Polyamory or Polyagony?
Jealousy in Open Relationships

by

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Abstract

Polyamory is the contemporary practice of consensual and responsible non-monogamy. Using qualitative, open-ended interviews, I spoke with twenty-two queer, polyamorous women in Vancouver, Canada, about how and why they practice polyamory and specifically how jealousy is experienced, expressed and re-imagined in their relationships. Through the development of a polyamorous philosophy and subculture, polyamorists rethink *feeling rules* about love, relationships and jealousy with the goal of attaining *compersion*, a term developed by polyamorists to describe the emotional experience of pleasure felt in relation to a lover's sexual and/or emotional connection with other people. It is through their participation in the polyamorous community and engagement with its philosophy that polyamorists shift their embodiment of emotion. Jealousy is connected to power relations; therefore I explore how polyamorists are affected by Western cultural regulation of sexuality and emotion, as well as how they rethink power relations within their personal dynamics. Using sociology of emotion, feminist intersectionality theory, queer theory, critical sexualities theory and an insider research methodology, I document a moment of this sexual subculture's process and illustrate its numerous emotional challenges, punned poly*agony*.

Dedication

For AJ Murray: Thank you for making polyamory possible in my life and for being my Editing Guardian Angel. And for talking over my ideas at every stage of this process. This dissertation would look completely different without you.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Concluding Remarks

Chapter 1 - But Don't You Get Jealous?

When discussing polyamory, the two most common responses I receive are, "I could never do that; I would get too jealous" and "where do you find the time?" While the time question remains a mystery, I find the issue of jealousy absolutely fascinating. The assumptions implied in this remark sparked my research into how polyamorists are affected by jealousy. Popular wisdom suggests that non-monogamy is impossible; if one's lover has sexual encounters outside the relationship, jealousy will be the inevitable and intolerable outcome. At the same time, jealousy is viewed as a sign of love, and thus the expected and correct reaction to a partner's sexual and/or romantic activities outside of the relationship. By this logic, we would expect polyamory to be the cause of jealousy and monogamy to be the cure. Yet there is no shortage of stories of jealousy in otherwise monogamous relationships. By engaging in multiple relationships, polyamorists do exactly what popular culture deems dangerous and unsavory. Polyamorous people may indeed experience jealousy, but the circumstances are different, and consequently the experience and embodiment of jealousy is also different from dominant portrayals of jealousy. My research explores the question: how, and why, do polyamorists manage jealousy?

Non-monogamy has existed throughout most of recorded human history (Clanton & Smith, 1977; Mead, 1968; Ryan & Jetha, 2010). Contemporary Western culture,

however, privileges monogamy as a natural and superior form of family and relationship organization (Ryan & Jetha, 2010). Within the last few decades, *polyamory* has emerged as a "burgeoning sexual story" (Barker, 2005), with its own particular discourse and cultural practice. Polyamory is commonly defined as a form of non-monogamy where people maintain multiple, simultaneous sexual and emotional relationships and where all parties are aware and consenting (Sheff, 2005; Haritaworn, Lin & Kleese, 2006). Polyamory (often called *poly* by its practitioners) differs from swinging in its emphasis on emotional intimacy and longer-term commitments. Polyamory differs from polygamy (wherein a husband can have several wives) in its emphasis on gender equality; in polyamory both men and women are free to have multiple partners. Polyamory differs from adultery in its focus on honesty, consent and full disclosure by all parties involved (Sheff, 2005). The word *polyamory* is used to describe a sexual identity, sexual preference, discourse, politic, practice and/or philosophy. In my study, I look at the range of uses of the word and how people who espouse polyamory do and do not abide by these criteria.

The term polyamory was coined in 1990 by Morning-Glory Zell[1], a self-proclaimed polyamorist, and the terms *polyamory, polyamorist,* and *polyamorous* officially entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 2006.[2] The term polyamory stems from the Greek word *poly*, meaning many, and the Latin word *amor*, meaning love.[3] Since it was coined, the term polyamory has been adopted and expanded upon by increasing numbers of people. Unlike many sexual identities that were named by

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[1] The first use of the word polyamory was by Zell in *Green Egg* Magazine, 89 (May 1990), in the article "Bouquet of Lovers" (Robins, 2004).
[2] http://www.oed.com/help/updates/pleb-Pomak.html
[3] Notably, the combination of multiple linguistic roots is troubling to some strict grammarians.

scientific 'experts,' the term polyamory emerged from within the community itself and polyamorists have worked to have the term recognized as a legitimate sexual identity category (such as by the Kinsey Institute)[4]. Polyamorists continue to educate each other as well as psychological institutions that care for those who practice polyamory (Weitzman, 1999; 2006). Consensual non-monogamy has experienced a "massive resurgence of interest in the new millennium" (Barker & Langdridge, 2010, p.748), within academia as well as popular culture, including celebrities 'coming out' as polyamorous.[5] Prior to 2005, there was very little written about polyamory specifically (as opposed to other forms of non-monogamy) within academia (Sheff, 2005). Since this time there has been a proliferation of academic research on polyamory (Barker & Langdridge, 2010; Haritaworn, Lin & Kleese, 2006).

Plummer (2001) developed the concept of *emotion world* to describe the way in which a culture's words and concepts shape people's emotional responses. Polyamorist theory critiques the "dominant assumptions of the normalcy and naturalness of monogamy" (Barker and Langdridge, 2010, p. 750), dubbed *compulsory monogamy* or *mono-normativity* (Pieper and Bauer, 2005; Ritchie & Barker, 2006), its norms regarding emotion, sexuality and heterosexuality and thus how it shapes people's view of relationships (Ritchie & Barker, 2006; Sheff, 2006). In Western culture, for example, the idea of sexual exclusivity is part of our emotion world; it is held up as the epitome of love and commitment and hence any digression from this path is constructed as if it should be met with distrust and jealousy. Polyamorists try to re-craft their approach to love, relationships, sexuality and emotions in ways that minimize instances of jealousy. They

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[4] http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/
[5] One prominent example is actress Tilda Swinton who came out as polyamorous.

3

strive to replace jealousy with *compersion*, a term used by polyamorous people to describe feelings of pleasure in response to a lover's romantic and/or sexual encounters outside the relationship. One aspect of this emotion world is its *feeling rules*, a concept Hochschild (1979) developed to refer to the cultural norms that dictate how one is supposed to feel in a given situation. The polyamorist movement questions the feeling rules associated with monogamy, romantic love and jealousy, and has developed alternate feeling rules, creating norms and strategies that steer their practice as a culture, as opposed to each individual negotiating jealousy in isolation. These rules include ways to initiate communication, negotiate boundaries and structure disclosure. By doing so, polyamorists attempt to create a lifestyle where jealousy is neither inevitable nor intolerable, and where the emotional experience of compersion is not only possible, but actually common. Thus, my research asks, what are these polyamorous feeling rules? In what way do these rules inform polyamorists' embodied experience of jealousy? How, and to what extent do polyamorists resist the regulation of emotion and sexuality and create alternatives that better meet their needs? To what extent do these re-imagined emotion worlds translate into instances of compersion or do they merely reproduce the dominant model that they are attempting to re-envision?

For my research, I used qualitative, semi-structured, open-ended interviews to talk with twenty-two self-identified queer, lesbian and/or bisexual polyamorous women in Vancouver, Canada, about how and why they practice polyamory and how they experience, manage and re-imagine jealousy within open relationships. The central questions I sought to understand were:

What stories of jealousy emerge from the culture and experience of queer, polyamorous women in Vancouver?

How does a re-imagining of love and jealousy shift embodied affect?

What challenges, contradictions and tensions exist within polyamorous culture?

Is the experience of *polyamory* enough to overcome *polyagony*?[6]

Polyagony is a tongue-in-cheek polyamorous term to remind us that jealousy can sometimes be excruciatingly painful. My interest in this "ugly feeling" (Ngai, 2005) stems in part from the soft taboo surrounding jealousy. While jealousy is expected in the dominant culture, it is often accompanied by embarrassment. As a result, people tend to downplay their jealousy and recast their behavior as a matter of honour, pride or anger (Clanton, 1996). Jealousy occurs at the intersection of contradictory feelings: love and hate, romance and heartbreak, excitement and fear. Jealousy has been linked to such social concerns as difficult feelings (Clanton & Smith, 1977; Baumgart,1990), damaged relationships (White & Mullen, 1989; Salovey, 1991), and male aggression and violence (Ben-Ze'ev & Goussinsky, 2008; Edalati & Redzuan, 2010; Kleese, 2006; Speed & Ganstead, 1997). As Ngai (2005) makes clear, an analysis of these *ugly feelings*, so named for their unpleasantness, reveals a great deal about the structures and institutions from which they emerge. Jealousy may be experienced as an internal feeling, but it is embedded in a larger social context. The study of jealousy is important to understanding the emotional experience of polyamorists as it is often cited as a barrier to successful

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[6] A complete list of the schedule of questions posed to participants is provided in Appendix C.

polyamory (Easton & Liszt 1997; Taormino, 2008). For polyamorists, mitigating

jealousy can often be a site for critical resistance, with compersion or at least a lack of

jealousy, the ultimate goal to strive for.

Polyamory Terms

As the community has blossomed, polyamorists have developed vocabulary to

describe their lifestyle and practices. What follows is a glossary of terms commonly used

by polyamorists.

<u>Monogamy</u> is the practice of having one sexual or romantic relationship for a given

period of time, with emphasis on sexual exclusivity. There are subtle variations in the

definition of monogamy; serial monogamy (consecutive relationships), social monogamy

(people pairing up together to share resources, engage in sexual relations and/or raise

children), (Loue, 2006, p. 4) and sexual monogamy (sexual exclusivity).   The definition

of monogamy implies marriage, however the term monogamy is commonly applied to

non-marital as well as marital relationships.

Non-monogamy versus Polyamory: The term *non-monogamy* is used either as a) an umbrella term for everything other than monogamy, or b) the act of having sexual, but non-emotional relations outside of a primary relationship. The term *open relationship* is an example of the latter definition of non-monogamy, however many people use all three terms interchangeably. The term *two-plus-one* is more commonly used among gay men to refer to an agreement to have sexual encounters outside of a primary emotional commitment (Adam, 2006). The term *polyamory* refers not only to the desire for multiple sexual and *emotional* connections, but a philosophy and culture based on full disclosure, honesty and non-possessiveness. Polyamory as a term, gained popularity in the mid-1990s and has replaced non-monogamy to describe multiple emotional and sexual connections. The term *consensual multi-partnering* is also used as an umbrella term for all forms of non-monogamy other than adultery (including polyamory, swinging and open relationships). Notably, the use of the term non-monogamy prior to the popularization of polyamory included an implied potential for emotional connections with several people simultaneously, (particularly within lesbian non-monogamy), although this outcome did not always follow.

Primary/Secondary: Some polyamorists place a hierarchy on their relationships, creating primary, secondary and tertiary relationships. A person in a primary relationship may reserve certain acts for their primary and prioritize them in their day-to-day decision making. A *secondary* partner may be long-term and emotionally significant, but will come second in terms of important decision making and possibly time allocation. There may also be *tertiary* relationships, but if an individual has three lovers, both lovers 2 and

3 are more likely to be considered secondary relationships. It should be noted that these words may be used in negotiation, but are not usually used in common conversation or as terms of affection. Many polyamorists eschew hierarchies and thus will have two (or more) primary relationships in which each lover is treated more or less equally and not prioritized in decision-making. In any of the above situations, partners may be "in love" with their primary and secondary lovers. Primary does not *necessarily* denote the person one lives with, the co-parent of one's children or the person who came first, although these are often qualities of the primary.

Polyfidelity/ Triad: With polyfidelity, three or more people may be involved in one relationship, which may also be called a *group marriage*. These people may or may not have lovers outside of their closed circle. Another related term is *moresome*, which Sheff (2006, p. 640) defines as " a relationship composed of five or more sexual and/or affective partners." In a *triad* (also known as a *thruple*), all three people are involved in one relationship.

V-Relationship: In a V formation, two people are involved with one person - the crux of the V. These people may also have lovers outside of the V, forming other Vs. In this case a "chain" of lovers is formed, often called a "W."

Cohearts: Cohearts are people who are both lovers with one particular person, but are not lovers with each other (as in a V-Relationship). The relationship between cohearts varies significantly, although they often know each other and are at least friendly acquaintances.

The polyamorous ideal is to have harmonious, caring and compersive relationships between cohearts.

Relating-ship: Polyamorists use the term *relating-ship* to refer to a relationship dynamic somewhere between romance and platonic friendship. This term illustrates the movement by polyamorists to challenge the dichotomy between friend and lover and thereby allow for a greater range of social/sexual interactions. It is also be used by some polyamorists to avoid creating a hierarchy of lovers (such as primary/secondary/tertiary), to emphasize the emotional significance of the connection or to avoid the trivializing connotation of terms such as 'friends with benefits' or 'casual lover'.

Single: The term single was used by one of my participants to refer to her lack of a primary relationship, even though she was involved with several people as lovers. She did not consider any of these lovers primary. For polyamorists, single and "available" are not used interchangeably.

Polyshagory: I coined the term *polyshagory* in an article in 2008[7] as a tongue-in-cheek way to distinguish between dating around with the intention of eventually becoming monogamous with one person, and intentional polyamorous practice (i.e. long-term emotional commitment with multiple people). The term polyshagory helps to distinguish between otherwise monogamous people casually dating multiple people and committed polyamorists.

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[7] http://www.xtra.ca/public/Vancouver/Polyamory_vs_polyshagory-4329.aspx

Swolly: *Swolly* refers to people who straddle both polyamorous and swinger identities and practice. The term was coined to complicate the divide that positions swingers as solely interested in recreational sex outside their relationship and polyamorists as being primarily interested in emotional connections. Swolly attempts to trouble the binary between sex and love within a sex-positive discourse and to recognize the overlap between the practices and communities.

Jealousy Defined

The use of the term jealousy varies both in academia and in popular discourse. People differ in their description of how jealousy feels, the events that cause it and the behaviours associated with it. Guerrero et al. (2005, p. 233) define romantic jealousy as

> a multi-faceted set of affective, behavioral, and cognitive responses that occur when the existence and/or quality of a person's primary relationship is threatened by a third party.

While this definition is based on *primary* relationships, I argue that any relationship can be subject to jealousy. Also, Guerrero's definition does not make the distinction between real or imagined threats, both of which can incite jealousy. My study looks at how people manage jealousy in relationships where the inclusion of a 'third party' is openly

negotiated and thus exclusivity is not the preferred strategy to mitigate jealousy. Jealousy is a complex emotional experience that combines many primary emotions, including fear, anger, sadness, betrayal, (Turner & Stets, 2005), or "fear of impending loss, grief, and anger at the source of loss" (Stearns, 1989, p. xi) and it is for this reason that some theorists are reluctant to call it an emotion on its own (Hart & Legerstee, 2010; Hupka & Ryan, 1990). Hence for many theorists jealousy refers to the emotion, feeling, state, character trait and/or "emotional episode" of a situation, a multitude of feelings related to the situation, actions, and often a resolution (Parrott, 1991, p. 4). Jealousy is also a matter of degree (as opposed to an all-or-nothing emotion), ranging from a fleeting sensation to an overwhelming feeling.

White (1991, cited in Salovey) distinguishes between three categories of jealousy. Symptomatic jealousy is a "consequence of a major mental illness such as paranoid disorder, schizophrenia, substance abuse or organic brain disorders" (ibid, p. 233). Pathological jealousy occurs when people are "especially sensitive to self-esteem or relationship threats" and this tends to be a personality trait and not solely an episodic emotion (ibid, p. 233). "Normal" jealousy is the relatively common sensitivity in the absence of psychological or personality disorders.[8] Although I am wary of the word 'normal,' White's description of 'normal jealousy' is the most common definition within research on jealousy, including my own. To the best of my knowledge, none of my participants experienced symptomatic or pathological jealousy.

It is useful to distinguish between two types of 'normal' jealousy: *suspicious* and *fait accompli* jealousy (Parrott, 1991). Suspicious jealousy is the feeling of distrust or

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[8] Other names for the classifications include normal, neurotic and psychotic jealousy (Bernhard, 1986).

doubt in relation to a partner's faithfulness and/or commitment to the relationship. Fait accompli jealousy is where the threat or 'rival' is known and/or the relationship is in real jeopardy, such as when a lover has left one person for another. Jealousy is closely related to envy, which can also be subdivided into two groups: *malicious* versus *non-malicious* envy (Parrott, 1991). Non-malicious envy is the feeling of wanting something that someone else has (such as a relationship with a certain person). Malicious envy is the feeling of wanting someone *not* to have the object/subject that you desire and wanting bad things to occur to this person in relation to the desired object/subject. Malicious envy is reminiscent of the German term *schadenfreude*, the feeling of taking pleasure in another person's misfortune. Fait accompli jealousy frequently accompanies malicious envy where a person wishes bad fortune upon their romantic rival. This might explain why some people's jealous anger is directed toward their rival rather than toward their own lover (Yates, 2007). Simmel (1955) notes that jealousy and envy require a feeling of entitlement regarding the possession of an object/subject. Thus, people are more likely to experience jealousy or envy regarding people in their lives than in relation to a celebrity, for example. Similarly, Yates (2007, p. 25) argues that sometimes envy is about possession for 'possession's sake' as opposed to actually wanting the object/subject. This urge to possess may reveal one's own "narcissistic fragility, something that provokes envy of the other's apparent completeness" (ibid). Simmel (1955, p. 51) also includes a third distinction within the family of envy and jealousy - begrudging, which he defines as,

> The envious desire of an object, not because it is especially desirable but because the other has it [and it is] accompanied by the utter unbearability of the thought that the other possesses it.[9]

Jealousy, as with all emotions, is manifested in/on the body, with physical and psychological symptoms. At the same time, culture plays a role in how jealousy is experienced, how one appraises the situation in which it arises and how jealousy is expressed. Jealousy is a *social* emotion in that it is experienced in relation to another person (real or imagined), (Parkinson et al, 2005). Consequently, I ground my theory in work that highlights the intersection between sociological, cultural and biological processes in the formation, experience and expression of emotion (Hart & Legerstee, 2010; William & Bendelow, 1996). Ahmed (2004, p. 27) argues that,

> Rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and collective.

Additionally, Harding and Pribram (2004, p. 865) contend that even though emotions tend to be understood as individual and private affairs,

> Emotions are formed and function as part of the historical, cultural, and political contexts in which they are practiced to reproduce, and potentially resist, hegemonic relations.

I investigate how polyamorists' cultural and collective beliefs (not solely individual beliefs) translate into embodied feeling, at times both enabling *and* preventing the experience of jealousy and compersion. Further, these collective feelings are transformed into "an act of reading and recognition" Ahmed (2004, p. 29), so that internalized cultural practices and embodied ideas reveal themselves narratively. In other words, I examine

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[9] Stearns (1989, p. 12) notes that jealousy is more likely to be seen as an emotion of the upper classes since it is related to fear of loss and they have more to lose, while envy is attributed the lower classes who want what they do not have.

how polyamorists' affective experiences of jealousy are understood and re-imagined through their narratives and verbalized understanding. Through my research, the emotion of jealousy is revealed to be at once a function of social ideas about love, monogamy and polyamory, and experienced as a bodily sensation that is interpreted and resisted through conscious understanding of those feelings.

Emotions are rarely experienced as singular feelings. Jealousy tends to be mixed with other feelings including affection, love, fondness, sadness, pride, bitterness, anger, etc., (each person has a personalized set of associated emotions). Beyond that, the boundary of what qualifies as "jealousy" is also ambiguous. Although most people experience jealousy in a multitude of ways, the term *jealousy* is still useful since it frames the discussion and moves away from free-floating emotionality, which is also not accurate. Saying 'I feel jealous' will illicit you nods of understanding, rather than utter confusion. Yet the limits of the emotional experience of jealousy are rarely clear-cut. I have experienced both fierce sensations and fleeting twinges, both of which I am apt to label jealousy, although the actual sensations are vast, seemingly different in kind, not just degree. The kind of jealousy experienced also depends in part on one's care, affection and/or sense of entitlement. For example, I rarely experience jealousy with regard to someone over whom I do not have a sense of entitlement, or someone toward whom I feel no sense of care or affection. That is why I call jealousy the *shadow* of love.

I use the term *intersectional emotions* to highlight the intricate ways in which we convey constantly shifting feelings, and to acknowledge the influence of feminist intersectionality on my work. I also use the term intersectional emotions to illustrate the complexity of factors which contribute to our experience of emotion, including biology,

14

psychology, neurological composition, gender, age, culture, class, context and other relevant factors. These factors are not solely *additive*, as in a combination of personal and cultural history, but rather multiply to produce an extensive range of outcomes. Emotions are embodied manifestations of social practices which are subject to intersecting power relations. Such power relations operate at the level of individual, social and systemic structures, and such power is always resisted, often creatively. With an intersectionality approach, I de-center the idea of a unified, neutral subject and instead understand emotionality and power as dynamic processes. I emphasize the complexity and diversity of positionalities, and approach social positioning as a process rather than a state. With an intersectional approach, I also accept that due to the complexified analysis, my understanding of emotionality and power relations can only ever be partial. An intersectional approach tends to bring up more questions than answers. A feminist intersectionality lens also highlights the need for reflexivity, responsibility and accountability in any research project, and this is how I continuously position myself within this research project.

Jealousy Research

Often research on romantic jealousy assumes a monogamous model of relationships, and hence also assumes that a third party is never welcome, rarely known, and is

necessarily a threat. Thus research often identifies a partner's cheating and/or the

suspicion of cheating as a "crisis event" from which to discuss jealousy (Bryson, 1991, p.

202). For polyamorists, having other lovers is consensual and pre-negotiated and

therefore the presence of another lover is not enough reason in itself to feel jealous. It is

therefore under potentially different circumstances that polyamorists experience jealousy.

The participants in my study reported feeling jealous when their partner started to date

someone new, when they fell in love, when the other lover was too similar to themselves,

when there were overlapping roles, when they felt less secure in their relationship, for no

identifiable reason, and for a range of other reasons discussed later in this dissertation.

For polyamorists, what is called 'cheating' is lying or breaking an agreed-upon rule rather

than having an outside sexual affair (Wosick-Correa, 2008).

Surveys on jealousy that assume a monogamous model often ask questions that

are not relevant to a polyamorous person. For example, one questionnaire on jealousy

asked people to respond to the following (on a scale of 1-5):

> "If I thought my partner was seeing another lover, I would get angry or
> hurt." "If I thought my partner was interested in another woman, I would
> get very upset." "If my partner admired another woman, I would feel
> irritated." "If my partner went out with another woman, I would get
> intensely upset" (Clanton & Kosins, 1991, p. 147).

A polyamorous person or one inclined towards non-monogamy would probably answer,

"It depends" to all these questions. This is not to say that polyamorists would never be

jealous under these circumstances, but rather, would need more information to answer

these questions. In Bernhard's (1986, p. 26-29) "Jealousy Inventory," she asked people

to respond to the following scenarios:

16

"I get a visual or mental picture of my partner with another person." "I am a highly competitive person." "I have asked to hear private details about a previous lover/partner."

A polyamorous person might answer affirmatively to all these questions, yet this may have nothing to do with jealousy. In her survey, she also equates people's level of agreement with monogamy to their level of jealousy, by asking questions such as "I believe in monogamy (one partner) for an extended period of time or for life"; "My partner does not believe in monogamy (one partner) for extended periods of time." She implies that a 'belief' in monogamy refers to a belief in its viability. While these authors present interesting insights into jealousy, their surveys do more to highlight underlying cultural assumptions than to reveal universal "truths" about jealousy. For example, one may "believe in monogamy" but retain a jealous fear of their partner leaving them for another monogamous relationship, thus one's degree of jealousy might not correlate to their commitment to monogamy.

Research also often presents a highly gendered portrayal of the experience and expression of jealousy. For example, Buss (2000) argues that men respond with jealousy to a partner's (feared or real) sexual interactions with another, while women tend to become jealous due to a partner's emotional attachment to another person. Buss also claims that lesbians respond like heterosexual men, while gay men respond like heterosexual women (ibid, 2000). Clanton (1996) found that men are more likely to deny jealousy, call it anger and fight to avoid humiliation, and women are more likely to admit jealousy, internalize the blame and work on the relationship. Popular media representations of jealousy reinforce the idea that women express jealousy with cattiness, gossip or manipulative behaviour, while men express jealousy with anger, aggression or

violence. Such generalizations, however, reveal more about cultural ideology and socialization than intrinsic truths about gender or jealousy. When research begins with an assumption that men and women are two discrete entities, one will often find results to suit this assumption (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Fine, 2010; Jordan-Young, 2010). Such an assumption leads the inquirer to emphasize differences between genders rather than differences within a gender or similarities between genders, let alone question the construction of the dichotomy (Peterson, 2004). Also, research tends to look for the causes of masculine and feminine traits as opposed to questioning what masculinity and femininity actually *are* (Jordan-Young, 2010). Peterson (2004, p. 148) notes that researchers tend to assume monogamous heterosexuality is the norm and study the "other" as a deviation, which "shape(s) the conduct of research, and the interpretation and portrayal of findings." This has led to the assumption that monogamy is a "natural" state of human behaviour, thus recording any deviations from sexual exclusivity as disproportionately negative, especially for women (Ryan and Jetha, 2010).

Since Descartes, Western philosophy has been characterized by a theoretical dichotomy between reason and emotion, where reason is exalted and emotion is linked to irrationality, excess and the feminine. Within this discourse, emotions are "antithetical to logical thinking and tend to be impulsive and intuitive" (Parkinson et al., 2005, p. 46). The problem with this perspective, according to Parkinson, is that it suggests that "emotions are involuntary, implying that the emotional individual is coerced into doing things that he or she has not really chosen to do" (ibid, p. 46). Indeed, there is a preoccupation with being in control. In more recent times, feminists and other theorists of emotion have challenged the legitimacy of this split and its subsequent hierarchy

(Boler, 1999; Grosz,1994; Jaggar, 1989). These feminists and sociologists of emotion challenge the idea that the only legitimate knowledge is that which is based in reason; they instead argue for the value of emotional ways of knowing (Jaggar, 1989). Recent neurological studies indicate that emotion and reason are intricately connected in decision-making and experience (Lehrer, 2009; Sacks, 2010; Seigel, 2010). Even within this school of thought however, jealousy is often regarded as negative and weak, as a barrier to knowledge, and often dismissed as paranoia or irrational insecurity. For many people, jealousy is too shameful to admit and is often described as crazy-making, out of control, or "taking over," which replicates the negative association of jealousy with out-of-control emotionality. Jealousy is also framed by our understanding of ownership (Robinson, 1997) and thus control and entitlement over that which is "ours".

Our understanding of that which is labelled *emotional* is culturally-specific and therefore requires an analysis of gender, race, class and ability, since women, people of colour, the working-class and people with disabilities are disproportionally thought to be 'overreacting' or 'over the top' (Harding & Pribram, 2002; 2004; Jaggar, 1989; Parkinson et al., 2005). Kleese (2006, p. 647) argues that,

> Jealousy is constructed in a way that justifies the control of women's bodies and sexuality and has the potential to legitimize all kinds of male violence and atrocities.

There is relatively more room for women to express emotion, whereas a man who is emotive is likely to have his masculinity called into question (Jackson, 1993). However, the degree to which women may express emotion is culturally circumscribed. Women who act on, rather than verbalize certain emotions are seen as inappropriate. Crying may be seen as a feminine expression of an emotion, but too much crying is deemed

19

"hysterical." 'Normal' jealousy can be expressed in flirtatious jest, but excessive jealousy is seen as a sign of character weakness, low self-esteem or even insanity (Clanton, 2001). Jealousy is further complicated by the way that some people take pleasure in knowing that someone is jealous of them and may even try to elicit this response in others.

The expression of jealousy is socially acceptable only within certain cultural and gender-specific parameters. Within the contemporary, Western, middle-class cultural framework, it is only acceptable to verbalize jealousy when there are identifiable reasons for its cause and rather than behaving jealously, one must speak calmly, for example saying, 'I feel jealous with regard to you' (Zembylas & Fendler, 2007). When emotions are expressed this way, it is assumed that people are speaking their truth and are taking care of themselves by proactively asserting their needs (ibid, 2007). Most other expressions of jealousy are seen as 'emotional' or 'excessive.'

