movement known as the Sexual Revolution saw a change in attitude that challenged the traditional model of sexuality characterized by an increased acceptance of attitudes around topics such as sex outside of marriage; behaviours such as porn and homosexuality; and contraception, specifically the pill.

By the 1980's the term non-monogamy was being used, which finally provided a term to describe a practice that had already been used for years, but was just becoming popular knowledge (Baumgartner, 2009).

Over the decades, there has been collective fear regarding the breakdown of what is known as “the family,” due to the rate of divorce rising steadily over the last century. In 1900, the rate of divorce was around one in very twelve marriages. In 1993, the rate increased to one in every two marriages. Interestingly, the same proportion of marriages ended in 1900 as today, however, the cause of ending was due to the earlier death of a spouse rather than divorce (Cox, 1993). In reality, “the family” has experienced tremendous resiliency as a response to widespread social and economic changes that have taken place (Cox, 1993). The recent shift in society to accept more inclusive and diverse relationships is not only about testing the bounds of sexual and romantic liberation, it is also paired with questioning and reconfiguring what constitutes a family (Perel, 2017). Rather than focusing on the fall of what traditional unions once looked like, an alternative perspective is to accept and embrace the adaptations of the family that have been borne out of this change and revise our notions of the family.

The collective morality that once only approved of sex occurring between spouses has expanded to allow sexuality to occur outside of the marriage (Jamieson, 2004). This shift in reasons to marry, from practical to romantic love, has led to an increased pressure for one's primary partner to be the sole fulfiller of their partner's emotional, physical, social, and sexual needs. Marriages now expect an individual to supply love, affection, emotional support, loyalty, excitement, stability, companionship, sexual gratification, and financial support to their partner (Cox, 1993). This had led to a community of people rebelling against this idea of monogamy and forging a new path of relationships. Polyamory is a relationship style that allows needs to be met

by more than one individual, taking the pressure off partners to fulfill the needs that used to be met by an entire village. At its core, it is a sex-positive attitude towards desire, love, and relationships (Haritaworn, Lin & Klesse, 2006).

A Critique of Monogamy

Each culture has assessed and established an appropriate and accepted system of sexual behaviour that they control by promoting a system of rules and punishment for transgressions (Cox, 1993). In Western culture, monogamy is the highest valued appropriate practice of relationships and proper outlet for sexual expression (Cox, 1993). Rosa (1994) suggests that monogamy is “enforced by culture products (the media), economic restraints (tax incentives, the high cost of single living), social factors (the provision of support and companionship or social status and privilege) and by the notion that this is ‘how it is’ this is natural.” (ac cited in Robinson, 1997, p.144). This has led, for many years, to an unquestioned acceptance of monogamy as the default path that relationships take.

A feminist critique of marriages views the practice as a patriarchal institution that favored the rights of men to have a wife who provided sexual, reproductive, and domestic services and was established to protect men’s land and inheritance rights (Jackson & Scott, 2004). Institutionalized monogamy is viewed as disadvantageous to women and “privileges the interest of both men and capitalism, operating as it does through mechanisms of exclusivity, possessiveness, and jealousy, all filtered through the rose-tinted lens of romance” (Robinson, 1997, p.144). Due to the roots of marriage in property ownership, a capitalistic principle, men also benefit from women’s “over-investment” on one man allowing them to gain access and control to women’s assets. Rather than encouraging women to fight for equal rights in this system, feminists challenged the principles that create the basis of the system itself.

Therefore, this questioning and resistance to monogamy was not just focused around sexual freedom, but the idea of ownership and possessiveness that occurs within the tradition view of couples (Jackson & Scott, 2004).

Feminists took the movement of the sexual revolution to challenge the traditional privileges of men and promote the sexual independence of women (Jackson & Scott, 2004). Also called into question was the oppressive nature of heterosexual relationships. However, while the freedom of this sexual liberation did increase, the questioning of monogamy fell silent (Jackson & Scott, 2004). Since in the western world, monogamy is the only legally recognized form of marriage, these critiques are closely related. Robinson (1997) furthers the critique by questioning whether the sexual revolution, while increased freedom and acceptance of sexual liberation, resulted in women being freer to be sexually exploited by men. She posits that wife swapping and group sex were a greater demonstration of men's sexual freedom than of women's.

Monogamy, in this view, allows policy makers to create well established categories to understand and treat relationships in ways that minimize the complexity and diversity of the experience of intimate human relationships (Robinson, 1997). This is further enforced for those who have not conformed to the mold, such as lesbian families or single mothers, who have been disadvantaged by not qualifying for benefits, stereotyping from the media, and discrimination by the legal system. For women to decide against being in a monogamous, heterosexual relationship can be an individual decision as well as a political stand (Robinson, 1997). It also must be kept in mind that this choice occurs within frameworks as diverse as race, class and age; all framed by the dominant culture of compulsory monogamy. Due to the oppression experienced by women, they may not be afforded the luxury of free choice to follow sexual preferences or orientation, especially if they have children to care for and are dependent on these benefits or legal

allowances, or there is a fear their children would be removed due to their lifestyle. She continues by pointing out that we do not have to practice non-monogamy to be impacted by the monogamous ideals that are perpetuated in the social and economic system in which we live.

There is also an implication of institutionalized monogamy for men. Robinson (1997) describes the impact of the commonly held belief (referenced to sociobiology) that men are naturally more sexually driven than women. The resulting argument goes that monogamy effectively acts to contain and control men's wild and unyielding sexual nature into a single relationship, therefore, making it more socially acceptable. The converse assumption is that women are more naturally monogamous due to the intense investment required for reproduction. This further demonstrates how everyone, monogamous as well as consensually not monogamous individuals, are affected by these societal views.

Why People are "Poly"

A shift over time has seen humans living longer, with a growing increase in social and financial equality for women, and a current expansion of possibilities due to the role of internet and social media (Weitzman, Davidson, Phillips & Fleckenstein, 2009). Also, it is important to keep in mind that while the social and financial benefits gained by females in western society are still not equal to males, there is now relatively more freedom from remaining in unhappy unions. These shifts in longevity, independence, and connectedness have contributed to the current high rates of divorce and dissatisfaction with monogamous relationships due to the increased time with one partner and a new ability for women to be sufficient without a partner (Weitzman, et al., 2009). All of these factors have led to a reconsideration of mating for life and the question of the viability of monogamy in this current time and age.

Understanding the tradition of marriage and the strict expectations and roles that were associated with it illuminates the political reasons for rebellion against this restrictive form of consensual unions. Fitting with their sexual and romantic desires, this expression of relationship anarchy allows people to embody a political message, demonstrating this rejection of tradition.

Since traditional views of relationships are based in long-held cultural beliefs, this relationship practice violates western cultural norms. Relationships usually begin with the expectation of sexual and romantic fidelity and this is not often intentionally negotiated. There is also an assumption that if a partner does “stray”, the relationship should be terminated. With the new ability to leave a relationship, staying in a union after a partner has “cheated” is widely prejudiced by contemporary society. Previously, divorcing a spouse carried heavy stigma. However now, deciding to stay after experiencing a betrayal when you are able to leave carries the new shame (Perel, 2017).

Polyamory has specific implications for women. It has often been found that women sacrifice individual identity for the stability of the relationship flowing from the societal ideals that women, wives, and mothers are nurturing givers and caretakers with needs second to that of the family’s (Jamieson, 2004). This allows for a unique way for women to claim back their identity that they have lost as well as desires that they have diminished for the sake of their domestic roles. It also allows an option for bisexuals to express their full sexuality. Polyamory for women in particular is a unique way to allow their needs to be met that might not have been in monogamous relationships.

Polyamory was born out of a movement calling for the experience of an optimal amount of love and intimacy available in a conscious and intentional way. It is often referred to as “ethical non-monogamy” due to its roots in values of honesty, respect, and equality (Klesse,

2011). These principles are pervasive in the literature, both academic and popular, and generally emphasized. Polyamory means loving without limits by rejecting constraining traditional conventions (Klesse, 2011). Ester Perel (2017) state that when non-monogamy is done successfully, two people straddle commitment and freedom together.

It is also viewed to be more about freedom in relationships, whether it is acted upon or not (Klesse, 2011). In contrast with society's tendency to fixate on the sexual implications for polyamory, Anapol (2010) views it less about practice and more about an attitude of questioning these traditional relationship standards. This stance is demonstrated by saying, "to me, polyamory has more to do with an internal attitude of letting love evolve without expectations or demands that it look a particular way than it does with the number of partners involved" (p.18). To elaborate further, if a couple defined their relationship as sexually and emotionally exclusive, however, had arrived at this decision after a period of questioning that this was right for their relationship, rather than automatically accepting the heteronormative standard, she would identify them as polyamorous rather than monogamous. Regardless of whether a person partakes in multiple romantic relationships, they have gone through the process of questioning and rejecting the notion that the "one and only" is the only possible path to a fulfilling romantic life (Jackson & Scott, 2004). However, Anapol cautions that many polyamorous people have forsaken traditional relationship rules and replaced them with "polyamorous rules" rather than adopting an ideal-less version of being in relationships. This is one of the criticisms of pop culture polyamorous "how to guides," that it sets out its own normativity and suggests a universal model of partaking in these relationships (Haritaworn, Lin & Klesse, 2006).

Critics of the lifestyle suggest that people enter this form of relationship when suffering from low need fulfillment with their current partner. It was found, however, that each

relationship usually operates relatively independently from the others (Mitchell, Bartholomew & Cobb 2014). Some also suggest that one partner may force another into this lifestyle to save a relationship or to have the option of sleeping with other people. When this occurs, however, it is not the true philosophy of polyamory and is discouraged in poly self-help books.

Communication

Communication between partners builds intimacy when it is used, and the lack of it has the potential to derail relationships. The definition of intimacy is unclear in the literature, but it is thought to be the general sense of closeness partners feel towards each other (Yoo et al., 2014). It has also been described as strong intellectual and emotional communion with another individual (Cox, 1993). Couples lacking skills to regulate their feelings and properly communicate them to their partner usually withdraw from conflict, which leads to relational unhappiness and threatens the longevity of the relationships (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005). Communication styles that were perceived as more positive by their partner lead to increasing emotionally and sexually intimacy that, in turn, increased relationship satisfaction (Yoo et al., 2014). These findings demonstrate that an inability to communicate feelings effectively can negatively impact the relationship and conversely how positive communication can increase contentment in the relationship. Therefore, the ability to give accurate expression to one's experience is an essential factor in relationships having a significant impact on happiness and ultimate outcome.

Polyamory is based on the belief that open and honest communication should be used as the method of maintaining multiple relationships. This is done through negotiating agreements that work for both partners using unique rules for maintenance (Balzarini, 2017). Usually, couples entering non-monogamous relationships undergo a process of creating rules and the meanings around them, and this becomes part of a continual process of mutual communication

(Jamieson, 2004). Rules are created to balance the freedom of the arrangement while managing the feelings that arise for the other partner in the primary relationship.

Primary partners often try to maintain the specialness of their union by allotting more energy, time, and self-disclosure than is done in other relationships due to high levels of commitment (Jamieson, 2004). Commitment is expressed as members of the relationship invest time and energy towards promoting the wellbeing and happiness of both self and other. (Cox, 1993). On the other hand, their secondary relationships may have exclusionary rules to protect the primary relationship. For example, rules governing such situations such as birthday, anniversaries, and holidays need to be negotiated between partners. It was found that more frequent and in-depth communication occurred between primary partners than did in secondary relationships (Balzarini, 2017).

Some aspects of polyamory require making the implicit explicit and depend upon the negotiation of the logistics and practicalities of opening a relationship and managing multiple partners in addition to the emotional aspects. A significant amount of energy is required to negotiate the practicalities of conducting multiple intimate relationships while simultaneously addressing underlying issues of power, dependency, and separateness. All this hinges on the capacity for, and skills of, communication (Jackson & Scott, 2004). Factors that require negotiation when beginning a relationship are the degree of openness that the couple will allow others to enter, the gender of potential partners, and the extent of the behaviours and emotions sanctioned to be experienced with secondary others, including sexual activity and love (McLean, 2004). Past research has found that some couples set boundaries such as limiting connections with another partner only when their primary is out of town, or only during certain events such as pride week (McLean, 2004). The use of protection and safe sex, as well as the special allowance

of fluid bonding or sex without a condom, are also common considerations. Other areas in which rules are required include needs, expectations, behaviours, level of knowledge shared, schedules, and boundaries, in addition to typical relationship issues that arise (Balzarini, 2017). Most view honesty as the bedrock for practicing polyamory and it is with honesty that any re-negotiation of boundaries becomes a possibility (Klesse, 2011). Partners may be motivated to change rules after feeling unexpectedly uncomfortable by a partner's feelings or experiences or by coming across a scenario they had not foreseen. This demonstrates the necessity for flexibility with rules.

Not only does honesty apply interpersonally within the relationship, but also involves a genuine introspection of one's feelings, behaviours, and thoughts (Zhu, 2018). The process of deciding to become polyamorous often involves exploring previously unexamined aspects of the self, such as feelings and the causes of jealousy, insecurity, and fear they experience. This honesty is usually described as being conscientious in that is used with discretion, avoiding comparisons and the undermining their partner's specialness (Jamieson, 2004).

Polyamorous individuals experiment with discovering where they fall on the continuum of information to be shared, ranging from silence to full disclosure. What works for their particular relationship, or for them as an individual, may involve not wanting to know the details of their partner's actions and their intimate feelings towards other partners (Jamieson, 2004). Total separation may be challenging if the other partner derives intimacy from the practice of sharing and feels they must withhold a large part of their relationship and life.

Betrayal

Traditionally, infidelity consists of a break in the contract between a couple in the realm of physical, sexual, or emotional intimacy with another or with participation in acts such as cybersex or viewing pornography (Hertlein, Wetchler & Piercy, 2005). Which behaviours would

be considered as constituting infidelity depends on each individual's beliefs. At the core of betrayal today is the feeling that trust has been violated, based on the agreements previously made between partners (Perel, 2017).

Evolutionary theorists propose that, in theory, men are more upset by sexual infidelity because sexual exclusivity is the only way to ensure paternity of their offspring (Buss, Larsen, Westen & Semmelroth, 1992). Since it is evolutionarily beneficial to support one's own genetic lineage, men strive to support offspring that are biologically theirs rather than another male's. Women, on the other hand, are said to be more threatened by emotional infidelity because this may cause their mate to spread their resources to another partner with whom they also have an emotional bond. Since pregnancy and child rearing is a great investment in time and money, this access to resources and support is essential. While some studies have found evidence for this theory, Harris (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of more than 100 studies and found little support for this theory of innate sex differences. Therefore, it is unclear whether sex differences play a role in differences in jealousy for sexual or emotional infidelity.

By historically defining intimacy as something that only occurs between two people in an exclusive intimate relationship, society has established that any sexual activity that occurs outside this relationship be deemed forbidden, resulting in a fixation on infidelity and sexual exclusivity (McLean, 2004). Monogamy often sets itself out to be the dichotomy of cheating. However, the true spirit of polyamory also aims to contrast itself as the opposite of cheating by accompanying extra-dyadic involvement with honesty and consent. This elaboration attempts to establish validity to the practice of polyamory by focusing on the separation of the truth telling from the lying associated with affairs (Zhu, 2018).

Weiser et al., (2014) breaks down the construct of infidelity to isolate its defining characteristics, exploring whether it is specific behaviours, concealment of the actions, or the emotional fallout that follows which causes it to be defined as infidelity. These are important components to distinguish since infidelity, as it has been traditionally viewed, is not an accurate construct to use in the realm of polyamory, in which a breach or betrayal is more accurately characterized as a feeling that some rule or agreement was broken.

However, non-monogamy does not entirely eliminate the experience of betrayal and hurt. Betrayal in polyamorous relationships may occur for a primary partner by feeling that they were not were not allocated their special consideration, especially during a particular time of need. This occurs when there is a breach in the shared understanding of the practices that partners had laid out to prioritize their relationship (Jamieson, 2004). A sense of betrayal may also be felt when there is a lack of open communication and the honesty that is a foundational block in the relationship structure (Rubinsky, 2018). Additionally, betrayal may occur when a partner is dishonest or manipulative in how they are conducting a polyamorous relationship (Jackson & Scott, 2004).

Jealousy

The American idea of “romantic love” is described and categorized by such phrases as “the one and only,” “I can’t live without them,” and “the perfect partner” (Cox, 1993). Additionally, partners are frequently described as one’s “other/better half” (Jackson & Scott, 2004). Common expectations include being the center of your partner’s universe and building your life around them (Jackson & Scott, 2004). Jamieson (in press) describes how these phrases and beliefs contribute to the romanticized idea of a relationship, leading to ideas regarding the privileges that our romantic partner holds, especially the demand for sexual

exclusivity. For many, the foundational relationship characteristics of trust, relational security, commitment and loyalty are synonymous with sexual exclusivity (Perel, 2017). Jamieson comments that while our expectation of friends is that they are able to have other friends, and that one would never assume a parent of two children loves them each less than a parent of one child, the notions of exclusivity and restraint of sex as well as other physical and emotional intimacy is viewed as something that must be saved for a single intimate relationship. An example given to illustrate this is that a person who has a relationship centered around a special activity with their tennis partner would not break down if their tennis partner were to play with someone else. While it is acknowledged that having sex is not the same as playing tennis, it illustrates the extreme differences of expectations and consequences for sexual relationships compared to other close relationships when exclusivity is not honored (as cited in Jackson & Scott, 2004).

Monogamy is also based on the belief that if you truly love someone, you will no longer be attracted to others and, therefore, conversations around this topic are deemed irrelevant (Perel, 2017). Due to this, many couples do not open up about this aspect of their sexuality and attractions. Having conversations about these topics of having attractions for others that bring us out of our comfort zone, and being open about the fear and loss associated with this honesty, can actually promote intimacy and commitment (Perel, 2017).

Perel (2017) begs the question of the nature of our erotic freedom: Do we believe that our partners' erotic being belongs to us alone? Sexuality can be considered a continuum of something that is individual versus a domain that must be shared. On the latter end of the spectrum, any independent expression of sexuality constitutes a betrayal. This can be further extended to view polyamory as a greater freedom of one's partner to have erotic experiences

outside the bounds of the dyad. By knowing and controlling our partner, it can dampen eroticism. Instead, by embracing the mystery of our partner, replacing fear with curiosity, we can remain interested and drawn to our partner (Perel, 2010). In addition, it is possible to accept the existential reality that we do not have a lasting hold over our partner. The more we try to suppress our primal longings, the greater the desire and degree that we may rebel (Perel, 2017). Therefore, creating confining rules may not prevent what we fear most and instead create a longing for what it so vehemently banned.

Jealousy that occurs in romantic relationships is a communicative phenomenon and how it is conveyed in relationships is an important insight into the process of managing this powerful feeling in the relationship (Rubinsky, 2018). Jealousy is typically experienced through thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. Thoughts can include suspicion, obsession, and rumination. Rubinsky (2018) found that some of the emotions experienced with jealousy were anger, fear of loss or replacement, hurt, sorrow, and insecurity. Jealous behaviour may be demonstrated in restrictive actions towards one's partner and checking messages. Jealousy is often described as arising from a perceived real or imagined threat to a relationship. Polyamory is unique in that while third party sexual or emotional interaction is typically defined as an act of infidelity, this is one of the defining characteristics of the polyamorous relationship style. Even though the relationship, by nature, is not exclusive, a threat to the relationship has still been found to be a concern for polyamorous individuals (Rubinsky, 2018).

Jackson & Scott (2004) found that in their experience, jealousy had more to do with a feeling of being threatened with the potential loss of a partner than the idea of sharing a sexual partner with another. They suggest that the threat of losing a partner is much greater in a monogamous relationship due to the stipulation of only having one partner and the forced choice

that must occur. The possible danger is that of being replaced by a “better” option. However, in polyamory, attractive qualities of a new partner are allowed appreciation, while also still valuing one’s primary partner.

Ester Perel (2017) found that when she asked people when they are most attracted to their partner, a common answer was when others are attracted to them. She contends that opening up a relationship does not necessarily expend the intimacy allocated to the couple, but often serves to replenish and increase it. While infidelity is often viewed as due to a relationship gone awry, Perel (2017) conveys that affairs can act as places for self-discovery of new or long lost identities and can facilitate individual growth and exploration. Similarly, polyamory can also allow a platform for such transformation without the secrecy and destructive effect of an affair.