Clanton's research (2001) reveals a shift in the cultural portrayal of jealousy in the American context. Prior to 1970, jealousy was often described as a "proof of love," coinciding with this period's emphasis on monogamy. Since the Sexual Revolution with its emphasis on personal freedom, choice and control over one's body, jealousy is more often seen as the characteristic of a person who is "unduly possessive, insecure, and suffering from low self-esteem" (ibid, p. 160). Noting the shift in these perceptions, Clanton (1996, p. 173) argues that "jealousy is a socially-constructed emotion that changes to reflect changes in marriage rules, the adultery taboo, and gender roles." As polyamorous discourse reworks these same norms, does it have the potential to further shift our understanding of jealousy? It could be argued that as polyamorous discourse

gains greater mainstream credibility, compersion may become more common. Not all

polyamorous people are successful at alleviating jealousy, and at times they reinforce or

repeat conventional manifestations of jealousy. But the discourse on polyamory

challenges hegemonic structures of emotion by exposing the cultural ideology of jealousy

while concurrently developing an alternative set of values, guidelines and theories about

it. Polyamorous people are not the only ones who experience compersion; they are

however, actively disseminating this concept and the guidelines for its practice.

Polyamorous Ideas of Jealousy

To the extent that popular culture equates jealousy with loss of control, polyamorous

culture views jealousy as an emotion over which people have a great deal of

control. Easton and Liszt (1997) contend that jealousy is not something that is caused by

one's partner and therefore cannot be blamed on her/him. Instead, jealousy originates

within the self and thus is one's own responsibility. By this argument, feeling jealousy or

behaving jealously will not change a partner's actions. Jealousy is portrayed as at once

an internalized individual emotion and as socially constructed. The one who suffers most

is the one feeling jealous, but such jealousy can also inflict suffering upon the other

partner. Easton and Liszt describe jealousy as an emotion that cannot be experienced in

isolation, but rather is representative of other feelings, such as low-self esteem, insecurity

or dissatisfaction with the relationship. They argue that because jealousy is related to

these unfavorable emotions, it is also linked to feelings of shame, which can prevent acknowledgement and mitigation of jealousy. Similarly, in his popular online essay, Veaux[10][11] (2009) insists that within open relationships, jealousy needs to be addressed by looking at underlying emotional issues rather than changing the actions that are the surface triggers of jealousy, otherwise patterns will repeat themselves. Taormino (2008, p. 162) asserts that it is important to let yourself feel any remaining jealousy and validate whatever feelings you have, instead of "criticiz(ing) yourself or pil(ing) shame and judgment on top of it – that will just make you feel worse." Additionally, Taormino maintains that one must *believe* that loving multiple people is possible in order to be successful in open relationships. She contends, "if you don't, you will always see other people and other relationships as infringing on and threatening to yours" (ibid, p. 158).

Easton (in Kleese, 2006, p. 646) notes that the dominant strategy for dealing with negative emotions is avoidance and denial. She argues instead for a sociopolitical analysis of personal experiences of jealousy that encourages full expression of all emotions. According to the polyamorous model, feeling any emotion is appropriate, but acting on that emotion should be tempered by its circumstance. In her online essay, Labriola[12] suggests that polyamorous people need to rewrite popular beliefs about love and relationships. For example, there is a core myth that "if a partner really loved me, (s)he wouldn't have any desire for a sexual relationship with anyone else." She rewrites this belief as, "My partner loves me so much that (s)he trusts our relationship to expand

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[10] http://www.xeromag.com/fvpoly.html
[11] Although open relationships predate the Internet, the Web plays a significant role in contemporary information sharing about polyamory. Online texts were frequently referenced by my participants (and notably few academic articles on polyamory were mentioned). Therefore, I reference popular online resources for information about polyamory.
[12] http://www.cat-and-dragon.com/stef/Poly/Labriola/jealousy.html

and be enriched by experiencing even more love from others." There is also a core belief that "it is not possible to love more than one person at a time." These myths are based on the idea of an "economy of scarcity" with regard to love, which is easily refuted when one considers how parents are able to love more than one child, and how people are able to love more than one friend at a time. Polyamorous people see love as abundant and expandable (ibid). In her analysis of polyamory, Anapol (1997, p. 50) states that jealousy is due to "a combination of acquired beliefs and genetically programmed reactions." Robinson (1997), on the other hand believes that monogamy remains normative because jealousy is assumed to be the natural and only possible reaction to a partner's extra-relationship practices. Robinson (ibid, p. 2) contends that the institution of monogamy serves as a social control for patriarchy and capitalism "operating as it does through the mechanisms of exclusivity, possessiveness and jealousy, all filtered through the rose-tinted lens of romance."

Polyamorous culture critiques mono-normativity and how this shapes emotional experiences of jealousy, love, and sexuality. It should be noted that there is a difference between the *practice* of monogamy and the *institution* of monogamy. If one accounts for the prevalence of cheating, and somewhat less commonly, swinging, the practice of true monogamy is rather rare – both in Western culture and elsewhere (Barker & Langdridge, 2010; Duncombe et al., 2004; Kipnis, 2003; Mead, 1977; Ryan & Jetha, 2010). Indeed, according to Barker and Langdridge, (2010) "current relationships are generally monogamous in name rather than deed, non-consensual non-monogamy being a more common mode of relating." However, as the institution of monogamy is held up as the standard of true love, any breach of this practice is frowned upon. Therefore if true love

is necessarily monogamous, breaching monogamy must inevitably lead to jealousy. Polyamorists work to remove the connection between love and sexual exclusivity, thereby attempting to disrupt the connection between jealousy and non-monogamy.

While the doctrine of compulsory monogamy does influence our experience of jealousy, emotions cannot simply be liberated from these dominant forces. Instead, following Weeks' example, we must look at the,

> Historically shaped series of possibilities, actions, behaviours, desires, risks, identities, norms and values that can be reconfigured and recombined, but cannot be simply unleashed (Weeks, 2008, p. 29).

So while it is true that cultural regulation greatly affects our emotion world, agency also matters. Such agency emerges through grassroots organization and "the democratization of sexuality and intimate life" (ibid, p. 32). Polyamorists attempt to manifest alternatives to jealousy by developing a different set of expectations than those implicit in dominant culture. The culture in which we live shapes our identity, and our understanding of this identity is somewhat limited by the language available (Weeks, 2003). Whereas a monogamous cultural discourse has not identified a word for the opposite of jealousy, polyamorists have developed language to express occasions of pleasure ensuing from their non-monogamous practice: compersion. In what ways does naming an emotional practice increase the likelihood of its occurrence? If there was no word for jealousy or its opposite, would these emotions remain unexperienced?

According to Heaphy, Donovan and Weeks (2004), the particular practice of consensual non-monogamy in same-sex relationships (such as those I research) reflects Foucault's idea that resistance produces creative outcomes. An unintended benefit of the

24

historical exclusion of gays and lesbians from institutionalized marriage is that gays and lesbians have had ample opportunity to question the institution of marriage.[13] Through this reflexive critique, they have created relationship alternatives to the mainstream that often better reflect their chosen sexual expression, with a renewed importance given to pleasure (ibid). These creative alternatives include open relationships, the emotional dimension of polyamory and the pursuit of compersion. My research examines how these polyamorous ideas are actualized in ways that make embodied experiences of compersion possible and where these ideals fail to be realized.

A Short Note on Love

Any study of polyamory or jealousy must address the matter of love. Historically the study of love within sociology has been minimal (Brown, 2006; Jackson, 1993). Sociologists tend to neglect the subject of love because of its immeasurability, its relativity and the general dismissal of matters of the heart in most 'serious' studies. The word *love* has many definitions as it is used to describe how we feel about chocolate, dogs and the connection between soulmates. Even though many fields such as queer studies are at least in part concerned with love relationships, the actual subject of love is seldom addressed. Yet, as Jackson (1993) cleverly points out, "even sociologists fall in

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[13] Notably, in Canada, same-sex marriage has been legal since 2006 and this may shift the "unintended benefit" alloted to same-sex relationships.

love." More than this, I argue that love, compassion and connectivity contribute to what drives our social world. Still, in many academic circles, the use of these words can call into question the credibility of one's research. I would argue that the delegitimization of love as an area of sociological research points less to the immeasurability of love than to the hierarchical split between emotion and reason. Love is a risky topic for an upcoming scholar to pursue, even though an understanding of love, its construction and effects is important for understanding social dynamics, art, politics and even economics.

Love is an emotional experience heavily laden with ideology, and thus the construction of love's *feeling rules* is relevant to its understanding. Ben-Ze'ev and Goussinsky (2008, p. xi-xii) argue that the ideology of romantic love includes the belief that,

> The beloved is everything to the lover and hence love is all you need; true love lasts forever and can conquer all; true lovers are united - they are one and the same person; love is irreplaceable and exclusive; and love is pure and can do no evil.

True love, they argue, is idealized as eternal, self-sacrificial and has "unlimited justification" (ibid, p. xii). They argue that since these beliefs are idealized, they are far from realistic, and the disjuncture between the ideology and its attainability can lead to dangerous situations. In particular they cite statistics on violence inspired by jealousy, and other "horrific crimes in the name of the altruistic ideas of religion and love" (ibid, p. xii). Brown (2006, p. 189) identifies the "romantic narrative" as including "courtship, marriage, long-term relationship, monogamy, exclusivity."

The question is thus: what components of romantic love do polyamorists abide by and which do they critique? Polyamorist culture eschews the sexually and emotionally

exclusive focus of romantic ideology, and yet maintains the importance of love. Polyamorists are generally critical of the notion that a partner's jealousy represents their love and commitment to the relationship. Polyamorists rework some common romantic complaints, while they also take some romantic notions even further than a monogamist might. For example, polyamorists tend to be skeptical of the idea that true romance is ever-lasting and is necessarily accompanied by a lack of attraction to other people. Polyamory also challenges the idea that one's romantic partner should be able to fulfill all of one's needs, or that a partner should be endlessly devoted to one person. On the other hand, polyamorists maintain the importance of love and romantic connection, as well as the significance of emotional connection in sexual encounters. After all, polyamorists make *more* romantic commitments, not less. Polyamorous ideals and critiques of love are described throughout this text, along with their views on jealousy and compersion.

Compersion

The term *compersion* was coined by members of Kerista, a polyfidelitous commune in San Francisco. Polyfidelity refers to a group of people all committed to each other romantically and sexually, also called a group marriage. The Kerista Commune existed between 1971 and 1991, and there were thirty-three members during this time. The members of the Kerista commune defined compersion as,

The feeling of taking joy in the joy that others you love share among themselves, especially taking joy in the knowledge that your beloveds are expressing their love for one another.[14]

Ryan and Jetha (2010) claim that non-monogamy has been the dominant practice throughout human history and that, historically, most non-monogamous sexual arrangements did not result in jealousy. It is possible that the experience of compersion was prevalent in such arrangements, but the term did not exist as such. Polyfidelitists and polyamorists were the first to coin the term and use it to describe a goal for their sexual relationships. According to Anderlini-D'Onofrio (2004, p. 4) the,

Ability to turn jealousy's negative feelings into acceptance of, and vicarious enjoyment for, a lover's joy is a key operative concept in today's polyamorous practice.

One's experience of compersion can take many forms, ranging from tolerance to strong pleasure, non-sexual joy to sexual arousal. In his online essay, Francis states that being turned on by your lover's pleasure is an aspect of compersion.[15] Compersion usually refers to one's response to a lover's happiness, but it could also be applied to joy in relation to the happiness of platonic friends or family. Indeed, experiencing compersion in a non-romantic context can be a stepping-stone for understanding and extending this practice to romantic relationships.

The term compersion appears to have its roots in the word compassion. As Francis[16] writes "compersion is the compassion for the love pleasure of other people and compassion for your own pleasure and desire." Ferrer (2007, p. 37) suggests that

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[14] http://www.polyamorysociety.org/compersion.html
[15] http://www.planetwaves.net/compersion.html
[16] http://www.ericfrancis.com/scorpio/scorpio22.html

> Compersion can be seen as a novel extension of "sympathetic joy" that was developed within certain Buddhist philosophies, which is one of "four immeasurable states or qualities of an enlightened person.

To understand compersion, he turns to a figure in Vajrayana Buddhism, the goddess Green Tara "who is said to...have the power of turning jealousy into the ability to dwell in the happiness of others" (Ferrer, 2007, p.40). Ferrer (ibid) notes, however, that because many Buddhist teachings were developed by monks "who were not supposed to develop emotional attachments..., the lack of systemic reflection in Buddhism upon romantic jealousy should not come as a surprise."

Contributions and Limitations of my Research

My interest in queer women's polyamory stems in part from my personal involvement in the practice and culture, as well as a critical interest in the political role of gender and sexuality in the polyamorist movement, with a particular emphasis on the following areas. First, in light of the struggle for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered rights, including the same-sex marriage campaign in Canada and elsewhere, polyamorists have begun discussing comparable strategies for increasing public awareness of alternative family structures and for the pursuit of polyamorist rights. Second, the prospect of institutionally recognized polyamory poses an interesting challenge to the historical and cultural primacy given to the nuclear family in contemporary Western society (Lehr, 1999). Third, the growing discussion of alternatives to monogamy

signifies shifting gender relations and demonstrates the influence of feminism on

women's sexual freedom and role within the family. Fourth, as Haritaworn, Lin and

Kleese's (2006, p. 521) question highlights, "Will 'relationship rights' join 'women's'

and 'gay rights' in determining who can pass as 'civilized?'" (i.e. worthy of citizenship).

After all, as Noel (2006, p. 605) claims,

> A re-imagined polyamory could successfully transform systemic
> inequalities in hegemonic social structures by focusing on addressing
> common issues in relationships and families as well as by developing
> norms of inclusivity.

Such systemic inequalities include those connected with gender and sexuality. Similarly,

Haritaworn (et al. 2006, p. 518) contend that,

> An engagement with polyamory and non-monogamy can provide novel
> insights into the social construction and organization of kinship,
> households and the family, parenting practices, sexual identities and
> heteronormativity. What is more, polyamory opens up new sex-positive
> terrains for erotic, sexual and relational understandings and practices.

Finally, the discourse on polyamory calls into question compulsory monogamy and the

presumed naturalness and inevitability of jealousy. While jealousy is usually regarded as

a psychological, biological and individual condition, studies indicate that the experience,

embodiment, and expression of jealousy is better researched as a sociological

phenomenon (Williams, 2001). Although jealousy is influenced by its social

construction, the emotion itself tends to be experienced as real and embodied.

   While there are a significant number of polyamorous people in Canada, there is a

dearth of literature from a Canadian perspective. Vancouver has an active, queer,

polyamorous community made unique by the city's west coast culture, demographic composition, and proximity to the USA. I limit my fieldwork to the particular demographic of queer, polyamorous women currently living in Vancouver in order to manage the scope of the project. I am interested in understanding the specifically queer context of this sexual subculture. I do not claim to provide findings that can be generalized to all polyamorous people. My findings on the sociology of jealousy however, have implications both beyond the population being researched, and beyond primarily romantic situations. The sociology of jealousy has wide ramifications for understanding emotion as social construction with embodied outcomes. By studying the intersecting regulation of emotion and sexuality, my work contributes to the increasing attention paid by social researchers to emotion (called the "affective turn" by Clough and Halley, 2007). My work contributes to the fields of the sociology of emotion, affect theory, sexuality studies, queer theory, feminist intersectionality studies, and studies of the emotion of sexuality.

The research included in this project is limited in scope to the Euro-American, English-speaking context from which the bulk of polyamorous discourse has emerged. My research tries to unpack the discourse which is relevant to my participants. The ways in which jealousy is labelled and expressed outside of this context is addressed only peripherally to point out that other experiences of jealousy exist. I steer away from a comparative focus and hence this dissertation does not include extensive research on jealousy within polygamy, jealousy associated with swinging, jealousy associated with cheating, and heterosexual polyamory. Although I maintain a sociological emphasis, my

31

work integrates other approaches to the study of emotion, including psychology, biology and cultural studies. My work does not fully consider the contribution to emotion studies from literary criticism or psychoanalysis. Although I complicate what qualifies as jealousy and its sources, I primarily address how my participants identify, articulate and re-imagine their experience of jealousy, as opposed to trying to analyze the *cause* of their individual jealous episode. Such as psychological assessment is beyond the scope of this project.

Chapter Overview

Due to the insider nature of my research (I am an active, queer, polyamorous woman in Vancouver), my work necessitates extensive reflexivity to ensure my subjectivities do not interfere with my results, as well as to avoid any potential harm to participants. Along with an overview of my research methods, in the remainder of this chapter I include a selective summary of my field notes, in which my methodological challenges and revelations are discussed.

The focus of Chapter 2, *Jealousy and the Sociology of Emotions* is a review of social science literature on emotion. This overview ultimately produces the theoretical approach that frames my dissertation on jealousy, namely an intersectional sociology of emotion that integrates biological, individual and socio-cultural understandings of emotion from queer, feminist and radical pluralist views of sexuality. I review literature

that focuses on questions of jealousy in relation to culture, gender and power. As research on jealousy tends to dichotomize men's and women's experience and expression of jealousy, I consider this research and present theories that complicate this divide, with particular attention to queer and feminist theorists. Next, I discuss how power relations are intricately connected to the experience of jealousy, both in polyamorists' negotiations with the regulation of sexuality and of emotion, and within their personal relationships. To guide this analysis, I turn to Foucault's critique of power along with feminist responses to his work. I am also influenced by radical pluralism, as espoused by Jeffrey Weeks, in my approach to research on sexuality and intersectional power relations.

Chapter 3, *Research Site: Polyamory as Philosophy, Discourse, Politics and Sexual Practice,* is a more in-depth look at my research site, the culture of polyamory in general and the positioning of my sample within this burgeoning sexual culture. I look at the cultural influences that lead to the contemporary manifestation of polyamory and the growing body of academic work which has emerged simultaneously. I describe my research sample in terms of demographics and psychographics. Finally, because polyamory emerged partly in response to the limitations of institutional monogamy, I describe polyamorous critiques of monogamy.

In Chapter 4, *If You Move to the Rainforest of Vancouver, You've Got No Right to Complain About the Rain: From Polyagony to Compersion,* I describe some of my findings on how polyamorists experience, express and navigate their jealousy. My research reveals the prevalence of tensions and contradictions within the culture's approach to the difficult emotions associated with open relationships. Instead of each individual working through their personal emotional trials, I found that polyamorists

33

build a culture around polyamory, with particular norms and etiquette developed with the intention of enabling the experience of compersion. However, as with most etiquette, the rules are not always followed, they are always in flux and hence the norms in place to mitigate jealousy do not work for everybody. Within my sample, jealousy is described as a difficult and challenging emotion, but one that is tolerable and manageable. In this chapter, I also address some of the other challenges of polyamory that arose within the research, including time pressures, issues regarding parenting and maintaining safer sex practices. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the rewards and benefits that polyamorists experience due to their practice.

In Chapter 5, *Once You Say, I'm Poly, It Kind of Eliminates the Need for the Feminist Part; Gender, Jealousy and Polyamory,* I analyze jealousy within polyamory in terms of gender, feminism and queerness. My research reveals that the gender divide is more complicated than certain research and representations of jealousy suggest. I investigate how my participants re-imagine and recreate the gendered feeling rules of jealousy, and the extent to which they are successful in such a re-imagining. Polyamorous communities are portrayed in the literature as strongly feminist, and while my sample reflects this political leaning, there is much variation in how feminism is defined and demonstrated, particularly with regard to reclamation of promiscuity, competition between women and emotional control.

In Chapter 6, *Jealousy Can Be Hot If You Flip It*; *Working and Playing with Power,* I investigate the intersection of polyamory, jealousy and power relations. Jealousy within polyamory is inextricably linked to power on two levels; through interpersonal relationships and through the regulation of sexuality and emotion.

Although the definition of power is relative and individual, this chapter addresses how power is perceived and operates within relationships in terms of practical matters (such as investment in the relationship, financial power, quantity of lovers, etc.) and reconstructions of power (playful jealousy and sexual practice). I look at how the regulation of sexuality and the subsequent marginalization of polyamory affect my sample, as well as my participants' resistance to such power structures. My participants found creative ways to interpret, construct and re-imagine power relations. At times, they found ways to mitigate negative emotions associated with power imbalance without necessarily diminishing the inequity itself. In other instances power reemerged in conventional hierarchical patterns. Polyamorists' re-imaginings of emotional power both within their relationships and in relation to the larger social framework offers insight into the social context of jealousy.

In my concluding remarks, I highlight the central themes that emerge in the preceding chapters. Questions about polyamory are often concerned with the viability of compersively loving multiple people, and this concern reflects cultural notions of love. While considering instances of both compersion and polyagony, I focus on polyamorist culture and resistance to mono-normativity. Although polyamory is likely to remain a minority practice, the cultural values of polyamory have the potential to challenge contemporary culture's treatment of jealousy, feeling rules, gender and the regulation of emotion and sexuality. I offer a predictive account of polyamorous culture's influence on mono-normative culture and on conventional understanding of jealousy using Marshall McLuhan's model of the *Laws of the Media*. I revisit my field notes to highlight my

changing views of jealousy and love within polyamory. Finally, I propose several topics

for future research.

Methods and Reflections

In the following section of this chapter, I describe the methods I use to undertake the research for this dissertation. Some of the limitations of my methods are reviewed, along with what I have done to remedy them. Because I am an insider to the group I research, I give particular attention to reflecting upon my process in hopes of making my process transparent. Following examples of research projects that involve insider positions, in particular, the thoughtful works of Westhaver (2003) and Kleese (2007), I took copious field notes about my research process. It is from these field notes that this section is drawn. I reflect upon my research regarding the following areas of concern: First, I acknowledge my method of recruitment in terms of knowing participants within this small community, and hence the limitations and benefits of snowball sampling. Second, I reflect upon my interviewing process in terms of hearing gossip and issues of disclosure. Finally, in the post-interview period, I reflect upon doing research within a small community and upon the sexual nature of this research.

My participants were primarily recruited through an email list-serve for polyamorous people (Vanpoly) and a social networking website (Facebook). These methods plus word-of-mouth (i.e. snowball sampling, Noy, 2008) were sufficient to arrange twenty-two interviews in Vancouver. I already had key contacts through my involvement in this community, through online discussion groups and from attending and facilitating workshops. All interviews were conducted with informed consent and all information was kept confidential. Participants were given pseudonyms and all identifiable characteristics were changed or deleted to protect their identities. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by myself alone and kept in a secure and private location.

Challenges in Research on Emotion

Due to the subjective nature of emotion, research poses several challenges and some ethical and/or validity concerns. For example, creating a scenario in which a person may directly experience jealousy (i.e. "emotion-eliciting situations," Cornelius, 1996, p. 14) is unpleasant and potentially harmful. Surveys on emotion are often too simplistic to reveal depth of information. Field observations alone may cause the

researcher to impose their understanding onto the participant's experience based on personal perception of emotion and its expression. Analysis of fictional literature may offer insight into emotional experience in general, but it does not capture the specifics of my chosen sample or the complexities of managing emotions.

I chose to use qualitative, open-ended, semi-structured interviews to answer my research questions for several reasons. Interviews have the potential to reveal perceptions and allow participants to offer additional information they may not have previously expressed, even if known or practiced, thus demonstrating how lived experience may differ from polyamorous theory. Interviews are also very practical given the readiness of many polyamorists to share their experiences. Interviews, however, are not without limitations. Self-reporting through interviews relies on participants' willingness to disclose, as well as their ability to recall scenarios in the past (Cornelius, 1996). There is usually a gap between how one feels and how one communicates these emotions. Due to the cultural shame attached to jealousy, people who admit to experiencing feelings of jealousy may actually be less jealous than people who deny it (Clanton & Smith, 1977, p. xi). People are apt to deny, repress, and/or rephrase their emotional experiences to better fit the social standards of "good practice." Experience itself is socially mediated. Words used to describe emotions have personal definitions and are often culturally loaded. I acknowledge that all stories and all memories are partial, and that memories of an emotional episode may differ from the original emotional experience. Also, there are often no adequate words to describe affect, and words can shift or contain affect in ways that alter its original meaning - an unresolved problem that

is partly responsible for the renewed interest in emotions within social research, dubbed the "affective turn" (Clough & Halley, 2007).

There is always a discrepancy that occurs when affect is translated into words. While this element at once poses a barrier to full understanding of affect, it also demonstrates the ways in which one's language shapes our understanding of feeling and potentially the emotional experience itself. Every researcher who studies emotion via interviews is faced with the fact that we are always (at least) two steps removed from the 'truth.' First the participant's experience is translated into words that the researcher must then interpret. Thus the reader of the resulting text would be a third generation removed from the affect. That said, the differences between everyone's experience of jealousy does not mean that we cannot understand or empathize with another person's experience of jealousy. Without this degree of comprehension, culture would not be as cohesive as it is. In other words, the fact that we tend to understand each other's emotional experiences as much as we do points to the ways in which there is enough common ground to communicate emotion. Even if every person's exact perception of the colour red was different for example, we could still come to an agreement as to what constitutes red. We can communicate and understand each other without needing to completely understand each person's definition of a word. A degree of consensus tends to suffice.

Feelings can be understood without articulating them in words. At the same time, words shape our interpretation of experience. Often when I explain the word compersion to someone new, they are surprised that one could feel compersion for a lover. When I switch the context to one of being happy for a friend who succeeds, or loving more than one child in a family, people are then able to relate to compersion. We can understand an

emotional experience without needing an exact word to describe it. Yet, having a word can force a reinterpretation of an experience within that context or even create its potential. Thus, I argue that learning the word *compersion* could increase the likelihood that it will occur.

Recognizing these limitations, I utilize the discourse that is available to me through the interviews. I always assume a participant is offering me the best possible version of their truth as they experience it and I asked for clarification any time there is ambiguity. While trusting that participants are telling me the truth is a matter of course while engaging in interviews, this is important to reiterate in the context of potentially vulnerable emotional stories. Thus, I take into account what people say, what they do not say, and any contradictions in their stories. For example, when participants told me that they did not experience any jealousy, as three participants did, I believed they were speaking their reality at that moment.

Disclosure is difficult at the best of times, and heightened by the difficult emotions and vulnerable matters of the heart being investigated. Given that we all live in a hetero-normative, mono-normative, and patriarchal culture, it would make sense that polyamorists may wish to portray their chosen practice in a positive light. However, I find that most participants are very willing to disclose their pleasant *and* challenging emotional experiences to me, with the proviso of confidentiality and anonymity for themselves and the people involved in their lives. I am also clear about respecting their boundaries about disclosure. People are more likely to disclose personal experiences that are embarrassing to them (as jealousy can sometimes be) if these are past experiences, rather than an immediate situation. Also, my participants' presentation of their practice

of polyamory is shaped by what they learned since the last time and the development of their ability to bring about compersive feelings. It is my impression that while polyamorists do value compersion, and there is a degree of shame attached to feeling jealous, polyamorists are also very upfront about their emotions and are able to articulate how they feel in part because they have given it significant thought and attention.

The limits of language are exacerbated by the postmodern and queer tendency to deconstruct terms (Rosenau, 1992). People use the words *jealousy, envy*, and *compersion* in very different ways. People's description of how jealousy feels varies significantly. My position as an insider to the research aids my comprehension of the nuances of the polyamorous lexicon. Another language-based limitation is the different use of labels, such as polyamorous and queer. Within the polyamorous community, there is still disagreement about the definition and use of the term polyamory. Instead of forcing all experiences of polyamory into one use of the term, I explore the variety of polyamorous expressions and styles (described in Chapters 3 and 4).

Use of the Internet

More information about polyamory is being generated outside of academia than within. The Internet has become a crucial forum for information generation and sharing, and as such it serves as an important source of data for my research and a mechanism for understanding the cultural pulse of the community. Langdridge and Butt (2004, p. 32)

argue that "Web material offers an untapped textual resource for researchers concerned with the discursive construction of new sexual identities." Some ethical concerns regarding use of the Internet as a data source include: the potential for false information, the difficulty of verifying sources, and the difficulty of acquiring informed consent to reproduce information. Despite the tenuous nature of the Internet as a reliable source of information, online dialogue provides a valuable record of popular discourse and the sexual subcultures in which polyamorists are active (Langdridge & Butt, 2004). Given that polyamory is a concept that emerged from the bottom-up, (i.e. the language, identity and practices were developed by polyamorists themselves) the Internet provides the most current reflection of the discourse of polyamory as it allows for a constant update of information as well as a space to contribute and refute claims.