Jealousy has a negative connotation in society that is constructed within and based upon a monogamous ideal (Ritchie & Barker, 2006). Therefore, when looking at jealousy in polyamorous relationships, a new framework must be applied to this construct. It is suggested that jealousy arises in the tension with the ideal of compersion. In addition, it has been suggested that polyamorous individuals go through a process of reframing traditionally negative feelings such as jealousy into more positive ones such as compersion or happiness for their partners’ happiness (Rubinsky, 2018). It was found that women scored lower on compersion than men and scored higher on both behavioural and emotional jealousy (Aumer et al., 2014). Despite the importance that polyamory literature placed on practicing compersion, it was found that for men, the presence of compersion had no bearing on their relational satisfaction. Furthermore, the only group who significantly benefitted from this practice were women in open relationships, not polyamorous ones. Therefore, despite the emphasis which polyamory literature stresses the necessity of practicing compersion, it may not be as required or experienced in practice.

Rubinsky (2018) found that one facet of jealousy that is often reported by research participants is letting go of the possessiveness and ownership of one's partner. The reason for this possessiveness is suggested to be due to not having one's needs sufficiently met (Rubinsky, 2018). An alternative to jealousy that has been seen to appear in polyamorous relationships is the feeling of missing out when one's partner is either spending too much time with another partner, or is doing a fun or desirable activity with the other partner (Rubinsky, 2018). This feeling of missing out or wishing they too could participate in that experience, rather than a feeling of threat to the relationship, is frequently seen in polyamorous relationships.

Since the experience of jealousy is widely reported, how jealousy within relationship is managed is a relevant and significant topic to address when providing support to individuals working through this. Primarily, how jealousy is communicated can influence the experience of satisfaction in the relationship. Guerrero (2014) distinguished between destructive methods of communication that are intended to control the other partner. This includes actions of yelling, arguing, violence, and trying to make the other partner feel jealous as well. This contrasts with constructive methods of jealousy discussion which focus on maintaining the relationship. This is done by disclosure and positive behaviour to compensate for shortcoming by trying to make oneself more attractive to their partner.

Rubinsky (2018) also found that partners in polyamorous relationships would normally communicate their feelings of jealousy to their partner. The aim of this sharing was to receive a response from their partner acknowledging and validating these feelings of jealousy. Partners were not sharing with the goal of changing their partners behaviour. This demonstrates the polyamorous lens of jealousy as an emotion that can be managed and worked through personally without the onus being placed on their partner. This contrasts with monogamous culture where

the coping is done by a partner adjusting their behaviour to not bring up those emotions in their partner.

Clinical Practice

Most psychological frameworks for couples and family counselling are based off the examination of the couple as a monogamous dyad and prizing this as the healthiest and most natural formation of relationships (Moors, Conley, Edelstein & Chopik, 2015). The consequence of this is that our understanding of how people relate in relationships is based off one model that excludes individuals in consensually nonmonogamous relationships. Since therapies are based on theories of understanding human behaviour, therapies are also constructed from monogamous models. The implication is providing help based on frameworks that do not apply to the client. This lack of knowledge also means that proper training to work with consensually non-monogamous individuals, relationships, and families is not taught thoroughly in graduate programs and therefore, goes largely unaware or misunderstood by professionals.

Contrary to the belief that polyamory is the cause of relationships that terminate, Ramy (1975) found that the responses to why polyamorous couples broke up was largely attributed to reasons similar to that of monogamous couples such as growing apart and feeling unequal levels of attraction, and not due to extramarital sex (as cited in Weitzman et al, 2009, p. 8). Since Mitchell, Bartholomew & Cobb (2014) found that each relationship does not have strong effects on the others, clinicians should focus their interventions on the dyad without assuming the other relationships are the cause of the interpersonal issues.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter will outline the design of the study from a description of the setting of the research, the demographics of the sample, the procedures, variables, and analysis of the results. This study uses a qualitative research design.

Past research in the area of polyamorous relationships has either used a survey method or semi-structured interviews. The method used in this inquiry, due to the small sample size and the desire for in-depth answers, was a semi-structured phenomenological interview.

Design & Approach

In total, twelve individuals were interviewed to explore their lived experience of infidelity, relationship boundaries, experiences of betrayal and jealousy, and definitions of intimacy within the context of a polyamorous relationship. Based on the current research, a series of interview questions was developed to explore how the individuals interviewed use communication to manage their unique relationships. The answers to the questions were carefully received and recorded for later interpretation.

Data was acquired through lengthy and focused interviews consisting of open-ended questions. The role of the interviewer was to gain access to the interviewee's subjective experience of how they perceive being in a polyamorous relationship and the meaning for them in it. Open-ended questions were used to facilitate the exploration of the personal experience of individuals in navigating the beginning period of the relationship as well as the maintenance of this lifestyle over years. This work is based on a constructionist worldview, which assumes that individuals construct the meaning of their world around them (Creswell, 2014). Since there is relatively little access to personal accounts of individuals experience of polyamory, this study is

aimed to explore how a select few individuals construct meaning in their nontraditional relationships.

Research Setting

Interview subjects were recruited from a posting made on two polyamorous Facebook groups in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. One is *Vanpoly* and the other is *Vancouver Polyamory 101*. This post emphasized the voluntary nature of the study and specified that the study was seeking individuals who self-identified as polyamorous. Also, necessary for eligibility was to be currently in a primary relationship and to engage in at least some form of extra-dyadic contact, whether emotional or physical with a secondary individual. In total, twelve individuals completed the interview.

Participants were also distinguished as ones who practiced polyamory by having a primary relationship, a partner with whom they are either married or have a similar level of commitment. Interviews were conducted with individuals who had at least one primary partner with whom they have gone through a process of communication and negotiation. My aim was to interview people who were with a committed partner with whom they either had to shift from monogamy to polyamory or with whom they had developed unique rules to fit with their current polyamorous relationship. This desire to talk to individuals who had gone through a significant process of communication was why primary partners were chosen rather than polyamorous individuals who casually date. Therefore, this research is limited to people who identify at least one current significant relationship and at least one additional person as their secondary partner. Participants were also required to be over the age of 19 and were recruited from Vancouver to either meet in person or by phone. Other than these criteria, all cultures and sexual identities and classes were welcome.

Participants were selected based on convenience and, therefore, the study becomes vulnerable to the usual issues of not obtaining a random selection from the population. This method of recruitment automatically excludes individuals who do not have access to the internet, speak English, or have a social media account. However, since the purpose of the study is to inform therapists about common struggles and experiences when negotiating polyamory, rich description rather than generalizability is paramount.

Another aspect that must be kept in mind is that since the sample was on a volunteer basis, the 12 individuals who offered to be interviewed were from “successful” polyamorous relationships. This sample is not a comprehensive view of individuals in polyamorous relationships, only individuals that felt comfortable enough to volunteer to speak with me about the status of their relationship.

Sample Demographics

Past survey research has found that individual who practice polyamory are predominantly Caucasian, post-graduate educated, middle- or upper middle-class professionals (Sheff, 2005). In addition, the age range in Sheff’s widely cited study was between 30 and 60. The population used in the current study mimics the demographics collected from Sheff’s survey. All participants were in a marriage or marriage-like long-term committed relationship with their primary partner. Relationships with their secondary partners ranged in duration from a few months to decades. While some participants were concerned with labeling their partners *primary* and *secondary* (a subjective and hierarchical practice), they were able to distinguish between the two and explore the differences between these relationships.

Similar to the demographics found in this past research, the current sample suggested similar characteristics. Of the twelve participants, eight self-identified as female and four as

male. All participants described themselves as being employed, with the exception of a stay at home mom and one individual who was retired. The age range of interviewees was from 28 years old to 68, the mean age was 37.6 and the median 34.5 years old. Nine of the participants identified as heterosexual. Three identified as bisexual, all of whom were women. All participants were Caucasian except one who was of Spanish descent. The length of time that individuals had been polyamorous ranged from 6 months to over 50 years. The most common length was 3 years. Nine of the participants were married, while three were in committed partnerships. Eight of the participants had children, one was pregnant, and three did not have children. All participants were in a form of polyamory with primary and secondary partners except one who was in a long-distance triangle relationship. However, it was still characterized by a primary and a secondary partner.

Procedure

All participants were informed upon recruitment that their participation was on a purely voluntary basis and that they were free to withdraw participation at any time during the process. They were also assured that all efforts would be taken to conceal their identity and maintain anonymity. They were advised that the aim of this research was to increase understanding of polyamory with the aim of assisting counsellors to work with polyamorous persons who may be experiencing interpersonal struggles. All interviews were conducted with informed consent and all information was kept confidential.

Interviews were completed in person, over the phone, or by Skype. They were audio recorded and the device was stored in a secure location. The audio recordings were listened to at a private location by myself. Names are not used in this paper and some details and potentially

identifying references were changed to conceal the participants' identities. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by myself alone and kept in a secure and private location.

Variables

Demographics were taken from participants to gain a deeper understanding of the details that may influence the results. Such variables that were found to influence the data were the gender of the participants. Since the experience of participating in a polyamorous relationship interacts with cultural societal values and roles of gender, the self-identified gender of participants is distinguished in the results. In addition, the overwhelming majority of the participants identified as Caucasian, suggesting that this culture was most inclined to volunteer and possibly participate in these relationships. Another piece of data collected was to determine which type of polyamorous relationship they were in or had been in, such as primary-secondary, multiple primary, or triadic, since these could each pose very different experiences.

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed for relevant themes. These relevant themes were pulled to develop a rich description of the experience, including the trajectory, pitfalls and challenges. Also, individual experiences and exceptions are also included to highlight how each relationship is still very unique and there is no one "mould."

Chapter Four: Results

Relationship Composition

There were many variations in the stage of life that people chose polyamory. There were people who decided to open their long-term relationship up after a lifetime of monogamy as well as participants who had believed that they had always been polyamorous and found relationships in which to express this part of their identity. People who believed there was no particular point in time when they chose to be polyamorous described that they did not know the name for what they were doing or else did not attach a label to it until later in their lives. These individuals would equate polyamory more with a sexual orientation than a lifestyle choice.

Many different reasons for entering polyamory were given. Examples were not wanting to lose a partner, the shifting of a relationship to a long distance one, wanting to love more than one person, being attracted to another person but not wanting to cheat, being able to explore being with other people after getting into relationship at young age, wanting to indulge in additional passionate relationships, not wanting to sleep with only one person for the rest of their life, and wanting to be with a person of a different gender than their current partner. One participant described that she was confused by the fact that she was having sexual feelings for other men while still being very happy with her husband. Another woman said that during her and her husband's marriage, even though they loved each other very much, they were "always checking out other people and didn't want to be afraid of that." Another woman said that she sought therapy before opening up her relationship because she was unhappy with herself and not her husband, stemming from being bisexual and not being able to express this aspect of her identity in her marriage to a man.

One man described that he has chosen to act alternatively to the current culture around monogamy and sexuality, which he believes in our current western society is repressed. He described how, in his experience, deciding to be in a committed loving relationship with another person is not accompanied by a simultaneous deadening of attraction for all other people. He reports that this awareness of still feeling attraction for others creates a “core mistrust” in relationships due to our knowledge that our partner is also experiencing this desire for others. As a consequence of closing off intimacy with others, it leads many people to over-focus on the desirable and unattainable “greener grass on the other side” and to overlook what they are receiving in their current relationship. Another result is seeking out intimacy with others without their primary partner being aware, which is typically deemed sexual or emotional infidelity. Lastly, by realizing that this desire for others outside the primary relationship is problematic, it causes individuals to “lose all their sexual passion and fire for their own relationship because they have turned it off for others.” However, this distressing experience of attraction to others and knowledge that one’s partner is attracted to others occurs without knowledge of how to communicate and openly discuss this in our relationship. Therefore, it forces partners to try and utilize tactics to “discover this and prevent it” such as going through their partner’s phone or forbidding contact with others. Furthermore, he stated that because of this, “sexuality has become a crime of opportunity” and cheating occurs in the shadows after being pent up, such as an affair with a co-worker. He views polyamory as a “new paradigm where being with people becomes a conscious intentional effort due to the work it takes and the slow pace of the process.”

There were many definitions of what polyamory meant to each individual. One man said that polyamory is “not just about sleeping with other people, it’s a significant restructuring of your understanding of the permanence and impermanence of relationships.” He continued that

“monogamous relationships have a clean script with expectations, where polyamory doesn’t” and must be co-created by individuals. Another woman said that “monogamy is great because of the close, special-only-to-us kind of connection, but it doesn’t go away when you introduce someone else.” One man described the traditional definition of monogamy as heteronormative and based on sex. He stated that what constitutes monogamy is a difficult concept to define because intimacy is on a spectrum that ranges from an attraction, sleeping in the same bed, a hug, to sex. There is an assumption that polyamory is primarily about sex. He contended however that polyamory is the choice to allow free intimacy outside of the primary relationship, in whatever form it may take. He says, “sexual desire may be satisfied by just cuddling or kissing someone.” Moreover, “simply saying you have a desire for someone a few days in a row allows you to experience it and it moves through you.”

Before choosing polyamory, some people tried other forms of consensual non-monogamy and then discovered the appropriate form for themselves and their relationships. A few participants began by exploring other types of open relationships such as swinging. One woman said that this didn’t fit for her and her husband because they wanted the emotional connections in addition to the sexual aspect. Another couple went to swinger parties and fetish events to immerse themselves in the environment to see how they felt before choosing polyamory. One woman said that she and her husband were looking to find another married couple that they could date long-term. Another woman found that she preferred to date other married people because “there’s no pressure of having to be more than they can be.” Another woman also enjoyed being each other’s secondary partner to her married boyfriend because she feels less jealousy at each being each other’s secondary, rather than one partner’s primary and another’s secondary.

Primary partners did share numerous privileges not given to other secondary relationships. A woman defined a primary partner as someone who you “give a significant part of your life to and include in decision making.” Frequent privileges only given to their primary partner were living together, having children together, sharing finances – “and the depth of intimacy that comes from those activities.” One man said that his primary partner is “the socially sanctioned relationship that gets the privileges of this such as dental benefits.” Many people said that while they and their partner did not have explicit veto power over potential secondary partners, they would give it serious consideration if a secondary relationship were interfering with their primary partnership or if their primary partner was not comfortable with their secondary partner. One woman said that if her or her husband “were really distressed by another connection there would be more room to talk about this and influence what the other did.” Another woman said that at one point her husband was dating someone who she did not believe was treating him right. Ultimately, after sharing these concerns, she said that she supported his choice to be with her.

While many described contentment at this arrangement of having “primary” and “secondary” partners, other individuals were cautious about the hierarchy that this caused. One woman said that she did not want “people to feel secondary,” however; she didn’t have the same connection with others as she did her partner of nearly two decades. A few women did not define their partners on a hierarchical scale and had secondary partners who they would describe as another primary partner. They disclosed that they include their other partner in all large decisions and orient their lives to this other primary partner as well. One woman had the unique experience of saying that her boyfriend, who she had been with longer than her husband, would take priority

if she had to choose. She defines her boyfriend as the partner that has her full commitment and knows “he’ll be in the rocking chair with her in the end.”

Rules & Boundaries

Initial negotiations were frequently stretched over years beginning as hypotheticals while couples were deciding to open up their relationship. Rules and boundaries were described as constantly negotiated and renegotiated throughout the relationship. A few women said that they and their husbands started by each creating a dating profile online to chat with other people. They reviewed each other’s chats to see how they felt and then decided whether to proceed, moving very slowly to make sure they were comfortable. When they found that “the chatting phase didn’t ruffle many feathers” they progressed to dating other people.

Almost all participants said that they had more rules at the beginning while they were figuring things out. More restrictive rules at the outset of opening relationships frequently included either restricting sex or falling in love. Some rules for couples with children included not bringing a partner to their house and not introducing partners to their children without a discussion. One man said that one of their initial rules was that they did not have sleep-overs. Some people found that at the beginning, they would want to know every time their partner slept with someone and all the details of the encounter, which evolved over time to not needing to know every time. Sometimes, these rules were written out as agreements to follow. While restrictive, individuals found that “respecting boundaries helps build trust.” After these rules were followed and the trust was built, it was “easier to let rules go.” Two female participants said that they had more control over rules at the beginning because stuff upset them more than it did their partners.

Many participants also mentioned that when they were starting out they would describe the process of figuring out boundaries as “trial and error.” One participant said that they just started out and if something her husband did upset her, he wouldn’t do that again.” Another woman said that when she first slept with a man, her husband was very upset by it, which made her realize “that they couldn’t just do whatever” and had to renegotiate their boundaries. One woman said that her and her husband talked over different hypothetical scenarios such as public affection with other partners and what would they do if they ran into someone they knew. One problem with this, a man disclosed, was that there is no way to name all the things that might occur in another relationship such as off-limits places to go. He said that when the relationship is rule-based, there are lots of breeches because the boundaries are so tight.

After being polyamorous for years, one participant described his approach now as starting a relationship off with a “period of monogamy at the beginning.” This phase is so they can get to know each other. He describes the process a beginning with a discussion about who he is attracted to, what his fantasies are, and the inner workings of his sexual desire. This then progresses to going on a date with another person, followed by physical contact. The point of this intentional, slow, and explicit development is so that the other person is never surprised by the progression of other relationships. The aim is to “meet our partner on the edge of these fears and expectations, not to push them off the cliff, the edge is where growth is, continuously evolving and so do the boundaries.”

After being poly for some time, rules evolve to become more fluid. While participants said that the frequency and depth of this process decreased as the years went on, it is still a large part of their relationship communication. It is now described as “clarifying and re-establishing” rules and boundaries if an issue comes up. Since relationships are dynamic and changing,

renegotiation of rules is required to mimic this flow of the developing relationship needs. One woman said that she and her husband had a rule that they would not have sex with other people in their bed. However, when he started dating a married woman, this became necessary and required renegotiation. Another woman described her and her partner's rules as more based on courtesy now, such as having a shower after sleeping with someone else or washing the sheets after a night with someone in their bed. One woman disclosed that her and her partner base their rules on how their relationships are shaping up at the moment. Another woman said that she and her husband didn't have rules, but agreements, not because they "own each other," but because "what they do affects each other." She described how their process of negotiating these agreements involves questions such as "why are you doing this?"; "what are you wanting from this?"; and "what does this look like?" One woman said that at the beginning, she and her partner would "check in, process, and communicate to head-aching amounts" but now the conversation is more around logistics regarding how they share their time and are less emotional. Another woman said that an initial rule was that they would not have serious long-term relationships and now they are planning to move her serious boyfriend into their house. This demonstrated to her that "things that you think you're strongly opinionated about can change."

There were two seemingly universal rules found: safety and checking in. Safety was the largest concern that most rules stemmed from for individuals. The universal rule for every person was safe sex practices including using a condom and partners getting tested. It also included checking in with their primary partner, such as when they were out late for a date. One woman said that her husband had expressed that he wanted to "be kept in the loop about how many people" his wife was talking to and also requested that they do not schedule a date until they run it by each other. Another woman said that she and her husband have a joint calendar online so

that they are kept informed of the other's dates. Checking with their primary partner before booking time with another person was frequently mentioned by interviewees. Involved in the checking was the aspect of aftercare to process connections happening with other people. One woman gave the example that she had recently gone on a date with her husband. Afterward, she checked in with her secondary girlfriend so see how she was processing this event.

Rules tended to differ for primary and secondary partners. While many partners said that if they did have unprotected sex with someone, it was their primary partner. However, one woman described the opposite, having protected sex with her husband, and unprotected sex (IUD, not condom) with her long-term boyfriend. Many participants said that they protect their primary relationship by checking in with their primary partner more often than they checked in with their secondary. In addition, many people said that they talked about their secondary partner to their primary partner more often than they talked to their secondary about their primary.

There were some common practical aspects that primary partners had to negotiate. Many interviewees agree that time was the tightest commodity. In addition, dates had to be scheduled around childcare. One woman said that she was very cautious of she and her husband "living separate lives and just co-parenting" so they make a point of going out, just the two of them. This was echoed by other participants as well who described that they had to carve out time to go on dates and not just complete household tasks such as talking about parenting, paying bills, or grocery shopping. This was one way that they protected their primary relationship during the excitement of having other relationships.

A few participants said that there is really no way to protect a relationship from ending, only an ability to "commit to love someone." For one man, the protection consisted in at least not being surprised by a relationship ending. "By seeing the progression of a partner's other

relationships and having an open flow of communication, you can let go of the false sense of security in relationships.” He expressed that all too often “partners merge into one unit of *Bob and Mary* at the expense of losing friends and only doing things together, which usually involves sacrificing your identity so that when the relationship ends, you don’t know who you are anymore.” Instead, he believes in “walking a path together, not as one, but holding hands, aware that here may be a fork where they go separate ways.” However, “if you commit to love, you truly want what is best for your partner even if that’s not being with you so it’s about supporting them through that journey.” Rather than viewing it as a relationship that is ending, he views it as “moving through a spectrum of relationships without them being either *on* or *off*.” Alternatively, he sees it as transitioning to a different type of relationship such as primary partner to occasional lover or friend. Another man said that this fresh way of viewing a relationship ending allows things to “run their course” and contrasts the traditional view based on “toxic notions around divorce rupturing families.” One woman said, “the reality is you can’t protect your primary relationship. You can continue to nourish it, but you ultimately have to choose it every day.”