Insider Research

There are limitations and benefits to my insider position as a polyamorous, queer woman in Vancouver, BC. Insider research offers insightful methodological opportunities by disrupting the traditional empiricist distinction between the "knowing subject and the known object" (Westhaver, 2003, p. 17). One limitation is the potential for personal biases that may limit the accuracy of the result. Feminist methodology, however, emphasizes that attempts at objectivity render the participant an object (Reinharz, 1992). Instead of being distant and neutral, a feminist researcher should

"identify with" and know the subject of the social research (ibid, p. 233). Insider research benefits from the insider's understanding of and access to the particular information, (in this case polyamory's language and internal politics), and a subjective concern that motivates the research questions. In Lincoln's (1990, p. 86) work on constructionism, she suggests that an insider perspective can allow one to be a "passionate participant" and work with one's personal and social commitment. As someone with a critical, yet pro-polyamory position, I assume queer, polyamorous women have insight into the sociology of jealousy, but I approach my research with an open curiosity as to what this may be. With this in mind, I strive to be aware of any potential biases, offer a reflexive account of my research process and provide as much transparency as possible. As Reddy (1999, p. 262) points out, "ethnographers depend on empathy without ever acknowledging it." I argue that my insider position allows for a particular kind of empathy, an implicit understanding of jealousy within polyamory. Following Westhaver (2003), I also pay attention to how my experience as an academic might inform my participation in polyamorous communities. For example, since I have begun this research, I have noticed people's expectations regarding my polyamorous practice and the frequency with which I have been asked for advice regarding polyamory.

My first attempt at recruiting participants was via a note on my Facebook page describing my project and my call for participants. By the next day I had over ten responses. This demonstrated to me that polyamorous people are eager to discuss polyamory in this context (and that many of my Facebook friends are polyamorous). Some participants responded publicly to the post that they would like to participate. While this demonstrated an openness to disclose, it also challenged my wish to keep respondents anonymous. For this reason I deleted their public comments. To many people, polyamory is not a closeted identity or practice. All participants were encouraging of the research and expressed a desire for more awareness about polyamory in general, in academia and in the mainstream. Some people were closeted about polyamory in certain contexts (usually family or work), but most were very open about wanting to promote awareness of polyamory.

The call for participants on Facebook was an easy way to recruit subjects, but had the disadvantage of lacking diversity given that they came from my personal, albeit wide, circle of friends. Therefore, the next call I sent out was to the VanPoly listserve, a group with which I had little prior connection. I talked to some of the key organizers of this group who sent the call out to individuals who were outside my immediate community. It was through this snowball sampling that I was able to diversify to a larger range of ages, ethnicities and sexualities. I had the impression that I could have easily recruited more participants had I wished to do so or had the capacity to include more data in my

research. This gave me confidence that I (and other polyamory researchers) would be able to continue conducting research along these lines in the future.

Interviewing

During the interview process, I took into consideration Reddy's (1999, p. 256) anthropological research advice to avoid "sweeping generalizations about [...] informants' communities" and to instead consider the communities' "variation, resistance, or change." With this in mind, I paid particular attention to the shifts, changes and contradictions presented by the participants, as well as taking notice of what was not said. I avoided scripted understanding of terms provided by the participants, particularly the terms jealousy, resistance (particularly to monogamy), and power. I allowed space for "ambivalence and diversity" (Reddy, 1999, p. 258), and portrayed an account of polyamorous jealousy that studies emotion *with* emotion, while transcending the dichotomy between emotion and reason, and the individual and the social.

Due to my position in the community, as well as the small size of the group that I studied, I ended up interviewing several people that I knew and/or whose partners I knew. Interviewing people that I knew had both benefits and drawbacks. One concern I had was that a participant might avoid disclosing certain information regarding their personal experience of jealousy due to concern that we would be socializing together in the future. In an attempt to reassure them, I was very clear about my ethic of strict confidentiality

and respect for their boundaries of disclosure. On the plus side, having a close rapport with people, as well as being a polyamorist myself, meant that they trusted me with their information and felt a greater willingness to disclose. It is also possible that participants tried to impress me with their poly skills, perhaps favouring stories of compersion, emotional ease and/or a lack of jealousy. My purpose in this dissertation is to investigate how the culture of polyamory enables and prevents experiences of jealousy and compersion, and not to demonstrate the success of polyamory. So my strategy was to ask a variety of questions related to the topic and to read the text for contradictions. I also paid attention to differences in the stories told between partners (and ex-lovers) when I interviewed them separately, and how this compared to times when I interviewed other sets of partners together. It was only in a handful of cases, however, that I was able to interview several parties in a relationship circle.

When interviewing people I knew, it was very likely that I would also know their lovers or exes, who would inevitably come up in examples, even when names were omitted. I had to deliberately avoid assuming who they were talking about in their examples. When interviewing people I did not know, the chance that I would see them again at future events or polyamorous community functions was high. The community is small and tight-knit. Thus, I was very conscious and proactive about being professional in all communications with them, separating emerging friendships from what was spoken about in the interviews. It was challenging at times to maintain a formal interview, but this was not always necessary to elicit relevant responses.

Due to the nature of the research, participants felt very open with me by the end of the interviews. With the exception of only one interview, I ended up chatting with the participants for well over an hour after the official interview had ended. Many conversations kept going for hours and ended with the participant asking me to socialize again at another time. Many participants also asked me for advice or for my opinion on the situations which they had described over the course of the interview. I was usually willing to offer my feedback under the proviso that I am no expert. I felt that after they had offered me hours of their time and opened themselves up to me, I should reciprocate. People love to talk about love, romance and relationships and often want to keep talking about the subject to a willing listener (and unsurprisingly, given my choice of subject, I love hearing about it!). As a result, I often felt close to my participants by the end of the session, although sometimes this closeness was contrived and one-sided. After reading Kleese's (2006) account of his research on bisexuality and non-monogamy, I learned that a sense of closeness, or even flirtation from participants is a common response to research on sexual topics. Kleese was frequently propositioned by his participants and he noted that some of his participants went out of their way to state that sex was not an option after the interview, exceptions here pointing to the commonness of this phenomenon.

Knowing the culture of polyamory and my own community offers me access to an intricate understanding of the network of individuals and common access points. Through involvement in dialogues and discussion groups, I hear about common concerns,

celebrations, challenges, role-models, as well as gossip. I also have empathy for the

emotional turmoil and emotional highs common to polyamorous practice. The challenge,

of course, is to resist imposing my personal interpretation of polyamory and jealousy onto

participants' descriptions, while being empathetic to their stories. Hearing a wide range

of stories forces me to constantly challenge and rethink my prior assumptions.

An important aspect of doing feminist research is accommodating the needs of the

participants. For example, I conducted one interview while the participant was watching

her three children. This led to her attention being split and resulted in a less focused

session, but the alternative was no interview at all. As an unintended benefit, it gave me

insight into the reality of practicing polyamory under these circumstances. Her

relationships were affected by the chaos of daily life, the responsibilities of parenthood,

and the limits of time, but she also knew the strength of parental love, a quality relevant

to loving multiple people, juggling multiple relationships and accommodating schedules.

This reflection will be further explored in Chapter 4.

The integration of data and theory is a co-constitutive process where data and theory are developed simultaneously and where knowledge generation influences how I conduct my interviews, as well as how I analyze them (Mason, 2004). I do not look for a singular truth, but rather investigate what emerges through relations and stories. I recognize both the agency of individuals and the influence of society. I look at how social experiences are embodied, displayed and negotiated. I focus on people's perception of their practice rather than solely their actions, thus allowing the knowledge and evidence of the social reality investigated to be represented by the voices and words of the individuals interviewed. Most important to this inquiry is people's own perception and understanding of their emotions and practices and their view of themselves as they negotiate the dominant values of institutionalized monogamy. I do not assume my participants represent "the truth" about jealousy, or that their experiences represent all polyamorous people across space and time. But the insights provided by my sample group on the role of sociocultural forces in producing jealousy are powerful nonetheless. Much of the information regarding jealousy in polyamorous relationships is transferable to other experiences of jealousy.

As is standard in interview-based research, any form of judgment is discouraged. However, as Reddy (1999, p. 261) asks:

> Is one to accept with clinical indifference a common sense that treats
> feelings such as envy, sorrow, or fear as peculiarly personal, on a par with
> hunger or cold?

Jealousy is curiously stigmatized more than other difficult emotions. Rarely in Western culture is it shameful to express grief at the loss of a loved one,[17] and yet a culture that colludes in the construction of jealousy in certain situations will still link the experience of jealousy to a sign of personal weakness. With this emotional hypocrisy in mind, I attempt to discuss jealousy without any negative interpretation. It is rare that people enjoy feeling jealous however, and thus it is very hard to see jealousy as positive or even neutral.[18] Therefore, I attempt to posit jealousy as a potentially difficult emotion but remove the judgment or shame that surrounds it.

Reactions to my research

Although peripheral to my findings, people's reaction to my research has been particularly insightful. The subject tends to elicit one of two responses; either that polyamory is highly controversial and unheard of, or particularly common and "been there, done that." The subject of open relationships is not new by any means, yet, any practice that challenges monogamy is seen as highly problematic and a threat to the dominant ideal of the nuclear family. Polyamory is a topic about which almost everybody has an opinion. In fact, the most common reaction people express when

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[17] Indeed, it may be shameful when one does *not* express grief.
[18] Notable exceptions come from people who have a degree of "emotional masochism," those who seem to take pleasure in the intensity of the experience that jealousy affords, as will be discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to *playing* with jealousy and its sexual transformations.

presented with the topic of my dissertation is their opinion about polyamory's viability. As stated above, I would often hear "don't you get jealous?" or "where do you find the time? I can't even handle having one lover!" I commonly hear stories of people who have tried opening up their relationships or stories from people who know someone who has tried it. And most often I would hear about how it did not work out. People often relay one example of a failed attempt at polyamory as evidence that it can never work (though notably few people blame *monogamy* for the demise of a monogamous relationship). People relay their experience of how common open relationships were in the 1960s. Or how polyamory is only possible for youth who have the time and energy, and that it is not viable for 'grown-up' people who have children, or how polyamory is only possible in the short term, until they meet the person with whom they wish to settle down. After hearing my conference paper on polyamory, one woman wondered aloud why polyamorists would even care when a relationship ends, as if there could be no emotional attachment. It is my belief that these comments say more about the ideology of the dominant culture than they say about the viability of polyamory.

    People also tend to assume I am a member of the group that I study. Because this is the reality, I cannot tell if their assumption is due to the way I present the material or due to the subject matter itself. Another typical reaction is to make assumptions about my personal experience of jealousy. People often assume that either I am a particularly jealous person or a particularly compersive person, most leaning towards the latter. In

reality, I have known both intense jealousy and strong compersion, making me empathetic to a wide range of experiences.

While many people with whom I talk about my dissertation have never heard of polyamory, very few people are shocked by the idea of open relationships. One person who has been married for over 30 years said, "I get it! It's the best of both worlds!" Clearly polyamory is becoming increasingly well known, if not accepted in the mainstream. Given that I have chosen polyamory for my doctoral research, I am relieved that alternatives to monogamy can be discussed legitimately. The study of love, however, is still marginalized in academic and sociological contexts (Brown, 2000; Jackson, 1993). I am grateful that my research coincides with the *affective turn* in sociological research (although this is far from a coincidence) and I am finding increasing support from peers and colleagues for this kind of work.

Chapter 2 - Jealousy and the Sociology of Emotions

"Thoughts are the shadows of our feelings -- always darker, emptier, and simpler."
Friedrich Nietzsche

"As a jealous person, I suffer fourfold: because I am jealous, because I reproach myself
for my jealousy, because I fear that my jealousy is hurting the other, because I allow
myself to be enslaved by a banality: I suffer from being excluded, from being aggressive,
from being crazy, and from being common." Roland Barthes

The study of emotion has often been relegated to the sidelines of sociological

research. However, as Ahmed (2004, p. 4) notes, "what is relegated to the margins is

often, as we know from deconstruction, right at the centre of thought itself." Indeed,

emotion plays a fundamental role in the formation of key facets of social life, including

relationships, politics, education, art and nearly all decision-making. Far from marginal,

one's emotions and how they manifest actually help define how one's social life plays

out. With this understanding, it should follow that any examination of social life would

keep emotion near the centre of assessment. And the investigation of polyamory, as a

type of relationship, love paradigm, and sexual framework, absolutely calls for the

inclusion of an examination of emotions. Particularly important to the examination of

polyamory is the study of jealousy. Jealousy is a particularly *social* emotion in that it

depends upon the existence of relationships (real or imagined), and thus also requires a

sociological examination.

After reviewing the research on jealousy of the last 50 years (with a few key earlier

thinkers), I would argue that emotion is often understood in relation to popular metaphors

and/or the predominant technologies of the time. Contemporary portrayals of emotion

often use the Internet as a metaphor in that they describe emotions as a complex web of

interconnections that are in constant flux. It is no surprise that one of the key lexicons of

contemporary feminist and embodiment scholarship is *intersectionality*. Emotion, in

much contemporary research is portrayed as developing interdependently with, and

perpetually interacting with reason. Emotion emerges from the connection between the

body and culture, the individual and collective. In most of this research, emotion is still

gendered with the assumption of a two-gender system, but the range of emotional

diversity portrayed by each gender is now recognized to be more complicated. In

particular, in line with intersectionality, as well as the *affective turn* in social research

(Clough and Halley, 2007), I am drawn to work that integrates multiple perspectives,

complicates mutually exclusive divides and sustains a degree of ambiguity. Thus, the

following literature review works from a multitude of perspectives, on many sides of the

debates that guides my research.

My research brings together several topics of sociological inquiry, including

polyamory, jealousy, sexuality, gender, feminism, power relations, cultural studies, queer

theory, and emotion. This chapter is separated into three interrelated sections which

correspond to the three chapters that analyze my findings. First, I review debates in the

field of sociology of emotions that form the theoretical basis of this dissertation: queer,

feminist and cultural studies theory that connect the biological with the social, and the

individual with the community. I review this field in order to demonstrate my particular

approach to the study of emotion, starting with the biological and psychological approach

to understanding emotion, the social constructionist explanations and finally,

intersectional theories which incorporate the two. Second, I look at the research on

jealousy from the last 50 years, highlighting the way in which this research emphasizes a

divide between female and male causes, experiences and expressions of jealousy. This

theory and research, in part, identifies and contributes to the gender *feeling rules* of the

dominant culture, by which most of us abide. It is in response to this emphasis on the

gender dichotomy found in much of this literature that I turn to queer theory and feminist

intersectionality theory in order to complicate the dualistic gender divide. With this

foundation as my lens, I will critically analyze, in Chapter 5, how, and to what extent

queer, polyamorous women succeed in resisting gender normative *feeling rules* and re-

create their preferred relationship structures and emotional dynamics, while also

analyzing why some people fit their assigned gender normative model. Next, since

gender feeling rules are embedded in constructions of power, I present my theoretical

framework for my chapter on power, jealousy and polyamory. Power relations will be

analyzed on two overlapping levels, in interpersonal relationships and in response to the

institutional power of mono-normativity. Thus, I review work by feminists and

sociologists of emotion (who tend to also be feminist) as a guide to unpack power

relations in polyamory as they relate to jealousy. To guide my analysis of polyamorist

resistance to mono-normativity as it intersects with their re-thinking of jealousy, I turn to

Foucault's analysis of power and queer feminist critiques of power. Finally, I present my

approach to the evaluation of sexuality, led by radical pluralism (as espoused by Weeks) along with compatible social theories on sexuality that guide my approach to understanding polyamory as a sexual practice and sexual subculture. This literature forms the basis for my research, which demonstrates how polyamorists both challenge and replicate monogamist and heterosexist power structures.

Sociology of Emotion

"Feelings are not substances to be discovered in our blood but social practices organized by stories that we both enact and tell." Michelle Rosaldo

Sociologists of emotion analyze the source and circulation of emotions, examining the "sociocultural determinants of feeling, and the sociocultural bases for defining, appraising and managing emotion and feeling" (Hochschild, 1998, p. 5). This includes an examination of the "culture of emotion," (the expectations about what one is supposed to feel, also referred to as the *feeling rules*), the "social context of a feeling" (the social environment that causes or in which one reacts to the display of emotion), and the process of "emotional management" that people use to modify their emotions in order to correspond to or distance themselves from these social conditions (ibid, p. 7). A person's definition and expression of emotion is not static, however, and these pieces are formed

from the set of available cultural notions. Thus, I approach emotions as one embodiment of social practice.

Clanton (1996, p. 171) offers a sociological approach to jealousy which "shows how jealousy and other emotions are shaped by social situations, social processes, and social forces," in multiple levels of analysis. According to Clanton, at the micro-sociological level, the feeling and expression of jealousy is learned and thus is a reflection of an individual's life experience. His *meso*-sociological inquiry reveals that jealousy plays a role in contributing to social order, such as by preventing infidelity, defending relationships and/or protecting egos. This inquiry further demonstrates how culture, ethics and society shape the experience, expression, interpretation and treatment of jealousy, contributing to Clanton's *macro*-sociological analysis of jealousy. Clanton's (2001, p. 161) sociology of knowledge does not seek the "truth" about jealousy, but rather "search(es) for the social roots and social function of information, ideas, and opinions." With this basis of understanding, the differences of meaning and application of jealousy between various cultural contexts and languages becomes apparent. What is called 'jealousy' in one culture may refer to a very different sensibility, structure of feeling, expression and cause than 'jealousy' in another culture.

Most sociologists acknowledge some 'physiological substrate' to emotions, but social theorists vary in the importance they give to "nature" in talking about emotions (Kemper, 1990; Williams & Bendelow, 1996). The 'nature versus nurture' debate questions the balance between emotion as individual experience versus emotion as the

58

result of socialization. Studies of emotion tend to either emphasize the individual at the expense of the social, or focus on the social at the expense of the individual (Boellstorff & Lindquist, 2004). Those who try to address the role of both individual and social influences often do so in a manner that does not truly account for the extent of their interrelationship (ibid). Theories of emotion range from biological to interactionist to social constructionist, and each theoretical lens asks different questions, and consequently comes up with different conclusions. For example, is it natural for a person to become jealous when their lover has another lover or do they learn this behavior through socialization? Is a person's particular reaction related to their biology or their socio-cultural condition/context? Why is an emotion deemed to be natural? Does an assumption of naturalness lead to judgment of what constitutes "healthy" expression of emotion? I argue that there is a co-creative, intersectional feedback loop between biology and culture, and between the individual and the collective in the embodiment of emotion.

a) Biology and Psychology

Theorists who believe emotions are biologically based may acknowledge that culture shapes the expression of emotion (seeing how such expressions vary from culture to culture and over time), but still argue for a range of "instinctive reflexes" (Lupton, 1998, p. 11). Biological theorists investigate the anatomical basis for emotion and/or how emotions evolve with and benefit humans. For example, the oft-cited "fight or flight" response to a threatening situation can keep us safe from harm. Similarly, these theorists argue that the emotion of empathy evolved because those who experienced it more were more likely to live in community, thus making them more *fit* in that environment (i.e. more likely to reproduce and survive). Empathy has evolved out of and with the human movement toward communal living. Similarly by this reasoning, jealousy evolved to play a functional role in communal living by contributing to the maintenance of the pair-bond and thus a stronger family unit, which would contribute to members having a better chance of surviving and reproducing in a social group.

Many psychologically focused approaches to emotion follow Descartes' theory by suggesting a dichotomy of emotion and reason. According to Freud (1905/1977), an emotion is a response to a basic need and hence is an instinctual manifestation of one's libido and/or fear of death. Using one's reason is necessary to tame one's emotions and develop a civilization where people can live together. Thus, by this perspective, emotion

is natural/instinctual and reason is cultured/ civilized; reason depends on the control of emotion. Failure to tame one's emotion, according to Freud, results in neuroses or fetishes in the individual and lack of social cohesion in the larger social context. Jealousy, for Freud, is based in the Oedipus complex, which states that humans are universally (and inevitably) bound by an unconscious sexual desire for the opposite-sex parent and are jealous of the same-sex parent who steals their affection. Furthermore, Freud claims that a man's jealousy, seemingly due to a female partner's attraction to another man, may actually stem from his homosexual attraction to that man, or at least his own desire for an outside affair. The man, Freud argues, is therefore *projecting* his taboo attraction into an emotional state of jealousy.

Cornelius (1996, p. 40) argues that there are facial expressions which are universal, such as those which express "happiness, sadness, disgust, anger and surprise." Other researchers have compiled lists of core emotions that they claim are universal and basic and from which all complex emotions arise. Izard (1977, cited in Cornelius, 1996, p.41) argues that the following emotions are inherent: "interest-excitement, joy, surprise, distress-anguish, anger, disgust, contempt, fear, shame and guilt."[19] Jealousy, according to these theorists, is a combination of a few of these core emotions. Infants, however, Cornelius allows, do not always express these emotions, indicating that they may be to a degree, learned. This has led some theorists to look for "inherent emotions" that require socialization for their potential to manifest (Damasio, 1994; Restak, 2007).

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[19] It is interesting to note that the majority of these emotions are negative.

Biological theorists emphasize the existence of *universal* bodily changes which occur in response to certain emotions, such that emotions can be entirely readable between cultural strangers without the need for words. Anger, for example, produces similar facial expressions, physiological changes and body language across cultures. Yet, there is also a discrepancy between the experience of an emotion and its expression. Some cultures value certain expressions of emotions, while other cultures find such expressions to be rude or inappropriate. It is likely, however, that a halted expression of an emotion would not be correlated with a lack of understanding of the emotion or even a feeling of it. In a foundational study by Ekman (with Friesen, in Evans, 2001), he showed a disgust-arousing film to people of American and then Japanese descent and filmed their facial response. He found that the Americans gregariously expressed their disgust. The Japanese on the other hand, hid their facial expressions of disgust when in the presence of others, but when viewing the film alone, did not resist the expression. Also, when the film was played in slow-motion, he found that there was usually a "microexpression" of disgust that occurred before the expression was tamed. Ekman thus concludes that there are inherent aspects to emotional expression. While certain facial responses to disgust may be universal, the triggers that cause the reaction of disgust are far from universal.

These examples suggest a degree of universality of some emotions. Evans (2001) suggests that rather than thinking about emotion as either innate or culturally determined, it is more accurate to approach emotion as residing somewhere between the two, or, as he says, as having a degree of cognitive dependency. In other words, Evans (ibid) argues for the potential universality of certain core emotions, but views socialization as framing the

62

particularities of the more cognitively developed of these emotions. Shame, pride, envy and jealousy, for example, are emotions which rely on communities and social relationships. With these cognitively developed emotions, the circumstance in which they occur as well as their expression are culturally determined. Fear, according to Evans, is a core emotion and will develop independently and instinctively within each person, but other emotions require socialization for them to occur. Disgust in connection to rotten food may have an instinctive potential, but disgust toward moral actions requires particular socialization. Hence, it could be argued that jealousy has the common potential to develop, but requires a certain socio-cultural context, (or even attachment dependent circumstances, described below) from which to arise. Such socio-cultural determinants are also coupled with the plasticity of emotion, given that the cognitive functions (and even brain structures) shift continuously (Evans, 2001; Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Siegel, 2010).

Increasingly, biologically based approaches to emotion have been investigating how emotion and reason inform one another. Sacks (2010), a neurologist and psychologist, provides an example of a man who had an accident that effected part of his brain, leaving him without the ability to experience emotion. When trying to set up his next appointment with Sacks, the man could name all the reasons to select each possible time option, but was unable to choose between them. He required an emotional preference in order to make a decision. This situation suggests that emotions inform reason when it comes to decision-making. Lehrer (2009), a neurobiologist (and popular science writer), emphasizes the interconnection between reason and emotion (not solely their simultaneous functions) in all decision-making and thus in all intelligence. What these

63

two theorists propose goes beyond the need for 'emotional intelligence,' which Goleman (1995) describes as an ability to read, express and interact on an emotional level to function well in the current social climate. These new biological studies find physical interconnection between emotion and reason. Feeling contributes to knowledge, and knowledge contributes to feeling. What we think of as reason is based on our emotions, and although there is a difference between the two modes, they are inseparable processes.

My understanding of the interconnection between biology and socialization in the embodiment of emotion is influenced by some recent developments in neuroscience, which suggest that socialization contributes to biology. Although my work does not address the brain composition or development of my participants, my findings correspond to the theory of neuroplasticity (Siegel, 2010), which suggests that the brain's physicality, and thus affect, can shift through experience. Jealousy is embedded in sociological factors which contribute to one's feeling of jealousy, how one expresses this emotion and how one resolves it, which in turn forms patterns in the brain making us subject to particular emotional experiences in the future. Social factors enable emotions to be relearned and rewired in the brain, in such a way that people can change how and when they experience emotion (Siegel, 2010). Sacks' research (2010) has repeatedly demonstrated that after an incident which effects someone's physical brain, the brain reestablishes neuro-pathways that allow a person to reestablish function. This neurological body of work suggests that the communities and social practices of polyamorists may result in rewiring the pathways in their brains to make their emotions line up with their social values and ambitions. Siegel (2010) points to how "experience

64

shapes who we are" on a physical level and how, with effort, people have the ability to change emotional reactions even at the level of the brain.

Lehrer's (2009) neurobiological explanation for emotion includes the recognition of two important facts. First, neurobiologists increasingly recognize that, instead of there being two processes, emotion and reason are parts of the same process (ibid). Second, while emotional reactions can be "wired" into the brain's function, such processes are plastic. This plasticity of the brain is possible at any time in one's life and these changes can be long-lasting (ibid). Relationship structures, love and jealousy are modified by socialization, are experienced as deeply embodied and always subject to change. Nature and nurture inform each other in a positive feedback cycle. This body of work may explain how social ideas create biological affect. At the same time, Jordan-Young's (2010) thorough critique of brain science research on gender differences demonstrates that even the most acclaimed work is subject to faulty science and/or false generalizations. Little is certain about brain science or the biology of emotion, and hence it is important to consider the social constructionist argument in emotion studies.

b) Social Constructionism; Weak, Strong, and Postmodern

The variety of emotional experiences and expression across culture and over time is so great that it is important to examine the socio-cultural influences on emotion. Peterson (2004, p. 32) argues that the main concern with an emphasis on biology in the field of psychology is that those in the discipline tend to study deviations from the norm

"rather than questioning the normality of the norm itself." Petersen's (ibid, p. 3) research on emotion, in contrast, exemplifies the social constructionist approach by demonstrating "how the psychology of emotion reflects and reproduces social views on gender and emotions." In this section, I will briefly review the main arguments in *weak* constructionism, *strong* constructionism and postmodernist approaches to the analysis of emotions.

The social constructionist approach looks at how the experience, expression and meaning of emotion is a manifestation of one's culture and personal history (Cornelius, 1996). Reddy (1999, p. 259) argues that the term 'socially constructed' means two things:

> The individual is the site, but not the source, of the emotional event.. [and that] the learned feelings that individuals express are constant with ambient social order, its norms, its ideals, its structures of authority.

Social constructionists range from *weak* to *strong* in their degree of acceptance of biological and/or inherent emotional responses. The "strength" of a theory is not about its validity, but rather about the "size and topology of the domain that it organizes and its methods for determining that domain" (Sedgwick & Frank, 2003, p. 120). Thus, a *strong* theory extends the social constructionist analysis to encompass most, or even all social domains, while a *weak* theory limits social construction to a certain terrain of social life. Kemper (1987) typifies a weak social constructionist position by arguing that certain primary emotions are universal to all humans (fear, anger, depression and satisfaction/happiness) and develop through evolution. Secondary emotions however, such as shame, guilt, pride, nostalgia, love, as well as jealousy, he argues are the product

66

of 'socializing agents.' While Kemper analyses how culture shapes emotion, Durkheim

(1933/1997) looks at the role emotion plays in rituals that contribute to the formation of

social solidarity. As Ahmed (2004, p. 9) notes, for Durkheim, "emotion is not what

comes from the individual body, but is what holds or binds the social body together."

Durkheim thus concludes that social order is not solely dependent on reasoned behaviour,

but rather on affective and emotional ties.

In contrast to these weak social constructionist theories, advocates of a *strong*

social constructionist position on emotions state that all emotions are defined by culture.

For Gordon, people learn emotion through language and so the labeling of emotion

comes prior to the physiological shift. Love, he argues (in Turner & Stets, 2005, p. 3), is

what people associate with,

> Autonomic symptoms such as the flow of epinephrine (adrenaline) and an
> increased heart rate [which] occur in the presence of another whom we see
> as attractive.

If these same symptoms were to occur in a different context, we might label it anxiety or

pleasure, according to the particular situation. Thus, he contends, some people mislabel

physical reactions as love. Correspondingly, nervousness and excitement have the same

physiological responses, but the social context and interpretation in which this occurs

leads us to have a positive or negative association with the response. Similarly, in his

strong social constructionism, Averill (1980) concludes that people follow an emotional

role that is necessarily learned. There are no inherent emotions, he argues, so one's

appraisal of the emotion will define the emotion. He notes that people often confuse the

emotion with the action, such as calling the action of aggression 'anger.' Harré (1991), a

social psychologist, focuses not on the physiological aspects of emotions but rather on

67

their meaning and function in society. Emotion, he argues, may affect a physiological

shift, but this cannot explain the emotion itself. To Harré, emotions have no inherent

quality and are solely a product of socialization:

> There is no such thing as "an emotion." There are only various ways of
> acting and feeling emotionally, and of displaying one's judgments,
> attitudes and opinions in an appropriate bodily way. (Harré, 1991, p. 142)

Thus for these theorists, emotion is something one *does* instead of something someone

has. Within Denzin's (1984, p.1) constructionist claim, "people are their emotions. To

understand who a person is, it is necessary to understand emotion." He views emotions

as processes that are felt in relation to interactions and help people achieve self-

knowledge. What Denzin calls 'emotional accounts' are the justifications and

explanations people give for the things they feel, which are then classified by the

individual as appropriate or inappropriate, for example, being nervous for a job interview.