Communication

Communication was described as being in abundance during the process of transitioning a monogamous relationship to a polyamorous relationship. All but one participant entered into their polyamorous relationship with a great deal of discussion. For this participant who had entered into polyamory “without proper discussion,” he described his relationship as having suffered from years of miscommunications. One of the areas that had to be negotiated was how much disclosure to do.

Many individuals had at one time or another attempted a period of “don’t ask, don’t tell” and everyone who had participated in this said that it did not work out and frequently caused hurt

feelings and was unsafe. One man said this was problematic because you could not adequately assess the risk of safe sexual practices without knowing the activity of your partner. He also disclosed that this method allows imaginations to run wild. Usually, when partners transitioned from “don’t ask, don’t tell” to full disclosure, it created a lot of mistrust. Many people also struggled when it swung to the other extreme of needing their partner to disclose every detail. One man said that he struggled when his wife required him to show her every text message he sent to his other partner, which he felt did not respect the privacy of his secondary partner. His reasoning was that he “didn’t want to hide anything, but recognized that knowing every detail makes it harder.” One woman said that she started out by tentatively not disclosing as much for fear of hurting her husband, but increased over time.

After opening up, couples had to figure out how much they wanted to disclose to their primary partner. Most people said that they told their primary partner everything that the other was comfortable hearing. Two women mentioned that when they opened up they held off talking about the sexual experiences they had with others. In addition, they didn’t ask about their husband’s sexual experiences due to insecurity, even though they were both curious. They said that they would discriminate to a degree what they shared and would not emphasize possibly difficult details such as a particularly fantastic sexual experience. While they did admit to openly discussing aspects of their relationship, a few women admitted to keeping a few things private that they know would be very hurtful to their partner. However, these topics were not elaborated. Partners also used communication to give affirmations to their primary partner when they were experiencing jealousy. One woman said that when she was feeling insecure she would express these feelings to her husband and “ask for reassurance and to affirm [their] relationship.”

Almost every person interviewed said that they currently disclose most information and practice radical honesty with their partner. In addition, it was brought up that working towards also not feeling guilt and shame for anything you are disclosing is an important piece. The radical honesty was described as one participant is being able to talk about things such as sadness over another relationship ending to their primary partner. By practicing honesty about these “topics that might not usually be discussed openly, it gives the feeling that there is nothing unseen and this builds trust.” One woman said that since becoming polyamorous, her and her husband are more honest than they have ever been in their relationship.

To make polyamory work, many participants disclosed that it required them to learn how to communicate in a way they never had before. It was also mentioned that at the start it was more difficult to know what you needed to ask for. After time and practice it became easier to express themselves. One of these women said that their secondary partner was much better at “emotionally managing her” and this had improved her relationship with her primary partner by providing this emotional support that her primary partner wasn’t able to give to the degree that she needed. She also describes her secondary as taking “communication tensions away and reducing misunderstandings” between her and her primary partner, as well as teaching her how to communicate more effectively. Another woman said that she learned a lot about “knowing boundaries and knowing when they had been crossed and being able to express that” from a secondary partner who was skilled at this. She said that she brought this new ability learned in her secondary relationship to her primary partnership. She expressed gratefulness to polyamory as a way to continuously learn about ways of being in relationships.

Individuals described the type of information they usually shared with their partner. Most couples kept their primary informed throughout the process of meeting someone new. They

stated that they usually inform their primary partner if someone else expresses interest or if they have a date. One woman said that the disclosure they did to their primary partner about other partners included what they talked about, activities they did, and what the other person is like. Additionally, most individuals disclosed that they inform their partner before they have sex with someone new. Even then, one woman said that this was a loose rule for her and her partner.

Many emotions, thoughts and fears came up for participants when they were going through the process of opening up their relationship. It was stated that the most prevalent emotions stemmed from insecurity. One woman wondered if she and her partner would be able to manage this new transition in their relationship and feared they would end up losing each other. She was also worried because she knows that she “jumps into relationships and goes all the way” and was worried this would threaten the feelings she had for her primary partner. She said that for her and her partner, the beginning looked like a lot of talking and exploring fears and understanding what the intention of this was for them, why they were doing it and landing on “why not experience more in life and support each other in doing that.”

Jealousy & Betrayal

Individuals also described the different levels of comfort they had in meeting their partner's other partners. Some people found that they would tolerate, but “would not be friends with” their partner's partner. One woman said that for her, it was a requirement that if her husband was going to have more than just a sexual relationship, she would need to meet the woman. She disclosed that she felt more comfortable with her husband being with a woman if she had met her because it helps her to keep her imagination from running wild and “fear things are being hidden” from her. Another woman seconded this saying that it helped to meet her husband's girlfriends because that way she knew that the “big feelings” she was having “weren't

about the woman, because she's cool." Another woman said that she trusts her husband, however, if she hasn't met his other partners she doesn't know their integrity and intentions. Others found that their partners got along quite well. One secondary partner had started babysitting for the primary couple so they could go on dates. Two other primary couples were in discussion about moving the wife's second primary partners into their house to live.

Many experienced a related emotion of envy when their partner was on a date that sounded fun and was something that they would like to be doing. One woman said that she felt more insecure and envious if her husband did something fun and exciting with someone else than when he was just talking about someone else he was interested in. One woman also brought up that what she is jealous of is usually what she is not getting with her partner and that she witnesses her partner getting in his other relationships. This was demonstrated by one man who said that he feels very jealous when his wife, who has a low sex drive, has sex with other men because that is something he would like to do more with her and feels like he is "competing for a limited resource." He also said that he is envious of the ease with which his wife feels compersion rather than jealousy towards him and he wishes he could also experience more compersion than jealousy.

Individuals had different experiences of whether hearing about their partner's sexual or emotional experiences were more challenging. A common theme after opening up a relationship was having difficulty with their partner's sexual experience with others. After time went by and they had more practice managing this experience and relationships began to deepen, partner's emotional connections with others became more threatening. "I wish he would just go have sex with people" because for this woman, it is a container that is easier for her to understand and let happen without jealousy. Another woman said that the emotional aspect was harder because time

is such a tight commodity and, therefore, it is easy for her to feel that her time is compromised. Another woman said that hearing about her partner's sexual experiences varied from person to person but the emotional was difficult to hear about because "the heart wants what the heart wants and you can't control that." For some people, this also decreased over time. Many who had not yet had their partner experience strong emotional feelings for another said that they were very confident in the emotional connection with their partner, so their sexual relationships bothered them more. One woman found the unique experience of her partner experiencing "emotional depth and opening that happens in sex with someone they're falling for" is the hardest to hear about. For women who were bisexual, they described their partners as having experienced understanding because they knew that they could not give her what a female partner could. Usually their partners having experiences with other women was easier to hear about and was sometimes thought of as "hotter."

A few women said that the first time their husbands were with someone else, they had a "nervous breakdown" or "jealousy spiral." One woman said that it was not due to "the date or the person, but fear." "You don't know what your jealousies and insecurities are until they are in your face and you realize you're reacting to them." On the contrary, one woman said that it had taken over a year for her husband to find someone so that when he finally was with another woman she was very supportive and wanted to give him the support that he had given to her. She said that for her, "the lived experience of jealousy was much less than the anticipated jealousy."

However, jealousy was also mixed with "excitement" and "titillation" for some. One woman said that it was "cute" to see her husband feeling excited when he was getting ready for a date and then she would share this excitement for him in his new relationship energy. Another woman said that while sometimes she felt jealous of her husband's feelings for others, she also

feels a “sweetness for him” because she is happy that he is having a positive experience. Another woman echoed this by saying that she felt compersion for her husband at “seeing him get what he needs and witnessing his reactions to meeting new people.” One woman even said that she felt proud of her partner when he slept with someone who was attractive.

Another theme that came up for a few women was that they felt more jealous of their secondary partners’ actions with others than their primary partners. When asked why they think this is they said that they were very comfortable and secure in their relationships with their primary partners and felt that their secondary relationships were more fragile and vulnerable to ending. Specifically, they said that if their secondary partner started dating someone else they would feel very threatened.

Some interviewees said that they had not experienced any breeches or betrayals, yet the beginning of opening up was accompanied by the missteps of “figuring things out.” Many people said that their experiences of jealousy were very strong early on into opening up their relationship due to the unknown experience of acclimatizing to this new relationship practice. One woman disclosed that this jealousy was heightened even more because her husband’s first few relationships were with women than he had already known prior to opening up. One woman described an issue she experienced with her husband when he was on his second date when he spent an enormous amount of money on the date. In addition, he took this date on an activity that she said she would have loved to do. She observed that they had not discussed a budget for dates and was hurt because he spent more money on the date than he does with her. Another woman said that her husband was upset with her after one date when she said that she would be home by a ball-park time and was not. She said that “you do not know you’re crossing a line until you’ve crossed it” and this required being patient with each other. Even though these were not described

as betrayals that had occurred, hypothetical actions that would be were described as transgressions were dating off-limits people, getting an STI, or someone getting pregnant.

One type of betrayal disclosed was discovering a particular intimacy with another. For one participant, he said that he feels safety by knowing when his partner's other relationships were escalating, such as an attraction moving to physical intimacy. He described that on one occasion this information was not disclosed and he ended up being surprised by walking in on his partner with her other partner. One woman disclosed that she felt betrayed by her husband when he brought his girlfriend over to spend the night at their house when she was away, despite them having the rule against this. She said that this was the result of a miscommunication where he thought this would be an exception. This same woman said that she also experienced a betrayal with her boyfriend when they had plans for her to come over and she walked in on him in bed with another woman. She said that this was due to his belief that he could manage his time. That ended up not working out. Another woman disclosed an instance of betrayal at a party that she and her partner had gone to together. Prior to the evening, her partner had insisted that they not have relations with anyone else that night and just spend it together. The next day he admitted that he had slept with someone at the party. She was upset that he had not foreseen this happening, that they were not able to come to an agreement before, and that he did not follow the rule he had laid out. In these cases, this was worked through by lots of talking, disclosing feelings, processing, and relationship repair.

Another type of betrayal was the non-disclosure of a significant event, or secrecy. One woman said that she experienced a betrayal with her secondary partner, when he was coming to terms with being polyamorous. She said that he took part in secret conversations with other women that were sexual by nature because he was afraid to disclose this to her. This was difficult

for her because “it’s the opposite of what we are trying to do in polyamory.” One man said that a partner with whom he had been in a polyamorous relationship did not disclose that she was dating someone else. This secrecy was something he defined as “cheating.”

Fear and insecurity were universal emotions that were felt in the relationship, particularly at the beginning. One woman said that she felt that she wasn’t as important as the other woman her husband was dating and worried she would be replaced. Most women said that they feared their partner would find someone who was easier, simpler, more fun, smarter, hotter, sexier, or better in bed. Men also said they feared their partner would find someone funnier or smarter. One woman also said that she worried her husband would find someone who was heterosexual rather than bisexual and, therefore, “easier” than she was. Another woman said that she worried her husband would think of other women when he was with her. Another woman said ultimately, she feared being abandoned by her husband. She was apprehensive that her husband would develop stronger feelings for someone else than he had for her, or that he would find someone more exciting. Another woman worried that her husband would want to start another family and have more children with someone else. One process that interviewees described that helped them work through these fears was when they discovered that they were not tempted to leave their own partner after being with people who were hotter or smarter, it brought them comfort that this was most likely happening for their partners as well. It reaffirmed “how highly [they] thought of each other.”

Opening up was also described as being particularly fraught with challenges due to the real-life practicalities of being in a long-term relationship. One woman disclosed that since she and her partner do not have a lot of time together, sometimes seeing other people takes a toll. It puts pressure on their lacking intimacy and time spent together at times. She said that she does,

“have some ambivalence in [her] relationship.” When she feels that attraction and desire toward another partner, this deficit is highlighted. Yet she also says that there is a safety and security in her sexual connection to her partner that is not present with others. Another woman described that her and her partner first opened up when they had opposite schedules. She experienced this strain as being exacerbated by dating other people, which meant that they were not prioritizing their relationship. This caused them to come close to ending their relationship.

Jealousy was described as something that could be worked through by the person experiencing the emotion. A common theme was the sense that in order to work with jealousy, it was necessary to experience a shift in view by realizing that you are “choosing to feel jealous.” One woman describes it as something “you can either deal with by having self-awareness, opening up about your feelings and knowing it’s not about your husband and on him to fix.” One piece that was emphasized by multiple people was their adjustment in realizing that jealousy does not mean that their partner needs to change their behaviour in order for them to feel better. However, this shift can be very powerful because it allows you to “work through this and know that you don’t need to feel jealous.” The work involved in being poly is “having a willingness to go through those uncomfortable feelings.” One woman felt that “it’s okay to feel whatever you feel, but it’s about deciding to move forward together.” Another woman said that when she is feeling jealous, she takes her partner “in more and feels what the meaningfulness of his experience” is. When she focuses on how much she loves him and wants him to have a positive experience, she can feel happier for him.

While partners were not burdened with the responsibility of absolving the jealousy, there was a role for them in supporting their partner through this emotion. Multiple interviewees stated that what they find helpful is when they express these feelings to their partner and this disclosure

is met, not with “don’t be jealous,” but “I’d probably feel jealous too, I still love you.” It is also helpful when the “partner doesn’t take the disclosure personally, assuming they’ve done something wrong” and “provides extra care to help them through it.” Having a space where they can “talk about and process feelings of jealous” help partners to work through. It was echoed that by allowing themselves to feel the feeling, they realize that they were okay even though nothing has changed. One man said that being able to release these feelings and not hold onto them alone was healing. He expressed the belief that since we have a universal fear of being unseen, when a partner listens in a non-reactive way, you feel that your partner “sees you.” This can be sufficient without a behaviour change.

Despite jealousy being an overpowering emotion at times, participants found ways to overcome it. One woman stated that she is very aware of the difference between a 12-year relationship and a brand-new relationship in regards to the feelings, excitement, and newness so she tries not to compare both and makes an effort to appreciate what her partner brings that she does not have with someone else. Another woman said that even though she felt jealous, she has tried to open herself up because “it’s deepened our relationship, being free to do what you want and talk about what you want.” One man said that to work through his feeling of insecurity he tries to find his center where he can come back to the love he has for himself knowing that he is all that he needs.

Clinical Practice

Some individuals had not gone to therapy, others had seen non-poly friendly therapists, and others had seen therapists who marketed themselves as working with polyamorous individuals or were polyamorous themselves. The most prevalent comment from those who had been in therapy was that it is helpful when the therapist demonstrates an open-minded, non-

judgemental attitude. They specified that a general knowledge of what polyamory is and the difference between this and other types of CNM relationships was significant. Another common theme was that the therapist would be supportive despite what their personal beliefs about the lifestyle were. “Not judging someone for doing something just because you wouldn’t do it yourself.” One woman specified that this belief should be genuine and not just an act because it is observable. Another woman said that a therapist should know that, “there isn’t an underlying issue to why a person wants multiple partners.” In addition, being careful about the language used and never assuming two people are just a dyadic “couple.”

Examples were given for what a clinician can do to help facilitate useful therapeutic work. Suggestions included helping partners find out what they need to keep the relationship healthy and helping individuals discover what kind of approach they would like to take to polyamory. It was also reiterated that the therapist should know that “99/100 of the time polyamory is not the issue, it’s a relationship issue.” One woman described her relationship as not being defined by polyamory and sees it as no different to other healthy relationships. Another piece of work suggested is to help the couple continue to tend to their connection. How can they work to stay connected to each other? How carve out quality time for just them? Another consideration mentioned was being able to figure out who should be involved in the therapeutic process because “none of the relationships stand in isolation.”

It was suggested that therapists ask some poignant and difficult questions to help guide polyamorous clients to explore what polyamory means to them. One man suggested important questions for partners to ask each other and themselves are: “What do I get out of my relationships?”; “Where does my comfort and confidence in our bond come from?”; “What is it that I get out of my partner?”; “What are my insecurities?” Another element (suggested by a

woman as something that she had previously overlooked) is that a knowledgeable therapist consider how jealousy may show up for secondary partners.

Knowledge of polyamory and the places where individuals commonly experience difficulties is requisite for good therapy. One woman mentioned that it would be helpful for the therapist to know the “pitfalls of negotiation and rules, such as that resentments can grow if you create too rigid of a structure because it doesn’t allow things to breathe and grow.” She made an analogy of the secondary partner being like the “Disneyland parent” that gets to do all the fun parts of relationships. She said a helpful question for therapists to ask is, “what are you experiencing in other relationships that informs you of what you need to cultivate in this relationship?” They should have “an awareness of the usual places where there are hiccups but focus on the relationship.” One woman found that opposite scheduling created a large disconnect in their relationship that was exacerbated by opening it up. She suggested that having a therapist point out this potential issue and help them find a way to work through it would have been helpful.

Another woman said that it would be helpful for the therapist to know that even though they are in a “consensually non-monogamous relationship, jealousy and insecurity still have a place in the relationship.” Individuals are not immune to it and that it is okay for it to come up and work through it. She said that friends of hers would always be surprised that she still experienced jealousy and this misconception can serve to eliminate room to process and move through these feelings. Another woman echoed a hope that the therapist would be able to “normalize insecurity and jealousy that can get activated.” Another woman said that her jealousy stemmed from her lack of self-esteem and self-confidence and would want help with this from a therapist.

Therapists were described to have a specific role in helping partners work through jealousy and experiences of betrayal. In helping the partner process jealousy, “counsellors can create a safe space where people can share insecurities and fears and have feelings – not having them at our partner, but having them at the therapist who can contain them, put them back at you, take them apart, and put them back together.” “What helps with jealousy is being able to walk into the deeper stuff, not just the rage at the top, by moving to deep insecurity, where does that come from, and then how do we move forward and how do I move forward with myself?”

Also important is acknowledging that if this is a private experience for the couple, it can be very isolating when friends and family are unaware of this large part of their life. Sometimes their partner is the only one they have to talk to about their lifestyle and issues that come up. This can also be problematic when you just want to “complain about your husband’s girlfriend.” “It’s hard to open up to friends because you don’t know what judgments you will receive.” “You already feel shame from society and when it is expressed in a relationship it validates your shame.” Another woman said that when she realized that she loved both her husband and boyfriend equally, she felt pressure from her friends to pick one, “due to ingrained monogamy from the message that TV and movies tell you that you always have to choose.” In addition, because this can be an “underground lifestyle” for some, secondary partners may feel left out by not being able to meet a partner’s family and friends, an experience of one woman who felt this pressure from her secondary partner. This can create a real “tug of war internally.” She felt that “it shouldn’t be a shameful thing because you’re genuinely connecting with someone and falling in love and it’s very constructive, there’s nothing bad about it.”

Benefits

While polyamory involved many personal challenges, it was also said to have many positive influences on primary partner's relationships. One of the benefits of polyamory described was that the polyamorous lifestyle allowed people to get needs met that were otherwise not able to be met in their monogamous relationship. Two interviewees said that they were able to get their BDSM needs met outside of their primary relationship. Some women could express their bisexuality in their secondary relationships. Several women expressed being able to get the entirety of their emotional needs met between multiple partners that their primary partner could not fill alone. One man said that he was able to get his sexual needs met by having multiple relationships since he and his primary partner have discussed their different interest in amount and types of sex. One man said that when his primary partner is having sex with other partners, their sex life improves and increases. Another woman said that her and her partner feared their sex life would be impacted and were pleasantly surprised when it was not negatively affected. One perk of having a primary partner, one woman shared, is the "continuous emotional support" while exploring relationships and interactions with other people. Another woman described her husband as her best friend so "it's nice to tell him about this stuff."

Polyamory was described as intersecting with men's male identities. One participant disclosed that when he was younger he had an "extreme experience of possessiveness over a friend" and decided that he didn't want to feel that way again in the future. Later he discovered that this was farther than jealousy and was actually extreme chauvinism. Another man said that he had always struggled with the idea that you had to "be all things" for your partner and felt guilty that he had a high sex drive and would think of other people while he had a girlfriend. Growing up he said that he had shame around having an uncomfortable relationship with his

masculine identity and felt that “the narrative around men about having a constant voracious sexual appetite was a bad thing” and so felt that his “desire for multiple partners was shameful and a bad part of [his] masculine identity.” Therefore, becoming polyamorous allowed him to feel relief that this style of relationship enabled validation and a place for the expression of this aspect of his sexuality.

There was also seen to be gender differences in the ease of acquiring a partner and type of relationships had by interviewees. A common theme that came up was that men seem to have a more difficult time finding other partners than women did. Not going on dates could lead the men to experience envy. “Due to classic systemic bias, it’s harder for men to meet people because if they say, “no my wife’s cool with it,” women don’t always believe that.” Women were more likely to disclose that they had longer-term relationships or a serious secondary partner, while men said they had more one-night-stands or short-term relationships.