Sometimes this results in 'pretended emotion' when one does not feel the emotion one

thinks they are supposed to feel. The "appropriate" emotion is linked to the feeling rules

of a situation in a particular cultural context.

Another line of inquiry in the social constructionist study of emotion is the role of

the body and the self in relation to technology and the notion of *postmodern* emotions.

According to Shaviro (2004, p. 7), postmodernism has 'murdered' emotion or at least

significantly and irrevocably altered its meaning. Mass production and manufactured

repetition has overwhelmed the senses and "emotions have been transformed into brand

names " (ibid). Applying Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum, Shaviro (2004, p. 9)

claims that real emotions have been subsumed by representatives: "we still "have"

emotions; it is only that we experience them disinterestedly, at an ironic distance from

ourselves." Emotions, Baudrillard (1994) would gather, are copies of archetypes created by societies, without an original.

Although many postmodern theorists see emotion as banal, flat, or even simulated (Baudrillard, 1994), cybercultural theorists write about transcending the body through technology and creating a new relationship between the body and feeling (see Turkle, 1995).[20] Postmodernism in part stems from a critique of the modernist glorification of rationality that is associated with industrialism, colonization and war. Postmodernism instead supports the non-rational, undecided and emotional ways of knowing (Rosenau, 1992, p. 8). "All that modernity has put aside, including emotions, feelings, intuition, reflection…takes on renewed importance" in postmodernism (ibid, p. 6). Postmodernism, Rosenau argues, blurs the line between emotion and reason, suggesting that they are not mutually exclusive. Similarly, some post-structuralists emphasize "emotion as discursive practice" (Lupton 1998, p. 24) and look at what is lost through the translation of emotion into language. Discourse does not so much reflect reality as it constructs it. The words used to describe an emotion significantly contribute to the way we understand it (Lutz, 1990). Post-structuralists would argue against a systematic analysis of the naming politics of the word 'jealousy' and toward exponentially complex multi-faceted understandings of all this word potentially entails. Even the word *emotional* is rife with implications extending far beyond its literal meaning, usually leaning toward the negative and the excessive.

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[20] There is also significant research and development going into programming emotions into computers, thus shifting the definition and consequence of emotions. Such computers would force us to ask: do emotions rely on feelings? Do emotions rely on consciousness? (Evans, 2001).

c) Intersectional Emotion

Williams and Bendelow (1996; Williams, 2001) are critical of social theorists who ignore the role of biology and psychological theorists who ignore the influence of culture in the experience and expression of emotion. Williams (2001, p. 72) refutes the reduction of emotion to any one discourse and looks instead to,

> Put minds back into bodies, bodies back into society and society back into the body through the lived corporeal nature of human emotionality and the 'circuits of selfhood' in which it is located.

Likewise, Petersen (2004, p.158) notes that "the scientific study of emotion both mirrors and reinforces dualistic thought and the predominance of rationality over emotionality." For theorists who integrate sociological, cultural, psychological and biological processes in the formation, experience and expression of emotion, emotion and reason, as well as nature and nurture, are not mutually exclusive. I am calling theories that aim for such an integration *intersectional emotions*. The body and society are the source and the site of emotion, interacting in ways that are not additive, but rather multiplicative. In other words, emotions are not solely the addition of body plus society. Rather, physiological and social dynamics interact to create unique and ever-changing outcomes, in both directions. I aim for an account of polyamorous jealousy which evaluates emotion *with* emotion, transcending the dichotomy between emotion and reason, natural and constructed, without combining them into one indistinguishable process. Thus, instead of placing individual experiences in their "so-called social

context" (Boellstorff & Lindquist, 2004, p. 437), I look to a deeper "analysis that treats emotion as cultural - and culturally specific - without ontologizing either the individual or the social" (ibid, p. 438). Also, I reflect on my own emotional experience as a "passionate participant" (Lincoln, 1990) in the production, analysis and interpretation of knowledge. In other words, I do not reason out an understanding of emotion, but rather I integrate and problematize the categories of emotion and reason, biology and culture, and individual and collective, both at the level of theory and methodology.

My approach to intersectional emotions gives special attention to the affective complexity of interpersonal relations. A renewed interest in emotions from social and political life has emerged out of a response to the limitations of some deconstructionist theories that exclude the body and emotional embodiment (Clough and Halley, 2007). In this emerging body of work a distinction is made between the terms *affect*, *feeling* and *emotion* (with extensive debate over the delineations, a focus that is beyond the scope of my intentions here). *Affect* is the set of non-conscious, preverbal sensations which occur within the body and between bodies. Once these sensations are named, or placed within their personal history and context, they become *feelings*. *Emotions* are what are *emoted* and expressed, and these can be real or feigned. Notably, emotion, feeling and affect are not mutually exclusive, nor temporally necessary and thus can occur in any order or simultaneously (Shouse, 2005).

Affect is the intensification of sensations or the changes that occur. Much like the weather, affect is ever-present and we only tend to notice it once it changes, intensifies or

71

becomes extreme. The *affective field* or the *affective potential* is like the air or the

atmosphere in which it subsides - always available. Affect tends to be abstract since it

cannot be known through language and exists prior to consciousness. However, affect is

important to sociology and communication because it is often passed between bodies. A

person's affect can be sensed by others and can influence the mood of an environment in

a way that extends beyond the idea that people *cause* feelings in another person. For

example, when people say that 'the tension in the air can be cut with a knife,' they are

talking about the affective field. The medium is as important as the message being

transmitted (McLuhan, 1988), since medium includes affect. To understand physical

attraction, for example, one cannot solely look at what is being communicated. We also

need to understand how people influence and move us, which is a transmission of affect.

For example, a person may not fit the description of who I think I am attracted to, but

their affect on me may be significant. Or conversely, a person may fit a perfect

description of who I think I am attracted to, but they may not move me at all. It is nearly

impossible to tease out the separation of cultural imposition on attraction and the pre-

social aspect of this affect because both are fully intertwined once they reach the

conscious state.

Another example of the distinction between affect, feeling and emotion as it

pertains to jealousy in polyamory: if a person I deem attractive looks at my lover, I may

be filled with a series of sensations, or an intensification of affect. Once I notice these

sensations, analyze them and bring them into a conscious state, they become feelings,

which I may call jealousy, compersion or something else altogether. Another person may call it grungy feelings or anger or be conscious of these sensations without affording them a label. Once articulated or consciously recognized, I may emote these feelings. I may avoid the situation, I may ask something of my lover, I may cry, get defensive or even threaten violence. If this scenario occurs in the presence of a group of polyamorous people, I may emote differently. Perhaps I will place more attention on the polyamorous theory I know regarding the disconnect between this person and myself and how this attention on my lover is irrespective of my relationship with them. Perhaps I will show off my compersive abilities (real or feigned) for the sake of the polyamorous group in which I am immersed. Or, perhaps I will be more apt to express my discontent knowing that they are able to comfort me in a way that will please me. My affect will be bound up with the transmission of affect of the other people around me, who may sense my position and react in a way that modifies my affect. Thus, my affect, feelings and emotions will be influenced by the proximity of a group or my subjectivity within a group - i.e. how I know or experience myself in relation to this group. My identity may be tied to my group identification as a polyamorist, and thus my emotional experience may be modified accordingly.

In her book *Feeling Power*, Boler (1999) uses the word *emotion*, rather than *feeling* or *affect* because feeling and emotion are mostly used interchangeably and affect is not used in this way in common vernacular, making the academic distinction at times irrelevant to lived descriptions of experiences. My participants talk about affect, feelings

and emotion using the latter two terms interchangeably. Therefore, I follow Boler's

example in the discussion of my participants' experiences, unless the distinction is

relevant to a particular description.

Emotion and cognition are "inextricably linked" (Boler, 1999, p. xix) and it is a

shortcoming of much social theory when these are assumed to be mutually exclusive

processes. Thus, I turn to the work of social and cultural theorists who reformulate

questions and interpretations of social life by integrating emotions and reasons, who,

although premised on this concept, approach it with slight variations. For Ahmed (2004,

p. 190),

> Emotions are not 'in' either the individual or the social, but produce the
> very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be
> delineated as if they are objects.

It is emotion that brings about the boundary between the individual and the social,

that shapes the "I" and the "we" and produces the "relationship between movement and

attachment" (ibid, p. 11). Williams also concludes that emotion is part of reason itself.

> Emotion... may not simply *support* reason, providing it with salient direction
> and purpose..., it may also in an important sense *constitute* it (Williams, 2001,
> p. 133).

Reason is founded on emotion, not only as a background, but as a foreground (ibid).

Correspondingly, other avenues of contemporary scientific research are in agreement

with the recognition of the inseparable link between emotion and reason, including

neuroscience (see Lehrer, 2009 described above) and behavioural economics (see Ariely, 2008).

Jealousy is intricately linked to a set of social ideas regarding love, relationships and emotionality. Certain beliefs stimulate or exacerbate jealousy, such as the beliefs that jealousy represents true love, a partner is a possession and romantic love can only be directed toward one person at a time (Fleming & Washburn, 1977). These social ideas and their transgression can translate into deeply felt physical sensations and mental anxiety. I investigate how these ideas translate to bodily affect and how emotion is rewritten by polyamorists and polyamorous culture, thus how emotions emerge within social interactions and groups. Group emotions are more than the sum of the emotional experience of individuals. Groups and cultures develop qualitatively different emotional outcomes due to the collective. For example, my involvement in a polyamorous community shifts my understanding of what I can and should feel in response to an open relationship. My perception of what *is* and what *can be* in a social setting not only alters how I read my emotions, but also the feelings I embody. Instead of asking how jealousy emerges, I investigate how ideas, ideals and behaviour are replicated in society and in research on emotion, and how these ideas become corporeal sensations. By challenging the split between the mind/body, emotion/reason, nature/nurture, individual/collective and man/woman, the following questions become apparent. How do social ideas become "emotions" and therefore "fact"? How do social ideas about love, marriage, and gender lead to "facts" about how women and men experience jealousy? How are emotional

responses socially produced and how do they become embodied? What is written and practiced by polyamorous people about jealousy?

My approach to the study of emotion is influenced by the intersectional reading of nature/nurture as presented by Fausto-Sterling's (2000) Developmental Systems Theory (DST), which is proposed as a third alternative to biological and constructionist positions on sex and gender. Her theory challenges the dichotomy of nature/nurture, real/constructed, sex/gender and instead proposes that these categories are co-constitutive and interdependent of one another. Biology, sex and even our understandings of reality are shaped by sociopolitical context and ideals. Scientists' assumptions contribute to the methods, result and interpretation of what will then become 'fact'. For example, Fausto-Sterling uses DST to demonstrate that intersexuality often has no adverse medical symptoms and is a "problem" solely because of the social belief that there are only two legitimate sexes that are represented by certain somatic ideals. Thus, the social ideal is assumed to be natural. Intersexed people are viewed as defective versions of male or female and are treated with pharmaceutical or surgical intervention. Thus the medical field manufactures a medical condition, which serves the larger communities' need for a strict sex divide rather than supporting the needs of intersexed people.[21] Fausto-Sterling also argues that nurture creates nature. She offers an example of a goat that was born with only two hind legs and learned to walk upright. By the end of its life, it had an S-shaped spine and other musculature associated with bipedal movement. The goat was not

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[21] See also www.isna.org.

born with what it needed to walk upright but what the goat did during its life shaped its

biology.   Boler (1992, p. 72) explains that,

> The basic conception of human nature appears to be one that emphasizes
> the ways in which we are neurologically designed to allow us to learn
> social rules and relationships.

Thus, the *binary* framework we impose on the individual and the social, as well as the

natural and constructed emotions is itself a construction.

Sex is commonly understood as the fixed body while gender is the socialized

manifestation of sex. Fausto-Sterling (2000, p. 21) demonstrates that conventional ideas

about sex and biology are based on "social decisions." According to her, "sexuality is a

somatic fact created by a cultural effect" (ibid). Imposing a dichotomy on gender or on

sexuality reinforces a hierarchy. She follows Butler's line of questioning when she asks,

> Why…has the idea of materiality come to signify that which is irreducible,
> that which can support construction but cannot itself be constructed? (ibid,
> p. 22).

 Fausto-Sterling does not deny that sex exists or that biology influences gender.

However, she argues that the variety of sex characteristics within a sex is greater than the

differences between sexes and to reduce all variations of sex to two categories is a social

decision made "fact."

By applying Fausto-Sterling's theory to the sociology of jealousy, my study does

not reject biological explanations, but rather assumes that biological experiences of

jealousy are in part the product of socialization, which in turn contributes to biology, and

thus to physical sensation. I use DST to ground my understanding of the gendered

construction of jealousy, the interconnection between biology and socialization and the

development of relationship models as social decisions. By applying an intersectional perspective to my sociological study of polyamory and jealousy, the following questions manifest: Does the way one is socialized to experience jealousy become imprinted in one's psychology and thus experienced as (or assumed to be) a natural emotion? Does the assumption that monogamy is natural create its nature? How does the institutional dominance of monogamy create a particular understanding of jealousy? Is jealousy experienced differently by those who attempt to resist mono-normativity and/or by those who intentionally pursue compersion? What are the socio-cultural determinants of one person's experience of jealousy, where another avoids experiencing jealousy in a similar situation? If monogamy had different cultural implications, would the experience of jealousy be different? Could polyamory provide examples for monogamous people of how to mitigate the negative experience of jealousy in romantic and non-romantic settings?

Emotion, Gender and Feminism

Historically, emotion has been linked to the body and to women, while reason has been associated with men and the mind. Feminists have written extensively about emotion as an epistemological way of knowing the world to critique and oppose *malestream* rationalist thought (Grosz, 1994). Bordo (1986) criticizes the "Cartesian

masculinization of thought" which assumes a strict divide between mind and body, nature and culture, public and private, and reason and emotion. According to this model, emotions are linked to women's irrational and private sensations and to women's "hysterical bodies." As such, emotions need to be tamed by male reason. I situate my understanding of emotion in feminist approaches to the body and emotion that move away from the Cartesian dualism of mind/body and emotion/reason while staying grounded in the material (Grosz, 1994). Grosz approaches the body as a biological and historical entity. While not ignoring the historical relevance of dualisms, Grosz (1994, p. 22) speaks about the body without polarization in an attempt to "embod(y) subjectivity of psychical corporeality." The psychical and social are interactive and experienced on the body. The body and emotions are simultaneously both natural and cultural, psychical and social, learned and instinctual (ibid).

Research and popular ideas about emotion and jealousy are particularly gendered. It seems that people both modify their expression to fit gendered ideals and at times internalize convention in ways that influence how they feel. A gender divide in the bulk of popular representations persists, even though the ideals of masculine and feminine emotionality (as expressed by both males and females) are constantly shifting (Halberstam, 2004).   Emotional expression goes through "fashions" (see Craib, 1994). The emotionally stunted macho male often depicted in popular discourse appears concurrently with the 'sensitive new-age guy' and/or metrosexual male, a category that is at once celebrated and ridiculed. As a parallel, the emotionally involved or sensitive

79

woman is often upstaged in popular discourse by the hard, tough, aggressive diva, who is at once admired and feared (and occasionally ridiculed). Despite the fact that there is much more variation of emotional representation in popular culture as well as in lived experience, a significant amount of research on jealousy is still constructed along a strong gender divide.

Research suggests that men respond with jealousy to a partner's *sexual* interactions with another person (feared or real), while women are more likely to become jealous in response to a partner's *emotional* attachment to another (Clanton, 1996; White, 1980; Wright, 1994). Sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists explain this distinction using what they call the "parental-investment model" (Buss, Larsen & Westen, 1996), which suggests that jealousy developed throughout human evolution and contributes to our current state of being. According to this model of interpretation, a sexual encounter for a woman could result in pregnancy and thus child rearing, which requires a significant investment of time and energy for which she would require the emotional and material support of a man. The man, according to this model, has been the primary breadwinner throughout evolutionary development. Thus, the *emotional* fidelity of a man is of primary importance to her. The man may have sexual encounters without long-term consequences, but for the man to offer material investment to a woman, as a consequence of her pregnancy, he wants to be certain of the paternity of the child. Thus, for a man the *sexual* fidelity of the woman is of primary importance. Proponents of this theory also use this reasoning to explain why women are thought to be choosier about partners than men

(Symons, 1981). According to Buss (2000), lesbians respond like heterosexual men by becoming jealous over sexual infidelity and gay men respond like heterosexual women and become jealous if their partner demonstrates emotional infidelity.

The limitations of the parental-investment model lie in its assumption of heterosexuality, monogamy and the nuclear family (as well as a dichotomously two-sex model). The sociobiological and evolutionary psychology models apply presentist accounts of the current world by assuming a stereotypical perspective of each sex's preference and looking for explanations after the fact. Ryan and Jetha (2010) find evidence of human behaviour that defies such a model, including historical communities where women's sexual practices were not controlled by monogamy, and where multiple males played parental roles in the lives of children without any regard to their paternity status.

Levy and Kelly (2010) echo Buss' findings regarding sex differences and which forms of jealousy are more distressing; jealousy due to emotional connection or jealousy due to sexual infidelity. However, they also found significant variations within genders and suggest that such differences are due to *attachment styles*. Attachment theory (as first developed by Bowlby,1958/1982, and later by Ainsworth, 1979) comes out of psychology and is grounded in the notion that all humans require strong, long-term relationships for proper social and emotional development. The experience between someone and their first primary caregiver(s) will guide their attachment style later in life. The patterns that can develop are *secure attachment, avoidant attachment, anxious*

attachment and *disorganized attachment*. Psychologists address issues in connection with each attachment pattern, thus moving away from a forced choice between which source of jealousy is more distressing.

The amount of gender-dichotomizing research on jealousy is vast and the conclusions tend to reinforce stereotypes present in popular media. Conclusions published in journals and books can be grouped into paradigmatic belief systems and gendered stereotypes associated with the era in which they were published. Jealousy has often been researched with a nod to accepted gender roles in society as these are linked to the economic division of labour and corresponding emotional styles. In his historical work *American Values*, Whitehurst (1997, p. 136) explores how jealousy is "largely a function of social structure and sex-role socialization." He observes that,

> The ways in which we are prepared for adult life make it virtually
> inevitable that we will become dependent upon each other in adulthood
> (ibid, p. 136-7).

  Additionally, he states that historically, men are raised to depend on women for basic care, including cooking, cleaning and clothing and women have historically been discouraged from competing in the workforce and are taught to feel incomplete without the company of a man. This creates a gendered division of labour and jealousy arises when the rules are broken. American society, according to Whitehurst, revolves around a paired structure and therefore even an adult living alone can be perceived as deviant. Competition, ownership and private property are also characteristic of American patriarchal culture, where "jealousy and competition tend to reinforce and support each other" (Whitehurst, 1977, p. 138). Similarly, Stearns (1989) notes that marriage,

historically, had less to do with romance and passion and more to do with family

hierarchy and thus jealousy is experienced and expressed accordingly. Whitehurst's

work echoes Ellis' (1954) classic text linking monogamy to property rights, hence one's

spouse is considered to be a possession. Monogamy is thus premised upon the notion

that everyone has only one ideal mate, and one must compete for and then protect this

mate. Jealousy occurs when this socioeconomic and sexual possession is threatened.

Another gender stereotype evinced by Salovey and Rodin (1985, in Bernhard, 1986)

states that men care more about status, wealth and reputation, while women care more

about physical attractiveness and popularity. In this model, women's jealousy is

triggered by the physical attractiveness and/or popularity of the 'rival' and they would

compete accordingly.

Jealousy has also been correlated with what a culture values most, and thus what

people work hard to protect, which, in Western culture, Hupka (1981) suspects is

exclusivity. He suggests that cultures that demonstrate significant instances of jealousy

also display individualistic notions of property and ownership. In such cultures,

importance is placed on biological paternity, sexuality is restricted to marital

relationships, and marriage is intertwined with economic and emotional success. In

contrast, in cultures with less jealousy, private property is less individualistic, sexual

relations are more open, less value is placed on genetic relations of offspring and social

status is less linked to marriage. To explore and explain this cross-cultural difference in

the response to and the expression of jealousy, Hupkta (1981/ 2003, p. 41) notes that,

> Jealousy scripts in different cultures also appear to specify a wide variety
> of expressions, such as slaying one's wife and her lover, seizing the
> lover's property, and the lover's friends formally presenting the wife to
> her lover, accompanied with gifts, or simply getting divorced.

Hupkta and Ryan (1990, p. 51) find that the severity of jealous aggression correlates to the,

> Cultural importance attached to being married, the limitations placed on non-marital and extra marital sexual gratification, the emphasis on private ownership of property, and the requirement of personal descendants.

Because these cultural signifiers (i.e. the importance of being married, the importance of private ownership, etc.) differ between cultures, the expression of jealousy and the situations which give rise to jealousy also vary in relation to the cultural signifiers. Hupka (1981) found a connection between the importance of marriage and the amount of jealousy felt and acted on by members of the social group. He also explored changing cultural views on the permissibility of extramarital sex, which has been inversely associated with the prevalence of jealousy. Researchers have also found correlations between the appearance of jealousy in a culture and the extent to which extra-dyadic relations are permitted and forbidden, and particularly the control and sanctions directed toward women's sexual practices (Murdock, 1949). The Toda people of India, for example, are a rare group of people where women have more than one husband, and there are no reported restrictions on adultery and seemingly little jealousy (Ford and Beach, 1951).

Another example of the gender dichotomy as it pertains to the study of jealousy is the stereotype of men as sexually indiscriminate and as stiflers of their emotions (except anger), and women as sexually selective and emotionally needy, much of which echoes the paternal-investment model stated above in connection to evolutionary biologists. For example, Pines and Aronson (1983) surmise that women want monogamy more than men. Female jealousy, according to White (1981), can be predicted by financial

dependence, fear of losing the relationship or love, and lack of power in the relationship or in general. Bryson (1991) contends that men are more likely to initiate relationships, including external affairs. Jealous men, according to White (1980), are more likely to end a relationship than jealous women. By contrast, Bryson (1991, p. 204) argues that women are more likely to end a relationship where an affair occurred (and thus likely jealousy) and men have more trouble recuperating after such a break-up.   According to Bryson (1991), women are socialized to put more energy into relationship maintenance, such as by voicing and actively dealing with concerns. Bernhard (1986, p. 17) calls attention to a classic double standard: men will often boast about (and take pride in) the number of women they have slept with, but are uncomfortable being with women who have had many lovers. In turn, she theorizes that women do not care about the quantity, but rather the *quality* of their mate's sexual history. According to Bernhard, men perceive jealousy as a competition between themselves and their rival, and worry about "a loss of status as well as the loss of their partner" (ibid, p. 22). Women, she concludes, are "relationship-oriented and cooperative" while men are "independent and competitive" (ibid, p. 18).

Another gender stereotype apparent in research on jealousy is that women express jealousy through passive-aggressive cattiness, manipulative behaviour or gossip, while men express jealousy through anger or violence. White (1980), for instance, states that men are more likely to deny jealousy, call it anger and fight to avoid humiliation, while women are more likely to admit jealousy, internalize the blame and work on the relationship. Other studies maintain that men respond with anger while women react with depression and choose to revitalize their commitment to the relationship (Shettel-

85

Neuber, Bryson & Young, 1978; White, 1980). Shettel-Neuber (et al. 1978) contend that

men are more likely than women to become angry, high or drunk, verbally threaten the

rival or to be flattered by the jealousy of a rival, while women are more likely to cry, try

to make themselves more physically attractive or feign indifference (Sharpsteen, 1991, p.

19).   Bryson (1991) theorizes that men are more likely to respond with violence and less

likely to experience remorse about their jealous behavior. Women, Bryson (ibid)

suggests, are more likely to manifest jealousy in the form of 'snooping' through their

partner's belongings or inquiring about their past. Bryson (1991) suggests that men's aim

is to recoup their self-esteem and women's aim is to retain the relationship. White (1981)

maintains that men's jealousy can be predicted from their "sex role traditionalism," low

self-esteem and/or dependency on their partner for intimacy (due to lack of outside

friendships). Moi writes that women experience jealousy as a sense of loss, while men

experience jealousy as anger directed at the competitor (Moi, 1987).

The studies listed in the previous paragraphs focus predominantly on Western,

monogamy-centric and heterosexual-centric cultures. Most of these studies neglect the

possibility of non-monogamy and thus the possibility that the jealousy could be mitigated

via means other than eliminating the "rival" source. Gilmartin's work (1978) on

swingers retains a Western and gender-dichotomized focus, but does not take monogamy

for granted. In his examination of jealousy, he determines that the marriage of swingers

tends to be strengthened by their swinging, making them less threatened, and thus less

jealous, by outside sexual relationships. He also observes that the men in his study

experience an aphrodisiac affect from watching their partner having sex with someone

else. This phenomenon has been labelled "sperm competition syndrome," by

sociobiologists: after watching his wife have sex with another man, they claim a man will ejaculate with more intensity to compensate for the potential sperm competition (Shackleford in Gould, 1999).[22] Gould (1999, p. 205) contends that swingers mitigate their jealousy by separating their committed love relationship from the "social sexuality" of swinging. By this assessment, swingers avoid jealousy by steering away from emotional connections with their extra-relationship lovers (the assumed source of male jealousy) and thus by retaining emotional exclusivity. Gilmartin (1977) maintains that jealousy is still present in some swinger relationships, likely due to deep-seated and internalized beliefs of the mono-normative culture. The swinger strategy of maintaining emotional exclusivity to keep jealousy in check is at odds with the polyamorist goal of deliberately engaging on an emotional as well as sexual level with all their lovers.

Historical research on jealousy across cultures demonstrates that the experiences, expressions and sources of jealousy are indeed diverse. For instance, Mead (1968) investigated the expression of jealousy cross-culturally and found that it had more to do with breaking culturally agreed upon rules than about having sex outside of one's spousal relationship, a notion that rings true in my study as well. In pre-Revolutionary France, for example, male "peasants" were obligated to share their wives with the feudal lord on their wedding night. Although Mead makes no note about how women felt about this arrangement, the men did not appear to express any jealousy or resentment. In contrast, Mead reported that in the early 20th Century, the Banaro people of New Guinea had a custom where a friend of the groom's father was designated to have sex with the new wife, while the groom was to be sexually initiated by the father's friend's wife. Again,

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[22] It is for this reason, claim Ryan and Jetha (2010), that people enjoy watching pornography and other visual representations of sexual acts.

no signs of jealousy were reported in this arrangement. Mead also notes that in certain

polygamous arrangements, multiple wives care for all the children, take part in domestic

labour and heighten social prestige, thus many women welcome the new wives. In some

Inuit communities, a wife's sexual encounters with guests are considered a gracious

gesture (ibid). Mead contends therefore that the existence of jealousy is at least in part

the product of the rules and power relations in specific cultures and social contexts.

Hupka (et al., 1997) discuss cross-cultural understandings of a variety of

emotions, including jealousy. They contend that not only does the expression of jealousy

change across cultures, but that the actual understanding, feeling, and association with

jealousy may be partly formed through "culture-specific variables, such as language,

mythology, and literature" (ibid, p.156). Other researchers continue to find that the

emotion of jealousy in some form is nearly universal, yet with variation (Babcock, Costa,

Green & Eckhart, 2004; Buunk, Angleitner, Oubaid & Buss, 1996). In his cross-cultural

analysis of jealousy, Bryson (1991, p. 191) states,

> It appears that, when jealous, the French get mad, the Dutch get sad, the
> Germans would rather not fight about it, the Italians don't want to talk
> about it and the Americans are concerned about what their friends think!

Although this is a generalization, it does represent evidence of cultural variation in

response to jealousy. Thus the question remains; how is jealousy understood in

contemporary queer, polyamorous women's culture in Vancouver, given the gendered

feeling rules and mono-normativity of the greater society in which it exists. A critical

discussion of polyamorous critiques of gender and jealousy will be explored further in

Chapter 5.