Conversely, expression of female identity was impacted when women allowed polyamory into their lives. One woman said that as the years when on she realized that there was part of herself that she hadn’t had a chance to explore and wanted to. Becoming polyamorous allowed several women to explore and express an aspect of their sexuality that was dormant in their monogamous relationships with men. “If I could have done it younger I would have and I think I would have been happier.” One woman said that her whole identity was based on her role as a wife and mom. “I was losing myself.” Which also lead her to feeling a “toxic” level of jealousy towards her husband. What helped her work through this was remembering that before she was “a wife, mother, even a woman [she is] a human with likes and dislikes and that matters.” Therefore, polyamory helped her find her individuality again and see herself in roles

outside of the traditional ones she was inhabiting. It has allowed her to reclaim her identity and sexuality.

Chapter Five: Discussion

When taking on this project, my initial hope was to connect with 5-6 individuals about their experiences of being in a polyamorous relationship. I was overwhelmed with the flood of volunteers from the Facebook groups and ended up having to set a limit after I received 12 people who were interested. I was also struck by the honesty and openness of the responses individuals were imparting, especially given the highly personal nature of the questions asked. While I was met with some hesitation in the emails about whether I was “for” or “against” polyamory due to fear of judgment and a need for assurance of confidentiality, I received genuine, vulnerable, unguarded responses. I was also granted patience and space from the interviewees that allowed me to take on the role of a curious learner.

When I was seeking participants, I was met with a few comments about how I was only seeking primary partners, which naturally excluded other forms of practicing polyamory. Unfortunately, I had to specify my population in some way due to the limited scope of the study. I understand that in some ways this plays into perpetuating more “socially acceptable” forms of this controversial relationship style. My aim for the study was to gain insight into the deep communication process that occurs in commitment relationships that are also characterized by other sexual and romantic partners. My assumption was that a greater level of communication would occur in a marriage or marriage-like relationship, rather than shorter-term casual dating relationships. I ultimately did draw this conclusion based on the interview responses. Due to this assumption that I brought into the project, I chose to work exclusively with individuals in a relationship characterized by high commitment to observe this journey of communication.

To place myself in context to this project, I situate myself as a self-identified monogamous, hetero-sexual female. There is a long-held assumption in the helping profession

that to provide the most competent practice, clinicians need to work with populations with whom they share the personal experience of the presenting issue or situation with. However, not once was it mentioned by an interviewee that they would only work with a therapist who was themselves polyamorous. Unfortunately, for a population that faces so much stigmatization, this risk was described by participants as usually being reduced by seeing a clinician who also practices polyamory. Therefore, the aim of this work was to shed more light on the real world personal accounts of the experience of being in a polyamorous relationship. The wisdom shared that had been gained by these individuals over the years can be used to assist other individuals entering or maintaining this type of relationship as well as for clinicians to have a better understanding of the lived experience of practicing this style of relationships. For that reason, it appears that rather than having personal experience, it was of greater importance for clients to view their therapist as holding a non-judgmental and accepting attitude as well as having a willingness to challenge assumptions they may hold.

The main theme that this project was based around was the use of communication as an essential tool to sustain and manage relationships. Communication was used for affirming, repairing, negotiating, expressing feeling, updating, and connecting. Affirming was done to assure partners that while they were having exciting and new experiences with others, they still value their primary relationship and what their partner brings to their unique connection. Repairing was done after contact had occurred that in some way crossed a line. This would include mending the relationship rupture as well as planning for different outcomes in the future. Negotiating occurred not only at the beginning of the opening process but throughout the relationship to decide how they wanted to create this unique bond between themselves and find compromises for different desires, level of comfort, and any challenging situations that arose.

Communication was also used in the expression of the range of feelings that came up while conducting this relationship: love, pride, joy, jealousy, insecurity, uncertainty, excitement, attraction and many more. Updating kept both primary as well as secondary partners well informed of interactions and feelings of others. This included debriefing and checking in with their primary partner while on dates, checking in with how other partners were doing after dates with others, as well as checking in with partner's spouses regarding consent. Connecting was done with new partners, and was also used for maintaining a close connection with the primary partner. Participants expressed that this style of being in a relationship allowed them the opportunity to constantly learn new ways of participating in their relationship. This allowed some people to finally learn what they wanted from relationships as well as how to ask for it. In addition, they stated that these relationships give them the opportunity to grow and learn about not only about themselves, but also about new ways of being in relationships with others. Furthermore, they found that the constant discovery of new insight helps to prevent the relationship from becoming or remaining stagnant. This relationship style often was experienced as a catalyst that led partners to having more open and honest conversations than they had previously experienced in their relationship, even for some who had been together for over a decade.

One of the criticisms of polyamory is that it is a way for people dissatisfied with their current partnership to have the opportunity to be "allowed to cheat." Therefore, it was very interesting to hear about all the unique stories that led each individual to choose to be in or change their relationship to a polyamorous one. It was never mentioned that the reason for opening up was a discontent with their current partner. On the contrary, the overwhelming consensus was that participants were very satisfied with their current relationship, but wanted

additional experiences to love to their full capacity. Even further, interestingly, it allowed them to grow closer and more connected to their current partner. A commonly experienced worry was that loving multiple people would detract from the love and caring one had for their original partner. Alternatively, this research suggests that opening up was beneficial to their existing relationship in ways that they had never experienced before. In addition, many people felt closer and more bonded as partners than ever before.

I appreciated how this style of relationship derived from the intentional questioning of monogamy, resulting in the decision that it did not work for these particular individuals. This style of relationship allows for a customization of the structure and amount of intimacy that works for you personally, simultaneously reducing dependence on one's partner to provide the exact amount while providing it for them. This addresses the historical shift arising from the loss of a village of people available to meet an individual's needs. Currently, the expectation that a partner will be the sole provider of all their lover's emotional, sexual, physical, and spiritual needs continues to be problematic. Polyamory is a way for individuals and their partners to get the amount of sex, emotional support, excitement, familiarity, and intimacy that they desire, even if this is not a direct match. Monogamous relationships are still based on this structure. Polyamory manifests as a resistance to this way of pursuing one's needs. One fact was clear: what worked for one person did not necessarily work for others. It is unlikely that each partner is capable of fully satisfying another person's needs to the fullest degree without compromising their own. While individuals in monogamous relationships may have accepted this compromise, polyamory involves a desire for a new way of being that allows for more of their needs to be fully met. This also places enormous pressure on each individual and leads to disappointment in a partner when they are unable to meet their significant other's entire needs. In addition, it may

result in a relationship ending, in hopes that another will be able to satisfy a greater number of these needs. Instead, polyamory has been used to supplement needs with another person without having to terminate a relationship that does meet all of their needs.

Another interesting revelation was the dual nature of rules. They appeared to be both a positive tool used to build trust and create safety when branching into this new relationship territory, as well as becoming barriers to the desired freedom of experience. Rules seemed to be derived from situations or actions that would have felt like a betrayal at one time. Having safeguards in place appeared to bring some relief that helped individuals titrate the amount of extra-dyadic involvement they would have to experience their partner taking part in until they were ready to experience it. Additionally, it allowed them to reduce the challenges of having to process particularly sensitive information (such as a partner having a sleep over, having sex with someone in their bed, or falling in love) until a later date. On the other hand, rules were sometimes described as outgrowing their usefulness and crossed the line to a restrictive boundary. It was said that creating specific rules could create a narrow box in which the relationship exists, in that it constrains spontaneity, minimizes the rule of intuition and impedes the experience of a natural flow. This sometimes led to individuals feeling resentment at having an activity or person that was “off limits,” potentially leading them to desire it more. As was said by one participant, the art is meeting your partner at “the edge of fears and expectations” and continuously assessing where this line is, as the relationship evolves.

I learned from this project that there are some common pitfalls that come up when transitioning from a monogamous to polyamorous relationship. Additionally, polyamory appeared to magnify some of the concerns and challenges that are also present in monogamous relationships. This magnification forced individuals to deal with these problems rather than just living with them or

not working through them. Opening up also appeared to allow people the opportunity and setting to make the choice to do psychological work on themselves that they had not previously done. One thing that individuals mentioned was how they had felt possessive jealousy of their partner for the duration of their relationship for years. While they had managed this previously, their partner being with other people required them to finally examine, process, and work through this gripping emotion. Another challenge was the practicalities of sharing the running of a household, working, maintaining multiple relationships, childcare, all the while dedicating separate time to dating your primary partner. These challenges appeared to be common, if not inevitable. In today's modern society, the glorification of being busy has become the norm. This, along with the shift toward more women in the work force, while still upholding household and childcare tasks, requires work to prioritize the relationship, especially for parents of children. Mentioned multiple times was that individuals had a realization shortly after opening up that they did not have quality time together with their primary partner that did not involve grocery shopping or talking about the kids. This was exacerbated by the further reduction of time by dating others. Partners came to realize how intentional they had to be in creating a space for prioritizing the primary relationship as the new and exciting secondary relationship could easily use up all the limited available time and energy. It appears that affirmations and actions that done to make the primary partner feel that they were a priority were done to combat this feeling of disconnection. This assurance may have previously been implicitly assumed when it was just the two individuals, but after adding other partners and the accompanying insecurities, this process had to shift to being explicitly done to reassure commitment and caring for their primary partner. Resulting from this magnification effect, many partnerships were motivated to examine and

adjust these long-standing patterns, which appears to have led to a strengthening of their relationship following the opening up.

There seemed to be a universal feeling of insecurity that arose when working through and exploring deeply the feeling of jealousy. As mentioned, “you don’t know what your insecurities are until they’re right in your face.” Individuals expressed that they were finally compelled to face these insecurities when triggering situation arose. Many participants said that when they were feeling extremely jealous, their process of working through it involved looking deeply within themselves to discover the root of what was causing this painful feeling. They said that at the foundation was a feeling of insecurity about being enough that, and that ultimately, this would cause their partner to leave them to be with someone “better.” There seemed to be present a universal experience of insecurity, fear of abandonment, surveillance of oneself for signs of inferiority, and comparison, for both the men and women. Ultimately, a few processes were mentioned to work through this insecurity. One was realizing that being with additional partners only grew their love and appreciation for their primary partner and understanding that this process was most likely mutually happening for their partner. Also mentioned was refocusing on the happiness their partner was experiencing and taking that happiness in for themselves. Finally, there was a reconnection with the love one has for oneself in realizing they are all they need.

It also appeared that while individuals could plan for opening up their relationship by reading books and having lengthy discussions with their partner, there is no way to fully prepare for the experiences of polyamory. Even after copious amounts of planning and discussion, situations still arose that triggered strong emotional responses and caught individuals by surprise, sometimes resulting in betrayal and hurt. It appeared that most breaches occur around areas not properly discussed beforehand. As was mentioned by multiple participants, you can never

prepare for every situation, expressed by one man joking with the example, “I can’t believe you took them to my favourite ice-cream shop!” You can only hypothesize so much and, therefore, it is hard to predict and control everything. In addition, even though individuals were trying to be attentive to their partner, sometimes one does not know that a line has been crossed until too late. It was said to be inevitable that some areas would not have been properly explored before they occurred, so to combat this element of the unknown and unpredictable, continuous conversation appeared to be a necessity, requiring patience as mistakes unfold during the process. Even when partnerships became confident in their ability to handle anything that came up for them in their relationships after many years of practice, situations still arose which demonstrated a need to be communicating and processing together, even if it was to a lesser degree than in earlier struggles, including those of opening up. I found that during each interview, someone would mention a facet of relationships that I had never considered before, such as the example of setting a spending limit for dates, that illustrates this inability to forecast all situations before they occur.

Another key concept was the importance and centrality of jealousy and the belief that it can be processed and worked through if given the space to be explored, accepted, and then allowed to move on. As mentioned, jealousy was experienced by every person in the study at some time or another, demonstrating how widespread the experience is, especially in loving relationships. Often, in our society, jealousy is seen as something that requires a partner to adapt their behaviour to eliminate their partner’s sense of threat to the relationship. However, rather than accepting it as a suffering they must endure, individuals in polyamorous relationships worked to move through this and take back the power of their own emotional states. This involves reframing jealousy to “I’m choosing to feel jealous.” This process of working through jealousy even resulted in individuals getting to a place where they could not only feel happy, but

also excited and happy for their partner in being with someone else. On the other side of the relationship, there was also an acceptance and release of feeling responsible for one's partner's feelings. Rather, there was an allowance for and owning of feelings of jealousy and for letting go of shame for what was being disclosed in conversation. While this information may hurt your partner, it means owning it rather than hiding it. Also expressed was that this process is not just exclusive to jealousy and works identically with desire. By working to be open to both of these emotions, when they threaten to burst out of the subconscious, and instead to let them flow through, they can be experienced and then released.

Another powerful message seemingly held in many of these relationships is that there is no security in a relationship enduring simply because commitment is promised. An assumption expressed by multiple interviewees is that there is no way to protect a relationship or ensure that it will not end. Some interviewees mentioned that they had come to embrace this belief after opening up their relationship and accepting a non-possessive view of love. By opening up the possibility of limitless love, individuals realized that they actually choose every day to be with their partner and that this is what commitment means to them. "You can nourish it, but you ultimately have to choose it every day," is a clear expression of this sentiment. Accepting polyamory seemed to condition a release of the false sense of security held by some individuals that two people will always maintain the same type of relationship that they currently enjoy. Rather than protecting a relationship based on the fear of it ending, relationships were described as being tended to and nourished out of love. With this, came an acceptance that relationships may shift in nature over time, but do not necessarily need to end. This is a practice that is worthy of consideration for therapists collaborating with partners, regardless of the nature of their relationship.

When exploring the process that individuals went through while deciding to open up their relationship a few expressed that they experienced distress at the thought of wanting to be with other people since they were in a loving and satisfying relationship with their partner. This demonstrates the strong current of monogamy as the societal norm of practicing relationships. Many of the individuals in polyamorous relationships find this way of being very natural and have had to battle with the judgment and shame that came from a lifetime of exposure to monogamous culture. These messages are instilled through songs and movies where almost always pictured is a monogamous couple and the idea that you grow up, find your soul mate, and live happily ever after with them and only them. This culture of monogamy led to internalized shame for interviewees due to the experience of judgment from friends, therapists, or themselves. Some of the instances where shame and judgment were described as being present for individuals were when they desired to be with other people while they were already with a partner, when feeling like they had to choose between two primary loves, and when deciding to “come out” to friends and family. For many, finding the practice of polyamory validated these urges they otherwise had to repress in traditional monogamous relationships. As one participant said, one of the ways that polyamory acts is to “dismantle patriarchy and possessiveness” that has dominated western relationships for years, if not centuries, allowing for a new way of being in relationships that matches the natural flow of love and desire we experience in a lifetime.

Many people interviewed mentioned that, particularly at the beginning of the opening up process, when their partners went on their first few dates, it was an extremely difficult and upsetting experience for them. Many said that they were at home all night processing and ruminating in feelings of jealousy, insecurity, and fear. One woman went so far as to say she had a “melt down” the night of her husband’s first time sleeping with another partner. A few said that

it caused them sadness and great difficulty that they could not share this large part of their life with others. In contrast, one interviewee mentioned that he is part of a community of support, so that when one's partner goes on a date, someone will come sit with you and spend the evening so you are not alone to dwell in your feelings. Polyamory, at its roots, is based in the idea of community-building to find new ways of having multiple connections to counterbalance the isolation of modern coupledness that was once provided by the close connections to social and religious communities distinguishing the time hundreds of years ago (Perel, 2017). However, in our modern society, with a strong undercurrent of shame, many polyamorous individuals are sentenced to embarking on this journey of increased connection in the shadows, still closeted to close family and friends. Isolation due to the reality of the judgment surrounding polyamory exists in sharp contrast to the idea of the promises of the practice.

Another societal effect was found in the differences of gendered experiences. Cultural norms emerged that influenced experiences of the practice that were related to gender and sexual orientation. It was expressed that a common finding is that it is more challenging for men to find partners because there is this suspicion that when they openly share that their wife is aware of and okay with them being with other people, that this is a deception to acquire sex. The fact that male partners had an easier time when their female bisexual partners were with women than men demonstrate the common belief that female to female sexual encounters are desirable and "hot." One bisexual woman disclosed that she had not met many bisexual women in the community and, therefore, it was more difficult for her to find support and hear others' personal experiences. This is another instance of potentially further stigmatization when factoring in sexual orientation. For some women, polyamory was a way to reclaim a personal identity separate from that of a wife and mother. Through participating in multiple relationships and refocusing on what they

want to get out of relationships, it appears that this helps some women to hold on to their personal identity, preserving it from melding it into their primary partner. These factors seem related to beliefs about men's promiscuity and focus on sex, the sexual desirability of lesbian sexual experiences, and the idea that women as wives and mothers give to their family at the detriment of their identity and sense of themselves as independent individuals.

As mentioned previously, when eliciting participants, I was met with some hesitation and fear of judgment, which I believe shows the caution with which polyamorous individuals often have to share this aspect of their lives with others. Many accounts were given of previous therapy experiences with clinicians who shamed, blamed, misunderstood, and discredited individuals trying to explore this style of relationship. I believe this highlights the imperative that we as clinicians strive to remain unbiased, open, and conscious of ways we can further oppress and stigmatize this, or any, population with our language. As pointed out by one participant, the use of the word "couple," something highly utilized in relationship therapy, can be exclusionary in this context. In addition, the awareness that for all the individuals interviewed, they had one relationship that was the "socially sanctioned relationship" and the privileges that this entails, and others that were not acknowledge to this extent, if at all, in the public eye and what effect this had.

I note that the more people I interviewed, the more confident I was that I had found patterns I was expecting to find. However, this was disproven multiple times, which demonstrated the diversity of the experience of polyamory. I came with the assumption that primary partners or spouses would elicit a higher commitment from individuals than their secondary partner. That was until one participant said that if she had to choose between her husband and her boyfriend, she would choose her boyfriend. Another interesting finding was the

commonality that individuals felt more jealousy for their secondary partner than their primary. I held the assumption that primary partners would elicit more feeling of jealousy than short-term partners, and again I was incorrect. I also assumed that each participant would use explicit communication when they were in the process of opening up and negotiating a relationship. However, one man I spoke to said that he and his partner went through decades of miscommunications due to never explicitly discussing the boundaries of their relationship. This was humbling because it led me to realize that it is necessary to never assume these “givens,” even ones that seem obvious. This demonstrates how practitioners are vulnerable of slipping into this trap, even after increasing their knowledge of polyamory. For the woman who felt that her long-term commitment was higher for her boyfriend than her husband, she disclosed that she was hesitant to volunteer due to her uncertainty of being “right” for the project by not fitting the mold. Accordingly, we must exercise caution in making assumptions. As clinicians, we may be misled by unexamined assumptions. This may be exclusionary and demeaning to clients.

There is also a strong need for clinicians to assist in supporting individuals who practice this style of relationships. Many participants described harmful experiences with clinicians who were too strongly invested in their own views on relationships and impart this to the clients. By using their role to allow space for relational processes to be safely played out, validating all feelings including jealousy; fostering partners’ ability to non-defensively listen; helping partners reaffirm their commitment to one another; helping individuals ground more interactions in love than in fear; and helping primary partners nurture their special connection, clinicians can join in supporting polyamorous clients on their journey.

This area warrants further research and exploration due to the growing acceptance and knowledge of this relationship style, sexual identity and lifestyle. Future research could

explore the communication process that occurs in more casual or non-hierarchical polyamorous relationships. The most essential finding arising from this work is the imperative to check assumptions and use caution to minimize or eliminate further stigmatization of an already marginalized population involved in questioning traditional practices of monogamy, who have found and continue to explore an alternative practice of limitless love.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board
Certificate of Approval

IRB ID# Wallace_Sanders082318

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Principal Investigator (if faculty research):

Student Researcher: Meghan Wallace?

Faculty Advisor: Colin Sanders

Department: DAS M Counselling

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Title: ~~The Lived Experience of Negotiating a Polyamorous Relationship.~~

Approved on: August 23, 2018

?

Renewal Date: August 23, 2019?

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- Full Board Meeting Date of IRB meeting: _____?
- Expedited Review (US) ?
- Delegated Review (Can) ?
- Exempt (US)?

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CERTIFICATION

City University of Seattle has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The Faculty Advisor Colin Sanders and the student researcher Meghan Wallace have the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original Ethical Review Protocol submitted for ethics review. This **Certificate of Approval** is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol, consent process, or documents. Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board in advance of its implementation.

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ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the IRB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion.



Brian Guthrie Ph D, RSW, RCSW ?
 Chair, IRB City University of Seattle?