Instead of challenging each piece of research regarding jealousy and gender individually, I look at the cultural assumptions embedded in the research that take social ideas as fact. I am interested in how people are socialized to internalize these ideals and how social practices eventually become reoccurring embodied processes. I am critical of theories that naturalize and perpetuate the gender dichotomy. Noting how people are socialized to fit gender roles which are socially constructed and constantly changing, destabilizes the foundation of the gender dichotomy. Also, often variation is reduced to the ideal of each group, and these ideals in turn come to represent the whole group. Thus, I use polyamory and compersion as a counter-example to point out potential shortcomings of conventional research on jealousy and its roots in mono-normative assumptions. This enables me to challenge the naturalness of both jealousy and gender, while recognizing how both have embodied outcomes. I draw on queer theory and the sociology of emotion to transcend the gender dichotomy and bridge the conventional divide between nature and nurture, and between the individual and the social. In this section, I present the theoretical framework of queer theory which facilitates my analysis of polyamory, gender and jealousy.

Q*ueer* has been used as an umbrella term for gender and sexual identities which are outside the mainstream, critique heterosexism and mobilize as "resistance to regimes of the normal" (Warner, 1993, p. xxvi). The emergence of queer theory is often associated with the publication of Butler's work on performativity (1990) and de Lauretis' *Queer*

Theory (1991). Butler argues that gender is the result of the repetition of social patterns.

People copy ideas from already copied examples, and it is through this process that

gender appears to be reified. It is through the act of performing gender that gender is

thought to be "real," a process which Butler calls performativity. By troubling the

foundation of gender and by theorizing that gender is a copy of a copy, Butler

destabilizes not only the gender dichotomy, but also calls into question the categories of

lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender as sexual identities based on gender.

Stein and Plummer (1996) identify four "hallmarks of queer theory." First, queer

theory is,

> A conceptualization of sexuality which sees sexual power embodied in
> different levels of social life, expressed discursively and enforced through
> boundaries and binary divides (ibid, p. 134).

Second, queer theory problematizes sexual and gender categories, noting how identities

are always fluctuating and are built upon uncertain ground. Third, queer theory is a,

> Rejection of civil-rights strategies in favor of a politics of carnival,
> transgression, and parody which leads to deconstruction, decentering,
> revisionist readings, and an anti-assimilationist politics (ibid, p. 134).

Finally, queer theory includes a critique of social phenomenon that are not usually

thought to be in the "terrain of sexuality" (ibid), such as music, culture, fashion

(Karaminas, 2011) or hairstyles (Sycamore, 2004).[23]

Bersani (1995, p. 2) observes that *queer* is often "taken as delineating political

rather than erotic tendencies." The term queer was first used by non-normatively

gendered individuals who opposed the mainstream lesbian and gay rights strategy which

sought to gain social acceptance through assimilation with heterosexual norms. These

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[23] For an extensive review of such analysis, see www.queertheory.com

pioneering queers stated that assimilation was not their goal but rather radical shifts in thinking about sexuality and gender. The term queer is the reclamation of a previously grievous slur, thus transforming the word from a term of denigration to one of celebration, taking the power away from those who used this term as a insult. Queer is also a response to the modernist gender binary and a celebration of the multitude of ways of experiencing, expressing and embodying gender. Queer theory honours multiple, postmodern and post-structuralist ways of knowing, and places queers at the center of the construction of knowledge, as opposed to being told who and what we are by scientific and medical discourse. The term queer has not gained acceptance amongst all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals, but many appreciate the term because it avoids false divisions between and among these categories. In other words, if the categories of woman and man are destabilized, so too must lesbian, gay and bisexual.

Although not overtly feminist, Foucault's (1984) work on power and sexuality significantly influenced queer and feminist theory. Foucault's work contributes to feminist analysis of institutions that go beyond theories of victimization to more complex understandings of the interactions between power and gender. Foucault's work emphasizes not only how power operates through formal regulation (such as the state or economy), but also through micro-political environments, which can be extended to an analysis of families, relationships, and emotions. Foucault's work emphasizes prior feminist analysis that contend that the 'personal is political,'[24] which is the understanding that what is experienced by the individual is connected to larger sociopolitical forces. Foucault's work has been a source of empowerment for queer activists, helping advance

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[24] The phrase "the personal is political" was first used by Carol Hanish in 1970 in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* (Eds. Firestone & Koedt).

the same-sex rights movement from a model of oppression and liberation to a deeper

understanding of how relations of power produce sexual meaning. My approach to

feminist queer theory couples the destabilization of gender categories while recognizing

the grounded body. Also in line with feminist queer theory, I retain an anti-oppression

perspective that recognizes and actively challenges sexism, homophobia, racism,

transphobia, classism and ableism.

For my project, I apply Bryson's delineation of the term *queer women* used in her

project www.queerville.ca:

> The language is intended to be as vague and complex as our many and
> diverse identifications. Participants self-identify as "queer women". All
> queer women are welcome. Gender-queers, gender pirates, and trans. folk
> whose gender identifications reside somewhere in this complicated and
> deliberately and explicitly transgressive terrain are welcomed as
> participants. In this project, "queer women" does not mean that you
> identify, necessarily, either as "queer" or as a "woman", nor does it mean
> "queer"+"woman"=you. You may identify just like that - great. "queer
> women" was selected as the most inclusive of all possible phrases, rather
> than, say, GLBT women, because "queer" can function as a modifier of
> what "women" usually means. Queer doesn't have to refer to a group of
> people, it can also work as an adjective - one that we have reclaimed from
> its previously negative meaning (odd, peculiar) - where now, it can read as
> transgressive in a positive light - like gender queer, gender fucked and the
> like. Queer also can be used as a verb - as in, "to queer" - which means to
> interfere with the expected - this reading of "queer women" means "to
> interfere with, or thwart" the ordinary reading of the word, "women". All
> of this may appear like academic word play, but it is not. It is about
> insisting on using language to work against and to trouble the taken-for
> granted - that we know who or what "woman" means. People who
> identify straightforwardly as heterosexual and/or male would not fit the
> criteria for participation in this particular project.

Some polyamorous activists state that polyamory is a queer practice since it

opposes 'regimes of the normal.' Polyamory falls outside Rubin's idea of the 'charmed

circle' of sexual practice (1984), which delineates society's idea of *good* sexual practices

- heterosexual, monogamist and procreation-centric - and *bad* sexual practices - homosexual, non-monogamist and pleasure-centric. It can be argued that polyamory is closely aligned with queerness since polyamorists resist mono-normativity and challenge the dominance of the nuclear family. This resistance comes less in the form of organized political action such as protesting or lobbying, but instead, resistance occurs through the development of polyamorous relationship practices as alternatives to the conventional model and through shifting the emotional practices. My use of queer theory in this research reflects queer resistance to gender dichotomy, sexual binaries and imposed relationship structures. Queer theory also acknowledges unconventional ways of knowing, including the emotional and subjective. A queer reading of polyamory makes apparent the extent to which relationship models are social decisions, with monogamy socially constructed as 'normal.' At the same time, as my research will show, while polyamorists challenge dominant institutional structures, at times they also reproduce the very power structures they attempt to resist.

Jealousy and Power Relations

Jealousy is an emotion that emerges within social relationships, and as such it is intimately connected to power relations. Jealousy is intricately connected to social understandings of love, relationships and sexuality, and as such, is embedded in the

power relations that operate in interpersonal relationships. Boler (1999, p. xviii) argues

that emotions operate on two levels: as "a site of social control" and "as a potential site of

critical inquiry and transformation, both of the self and of the culture." Some

polyamorists describe jealousy as a form of social control in mono-normative culture and

hence they resist it and attempt to transform their experience of it. In the following

section of this chapter, I describe theories that frame my understanding of how power is

relevant to jealousy and polyamory in two intersecting realms; first, how polyamorists are

affected by the (intersecting) regulation of sexuality and of emotions, and second, how

power relations play out personally, in relationships and in polyamorous culture. In order

to understand power relations as they pertain to the study of emotion, it is important to

understand the role of systemic institutionalized power in society. Hence my approach is

guided by feminist intersectionality, sociology of emotion, feminist responses to

Foucault, Weeks' Radical Pluralism, and critical analyses of sexuality. This theoretical

framework guides my critical understanding of polyamory as a sexual practice and sexual

culture. In Chapter 6, I continue this discussion by describing how my participants

attempt to re-imagine and resist power in relation to jealousy in their polyamorous

relationships and in regard to the institutional regulation of sexuality and of emotion.

One way to understand how emotions operate as a site of social control is by

looking at how emotions are taught in informal contexts (such as through mass, or

increasingly, social media), and in formal contexts (such as public education). In the

classroom, rationality is generally the only acceptable form of knowledge. Students are

taught how and when it is acceptable to express emotions. Boler (1999) observes that

emotions are disciplined via two means. First, emotions have a "utility, or skills-based

discipline" and are read through the lens of science and pragmatics. Second, emotions

are disciplined as social control through "obedience, or rules-based discipline" and these

operate through "religion or moral values" (ibid, p. 31). Boler argues that,

> pastoral power - teaching students and teachers to self-police - manifests
> through a combination of religious, scientific, and rational discourses
> (ibid).

  Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* (1995) is a good example of the utility perspective on

emotions. In his best-selling and highly influential book, he argues that Emotional

Intelligence is replacing Intelligence Quotient (IQ) as a marker of success in education

and in the workplace. Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the ability to read, understand and

convey feelings. EI is not the ability to be nice or to let feelings dominate one's actions.

Instead, it involves intuiting and managing emotions, the ability to communicate

emotional needs and to read and respond to those of others. EI does not involve stifling

or repressing emotions, but instead involves learning how to manage bad stress and work

instead with "good stress" (i.e. motivating drives). According to Goleman, people with

strong EI have integrity, are conscientious and adaptable. They can find comfort in

ambiguity, are motivated by positive emotional desires and are comfortable with delayed

gratification. EI is characterized by knowledge of one's own emotions, the ability to

manage emotions, self-motivation, ability to empathize, and ability to handle

relationships (or "interpersonal effectiveness"). Thus, emotions function as tools.

Ahmed (2004, p. 3) notes that to Goleman,

> Emotions may even be represented as good or better than thought, but
> only insofar as they are represented as a form of intelligence, as 'tools'
> that can be used by subjects in the project of life and career enhancement.

In his Utilitarian analysis of emotion, Goleman positions them as something that should not be "uncultivated or unruly" (ibid). Ahmed argues that Goleman reproduces a social hierarchy of lower and higher emotional ways of being.

One example of emotional control using Boler's second category, obedience, is the way shame and social stigma are used to keep people expressing emotions according to 'proper' means, often impacted/perpetuated by dominant power structures of racism, classism, sexism and ableism. Hochschild (1979) identifies *feeling rules* as the socially constructed formal and informal rules about how people are *supposed* to feel. Women, for example, are encouraged not to demonstrate anger, to submit to the wishes of the men in their lives and/or to put all their emotional energy into the care of their spouse and children (Robinson, 1997). Examples of social resistance to these feeling rules include Lorde's (1984) politicization of anger as a response to racism, and feminist consciousness-raising practices, which politicize the emotional expression of discontent (Boler, 1999). Zembylas and Fendler (2007) note that in education, expressing and talking about an emotion have been conflated. People are discouraged from behaving jealously, but are encouraged to express jealousy using prescribed vocabulary, such as "I feel jealous with regard to you." Thus, there are acceptable and unacceptable feeling and expression rules with the result that many expressions of emotion become feigned and contrived. At the same time, only certain truths can be told and any divergent expression is taken as excessive and potentially a sign of disorder. My research asks how the

discourse of polyamory challenges the hegemonic structure of emotion and exposes the ideology of jealousy.

A macro-level sociological investigation of emotion looks at how societal structures, power and norms affect groups of individuals. For example, men are socialized to respond to jealousy by picking a fight with the 'rival.' A micro-level approach, in contrast, emphasizes how society functions as a collection of individual emotional beliefs, behaviours and decisions. For instance, a specific group of individuals' anger at an institution could lead to an activist demonstration (Barbalet, 1998). Similarly, envy can function as a means of balancing social inequalities. Some emotions are more directly social in that they rely on interactions with one's community or other people, as with confidence, trust and loyalty (see Barbalet, 1996), anger (see Lorde, 1984), shame (see Munt, 2008), and jealousy. Other emotions appear to be experienced independently, such as sadness and depression. Yet all emotions emerge from interactions with one's socio-cultural world. Bridging this divide is Mills' (1959, in Lemert, 1999, p. 350) "sociological imagination," linking "the personal troubles of milieu and the public issues of social structure." Polyamorists form their cultural ideas of emotion based on a macro-level critique of mono-normativity and its ensuing ideas about love, possession and jealousy. Emotions are not solely an interaction *between* the psychic and the social, rather, the psychic and social are inseparable from one another. The collective shapes how individuals understand and interpret their experience of emotion (Ahmed, 2004).

Jealousy is also intricately linked to perceived power relations. While power relations can have material affect, on an emotional level, *perceptions* of power play a

formidable role in understanding one's position in a relationship and contribute to tangible emotional effects. Emotions emerge in ways independent of cognitive understandings of them. Notably, the use of the word perceived is not meant to dismiss the validity of its affect. Rather, I point to the importance of our interpretation of situations in the embodiment of its affect. This distinction as well as the complexity of the notion of power as it relates to jealousy in polyamorous relationships is a key question in my study. Many people describe jealousy as a result of insecurity coming from an imbalance of power, real or perceived. Jealousy can be experienced as vulnerability linked to the fear of losing a relationship or a decline in its quality, which again is inseparable from how one understands power within a relationship. For example, a person may not be threatened in their relationship, but their perception of an imbalance of power could trigger a jealous response. I am concerned about power in terms of 1) the regulation of sexuality and emotions, and polyamorists' attempted resistance to this regulation and 2) in the interpersonal dynamics of queer women's polyamorous relationships, as well as the connection between these two levels of analysis of power.

Power relations and jealousy influence each other in interpersonal relationships. People can feel "powerless" when they are jealous (Bernhard, 1986), and this can be a powerlessness over their emotional state or over the situation about which they are jealous. Having a lover pursue other intimate relationships can put one in a vulnerable position that can bring up insecurities. Some people respond to jealousy by trying to exert power and control over a situation. Power also emerges in terms of social stigma and shame, which is revealed at the intersection of interpersonal relationships and the

regulation of sexuality. In his study on jealousy, Clanton (1996, p. 6) measured power

differences within a relationship using a "Relationship Assessment Scale" and found that

"the more equal the balance of power, the less jealousy." The scale includes the

following questions in order to determine power imbalances:

> Who has more professional prestige? Who earns higher income? Who
> loves who more? Who would find a new partner quicker if you broke up?
> Who receives more attention from persons of the other gender? Who
> desires sex with the other more? Who is more verbal, more articulate,
> more persuasive? Who is more likely to leave the relationship? Who has
> more close friends of the same gender? If you have children: Who is
> closer to your children? If you do not have children: Who wants children
> more? (ibid, p. 186).

 Despite the heterosexist and monogamist bias of this model, it does offer insight into

practical manifestations of power within a relationship. These differences may not reflect

actual power imbalances, but the perception alone can manifest as embodied experience

of jealousy. I would add other factors that contribute to the manifestation of power and

hence jealousy, including beauty, age, health, ability, gender, racial and class differences.

And for a polyamorist, other factors may come into play including who has more partners

and/or the quality of the relationship (i.e. a casual sexual relationship versus intimate love

relationship, strong chemistry with the other person versus weak chemistry), who wants

more lovers outside of the relationship, or primary versus secondary status.

Clanton's model of power in interpersonal relationships offers a valid and useful

description of how many people perceive power and thus how it influences their

embodiment of jealousy. Clanton's model of power is consistent with Foucault's (1976)

Juridico-Discursive model. This account of power relations assumes a zero-sum model

of power; i.e. if I have power, you do not, and power is a *thing* that one can have. This

99

understanding of hierarchical power is only a partial contribution to the emotional episode, offers limited escape from the experience of jealousy, and is (sometimes indirectly) challenged by polyamorists. The regulation of emotion is intertwined with the regulation of sexuality, as well as its resistance.

In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1976) questions why sexuality has such a strong hold over the social organization of Western society, asking "why do we burden ourselves today with so much guilt for having once made sex a sin?" (ibid, p. 9). Through his genealogy of sexuality, Foucault identifies and rejects the Juridico-Discursive model of power. According to this model, power operates in the following ways: Power is something that can be possessed by a person, a class, or a group of people. Power primarily flows from the top down, through law, the economy or the state, and functions as a binary where there are people who have it and people who do not. Power is primarily repressive and oppressive. The assumptions of the Juridico-Discursive model have led theorists to develop the Repressive Hypothesis to analyze society and social injustice. The Repressive Hypothesis assumes that power is dichotomized, hierarchical and that those with power repress those without it. In this model, liberation is achieved by overcoming oppressive forces that limit the freedom of the marginalized.

Foucault challenges the Juridico-Discursive model for several reasons. First, the act of repressing something produces a "discursive explosion" or a proliferation of discourse around it. In reference to Victorian society, Foucault argues that,

> If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression (ibid, p. 6).

Likewise, an attraction that is taboo in a monogamous dynamic may become heightened. The act of censoring something or making it taboo only draws more attention to it, making it more desirable. Another example of this is how, despite the repression of homosexuality, there is much more theory and analysis of homosexuality than of heterosexuality (for example, its etiology), with the word *homosexuality* being coined long before the term *heterosexuality*. Second, wherever there is power, there is resistance. This resistance is not opposed to dominant discourse, but rather circulates in it and thereby contributes to it. Third, if power is only repressive, then it is inexplicable that people would continue to obey and engage with such structures. Foucault rejects the idea that we are all brainwashed or mystified by ideology. He instead emphasizes people's agency and free will, enacted in what are in fact generative conditions of power. Polyamorists exemplify this generative agency.

Foucault proposes an alternate model of how power is conceived and how power operates. Power is "the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (Foucault, 1976, p. 93). First, power is not acquired, shared or seized. Rather, it is exercised and it comes into effect through relationships. Second, power is omnipresent; it is produced from one moment to the next. Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but rather because it is immanent in relationships (such as economic, knowledge production and sexuality). Foucault approaches power without judgment; it is neither good nor bad. Power can manifest as dominating and controlling,

but its operations can also appear ambiguous in terms of who benefits. Third, "power comes from below" and takes shape as a general network rather than a binary or all-encompassing opposition between ruler and the ruled. Therefore, power is best analyzed through relations and actions. And fourth, power is "intentional and non-subjective; […] there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives" (ibid, p. 95). Power is not a hidden phenomenon that only experts can understand. And finally, power is productive and generative. It is productive of a range of effects, including resistance. "Where there is power, there is resistance...This resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (ibid, p. 95). There is always a plurality of resistances, exemplified well by polyamorists in regard to mono-normativity. Bell (1994, p. 14) explains that,

> Power is productive – power produces knowledges, institutions, bodies, pleasures, desires, and truths. Power operates through the construction of particular knowledges which become accepted as truth and reality.

This notion of the productivity of power is applicable to how polyamorists produce their knowledge of emotion and of their sexual practice.

Foucault does not deny the existence of repression or the phenomenon of class for example, but challenges the assumption that any site could be the most important locus of analysis and resistance. Foucault rejects grand theories, reductionism, "binary divisions of struggle" and functionalism and the idea that institutions are self-regulating (Sawicki, 1991, p. 24). Foucault rejects the Marxist idea that the ruling class maintains their possession of power through the imposition of ideology, that certain people and certain locations in society have more access to this truth, and that there are good and bad positions in society. Instead, Foucault focuses on the exercise of power that comes into

being through relations. In other words, he focuses on the relations rather than on the subjects that are relating. Thus, it is polyamorous action rather than being which produces resistance.

Sawicki (1991, p. 14) applies Foucault's conception of power to "isolate disciplinary technologies of women's bodies that are dominating and hence difficult to resist." She argues that power operates through the production of knowledge, and thus an understanding of how the institutions of psychiatry and medicine, for example, function as disciplinary technologies contributes to a feminist analysis of their effect. Sawicki (ibid, p.14) also applies Foucault's idea to a feminist analysis by,

> Acknowledg(ing) domination but center(ing) on cultures of resistance to hegemonic power/ knowledge formations and on how individuals who are the targets of this power can play a role in its constitution and its demise.

Power operates not only through formal regulation (such as the state or economy), but also through micro-political environments, including families, relationships, subtle manipulations, etc. Foucault's politicization of such practices strengthens the argument that the 'personal is political' and contributes to an understanding of how power plays out on/in the body, a notion that is applicable to polyamorists' re-imagination of jealousy, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 6.

Foucault's work has been a source of empowerment for queer activists, helping advance the gay rights movement from a model of liberation to a deeper understanding of how relations of power produce sexual meaning. Halperin (1995, p. 56) argues that the aim of queer activists is not to reform institutions by demanding equality, but to "defend ourselves so that the institutions are forced to reform themselves." In other words, "the

aim of an oppositional politics is therefore not liberation but resistance." (ibid, p. 18).

Foucault "shifts the focus of our attention from matters of truth to matters of power"

(ibid, p. 31), enabling discussions to move beyond the etiology of homosexuality or of

non-monogamous desires into an understanding of the operations of homophobia,

genderism and mono-normativity.

Foucaultian queer activism is not meant to alter who has power, but to empower

marginal voices and to create a completely unique outcome that is "unexpected, dynamic

and open-ended" (Halperin, 1995, p. 56). According to Heaphy, Donovan and Weeks

(2004), what makes non-monogamous practice unique in same-sex relationships is

reflected in Foucault's idea that resistance produces creative outcomes. An unintended

benefit of homosexual exclusion from institutionalized marriage is that gays and lesbians

have had ample opportunity to question the institution itself. Through this reflexive

critique, the outcome is a creative production of alternatives that better reflect chosen

expressions of pleasure. The "repression" resulting from the (historic) gay and lesbian

exclusion from marriage enables a productive and creative counter-attack, and a

proliferation of alternate discourses.

> Power is not intrinsically, nor it is only, negative…power is also positive
> and productive… Power is therefore not opposed to freedom. And
> freedom, correspondingly, is not freedom from power – it is not a
> privileged zone outside of power, unconstrained by power – but a
> potentiality internal to power, even an effect of power (Halperin, 1995, p.
> 17).

Queer, polyamorous relationships are a practice of freedom emerging from the

dominant discourse that are in part modeled through their resistance to dominant ideas

about love, relationships and emotions. And yet, many conventional models of power are

replicated in their relationships. In Chapter 6, I reflect on how my participants perceive,

104

experience and re-imagine jealousy and power in their relationships in response to the

institutional regulation of emotion and sexuality.

Radical Pluralism

One limitation of Foucault's work is that it does not adequately address emotion,

interpersonal power, or intersectional matters of power imbalance from a feminist

perspective. Thus, my theoretical lens also integrates radical pluralism and other feminist

theories of sexuality. Radical pluralism offers a theoretical lens from which to critique

compulsory monogamy and dominant/ regulatory models of sexuality, as well as

understand the sexual subcultural formation of polyamory. According to Weeks' (1985),

sexual critiques tend to be polarized in terms of two approaches to sexuality. The first is

that sexuality is fundamentally dangerous and we need society to tame it. This approach

claims that the only good outlet for sexual energy is marital and procreative sex, and all

other modes of sexual expression are dangerous. Hence, social regulation is crucial for

the containment of sexuality that would otherwise run rampant. The second approach

suggests that sexuality is generally healthy and good, but social forces render it negative.

Hence, lifting sexual repression would result in sexual freedom. Radical pluralism is an

alternative to this polarization. It starts from a recognition of the importance of diversity. Awareness of the *fact* that there is extensive sexual diversity does not mean that such diversity will be normalized or accepted. Thus, radical pluralism recognizes the importance of some form of regulation.

As Plummer (1975, p. 30) notes, "nothing is sexual but naming makes it so." Indeed, sex acquires its meaning through social relations. Radical pluralism rejects any moral absolutism and instead prioritizes diversity by developing,

> Democratic ways of handling [antagonisms], to eliminate arbitrary
> exclusions and to maximize the possibilities of a non-exploitative freedom
> of choice (Weeks, 1985, p. 57).

Radical pluralism recognizes individual needs and dangers associated with certain denied sexual expression (Weeks, 1985, p. 57). Radical pluralism "involves a challenge to the idea that sexuality embodies the working out of an immanent truth" (ibid, p. 56). It moves away from linking sex to a *naturalistic fallacy*, i.e. the idea that what is perceived as natural is necessarily good, and that which is perceived as unnatural is bad. Thus in my study, I do not ask what normal/natural sexuality is, but rather how are 'normal' and 'natural' constructed? I ask similar questions as does Weeks (2009, p. 92):

> What makes this particular activity valid or invalid, appropriate or
> inappropriate? What are the social factors that make these meaningful?
> What are the power relations at work?

Radical pluralism is compatible with sex-positive feminist approaches to sexuality that see sexuality as an important aspect of overall health and happiness, and as an area that should not be relegated to the margins of feminist analysis and activism. This view challenges the 'sex-negativity' which characterizes much of contemporary Western thinking, including shame around sexual pleasure, double standards regarding women's

106

and men's sexuality, and fear of alternative sexualities and relationship structures such as

polyamory. Instead of assuming a "normal" sexuality and studying deviance from this

"normal" baseline, Rubin (1984) suggests that there is a need to look at "benign sexual

variation." This does not mean that absolutely anything goes, however, as Rubin

acknowledges, sexual action can be extremely dangerous and linked to violence and

abuse. Rubin is a theorist of marginalized sexuality, and through radical sexual pluralism

she develops space for difference. Rubin's (1984, p. 15) "democratic morality" suggests

that sexual acts should be assessed based on,

> The way partners treat one another, the level of mutual consideration, the
> presence or absence of coercion, and the quantity or quality of pleasure
> they provide.

From this perspective, polyamory should not be seen as necessarily good, but

rather, should be evaluated according to the criteria of action, consent and the

experiences of those involved. After all, polyamorous relationships are not immune to

abuse, lying or cheating. How such ambitions play out in the polyamorous context is a

central question in my project. Instead of applying naturalistic moral standards to

marginal sexualities such as polyamory, I consider the historical development from which

contemporary sexual representations have emerged and the historical roots of violence,

aggression and harassment associated with jealousy. I look at how the sexual practices of

polyamory, and of jealousy, intersect with other social and political forces.

In this chapter, I reviewed the theories and debates that frame my research. First, I contrasted biologically focused research on emotion with social constructionist research. In response to the limitations of either polarized view, I outlined *intersectional emotions*, a term I use to refer to my approach to a social analysis of emotions that incorporates the affective turn in social research, along with sociological and interdisciplinary theories on emotion that bridge the dichotomy of nature/nurture, biology/society and the individual/collective. Subsequently, I presented a range of articles on jealousy that contrast women's and men's experiences and expression of jealousy. I critiqued this work using a combination of critical gender studies, queer theory, and feminist intersectionality. I outlined Clanton's work on power and jealousy, complimented by Foucault's critique of power, intersectional feminism, radical pluralism and sex positive feminism. In the following chapter, I provide a detailed description of the culture of polyamory, as a philosophy, discourse, politic and sexual practice. In Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I continue this analysis by presenting the results of my field research and how it corresponds to the above survey of research on emotion, culture, gender, power and jealousy.

Chapter 3 – Research Site: Polyamory as Philosophy, Discourse, Politics and Sexual Practice

"Also, let us not forget what polyamory is. The poly movement is a straight-out refutation of monogamy. Polyamory upends notions of what a proper relationship should be, obviating the need for the large and growing adultery-advice industry, reforming jealousy from a green-eyed monster into a tame housepet, jettisoning possessiveness and its attendant insecurity, and redefining words like fidelity, commitment, and marriage." Peppermint (2007)[25]

In contemporary Western culture, monogamy is viewed as the superior relationship model and indeed is the only institutionally recognized marital, and hence family structure. Yet historically and cross-culturally, non-monogamy has been much more widely practised than monogamy (Mead, 1977; Ryan and Jetha, 2010; West, 1996). Despite its marginalization, non-monogamy does exist in Western culture and one current manifestation of non-monogamy is polyamory. As Peppermint argues in this chapter's opening quotation, polyamory has grown out of a critique of compulsory monogamy and involves the re-envisioning of love, jealousy and other emotions. In the preceding chapter, I outline the debates within sociological studies of emotion and studies of jealousy, leading up to the queer feminist intersectional perspective that guides my research. In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the polyamorous social movement, its philosophy and academic discourse, as well as a view of the cultural influences effecting polyamory and the demographics and psychographics of my research sample. Finally, I summarize eight of the myths related to monogamy that are highlighted in polyamorous discourse.

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[25] http://freaksexual.wordpress.com/2007/11/27/the-strange-credibility-of-polyamory/

Emergence of Polyamory Discourse

While non-monogamy has a long history in theory and practice, *polyamory,* with its particular discourse, is a recent manifestation of non-monogamy. My focus in this dissertation is on polyamory, but in this overview I include discourses on other forms of consensual non-monogamy because of their overlap in theory and practice and the way they inform each other. What distinguishes polyamory from other forms of non-monogamy is its emphasis on being consensual, transparent, ethical, responsible, honest as well as certain cultural traits. However, in practice, polyamory and other forms of non-monogamy are far from mutually exclusive, as evidenced by their shared history. According to Haritaworn, Lin and Kleese (2006, p. 518), the discourse on polyamory "emerged at the crossroads of several sexually emancipatory discourses" including gay male subculture, the bisexual movement, alternative sexuality movements (particularly sadomasochism/ BDSM[26]) and feminism. In this section, I discuss the intersection of these movements as they influence polyamory's "burgeoning sexual story" (Ritchie & Barker, 2006).

Haritaworn (et al, 2006; Weeks, 2001) argues that gay male subculture provides a "rich repertoire of sexuality and intimacy" with strong acceptance of open relationships,

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[26] BDSM refers to the practices of bondage, discipline, dominance, submission, sadism and masochism, collectively called leather, kink or sadomasochism (SM).

anonymous sex, cruising, and a celebration of non-normative sexualities. They also argue that among bisexuals there is an overlap with the polyamorous community, and that many bisexuals value the option of not limiting themselves to only one lover. At the same time, "non-monogamy is a troubling issue for many bisexuals, because dominant discourse constructs bisexuality as non-monogamous *by necessity"* with the fallacious assumption that to be truly bisexual, one must maintain relationships with people of both sexes (Kleese, 2005, p. 448). Sadomasochism (SM) provides a space to explore erotic and sexual play outside of 'couple culture' (Haritaworn, et al, 2006; Califia, 1994). The twenty-first century has been dubbed the "Singles Century" by Dennison (2000, cited in Brown, 2006) who notes the surge in popular representation of single people and the seeming quality of life that singles enjoy that characterizes this period. Polyamorists may be understood as the opposite of single given their multiple commitments, but their relationships depend in part on a break from the nuclear family structure consistent with Dennison's characterization.

Discussion of non-monogamy in Western culture seems to go in and out of feminist fashion. In the early 1900s in the USA, discourse on intentional non-monogamy was primarily generated from within feminist and socialist communities (Noel, 2006). Research into non-monogamy has often been coupled with a critique of the patriarchal institution of marriage. In the early part of the 20th century, anarcho-feminist Emma Goldman (1931/2006) was an adamant proponent of non-monogamy and described marriage as solely an economic arrangement tied to women's oppression. The 1960s saw the revival of this discussion with the rise of human rights-based social movements including the Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation movements, as well as a shift in

111

sexual mores brought on by the Sexual Revolution (Weeks, 1985). In the 1970-1980s, lesbian communities showed renewed interest in the practice of non-monogamy as a radical feminist political resistance to the patriarchal institutions of marriage and monogamy (Robinson, 1997; Ross, 1995). Millet (1970) offered a rich critique of marriage, linking monogamy to social and economic control of women as unpaid domestic workers. Feminists in the 1970s argued that the patriarchal institution of marriage,

> Granted men rights to the sexual, reproductive and domestic services of a wife, and a bourgeois institution founded on a hypocritical morality and the protection of ruling class men's property and inheritance rights (Jackson and Scott, 2004, p. 152).

Rich critiqued the institution of marriage and what she saw as the link between love and "compulsory heterosexuality" (1980). Robinson (1997, p. 3) described monogamy as an institution linked to the capitalist principle of "ownership of property, the property here being women and through them the lines of inheritance are maintained." She criticized the institution of marriage arguing that it diverted all emotional and political energy into one's 'other half.' Robinson (1997) notes that the way relationships are characterized by sexual exclusivity and emotional dependence rarely benefits women in heterosexual pairings since women are encouraged to sacrifice personal development, put all their energy into one person and do most of the emotional work within that relationship, all "through a rose-tinted lens of romance" (ibid, p. 2). From this perspective, compulsory monogamy operates as a means of social and emotional control. The alternative is not an end to the practice of monogamy but a reevaluation of the institution of monogamy and its enforcement as the only legitimate form of relationship.

The institution of monogamy also encourages women to compete with one another for the scarce resource of partners (Rosa, 1994). Rosa further argues that heterosexual monogamy isolates and separates women from their friends and community, thus disengaging them from political discourse. Feminist critiques of monogamy, along with the understanding that the "personal is political" led to a popularization of non-monogamous practices among both lesbians and heterosexual feminists. Proponents of this practice hoped to reduce the privilege afforded to coupledom and shift value to other kinds of relationships, including platonic friendship. The feminist 'sex wars' of the 1980s saw a split between feminists on the practice of non-monogamy. During this time,

> Non-monogamy became associated with a libertarian, individualistic, hedonistic pursuit of sexual variety, leading some political lesbians to endorse monogamous coupledom (Jackson and Scott, 2004, p. 153).

The 1980s also saw the rise of HIV/AIDS; during this period increasing scorn for promiscuity was coupled with a rekindled emphasis on monogamous partnerships (Kleese, 2005).

Adopting monogamy in practice did not mean that feminists of the 1980s were uncritical of monogamy as a patriarchal institution that adversely affects women. At the same time as some women were re-embracing monogamy, sex-positive feminism emerged in the 1980s as a reaction to the essentialism of radical feminist theory. Sex-positive feminists were critical of earlier feminist views that replicated dominant culture's sex-negative views on sexuality, in which only a limited number of sexual acts were seen as good. Also, they challenged the previous lack of diverse opinions in which a new set of sexual standards emerged (Rubin, 1984). The sex-positive movement was

113

critical of feminist theory that re-inscribed gender differences between men and women, as opposed to analysing the social construction of gender roles. Sex-positive feminism also emerged out of a need to respond to shifting social conditions related to the success of earlier feminist efforts. Sex-positive feminist discourse regarded sexuality as a politically important aspect of one's overall well-being, not a luxury set apart from politics. Sexual repression, whether in terms of enforced femininity, passivity and objectification, compulsory heterosexuality, or institutionalized monogamy, is linked to sexism, heterosexism and the dominant power structure (Califia, 1994). Contemporary polyamory appears to embody feminist values, particularly gender equality, body-centered politics, sex-positivity and a belief that the personal is political. In Chapter 5, I will further explore contemporary polyamorous practice to examine to what extent polyamory reflects feminist and sex-positive values and how it challenges and at times, replicates gender norms.

Queer, polyamorous women challenge conventional understandings of gender and jealousy and are therefore an ideal group from which to examine the sociology of jealousy. Queer women have a long history of critiquing monogamy and several generations of feminists have examined non-monogamy with different emphasis. Queer women also have a history of resisting culturally expected gendered behaviour (Butler, 1990; Halberstam, 1998). In their study in 1983, Blumstein and Schwartz (in Barker & Langdrige, 2010) found that 65% of gay male couples in the USA had some form of open relationship, while the rate among lesbians was 29%, and among heterosexual couples the

rate was 15-18%. Barker (2005) also found that 51-54% of polyamorous people were

bisexual.[27] My experience in Vancouver shows that polyamory is a common and

growing practice in queer communities.

In an article in Wired Magazine (Lynn, 2008)[28], Haslam argues that the Internet is

the "tipping point" for bringing polyamory into the mainstream, making it easy for

polyamorists to share and access resources, as well as meet other polyamorists, both for

dating and for community-building. A Google search on "polyamory" brings up over

1,450,000 hits (as of June, 2011), and articles on polyamory increasingly appear in

mainstream sources, including Newsweek (2009),[29] Washington Post (2008)[30] and Global

TV (2009).[31],[32] Polyamorists are using the Internet to create websites, blogs, and

podcasts, and to participate in forums, dating sites and academic networking.

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[27] I include these statistics to provide some numerical backdrop of polyamory's prevalence, but I
remain skeptical of their absolute precision. No large-scale study has been conducted recently to
gage the quantity of people who practice polyamory or other forms of non-monogamy.
[28] Regina Lynn;
http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/commentary/sexdrive/2008/02/sexdrive_0229
[29] Jessica Bennett, July 29, 2009, "Polyamory, The Next Sexual Revolution?";
http://www.newsweek.com/id/209164
[30] Monica Hesse, February, 2008 "Pairs with Spares; For Polyamorists with a Whole Lotta Love,
Three or More is Never a Crowd" http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-
dyn/content/article/2008/02/12/AR2008021203072.html
[31] October, 2009. http://news.globaltv.com/programs/16x9/Love+Affairs/2082446/story.html
[32] There is a blog dedicated to documenting mentions of polyamory in the news called
http://polyinthemedia.blogspot.com.

Polyamory as Social Movement, Philosophy and Academic Discourse

In 2006, Noel (p. 604) wrote that, "polyamory is an emerging field where the limited numbers of texts are largely instructional in nature, rather than analytical or sociological." Since 2006 however, there has been a proliferation of academic writing on polyamory, the bulk of which tends to be polarized as either celebratory of the progressive nature of polyamory or overly critical of its representation (Barker & Langdridge, 2010, p. 748). The 'celebratory' texts present polyamory as primarily "liberating and empowering," and focus on how non-monogamous practice, "enable[s] them to be creative, free and reflexive, building egalitarian and democratic families of choice through an ethics of trust and negotiation" and on the "creative and innovative" ways in which they work through emotional challenges (ibid, p. 754). The critical texts tend to point out the "largely apolitical motivations given by people involved in such relationships" (ibid, p.755). While both views offer interesting insights, neither polarity is completely accurate. As with any relationship structure and relationship discourse, there are positive and negative aspects. In my work, I look at the successes and difficulties in polyamorous relationships and philosophy.

In her study *Progressive Polyamory: Considering Issues of Diversity,* Noel (2006) divides twelve key theorists writing on polyamory between 1992 and 2004 into two cohorts, Self-Help and Esoterism. According to Noel, all of these theorists are pro-polyamory and write from the standpoint of personal narrative and activism but rarely critique the culture of polyamory. Often called the "Bible of Polyamory," *The Ethical*

Slut (Easton & Liszt, 1997) is a good example of the self-help cohort or the "genre of popular advice" (Haritaworn et al, 2006, p. 217). Easton and Liszt present an overview of possible ways to structure polyamorous relationships and devote a full chapter to managing jealousy. Likewise, Taormino's *Opening Up* (2008) surveys a wide range of non-monogamous practices (polyamory, swinging, polyfidelity, etc.) and their various challenges (including jealousy, legal issues, raising children, sexual health, etc.).[33] The Self-Help genre of writing on polyamory echoes Giddens' (1992, p. 2) late-modernist pursuit of the "pure relationship" model, which refers to "a relationship of sexual and emotional equality," emphasizing qualities of trustworthiness, self-reflexivity and consent. While self-help literature has contributed to the dissemination and popularization of polyamorous ideas, the community's reliance on it has contributed to a "power-evasiveness" within the community, that is, a lack of political awareness about issues other than sexuality, often neglecting issues of class, ability, race and privilege (Noel, 2006). Haritaworn (et al, 2006) identify three major concerns regarding this reliance on self-help literature. First, this reliance means that the producers of polyamorous literature are often unaware that they are setting up a new norm, and thereby establishing a standard of good practice (ibid, p. 519). This can lead to another rigid set of emotional feeling rules. Second, it,

> Endorses an abstract individualism at the expense of critiquing the structural power relations around race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality and class (ibid, p. 519).

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[33] Other popular Self-Help texts include Lano and Parry's *Breaking the Barriers to Desire* (1995), West's *Lesbian Polyfidelity* (1996), Anapol's Polyamory; *The New Love Without Limits* (1997), Ravenscroft's *Polyamory; Roadmaps for the Clueless and Hopeful* (2004) and Benson's *The Polyamory Handbook; A User's Guide* (2008).

Third, by arguing for a "universalistic model of affect" (ibid, p. 519) theorists of the self-help genre presume their own Western model to be emotionally and sexually superior. Petrella (2007) points out that although these self-help texts emphasize the need for self-reflexive communication, they lack a critical analysis of how emotions are embedded within socially-constructed power relations.

The second cohort of literature on polyamory described by Noel is Esoterism. Esoteric work emphasizes polyamory's connection to New Age spirituality and links monogamy to monotheism and thus religious doctrine (Haritaworn, et al, 2006, p. 522; Noel, 2006). Anderlini-D'Onofrio (2004; p. 5) argues that

> The nexus between monogamy and monotheism thus becomes transparent. Monotheism can be seen as a self-imposed limitation to love only one deity; monogamy as a similarly self-imposed limitation to love only one partner to the exclusion of everybody else. Polyamory and bisexuality propose a plurality of loves, both in the number of partners and of genders thereof.

Kaldera also falls under the category of Esoterism, incorporating "personal symbolism and magical affinities" into his polyamorous practice (2005, p. 5), including a description of "polyamorous astrology." In *Plural Loves*, Anderlini-D'Onofrio (2004, p. 4) claims that,

> Compared to the 1970s-style polyfidelity, polyamory today is not only more gender and sexual orientation aware, but also more adaptable to a globalizing world, and more effective in rendering this world more harmonious through its workshops and education to love.

I would argue that Anderlini-D'Onofrio exaggerates the diversity of the polyamorous community, as well as the superiority of polyamory as a relationship model. In her book *Gaia and the New Politics of Love: Notes for a Poly Planet* (2009), Anderlini-D'Onofrio posits that love is a panacea to ecological and global crises, and claims that the

polyamory and bisexual movements are exemplars of this process.[34] Although her position on polyamory's progressive social function offers one piece of the puzzle, it masks the complexities of the power relations which polyamorists navigate.

In the last few years, there has emerged a body of academic work within the study of polyamory on a wide range of topics including identity (Adam, 2006), gender (Sheff, 2006), language (Ritchie & Barker, 2006) and the intersection of poly and bisexuality (Kleese, 2007).   Jamieson (2004) argues that while monogamous couples rely on sexual exclusivity to feel important to one another, non-monogamous couples construct other forms of "specialness" to define the parameters of their relationship. Commitment, trust and openness, she argues, are no longer tied to sexual exclusivity. Ashbee's work addresses the way in which right-wing conservatives have posited homosexuality as a "slippery slope" leading to polyamory to argue against gay rights (Ashbee, 2007). In 2006, *Sexualities Journal* published a special edition on polyamory. In this edition, Ritchie and Barker discuss the ways in which polyamorous people have constructed their identities through language despite living in a society that only recognizes monogamy and brands all extra-relationship sexual engagements as infidelity. In his study on gay male open relationships, Adam writes that gay men retain a "masculine discourse of autonomy and adventurism" (2006, p. 5), while Sheff (2006, p. 621) describes how hegemonic masculinities are repeated and resisted within polyamorous relationships through their "emotional expressions and relationships." In a later work, Wilkinson (2010) parallels Sheff's sentiment about polyamorists' reproduction of romantic notions of love and conventional gendered hierarchies, what she identifies as "poly-normativity."

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[34] Other books that fall within this category are *Pagan Polyamory: Becoming a Tribe of Hearts* (Kaldera, 2005) and *Spiritual Polyamory* (Mystic Life, 2004).

Several researchers have concluded that polyamorous women experience a sense

of "empowerment" and self-development through their polyamorous practice (Cardoso,

Correia & Capella, 2009; Sheff, 2005; Weitzman, 1999). This finding is in contrast to

the common portrayal of women in polygamous relationships as oppressed (see Al-

Krenawi & Graham, 2006; Campbell, 2005), and the assumption that only men benefit

from opening up a relationship.   In her psychological research, Weitzman (1999, online)

describes the benefits that polyamorous people reap from their practice, including

personal growth due to the expansion of intimate relationships and "associations with

new and diverse people." Financially, she argues, there are benefits to sharing household

costs, chores and family care. These benefits, however, imply co-habitation, which is not

necessarily the case with many polyamorous partners. Weitzman links the following

positive elements to polyamory:

> Increased personal freedom; greater depth to social relationships; the
> potential for sexual exploration in a non-judgmental setting; a
> strengthening of spousal bonds; a sense of being desired; a feeling of
> belonging; added companionship; increased self-awareness; intellectual
> variety; and the chance for new aspects of personality to emerge through
> relating to more people.[35],[36]

In *The Ethical Slut*, Easton and Lyszt describe the benefits that result from

communicating and negotiating intimate dynamics that better reflect one's desires.

Within institutional monogamy, they argue, boundaries and behaviours are often assumed

yet rarely discussed. Polyamory, according to Easton and Lyszt, necessitates the creation

of personalized agreements that better reflect the realistic contributions each partner is

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[35] Geri Weitzman, 1999, http://www.polyamory.org/~joe/polypaper.htm
[36] Such conclusions and assumptions within polyamorous discourse parallel a popular joke told by polyamorists: What is the plural of spouse? Spice

willing to make. Easton and Lyszt challenge the negative connotation associated with the word 'slut' and question why pursuing one's preferred lifestyle and getting the most out of romantic relationships is deemed negative. They consider polyamory's rewriting of conventional rules to be a radical and subversive act.

Heaphy, Weeks and Donovan (2004) describe how polyamory and/or non-monogamy is particularly prevalent among queer people (although clearly not exclusively so). Because same-sex relationships are not the social norm and are only infrequently represented in the media, queer relationships do not have the cultural guidelines and support given to monogamous practice. This has resulted in what Heaphy (ibid, p. 169) refers to as the "unintended positive consequence" of exclusion from institutional marriage; queers rejecting the dominant model of heterosexual monogamy and instead creating new forms of commitment and negotiated relationship structures. Freedom, equality, intimacy and emotional fidelity are valued over sexual exclusivity, resulting in a "new form of emotional democracy" (ibid, p. 185). In spite of the double stigmatization they experience as a result of their participation in queer and polyamorous countercultures, queer polyamorists' experiences are multi-dimensional and are not solely overshadowed by resistance to their marginalization. Polyamorists are often in positions of privilege with regard to other social categories. Also, in certain queer circles, polyamory is viewed with esteem as a further deviation from hetero-patriarchy and mono-normativity. In Chapter 4, I discuss my findings regarding the polyamorous practice of my participants as it compares to descriptions within polyamorous literature.

Summary of participants: Demographics and Psychographics

The participants in this study range in age from 25 to 62. The median age of my participants is 37, and the mean is 38.5. Although most participants identified as white, other ethnicities and identities included mixed-race, Asian-Canadian, Australian-Canadian and First Nations. Of those who identified their religion/spirituality, the following were represented: Jewish, Pagan, Wiccan, Buddhist, Christian/ Catholic and atheist. Participants' specific occupations was omitted to protect their identity, but my sample included physical labourers, professionals, academics/students, administrators, social workers, stay-at-home parents, artists, retail workers and health care practitioners. Class backgrounds ranged from working-class to middle-class. Of my sample of 22, three were born outside of Canada. Seven of my participants were parents.

The polyamorous women in my sample participated in a wide range of relationships (both within and prior to their engagement with polyamory) including: triads, primary relationships with sex on the side, long-term monogamy, marriage, singledom, co-habitation with one primary, cohabitation with two lovers (who are not lovers with each other), co-habitation with three lovers (who are lovers with each other), having a primary and a secondary lover, and having two primaries. The longest polyamorous relationship reported by my participants was 11 years at the time of my interview. The majority of the participants identified as women and three identified as

genderqueer, (all of whom were comfortable participating in my study due to their partial and/or historical identification as queer women). The vast majority of the sample identified as feminists, although they differed widely in their definitions of feminism. One participant was polyamorous with regular experience in the swinging community. Close to three quarters of the participants identified as kinky and/or interested in BDSM/sadomasochistic practices.

Culture of Queer Women's Polyamory in Vancouver

According to Seidman, Fischer and Meeks (2006), sexual cultures emerge in one of three ways. First, people may create a sexual culture in response to being marginalized, stigmatized or criminalized due to their sexual practice or preference. An example of this is the rise of queer culture in resistance to heteronormativity. Second, a group's practice may differ from the mainstream, or from normative behaviour in a given subculture. For example, gay "bear" culture emerged in response to a pressure among gay men to look and present a certain way (Hennen, 2005). In this instance, men who fit the bear description may have already existed, but the sexual culture surrounding the identity may have not. Third, a sexual culture can develop around a shared art form or popular culture, such as the development of a sexual presentation among the hip-hop community (Seidman et al, 2007). Polyamorous culture developed in response to mono-

normativity, and refined its categorization as a reaction to the non-monogamous practices of the Free Love movement which neglected the emotional component of sexuality. Two significant defining characteristics of polyamorous culture are a shared vocabulary (as described above) and a shared philosophy (particularly a belief in the possibility of loving more than one person and the possibility of compersion). Polyamorists also have a symbol to represent their practice - a heart intersected by an infinity symbol. No aesthetic or artistic expression has emerged to represent polyamorous culture, and therefore polyamorists are not visibly identifiable.

In the city of Vancouver there are several communities interested in alternative sexualities, with organizations such as the *Mayhem/ Bride of Pride, The Art of Loving, Metro Vancouver Kink,* and *VanPoly*, all of which offer public conferences and workshops on polyamory (as well as parties for people interested in polyamory to socialize). Vancouver has regular fetish events (such as *Sin City*) and queer parties (such as *Bent*, *Prance* and *Spit*), which collectively shape the landscape and ease acceptance for alternative sexualities generally. Because Vancouver is the largest city in British Columbia (and because sexual cultures tend to emerge in larger cities), many people interested in alternative sexual practices relocate to it, making for a large, sexually progressive community. Vancouver also has a well-organized queer presence, with input from the local LGBT newspaper *Xtra West* (as well as papers of lower circulation, *LUV* and *V-Rag*), and the politically vocal queer bookstore, *Little Sisters*, both of which have addressed the topic of polyamory.

The sense of community among polyamorists varies significantly. Many of my participants reported that their sense of belonging to a queer community was more

important than their sense of belonging to a polyamorous community. Instead of looking

at the boundaries of the community, I find it more useful to look at the shared culture

within a certain region and group. This shared culture includes the construction of norms

and ideas around compersion, *feeling rules* and re-imagined power. Shared culture in this

case also includes a common interest in a certain topic, even if there is a vast array of

opinions on the topic. My research focuses on a specific community and therefore I

include only a peripheral investigation of heterosexual and gay men's polyamory, as well

as queer women's polyamory or non-monogamy outside of Vancouver.

I asked participants if they understood polyamory to be an identity, philosophy,

practice, or sexual orientation (or another category). Most participants said that

polyamory was some or all of the above. Polyamory is a *philosophy* in that it proclaims

ideas about love, relationships, ethics, communication and (romantic) behavior. To some

people, polyamory is also a *political* stance in that it is a marginalized practice which

calls into question the dominant discourse. Polyamorous activism includes information

production and sharing, online forums, workshops and face-to-face support. Polyamorists

have also participated in the court battle surrounding Bountiful, BC, (which will be

explored in Chapter 6).[37] For some polyamorists, polyamory is an *identity* rather than

just something they do. This was evidenced by my participants who identified strongly

as polyamorous even while they were single or had only one partner at a given time.

Polyamorists also tend to explicitly state their preference for dating other polyamorists

(thus avoiding the complications of dating monogamists). Some practitioners believe

polyamory to be a *sexual orientation*. Several participants stated that they were "wired"

to fall in love and/or be attracted to more than one person at a time. Even those who

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[37] For more information, see http://polyadvocacy.ca/category/blog.

believed that their polyamorous desire was learned, believed that this was the relationship style that best suited their desires and/or lifestyle. For certain people, polyamory is a *practice*, and thus just something that they do. One participant for example, fluctuated between polyamory and monogamy, stating that her preference depended on her situation and the partners she had at the time. One participant compared her polyamorous practice to bisexual attraction to more than one gender; she said she could engage in different relationship styles depending on the circumstance and opportunity.

How Participants Came into Polyamory

Some of my participants became polyamorous "accidentally" in that they happened to fall in love with two people at the same time and the situation played out in such a manner that acting on this desire was permissible. A few participants claimed to be "wired" this way, while still others stated that they grew to prefer polyamory through exposure to polyamorous ideas by their peers. Some of my participants came to polyamory through an idea suggested in a written text and others developed their ideas through use of written resources. Three resources were repeatedly mentioned as being particularly influential to polyamorous practice: Easton and Liszt's *The Ethical Slut* (1997), and the web pages xeromag.com and fetlife.com. A few participants came to polyamory through a partner they were dating or interested in dating. These participants

continued to prefer polyamory to monogamy even after that relationship ended, at least at the time of the interview.

Many participants came to their polyamorous practice through involvement in the BDSM/leather community. Several of these participants argued that polyamory was an expectation within their circle of queer friends. In particular, those participants who identified with the leather community noted that it would be challenging and rare to date monogamously within the scene. They also noted that in the BDSM/leather community, it was culturally acceptable to flirt or proposition a person visibly dating another, as long as this was done with openness and respect to all parties involved. Within this limited group, mainstream monogamous values seemed to be reversed, with polyamory being the norm. In online forums for leather/kink, there is a structural acceptance of open relationships. For example, when filling out a profile on fetlife.com or leatherdyke.com, one is offered multiple options for one's relationship status (i.e. bottoming to x, dominant to x, looking for x, etc). By contrast, in more mainstream forums such as Facebook, there are more limited options (i.e. single, in a relationship, married or 'it's complicated'). Even the category 'it's complicated' has a trivializing or negative connotation that polyamorists may wish to avoid, since having multiple partners may not be experienced as complicated.

There also appears to be a significant overlap between polyamorous and bisexual communities and practices. Although most bisexuals eschew the stereotype that they must be non-monogamous in order to be "legitimately" bisexual, many do embrace polyamory (Ebin, 2006; Kleese, 2007). As with the BDSM community, many bisexuals explain that once they have pushed past one cultural norm, they can more easily adopt

127

another marginal practice. This idea parallels Rubin's (1984) description of the cultural assumption of the "domino theory of sexual peril" which is the sexual axiom that states that once one cultural norm has been transcended, people are often comfortable pushing down other walls. At the same time, Rubin disputes the assumption that one *must* transcend another boundary once one has pushed passed a particular line. Some of the bisexual participants in my study noted cultural distinctions between the heterosexual and the queer women's polyamorous communities. They also noted some distinctions between polyamorous relationships with men as opposed to those with women. I explore this finding in my discussion of polyamory, gender and jealousy in Chapter 5.

Polyamorous Critiques of Monogamy

Although they are often read in opposition to one another, monogamy and polyamory should not be approached as dichotomous. After all, many of the ideas out of which polyamory emerged come from the institution of monogamy. Monogamy is the central model in contemporary Western culture and the only legal option for marriage. The strict practice of monogamy, however, is far from the most common, and many 'monogamous' couples construct their own variation of this model by "violating the boundaries" (Ben-Ze'ev & Goussinsky, 2008, p.134). One could argue that deviation from monogamous practice actually aids in the maintenance of the institution of monogamy. For example, having the option to cheat may contribute to a person's choice

to stay in a long-term relationship. Ben-Ze'ev and Goussinsky (2008, p. 212) note that some people see "parallel relationships" (i.e. extramarital affairs) "as aiding and preserving their marriage," and that many people pursue such relationships without having any intention of leaving their marriage. They quote a participant who says, "the spark is alive and well in my marriage, but I think that's because seeing an adulterer makes me a more fulfilled partner."[38] Swingers likewise breach the bounds of monogamy, but also reinforce monogamy's primacy through the invisibility of their trysts. In reality, while monogamy is still the cultural norm, there is a vast array of relationship options which reside somewhere between monogamy and polyamory (Ben-Ze'ev & Goussinsky 2008; Taormino, 2008). It should also be noted that the vast majority of polyamorists have practiced some form of monogamy in their dating life, be it temporarily or long-term. Because most of us were raised in a monogamous culture, most people start out trying to be monogamous.

As Peppermint notes in the opening quote of this chapter, polyamory is defined in part by its opposition to and critique of monogamy. I identify eight myths (or commonly held assumptions) about institutional monogamy and its role in the maintenance of social stability that are challenged in polyamorous writing.

The first myth is that monogamy mitigates jealousy. Jealousy is assumed to be an expression of a partner's care, is linked to the idea that human nature is inherently competitive, and to ideas about the scarcity of love. This myth inspired my research questions and will be further explored in Chapter 4. I will discuss how polyamorists argue that the institution and ideology of monogamy in fact exacerbates the prevalence

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[38] Dan Savage also provides plenty of evidence for this claim within his popular syndicated sex advise column, *Savage Love*, which give credence to this highly contentious possibility.

and social impact of jealousy and how the culture of polyamory encourages the experience of compersion.

The second myth is that monogamy guarantees longevity. Approximately 50% of American marriages end in divorce (and only 38% of married people say they are happy) (Kipnis, 2004).[39] Gould (1999) argues that swingers have increased satisfaction and longevity in their relationships. There has not been enough research on the longevity of polyamorous relationships to offer a comparison, but clearly monogamy alone does not cause couples to remain together. Arguably, longevity is not the best criteria for gauging the success of a relationship and many polyamorists argue that relationships should be valued instead based on their degree of happiness and support (among other things).

The third myth is that fidelity is realized through monogamy. Judging from the quantity of cultural narratives on adultery and the limited mainstream attention given to open relationships, adultery appears to be more socially acceptable than honest non-monogamy. Kipnis (2003) compared statistics on infidelity and found a range of 20-70% of people have cheated on their spouse.[40] The Hite Report states that 70% of women married five years or more have had affairs, (Hite, 1976, from Robinson, 1997). The majority in the survey expressed dissatisfaction, "they recognized and condoned the inevitable failure of monogamy" but they still paid lip service to it (Robinson, 1997, p. 8). West (1996) wrote that between 50-80% of people have or would commit adultery and that there is a greater percentage of men than women who are adulterous. There is

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[39] In Canada, there were 71,269 divorces in 2005, of which 9,954 were in BC. (CANSIM 101-6501)

[40] Kipnis (2003, 11) notes that the inconsistency and range of this statistic means that "you can basically select any statistic you like to support whatever position you prefer to take on the prevalence of such acts" (i.e. one member of the couple "straying" at least once). I concur that due to the stigma surrounding affairs, statistics on infidelity are likely to be inaccurate, but the numbers are likely to be higher than those who report.

also a double standard wherein men's adultery is considered less severe than women's, whose sexuality is subjected to more social control (Ryan and Jetha, 2010). Notably, breaches of either sexual fidelity or longevity do not diminish the cultural belief in the institution of monogamy (Staudenmaier, 2001). Ferrer (2007, p. 42) argues that "the history of monogamy is the history of adultery," after which he comically quotes H.H. Munro who says that monogamy is "the Western custom of one wife and hardly any mistresses."

Fourth, is the myth that monogamy ensures the "future accessibility of an apparently or potentially scarce commodity of sexual intimacy" (Overall, 1998, p. 6). This myth is connected to the idea of possession within a relationship and assumes that monogamy itself ensures the lasting quality of a relationship and the security that comes from having a partner.   As noted in the statistics on divorce, coupled with the frequency of loveless long-term relationships, monogamy does not ensure such qualities. As well, the ideal of lasting love built into marital vows is contradicted by the common complaint of boredom associated with long-term marriage.

Fifth, is the myth that it is only possible to have enough love and/or energy for one person. This myth is challenged, (as mentioned above) when one considers the love a parent has for all their children (Overall, 1998, p. 2) or how one can love more that one friend or family member. Ryan and Jetha (2010) note that most people find it easy to understand loving multiple friends and family members, yet seem unable to apply the same standard when it comes to romantic love.

Sixth, is the myth that monogamy is natural and superior. Far from being natural, theorists have argued that the institution of monogamy as we know it today is directly

related to capitalist institutions which perpetuate the idea of possession, ownership and material inheritance (Robinson, 1997). Robinson (ibid) explores how capitalist patriarchy has directly benefited from the nuclear family structure, and from women's emotional and financial dependence on men. This myth of 'naturalness' is also challenged when one considers that 90% of societies historically and cross-culturally have not practised monogamy as we know it today (West, 1996). Ryan and Jetha (2010) challenge the 'naturalness' of monogamy by looking to non-human species, demonstrating that sexual monogamy in the animal world is by far the exception. Notably, the work of Fausto-Sterling (2000) emphasizes the cultural construction of "human nature" itself, thus challenging any claim to naturalness in relationships.

Seventh, there is a myth that monogamy ensures good parenting. This myth is directly related to the myth that monogamy is natural and superior. This myth is so powerful that it has kept many polyamorists in the closet about their practice for fear of having their children apprehended. It is similar to the argument that only monogamous, heterosexual couples make good parents, which has been used to argue against same-sex marriage, adoption and single parenting. To the extent that raising children outside the mainstream is challenging, this challenge comes not from an inherent deficiency in the polyamorous family, but rather from the social condemnation imposed by the same ideology that reinforces the superiority of monogamy.

Finally, there is the myth that only monogamous love can be 'true love.' This myth assumes that all other forms of love are invalid or lesser than, and results in the belief that if one truly loved their partner they would not seek the attention of another

132

person. Love then, is a finite quantity that one has to compete for, and true love is both rare and constantly in danger of being usurped by another.

As these myths demonstrate, institutionalized monogamy has not succeeded in fulfilling its intended social role. Jealousy remains rampant with often violent and destructive outcomes (Ben Ze'ev & Goussinsky, 2008). Cheating, divorce and unhappy marriages continue to be common. While polyamory does not guarantee any of the positive qualities listed above, it does make for an interesting case study to explore alternative relationship structures and their emotional experiences. As mentioned above, most polyamorists do not advocate the abolition of monogamy. Rather, they critique institutional monogamy with the goal of lessening the cultural dominance of mono-normativity.

Conclusion

Polyamory is a "burgeoning sexual story" (Ritchie & Barker, 2006) which encompasses a philosophy, identity, practice and politic, all of which are constantly evolving. Polyamory emerged partly in response to a critique of institutionalized monogamy and in reaction to individuals' desire for multiple partners, both of which relied upon a particular political and social context. Thanks to the connectivity of the

Internet, polyamorous philosophy and practice has reached a *tipping point* of visibility, and is gaining media credibility and attention. At the heart of polyamory is a critique of institutionalized monogamy, the pursuit of compersion, the emergence of a culturally specific vocabulary and the establishment of cultural forums. The practice of polyamory is likely to remain on the margins, but the influence of its philosophy is already being felt in mainstream culture.

In this chapter, I outlined the characteristics of polyamorous culture and of my participants. In the following chapter, I will further explore how the ideas of polyamory play out in practice. In particular, I explore how jealousy is experienced, managed and transformed into compersion by individuals, as well as through participation in polyamorous culture. Emotions that seem to be experienced in isolation are actually embedded in a socio-cultural framework. I also explore the limitations, tensions and contradictions to which my queer polyamorous participants are subject.

Chapter 4 - If You Move to the Rainforest of Vancouver, You've Got No Right to Complain About the Rain: From Polyagony to Compersion

"Love lights more fire than hate extinguishes." Ella Wilcox

"I think we are all growing and evolving. I think there is really a huge collective consciousness around jealousy right now. Especially with polyamory becoming more and more a topic of discussion. I think that there is movement happening in the collective." Martha (study participant)

When their relationships encounter difficulty, some polyamorists half-joke that they are practising *polyagony* rather than polyamory. *Polyagony* is a tongue-in-cheek term to remind us that jealousy can sometimes be excruciatingly painful. In the following chapter I explore the question: how and why do polyamorists work through this emotional pain? In particular, I describe how my sample of queer, polyamorous women navigate jealousy and re-imagine and re-craft alternatives to jealousy. I begin with a description of situations that polyamorists associate with jealousy (as differentiated from monogamous experiences), and the various expressions of jealousy among my participants. Then I discuss how polyamorists have re-imagined jealousy and have developed tools, strategies and norms with the intention of facilitating compersion. To understand polyamorous norms, I examine the common themes of polyamorous practice that have emerged through my interviews. The tensions and contradictions within the polyamorous community become apparent as I document an illustrative moment of this rapidly blossoming culture. Like most social norms, the rules of polyamory are always in flux and are not always followed. The strategies in place to mitigate jealousy do not work for all polyamorists and all circumstances. For this reason, and in order to determine the polyamorous norms, I focus particularly on the intersection between what

polyamorists are doing and what they *wish* they were doing. I address some of the other

challenges to successful polyamory that arose in the study, including time pressures,

parenting and practicing safer sex. I conclude with a discussion of some of the reasons

polyamorists work through difficult emotions and the rewards of polyamorous practice.

Polyagony;

"Like someone else is driving the bus"

Polyamorists tend to describe jealousy and compersion as opposites, where their

feelings occur as a matter of degree, ranging from extreme emotional pain, subtle twinges

of jealousy, tolerance to delight and everything in between. Polyamorists idealize the

absence of jealousy and pursue experiences of compersion. Notably, jealousy and

compersion are not clearly oppositional and can occur simultaneously. Also, jealousy

can also be experienced positively without it becoming compersion. For example,

several participants in my sample eroticized and played with the negative intensity of

jealousy instead of trying to convert it to compersion. They took the intensity of jealousy

and converted it into a passionate experience, an experience that could be described as

emotional masochism (which will be further explored in Chapter 6).

Among my participants, jealousy was most often described as a difficult,

undesirable and challenging emotion, but many participants also claimed that jealousy in

polyamorous relationships was tolerable and manageable. Jealousy in polyamorous

relationships is inspired by different circumstances than in monogamous relationships. In

monogamy, jealousy is frequently triggered by suspicion of, or actual infidelity. In

136

polyamory, while cheating is possible, it is not typically under these circumstances that jealousy is most common. For polyamorists, what is called 'cheating' is more likely the breaking of an agreed-upon rule rather than an outside sexual affair (Wosick-Correa, 2008). For polyamorists, sexual non-exclusivity is not enough reason to feel jealous, but lying on the other hand, is seen as much more dangerous to the relationship. Polyamorous practice exposes people to more direct opportunities to see their partner with other people, under consensual agreement. The participants in my study reported feeling jealous when their partner started to date someone new, when their partner fell in love, when the other person was too similar to themselves, when there were overlapping roles, when they felt less secure in the relationship, and/or for no identifiable reason.

For many people, emotions are experienced as if they are isolated and individual. However, the singularity of emotions is artificial. Emotions are formed within social interactions and their cultural context. Group emotions are qualitatively different from a collection of individual emotions (Parkinson, Fischer & Manstead, 2005). Lazarus (1991, p. 284) wrote, "Hope cannot be distinguished from what is hoped for any more than anger can be divorced from what one is angry about." Similarly, Parkinson (et al, 2005, p. 10) states, "we don't just feel angry, for example, we feel angry with someone else, about something they have done." Likewise, jealousy cannot be experienced outside of social relationships. And yet, jealousy can continue to be felt far after the end of the context from which it arose. Recalling a memory of an experience when one felt jealousy can result in the reoccurrence of the feeling. Also, imagining a scenario without it ever actually occurring can also inspire the feeling of jealousy, and the feeling cannot necessarily be halted even when one realizes it is just imagination. La RocheFoucauld

(1967, p. 451) observes that jealousy "does not always die with love." Embittered emotions often continue beyond the end of a relationship and this is partly why jealousy in intimate relationships can make us feel so vulnerable. The emotional investment in an intimate relationship can be far greater than the actual interactions during the period of involvement. It is also for this reason that the challenge of overcoming jealousy is so appealing for polyamorists.

Among my participants, even those who managed their jealousy well described the feeling as quite terrible. Brianna stated,

> It feels irrational. And angry, and I get a lot of physical symptoms, like my heart beats fast and I get shaky and I get a little dizzy and I don't tend to have that kind of eruption of feeling with much else.

Alyson described jealousy in the following way:

> It feels like someone has taken over the inside of your head and is going to control your thought processes and keeps feeding advertising messages in there and I was having a perfectly normal time and now, *screech!* Oh, here's another thing to think about that is going to make you upset. It feels pretty out of control. Not being who I want to be and not feeling very calm. Feeling really reactive and feeling like someone else is driving the bus, which then makes me angry. Or a variety of other people are driving the bus but I am not anywhere close to the wheel.

Grace described jealousy in the following way,

> Like a gross squishy feeling in your heart. I just picture my heart as really black and not functioning. Most of the time I just feel like I am so full of love or whatever that it's so fine, but when I'm jealous I just get tunnel vision and I'm crazy because I'm very obsessive actually. So I will think only of the person I'm jealous about and my partner and make up these situation in my mind to the point where if I don't get it out quick enough, I almost can't distinguish between what actually happened and what I've made up.

Orion said jealousy,

138

> Feels kind of like a closing door that I'm trying not to look through. I'm
> like, I don't want to see it, and I'm closing the door, and I kind of do want
> to see it, but I kind of don't. I get angry.

The range of metaphors used to describe jealousy demonstrates that jealousy is not an innate or universal experience. Rather it is a culturally specific, complex mixture of emotion, feeling and affect, shaped by our language. Some people experience anxiety when confronted with a challenge, while others when confronted with this same challenge tend to experience stress, anger, withdrawal, sadness or enthusiasm. As Grace mentioned, imagination can shift our memory of a situation and thus also our emotional experience. Instead of forcing all experiences into one definition of jealousy, I aim to expand the definition into an umbrella of emotional outcomes that come up in response to a situation where a lover is involved with another lover (potentially or actually). There is always a discrepancy that occurs when affect is translated into words. Articulation cannot always adequately describe the preverbal ways jealousy is affectively experienced. Yet these descriptions provide an important context in which to understand the impact of jealousy, and thus the importance to polyamorists of managing jealousy and achieving compersion. Reddy (1999, p. 271-272) argues that instead of managing or constructing emotions, a more apt description is that of "navigation" because "navigation includes the possibility of both radically changing course and making constant corrections in order to stay on a chosen course."[41]

In her essay on jealousy and polyamory, Labriola[42] contends that,

> Jealousy can manifest as anger, fear, hurt, betrayal, anxiety, agitation,
> sadness, paranoia, depression, loneliness, envy, coveting, feeling
> powerless, feeling inadequate, feeling excluded.

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[41] Reddy (1999, p. 271-2) continues, "But even "navigation" implies purposive action, whereas changes of goals are only purposive if they are carried out in the name of higher-priority goals."
[42] http://www.cat-and-dragon.com/stef/Poly/Labriola/jealousy.html

Most of these feelings were expressed in the descriptions given by participants of their jealousy. The shame that Western culture compounds on jealousy exacerbates the pain. It may be for this reason that many of my participants found ways to talk about the spectrum of jealousy using a variety of other terms. Nora called it 'grungy feelings.' Dominique called it 'being stuck in a knot.' Two participants talked about the "Committee of Assholes" to refer to the voices in their heads that told negative, jealousy-inducing stories. The use of this term by two participants demonstrates a shared cultural language. One of them, Fo stated, "It would be a bunch of jerks in the back of his head going *mememememe*, him feeding himself a line of shit."

Jealousy, for Orion was linked to embarrassment and made her inclined to withdraw, "maybe I would peel back some of the hearty stuff. Build a little fortress around my heart before it gets blood inside it." Tianna described jealousy as linked to a desire to control a situation and she would ask many questions in order to gain control over her feelings. Jealousy is also significantly intertwined with fear. For Priscilla, "I think jealousy is often times about fear, fear of being left or not being able to control what's going on." Cheyenne responded, "What jealousy really comes down to is a fear of being replaced." For Nora,

> Usually what it comes down to is fear... Because I have a lot of
> fears. Like a lot of people do. Fear of inadequacy. Fear of abandonment.
> Fear of not being good enough in general. Once I can see those for what
> they are, which is simply fear. Fear is something that evolutionarily is
> really useful, but I think in those contexts it's less useful.

From Polyagony to Compersion: Norms, Etiquette, Tools and Strategies

"It's not sleazy to hit on someone's partner."

Polyamorists are critical of the dominance of institutional monogamy and how this shapes emotional experiences of jealousy, love, and sexuality. If one accounts for the prevalence of cheating, swinging and polygamy (and the desire for such sexual encounters), the practice of true monogamy is rather rare – both in Western culture and elsewhere (Kipnis, 2003; Mead, 1977; Ryan and Jetha, 2010). However, the prevalence of monogamy as an institution in Western culture means that exclusive (heterosexual, for the most part) pairing is held up as the standard of "true love." As such, any breach of this practice is frowned upon. In other words, if for love to be "true" it must be monogamous, breaching monogamy joins love to its one of its adverse counterparts - jealousy. And quite possibly, jealousy has parallel emotional sensations to hate. Polyamorists work to remove the connection between love and sexual exclusivity, thereby disrupting the connection between jealousy and non-monogamy.

Polyamorists "...do[..] not remain stuck in deconstruction but dare to actively construct" (Haritaworn, et al, 2006, p. 518). Polyamorists actively develop polyamorous philosophy which contributes to the experience of emotions associated with relationships, jealousy and love – in both positive and negative ways. There is an interesting contradiction in the polyamorous community. On the one hand, jealousy is seen as something to which polyamorists need to give particular attention – they need to be proactive and upfront in managing jealousy, and therefore good at its mitigation. On the

other hand, several polyamorists in my study reported a certain pressure to be "over it already," and this pressure actually stood in the way of mitigating jealousy since it drove it underground. One participant, Coraline called this "the posturing of poly cool." Some participants told me how "jealousy is socially constructed by the monogamy-centric mainstream culture" and thus should not be part of their poly experience. They felt that if they chose polyamory, they could not complain about how hard it could be. Heloise made the analogy, "If you move to the rainforest of Vancouver, you've got no right to complain about the rain." When polyamorists feel pressure to *not* be jealous, they often do not talk about their challenges, and this gives the false impression that everything is easy.

Polyamorists are aware of the misconceptions and prejudice around non-monogamy, such as that polyamorists are commitment-phobic, promiscuous or idealistic. When talking to monogamous people about their relationships, polyamorists sometimes downplay the challenges of being polyamorous, in an attempt to avoid adding the stigma of experiencing jealousy to the stigma of being poly. Polyamorists work hard to dispel these negative stereotypes, and therefore may gloss over the challenges of being polyamorous that could leave them open to criticism (Kleese, 2007). Additionally, some polyamorous people downplay the sexual component of their relationships, emphasizing instead the importance of the emotional connection in an (somewhat successful) attempt to gain mainstream credibility (Peppermint, 2007).[43]

The culture of polyamory emerged in part as a resistance to the hegemonic structure of jealousy encapsulated in the monogamist ideal (Kleese, 2006; Peppermint,

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[43] http://freaksexual.wordpress.com/2007/11/27/the-strange-credibility-of-polyamory/

142

2007). Whether poly people as a whole have achieved the intended compersive intimacy is debatable, but polyamorous culture does provide a framework for relationship structures and thereby cultivates more inclusive emotional experiences. Polyamorists share the belief that it is possible to love more than one person romantically and an opposition to the dominant monogamous model of love. Polyamorists tap into shared resources (websites, workshops), ideas and friendship circles and they actively create their own language and etiquette. Polyamorous culture rejects the notion that jealousy is both inevitable and intolerable. The culture of polyamory challenges several ideals of monogamy and romantic love. It rejects the romantic ideal of "total devotion," wherein true love must have only one object, and that true love lasts forever (Ben Ze-ev & Goussinsky, 2009). Polyamorists are critical of ideas of possession, ownership or entitlement regarding a lover (Robinson, 1997), which are aspects of envy as described by Simmel (1955). Polyamorists see having multiple loves as a more realistic expression of love, rather than idealistic. They claim that jealousy is a 'natural' part of a relationship, yet also say it need not be there at all in relation to a lover's other sexual encounters.

Generally, the polyamorist norm is to differentiate and disconnect the source of jealousy from the event. The source of jealousy is understood to be one's own insecurities or monogamous socialization, as opposed to the presence of another lover. When jealousy does arise, polyamorists try to address the emotion rather than the event that "caused" the jealousy. Ideally, polyamorists support their lovers to mitigate adverse emotions, although the individual is ultimately responsible for their own emotional experience. For example, polyamorists will support their partners by offering

143

reassurance or "being extra sweet," as Tianna called it, but will still go on a date with their other lover.

While polyamorists support each other by mitigating adverse emotions, the ultimate responsibility for one's emotional experience is personal. Tianna talked about how she would become jealous when her partner took another lover for a walk on the beach. She later realized that it was not the act of beach walking that was the problem, but rather what it represented, which was intimacy of the girlfriend kind. She wanted to be the only one with that particular girlfriend status. By figuring out what the act represented to her, she was able to strategize about other ways to feel primary, to reserve some activities as special and only for the two of them, and thus overcome the association of beach walks with jealousy. Frequently stated in polyamorous culture is the idea that nobody can *cause* another person to feel jealous. People are responsible only for their own emotions. This statement reflects a powerful agency over one's own emotions, but it underemphasizes the ways in which people are affected by the actions and words of others, and the transmission of affect.

Even though polyamorists claim that the ultimate responsibility for mitigating jealousy resides with the individual, ethical polyamory presupposes supporting one's partners when they experience jealousy. This is done mostly by reassuring, listening and renegotiating boundaries. Priscilla supported her partner by taking things slow:

> Sometimes just backing down with whatever I was doing. Sometimes, for example going painfully slow with somebody else while my partner has…time to digest. Sometimes it's maddeningly slow, but I'm being good.

Tianna described how she supported her partner:

144

> So I made adjustments all along for her. I tried to give her lots of
> love. Lots of affection and lots of reassurance and lots of telling her I
> appreciate her and telling her I love her. Just kind of being extra sweet is
> how I define it. Thanking her for letting me do this stuff. Trying to
> appreciate her as a whole.

The jealousy of one's partner, in the above two examples, was seen as a barrier to actualizing secondary polyamorous relationships, but it was resolved through their support.

According to Buss (2000), an evolutionary psychologist, jealousy in monogamy developed as a tool to identify a partner's cheating, show devoted love, and therefore to *prevent* the partner from straying. Because polyamorists encourage encounters outside the relationship, jealousy functions as a barrier, instead of a tool, to the full actualization of polyamorous love. Polyamorists want to trust their partners to play outside of the relationship, want their partner to have a good time doing so, want them to return afterwards, *and* they want everyone to feel compersion throughout this process. Because cheating and loss is still possible in polyamorous situations, however, Buss' description of the role of jealousy is still partly applicable. One participant, Brianna, spoke of the "ultimate poly betrayal," - a partner having unsafe sex with another lover. She noted that her jealous intuition that he was doing so was "crazy-making," particularly since her partner always responded to her suspicion as if she was just being insecure. In this case, the polyamorous ideal of addressing the emotion instead of the event did not serve her well. The distinction between suspicion and fait accompli jealousy is relevant here. Clearly, freedom to have multiple sexual relations does not necessarily guarantee trustworthy or ethical behaviour.

My participants described many instances of non-responsible practice under the guise of polyamory, (many of which came from stories involving their ex-partners or

145

stories about the experience of others). Negotiation is central to the functioning of

polyamory and to emotional democracy (Giddens, 1992). The clear communication and

negotiation necessary for polyamory to operate smoothly can be challenging and provoke

a great deal of vulnerability for many people. Awareness of the possibility of compersion

and of polyamorous norms developed to inspire compersion does not necessarily lead to

the emotional experience. There are situations where no satisfactory compromise can be

reached by all parties. Trust is also necessary for the success of polyamory. However,

trust is not a given, even when one is committed to disclosing and negotiating strong

rules and boundaries.

Examples of less than trust-worthy behaviour were described by my sample

group. Courtney spoke of one lover agreeing to a polyamorous situation, but then

imposing several arbitrary and hard to achieve rules, making another relationship

virtually impossible. Alyson noted that in her twenty years of poly experience, she met

several people who stated non-monogamy to be their preference, but who were actually

more interested in serial monogamy with overlaps at the end of one relationship and the

beginning of another. Thus the desire to 'see other people' was used as a mechanism to

leave the relationship. Because of this history, Alyson remained suspicious of people

who espoused non-monogamy and she remained a skeptic. Even though she continued to

practice polyamory, this influenced her expectations and thus her experience of

jealousy. For example, she would always ask a lover to explain what she meant by

polyamory when she chose the term and would gain trust by paying attention to actions

rather than words. The reality that one's partner may leave one for another person is not

avoided just because one has consented to their dating. There is nothing that guarantees

longevity or commitment in polyamory any more than in monogamy. Polyamorous

people often argue that longevity is not an accurate measure of the success of a

relationship and that the end of a relationship does not necessarily mean it was a failure.

However, this belief does not necessarily make break-ups any emotionally easier for

polyamorists. And, a painful breakup can still taint the experience of the whole

relationship.

Another polyamorous strategy to cultivate compersion and intimacy is through the

development and negotiation of rules in their relationships. Polyamorists attempt to

nurture a feeling of "specialness" in each relationship by creating or identifying an aspect

that is unique to the couple (Jamieson, 2004; Wosick-Correa, 2008). While monogamous

people often depend on sexual exclusivity to maintain a feeling of specialness,

polyamorists find other ways to achieve this. Among poly couples where there is a

primary/ secondary hierarchy, they may negotiate reserving certain things for their

primary relationship, such as acts (often sex acts), certain locations (their bed, for

example), or create certain time restrictions ("be home by 2am," "only one date a week,"

etc.). One participant had only one rule which was, "don't do anything you'd be ashamed

of."

Another site for negotiation is around rules of disclosure. Some examples of

these are: "tell me only the necessary details", "tell me before you do anything", "tell me

within 24 hours after an act", and "tell me all the juicy details." One participant had a

three-question agreement, where her partner could ask her three questions about a date,

thus putting the control of information sharing into her partner's hands. Her partner

could opt to hear more banal information (such as "what did you have for dinner?") or

choose more intimate questions. After the three questions, she could decide whether or not she wanted to hear more. Fo refused rules and instead would only offer *considerations*. She argued that rules were a form of control but giving consideration to one's partner involved knowing what she would want and finding the place where her partner's needs met her own, thus coming from a place of respect rather than obligation.

Among my interview subjects, honesty was highly valued, but full disclosure was rarely practiced and rarely idealized. Over-sharing was often seen as disrespectful since it led to "dumping" information onto people who may or may not have wanted to know certain information. There seems to be an unconscious following of William Blake's clever observation: "A truth told with bad intent is worse than any lie you can invent." Thus, there is a crucial distinction between honesty and full-disclosure. For example, a polyamorist may be happy to know that her lover is doing well with her other lovers, but may not want to hear about the details of her sexual adventures. Full-disclosure of all the information may be considered disrespectful and rather rude. Polyamorous etiquette indicates that pertinent information should be offered willingly and without needing to pry it out of a partner, but what counts as pertinent is variable. Some examples of what polyamorists wanted like to know included emotional affections, the quantity of time they spent together, or perhaps an issue to which they were potentially sensitive.

In polyamorous culture, as one participant, Orion, eloquently stated: "it's not sleazy to hit on someone's partner." Poly etiquette suggests that it is okay to flirt with or pursue a person who has a known partner. When one does so, they are not seen as trying to 'steal' one's date, as long as they follow proper etiquette. Such etiquette involves demonstrating respect, clarity and open communication regarding intentions toward the

148

person with whom one is flirting and their partner(s). Etiquette also suggests that a person devote their full attention to the person (or people) with whom they are on the date. Flirting with other people is usually not done at this time. When polyamorists neglect these subtle social graces, however, others feel disrespected and compersion is difficult. It is important to note that flirting means different things in different cultural contexts. Among polyamorists, flirting does not necessarily represent the desire to replace, but may express playfulness, appreciation, friendship or romantic interest, (the subtleties of which are significant yet not always apparent). Polyamorists are most likely to experience compersion when they feel as though they are being taken care of by their partners and feel secure within these relationships. Not surprisingly, actual practices did not always reflect the spoken and unspoken cultural rules.

Given the small size of many poly communities, overlaps of friends and lovers are quite common. Overlapping social networks could be a catalyst for jealousy, but polyamorous people have established an etiquette where difficult emotions are minimized through upfront discussion. In this instance, polyamorous etiquette calls for people to communicate with all the people who may be adversely effected by a relationship, including friends and ex-lovers. Etiquette calls for them to ask for permission or act in a way so as to minimize jealous tensions. Most participants relied on other polyamorous people for relationship support and were particularly caring and accountable to each other. For these reasons, polyamorous people widen the boundaries of their poly family to include lovers, ex-lovers, close friends and intimate non-sexual friends, treating them all with consideration as one might a romantic relationship. Significantly, close friendship and mutual respect often formed between people who are both lovers to one

149

person (i.e. *cohearts*). Also, there is an expectation that a friendship will emerge after a break-up. Although this expectation is common, such friendships are not always possible. Some participants even observed pressure to be friends with their exes and were concerned about how it looked to their community when such a friendship did not emerge. One participant even used a person's relationship with their significant exes as a measure of their ability to be in polyamorous relationships.

Celia is a participant who identified with and practiced both monogamy and polyamory, stating that her preference shifted over time depending on the dynamic with her lover(s). She noted that in her poly relationships, it has been common for her partner to check in with her about whether or not it is okay to flirt with a certain person. This act of requesting consent included her in the decision, which mitigated the potential for jealousy. Her monogamous partners, however, did not think to check in about flirting since it was not supposed to exist in their dynamic and such boundaries were assumed rather than discussed. According to Celia, it was this exclusion from the decision-making process that triggered her jealousy. She also noted that in a polyamorous dynamic, a partner's crush could potentially become a new relationship, whereas in a monogamous dynamic, the fear was that they may leave her entirely for another person. Tianna argued that if a crush remained unexplored because it was taboo, it would likely blossom. If a partner was permitted to explore a crush, they were likely to "get it out of their system" and find a better balance. In both of these cases, practicing polyamory works to decrease instances of jealousy.

Among my particpants, the process around acts was often as important as the acts themselves in the mitigation of jealousy. When Tianna's partner was going out on a date

with a new person, she felt a twinge of jealousy. She did not ask her partner to forgo the

date, but instead asked for an opportunity to express her feelings, to receive confirmation

of her importance, and then bid them an evening farewell with a smile. Neither partner

appraised the date as the source of jealousy, but rather, the source was insecurity or fear.

In contrast, another interviewee, Brianna stated that her monogamous friends felt

jealousy in situations that a polyamorist would not even notice, such as a partner looking

at another person. Cheyenne noted that jealousy was different for monogamous and poly

people because there was a different construction of the boundaries of a relationship:

> I talk to people all the time who say, 'my boyfriend looked at another
> woman and I don't even want to know about it!'… I can support that, I
> can hear that's really hard for you, but I can't understand it.

Cheyenne observed that this acceptance of a range of attractions outside the relationship

to be one cultural difference between polyamorists and monogamists.

There were instances where the jealousy of the participants was described in a

way that is consistent with Freud's theory of *projection,* a guilt not that we suspect our

partner's infidelity, but that we ourselves want to cheat, either through outside affairs or

by breaking a rule. Orion noted that the bulk of her monogamous breaks-ups were due to

"developing affections for other people." While practicing poly eliminated the necessity

of breaking up when there was a new lover or attraction, the projected fear of being left

by a partner for this reason persisted. Tianna also experienced projected jealousy and

found that trust was more difficult when *new relationship energy* and/or one's sexual

drive got in the way. *New relationship energy* (NRE) is the term polyamorous people use

to describe the early stages of romance, also known as infatuation, limerence or the

honeymoon period (Iantaffi, 2010). The emotional surge at this time can interfere with

one's affection towards others, and thus polyamorists take this into account when engaging in new relationships and try to act responsibly. Tianna simultaneously spoke of her own experience and what she projected onto her partner.

> I do for the most part trust her in that regard, like 97% of the time. Sometimes New Relationship Energy gets in the way. Sometimes your dick gets in the way. What happens when you really like her? I had a little bit of that with Blaire [her secondary date], so this is a little hypocritical.

She also noted that it was easier to trust a partner when other components of the relationship felt strong. When things were difficult, she feared that her partner would leave her for the new person with whom things were still light and easy. Sometimes the desire was as much about attraction to an outside person and it was about a desire to break a rule. For Priscilla,

> If I'm not supposed to do it then it's really hot. It's sort of a weakness… Well, it made it more hot for me, in that sort of secret, forbidden, tabooy sort of way, which was totally not forbidden… But it's my rules. That's the thing, sticking to *my* rules and respect the agreements you have with people. That's the most difficult part.

Priscilla exemplified a feature common in polyamorous discourse, which is a refusal to be confined by the imposition of dominant and seemingly arbitrary rules. A sense of agency and resistance to mono-normative values was often important to polyamorists. Such resistance was itself one of the reasons some people choose to engage in polyamory. The pursuit of being in control of emotions, of sexuality and of one's relationship model at times seemed to have as much to do with a political opposition and/or status in a subculture as with a personal desire. This aspect of polyamorous choice corresponded to the "posturing of poly cool" in that poly is perceived in some limited circles as being progressive and as something to be practiced by those who are more

"emotionally evolved." Such an association of poly as a progressive political stance must be contrasted with marginalization felt by polyamorists in other circles. Political and/or philosophical motivations for engaging in polyamory as opposed to emotional and/or desire-based motivations made for different experiences of jealousy. If one truly wished to be in a polyamorous situation, they may find it easier than someone who believed in the philosophy and wished for compersive emotions to follow accordingly.

There is a joke about polyamory that sums up one apprehension about the lifestyle: *How many polyamorists does it take to screw in a light-bulb? None; they are too busy processing to screw.*[44] In other words, polyamory is a lot of work. Celia noted, "Polyamory may be many great and wonderful things, but simple is not one of them." The idea that relationships take work is so pervasive that it often goes unquestioned (Kipnis, 2003). Add more relationships into the mix and there will be more work (Taormino, 2008). For polyamorists much of this work is done through communication and negotiation, often geared toward reducing jealousy. There was an understanding that jealousy should never be dealt with in a violent fashion, in opposition to much of the popular representation that portray reactions to jealousy using anger and aggression. There was an expectation of non-violent communication, which refers to use of language that emphasizes empathy, clarity and compassion instead of 'violent' language of coercion or manipulation.[45] Polyamorous culture encourages clarity and upfront communication, in particular about attraction to other people, intentions in a relationship and sexual practices. Although not unique to polyamory, an unintended benefit of such communication is a great depth of intimacy, feeling of freedom, and a sense of

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[44] Another variation of this joke is that polyamorists are too busy *scheduling* to screw.
[45] Non-violent communication was adopted from Marshall Rosenberg's conflict resolution strategy (2003).

interdependence in a relationship. Several participants reported feeling closer to their

polyamorous partners than they had felt to their past monogamous partners. In their

study on swingers, De Visser and McDonald (2007) also found that the processing that

swinging couples did to minimize jealousy strengthened their intimate connection. One

participant in my study, Fo, was particularly upfront about negotiating boundaries and

consent. She recalled the following story:

> We ended up being in this big chain of people and ... one of the people had
> a managed [sexually-transmitted] disease that no one had bothered to tell
> me about and I felt kind of like, Hey, I would really like to know what I'm
> getting into and I felt like that wasn't fair. So I called a meeting with
> everybody, so there was eight people at my house for dessert and I just
> said we need to decide how we are going to handle this... Let's all discuss
> what's going on. I would like to feel that I get to make the decision
> around it.

This kind of upfront clarity builds trust, which is crucial for mitigating jealousy. Direct

processing may seem like more work up front, but my participants agreed that it brought

a greater depth of intimacy to their relationships and essentially made polyamory possible

for the long-term.

All of my study participants agreed that communication was the central tool for

mitigating jealousy and enabling compersion. Communication involved negotiating

boundaries (which are never a given), learning and expressing one's own triggers for

jealousy and building trust. Some participants felt that the vulnerability that comes from

discussing one's jealousy was emotionally risky. Through practicing polyamory,

however, jealousy was normalized and thus minimized. Rihanna argued that "the three

C's of poly are Communicate, Communicate, Communicate." For instance, one

participant noted that as soon as she vocalized her feeling of jealousy and had it heard,

the feeling dissipated. Grace relayed the following:

One of my yoga instructors said, whenever she felt jealous she would tell whoever she was jealous of that she was jealous at the first opportunity that she could, and she found that the other person usually took it as a compliment and that diffused the situation a little bit. It was easier for her to feel this bad feeling when it was actually making someone else feel good, but at the same time there was no power because the other person couldn't use the jealousy over her because it was out there in the open.

Interestingly, she also described how it can feel good when someone is jealous of you. In contrast to Grace's story, other participants felt that this kind of vulnerable exposure was emotionally risky and did not lead to the same result. Alyson observed that having space to experience her feelings and speak her mind dissipated negative emotions:

I've spent time with lovers of my girlfriend. Sometimes that works, sometimes it doesn't. I think what matters is for me to be allowed to let my feelings run their course and not feel like I'm being corralled into something. If I don't necessarily like somebody, I don't want to feel pressured to like them. I like to figure out what I think of them. Just because you like them doesn't mean that I'm going to like them. I need to be able to take my own time. That matters to me about being given that.

Notably, most polyamorists found that liking their coheart eased feelings of jealousy. Many participants also noted that allowing yourself to feel whatever you felt rather than forcing or repressing the emotion was a useful strategy to mitigate jealousy. In contrast, Nora said, "I don't let emotions run me." In this instance, Nora was suggesting a common Western notion of controlling emotions as a means to mitigate negative feelings. Emotional control will be further examined in Chapter 5 under the context of a gender analysis.

Orion noted, "Jealousy is the beginning, not the end of something." In other words, jealousy can be an opportunity to investigate one's emotional needs, rather than a reason to stop one's actions. It should be noted that not all polyamorists have primary relationships with secondary dates on the side; however, among those that did, the arrival

of a new lover frequently coincided with the emergence of a jealous episode. Another

instance that provoked jealousy was when a partner's date moved from a place of novelty

into actual love. Dominique said,

> The challenging part is not the new relationship energy, it's the real life
> experience. It's not so much the early hot sex. It's the falling in love that
> gets me in trouble.

Many participants found that lack of information about a partner's new lover was worse

than the known information. Nora said, "When I don't know who they are, they turn into

this giant bogeyman." In other words, imagining the fabulousness of the new lover was

worse than knowing them personally, since one's imagination tends to construct grander

images than actually exists. Tianna said,

> I've found that some of the hardest stuff to work through is bumping up
> against boundaries that you didn't know were there until you hit them…
> That can be tricky, because if you didn't know the boundary was there, it
> wasn't intentional but the hurt is already there. Like it's already done, so
> trying to unpack some of that and trying to unravel that without my
> partner getting defensive or feeling attacked or whatever can be
> challenging.

In other words, negotiating boundaries only got her so far since the events that caused her

the most strife could not be predicted.

I argue that the assumption that jealousy is inevitable in a given situation, as

frequently modeled in compulsory monogamy, actually contributes to the embodied

feeling of jealousy. Thus, re-crafting this model of love and relationships also shifts the

experience of jealousy. Here is an (polemic) example of how monogamy as an institution

relates to jealousy. A tabloid headline read "Madonna's A-Rod Jealousy Plan."[46] The

article claimed that Madonna was spending time with a young model, Jesus, to make her

long-term lover (Alex Rodriguez, aka A-Rod) jealous. The expectation was that A-Rod

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[46] http://www.boston.com/ae/celebrity/articles/2009/02/04/madonnas_a_rod_jealousy_plan/

would inevitably feel jealous from such an action. The article assumed that a person can make someone else feel jealous and that creating jealousy was a controlled strategy that will bring her a certain result (such as a commitment from A-Rod). This suggests too that the use of the word jealousy is removed from any real feeling, since reports did not come from anything A-Rod did or said. In this case, jealousy represented the situation (time with other man), not the feeling (achy-heart, fear, etc), which implies that the situation and feeling are interchangeable, marking their inevitability. The article also linked A-Rod's jealousy to his 'embarrassment' about her association with another man, and thus to his masculine pride. The article also assumed that they must be operating under a strictly monogamous model. The whole situation, particularly A-Rod's reaction, was likely all fabricated, but it does represent a common story of jealousy in cultural discourse, which contributes to how people internalize feeling rules. This story must also be read in the context of gendered feeling rules in which violence against women is frequently triggered by jealousy (Ben-Ze'ev & Goussinsky, 2008).

Common in popular cultural discourse is the story of the person who feels that he or she is being taken for granted by their partner. Their response is to try to make their partner feel jealous as a way to get their attention or elicit an action, (such as in the films *Waiting to Exhale* and *Chloe*). For the most part, it is only in pop culture, however, that this strategy actually works. Polyamorists in my study did not see their partners' jealousy as a sign of love and most abhorred the use of jealousy as a passive-aggressive tool. Many participants argued that contrary to such popular representations of jealousy, trying to make someone feel jealous was not a good way to spark passion or achieve a result and they found plenty of other ways to inspire intimacy. For many, a partner's

157

jealousy was viewed as a barrier to their freedom to fully actualize their polyamory. Coraline noted that when her partner felt jealous, her initial response was to feel guilty, as if she had done something wrong. She said it felt "toxic." For some participants, if their partner was jealous, they would curb their actions or devote more emotional energy to remedying the situation. Orion said:

> At least in my past relationships I experienced a lot of joy with my partners getting their needs met somewhere else because it frees me up a little bit. It feels really nasty and reciprocal that way but, if you go and get some… It's more like I hope it would compel empathy or understanding in them, if you go and get some and come back and understand that it doesn't compromise our relationship, then you'll understand that I can also go out and get down with somebody else or have a relationship with somebody else and still come back to you. It's more about reciprocity than, 'if you do I can.'

One notable exception was a participant, Alyson, whose partner never experienced jealousy. She wished her partner could experience it at least temporarily so she could empathize with her own challenging experiences.

Another quality useful to being able to practice polyamory successfully is the ability to be comfortable with a degree of ambiguity. Ambiguity can sometimes induce anxiety, but polyamorists often found some stable qualities, such as the specialness of their relationship, and live with ambiguity outside of that context. This is not to say that extra-relationship sexual encounters are reason to feel insecure or ambiguous, but such ambiguity is the conventional association with 'affairs' and is often portrayed as triggering suspicious jealousy. Thus polyamorists must find comfort in the unknown and find security in their positions, their mutual commitment to polyamory and most importantly, trust. Enough trust can supersede ambiguity. Fo rarely experienced jealousy and she connected this to her strong sense of security.

I play mind games with myself. So I take comfort in strange things that
people might find really drive them to massive insecurity, where it
actually makes me secure. I have my little tenets of
understanding. Nobody is going to be with me unless they want to be with
me. In fact the worst thing I can imagine is someone choosing to be with
me out of a sense of obligation, sympathy or anything else like
that. Ew. If they are with me, I have to believe they are with me because
they actually want to be with me. If they stop acting like they want to be
with me, I will ask them, maybe you don't want to be with me. Maybe
you should move along. I have no fear of being alone. I guess that's part
of it.

The issue of trust arose frequently among polyamorous participants in relation to

jealousy and security in a relationship. It was particularly important to trust their partner

to have responsible sex outside the relationship, both physically and emotionally. While

they may know and trust their partners, they also want to be able to trust their partner's

lovers, who they may or may not know well. Uslaner (2001) argues that there are two

kinds of trusters, a distinction that coincides with my participants' approach to

polyamorous practice. Moralistic Trusters have an optimistic view of people, assume

people are generally good, and thus are more likely to trust someone they do not know.

In the case of my participants, this would mean that a partner's choice to stay or leave is

irrespective of being actively polyamorous and thus easily trusted their partner's outside

sexual and emotional actions. Strategic Trusters, on the other hand, depend on

accumulated information. In my research, Strategic Trusting polyamorists maintained

skepticism and hoped to overcome distrustfulness once people proved themselves. While

their core reasons for practicing polyamory are strong (i.e. philosophically based or

toward a more realistic portrayal of their love), they had to work hard to trust the

intentions of their partners and cohearts. Moralistic Trusters had an easier time with

compersion. Some participants straddled both sides of the fence, such as Coraline who

stated, "you trust what you know" and thus she approached her relationships not with a lack of trust but with an optimistic lack of expectations.

While expectations are shaped by socialization and culture, they are also influenced by personal history. Having a history of partners who have lied or cheated effects one's likelihood of trusting people in the future. Although polyamorous people found ways to experience sexual non-exclusivity without cheating or lying, fear of infidelity and/or lies may still exist. Orion:

> Honesty is hard. Honesty is really hard, partly because I have a nasty self-image that I'm a liar. I've been in a position of being the cheater and I'm totally aware and out and open about that because I have to be. I differentiate between the lying I did do about dating people and the way I structure my relationships now. And still don't regret any of those actions, just regret that I didn't have better communication skills and talk about my needs.

Many participants reported that honesty with themselves was the hardest aspect of relating, and once they were clear about their own expectations and intentions, honesty with their partners was less difficult. Also in terms of disclosure, there was a common expectation that a person would disclose their polyamorous status and current lovers to any potential dates. It is no accident, therefore that none of my participants employ a 'don't ask, don't tell policy.'

Other Challenges to Polyamory

Jealousy is not the only barrier to successful polyamory. Other common challenges include having enough time, issues regarding parenting, and maintaining safe-

sex, all of which will be addressed in brief here. The challenge of social stigma will be explored in the context of power in Chapter 6. Other challenges and/or prohibiting factors that came up during the interviews that will not be addressed here include the financial burden/cost of dating, coming out to lovers and/or to the outside world and meeting people to date (which may be the most significant challenge with dating in general).

<div align="right">*Time*</div>

Having enough time for more than one relationship is one of the biggest barriers in polyamory. Relationships require time to sustain quality, to process dynamics, to support one another, let alone having the mental and physical energy for multiple romances. As one participant, Priscilla noted, "There is always room for Jell-O and always time for Facebook - and one more lover." In other words, we make time for that which we love. Just as someone may make time to watch every game of the World Series, people reshuffle their schedules and priorities when the need or want arises. Yet, exactly how they do this is still mysterious. Many polyamorists espoused the idea that quality is much more important than quantity of time spent with their partners. For example, a few hours of focused attention on each other was more valuable than many hours spent together focused on the TV in front of them, and thus they prioritized their limited time accordingly. Polyamorists find value in many forms of relationships that

diverge from conventional models of relationships. For example, some polyamorists saw their lovers only once a week. Some saw their lovers, often long-distance lovers, even less often, yet were able to sustain very intimate relationships. Many polyamorists talked about the difference that the 'little things' make, such as short phone calls or text messages to feel connected and loved. Some polyamorists were tolerant of their partner offering them slightly less attention during the period when their partner is starting a new relationship. Not having enough time to sustain a relationship was frequently cited as the reason relationships ended (and I would love to see this question pursued in a follow-up study).

Parenting

Being a parent poses many challenges to polyamorous relationships. Jamieson (2004) reports that many relationships shift to monogamy when children arrive in the picture. Sheff's (2010) research indicates that benefits to poly-parenting include having more resources (material, emotional and more role-models), as well as limitations, such as detachments post-break-up and stigma associated with polyamory. Parenting is a huge time commitment, making it challenging to have enough time for more than one lover. To go out on a date means having to find someone to watch the children (if they are young) and possibly finding space outside the home for a date. When interviewing one participant, Priscilla, in the presence of her three young children, I had insight into the

reality of practicing poly under these circumstances. Her relationships are stifled by the chaos of daily life, the responsibilities of parenthood and the limits of time, but she also knew the strength of parental love, a quality highly relevant to loving multiple people and juggling multiple relationships. She also had several people in her poly family who had parental roles to her children, comparable to aunts and uncles. Notably, she was not actively polyamorous during the first few years of her children's life, even though her wife was actively polyamorous, but started dating again once they were old enough to be watched over by other child care providers.

There was also the challenge of introducing the children to a new lover. The opinion and practice of the participants varied on when and if this was done. One parent, Cheyenne, saw her secondary lover as part of her family and was comfortable interacting with them all together. She did not do anything overtly sexual in the presence of the children, but would be affectionate. One participant lived with her family of lovers and her children. This family included three people who have been and/or are lovers to her, and the child was fully aware of these relationships. The child would sometimes talk about his two mothers and two fathers, and in other situations would talk about his mother, father and their roommates. This shift in his expression of their relationship title depended on his comfort in given situations, and demonstrated his agency in the situation. His mother had full respect for his control over disclosure. Children often do not know families are different until they are told as much and because he grew up in a poly household, he had normalized having a large, non-nuclear family.

Cheyenne talked about her fear that her child would grow up confusing friends with lovers and with family. She argued that because adult relationships are complex and

163

he only saw glimpses of the dynamics, which are interpreted through a child's lens, he

may not understand. Therefore, she let him ask questions at his own pace. Another

parent, Heloise, described the benefits of her child seeing love and affection in many

forms, particularly growing up in a loving household and environment. This participant

noted that while the nuclear family is normalized in Western culture, it is far from the

most common familial structure. Tianna hid her polyamorous relationships from her son

while he was a child, but once he became a teenager, she realized that he had been fully

aware of her polyamorous practice throughout his upbringing and was relatively

comfortable with it. There is a significant cultural assumption that the heterosexual,

nuclear family is the superior environment in which to raise a family, and therefore

alternative family structures tend to be under greater and disproportionate scrutiny.

Further research on children who grew up in non-monogamous households would be very

valuable.

Safer-Sex

Safer sex was at once very important to my participants and yet not very

challenging to accomplish. Many polyamorists practiced safer sex (barriers, gloves,

condoms, etc) with their lovers. Some were "fluid bonded" (i.e. deliberately have non-

barrier sex) with only one person (often their primary) and used barriers with all other

lovers. The upfront clarity about sexual practices placed polyamorous people at a lesser

risk than some other groups (particularly people who cheat and those who are 'dating around'). In the example above where a participant was in a chain of lovers and one had a manageable sexually-transmitted infections (STI), the doctor informed her that she was in a very low risk group because of the openness of communication and the respect/desire for the infection to not be transmitted. According to the doctor in this scenario, people are at more risk when STIs are unknown, people are unwilling to disclose, or their sexual partners are anonymous. Polyamorists pride themselves on their open communication about sexuality and about full disclosure of all people with whom they are involved sexually. At least in theory. In an example provided above, I discussed the 'ultimate poly betrayal' where a woman found out her partner was having unsafe sex with a known lover. (Luckily, no STIs were transmitted in this circumstance, but the relationship ended). Notably, lesbians are often considered to be in a lower risk group for many major STIs and this fact is not irrelevant to the observations, although I can only guess the correlation.

Compersion and the Benefits of Polyamory
"Those moments when you feel really proud of yourself about the way you live"

The above polyagonous narratives may lead one to ask why polyamorists continue to practice polyamory through such difficult emotions. My research indicates that the answer is multifold. First, while jealousy in polyamory can be difficult, there is

jealousy in monogamous practice as well. Second, once tools are in place to manage difficult emotions like jealousy, it is experienced less negatively. Most polyamorists stated that jealousy was more common in their early experiences of polyamory and became increasingly rare. Third, the tools in place to mitigate jealousy in polyamorists' relationships could be applied to other difficult emotions. Fourth, my participants described polyamory as a much more realistic and freeing expression of their love and sexuality than monogamy would be and thus welcomed the full package. They see polyamory as no less normal than monogamy, just less common. Several participants talked about being able to love every partner more when they did not feel trapped in a monogamous model. Fifth, the benefits of polyamory outweigh the difficult feelings and the pleasure found in compersion was particularly satisfying. Sixth, the challenge of polyamory and its ensuing opportunity for growth was highly gratifying. And lastly, sexual enjoyment was a significant benefit to polyamorous practice.

Studies have shown that open relationships correlate to increased self-esteem and self-knowledge (Wolfe, 2003), personal empowerment (Cardoso et al, 2009; Sheff, 2005; Weitzman, 1999), "boosts in sexual self-confidence...and [the] dissolution of jealousy" (De Visser & McDonald, 2007, p. 469). My study reveals similar results. One participant, Cheyenne talked about polyamory as empowering and felt a great deal of pride and satisfaction in bringing her jealousy to a place of solid compersion;

> You know those moments when you feel really proud of yourself about the way you live and what you do. Like, 'Look at us!' And I do, I feel so attached to that word [compersion], really excited that I do receive so much pleasure from my partner being off with someone else and having a great night. I want to hear about it the next day in whatever degree of detail they want to give me. And that's fun.

Another participant, Nora responded:

166

It is all worthwhile for me to do it. It's a beautiful thing. It's like getting your cake and eating it too. Even if it means the making of the cake is six times longer, it's worth it. It's the most difficult cake in the universe to make.

While many polyamorists maintain 'It's not all about the sex,'[47] the sexual benefits of polyamory were frequently mentioned in the interviews. Several polyamorists talked about eroticizing what may have otherwise triggered jealousy (such as a partner having sex with someone else), thus converting a potentially painful event into one of pleasure. Research on swinging has also demonstrated that certain situations that are typically ripe for jealousy had an erotically stimulating effect on swingers (De Visser & McDonald, 2007; Gould, 2000). Similarly, Stearns (1989, p. 15) notes that a certain amount of jealousy can "provide some enjoyable spice." Many polyamorists reported that having outside sexual experiences increased their overall libido and that this increase transfered to their other partners. One participant, Courtney expressed a strong sense of sexual compersion:

> If my lover has a lover who I am friends with or who I like, and this is about 98% of the time, watching them hug, kiss, snuggle, love, have sex with that person, is so hot I could almost die from it. It's not even a vague pleasure. It's like Oh my God, right. It's the hottest thing ever. Ever. And the better I like the person that my lover is having sex with, the hotter it is.

Heloise described another aspect of compersion:

> It's funny because if you look at the 'How do you know if your spouse is cheating' [article in a magazine] and some of the big signs are, he's suddenly bringing you gifts, they're telling you they love you more, and you are having more sex. And I'm like 'Right, what's wrong with that?' Okay, so find out who they are cheating with so they stop doing all those wonderful things for you. I mean the concept is that they are doing it out of guilt, but it could be that they are feeling more sexual and more loving and more gregarious.

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[47] This phrase was popularized by the podcast on polyamory by Cunning Minx.

Conclusion

Even though it is often neglected in sociological research, romantic love is central to Western culture (Jackson, 1993). Love, of course, is also a central organizing principle in polyamory. Love's shadow is jealousy - and jealousy plays a significant role in the polyamorous experience, either by its presence or its absence. It may be that the more people open their hearts to truly open relationships, the more vulnerable they are to the experience of jealousy, or, alternatively the more they can conquer love's shadow. Through their extensive critique and re-imagining of jealousy, polyamorists seek to shift personal and cultural understandings of jealousy. Compersion is a creative act of resistance that places the body, pleasure and love in center stage. Polyamorists' practice of compersion challenges emotionally normative constructions of jealousy.

The creation of the word *compersion*, arguably, has contributed to the potential for it to be experienced. When experience is bound by particular feeling rules, it can be difficult to experience emotional outcomes outside of this box. If, for example, one assumes love must be directed toward only one person, any attraction to a third party may be interpreted as a failure of love, or possibly as if that prior love was not legitimate. But as many people who have been in long-term relationships can attest, such criterion sets up nearly impossible parameters, and these can actually interfere with the value of the relationship. Polyamorists vie for their own parameters, and thus try to live up to their

standards they create. The cultivation of their experience, both sexual and emotional, through the development of language and culture can shift emotional outcomes.

From the interviews I conducted, I found that my participants (usually) experienced more poly*amory* than poly*agony*. It could be that those who struggled greatly are no longer polyamorous and therefore did not make it into my sample. Although class background varied significantly, my sample represents people who have enough social and cultural capital as well as education to be able to persevere with polyamory, which then must also influence their approach to processing jealousy. My data suggests that jealousy is manageable for many polyamorists, so long as all practitioners are willing to do the work. The experience of polyamory contradicts conventional beliefs about the naturalness and inevitability of jealousy and the supposed gendered ways that jealousy is embodied. While polyamorists do not necessarily have different emotional experiences than monogamous people, they follow a different model of love that in turn effects their emotional experience. Through the creation of a cultural ideology of poly, polyamorists intend to cultivate the emotional experience of compersion. Polyamory exemplifies a culture where sexual non-exclusivity and jealousy are not necessarily associated, and offers an alternative narrative of the embodiment and expression of jealousy.   In the following chapter, I will explore how queer polyamorists re-image and re-craft jealousy in regards to gendered feeling rules.

Chapter 5 - Once You Say, I'm poly, it Kind of Eliminates the Need for the

Feminist Part; Gender, Jealousy and Polyamory

"The most radical thing we can do as feminists is to treat our happy, open, free lives as if they were simply normal." Courtney (study participant)

Gender plays an intricate role in romantic relationships and is part of how people relate to each other sexually. Understandings of one's gendered subjectivity are also tied to emotional experiences, particularly emotions that are connected to sexuality, the body and intimate interactions. It is nearly impossible to separate emotion from the constructs of gender, sexuality and their intersecting regulation. In refusing to participate in compulsory monogamy, do queer, polyamorous women also resist heteronormativity, genderism, sexism, and emotional normativity? While creating new relationship structures and emotional dynamics, does this population also play with, re-imagine, and transform the gendered *feeling rules* of emotions, sexuality and the body? Barbalet (1998, p. 180) notes that "emotions are never in fact "finished projects" but always in process." Although emotions are always in flux, I look at an illustrative moment of this subcultural discourse to see how the intersection of gender and jealousy is re-imagined by my sample of queer polyamorous women. I found that their resistance to gendered feeling rules was contextual and at times that my participants reproduced the very structures they intended to resist.

Emotional norms are repeatedly reinforced in social interactions.   As mentioned in previous chapters, the fact that there is no word for the opposite of jealousy in the English language (prior to *compersion* being coined) reveals a key feeling rule in

Western culture, i.e. that jealousy is the expected reaction to a lover's affection toward another person. Expressing socially unacceptable (or 'inappropriate') emotions tends to be met with scorn, shame or ridicule. Lupton (1998, p. 84) notes that,

> The notion that the emotions are disruptive and somehow external to the self remains dominant in contemporary Western societies. Indeed, we commonly talk about the emotions in terms that suggest that we are passive and even helpless in the face of the power of emotions, suggesting that we often find ourselves submitting to them or over-powered by them despite our better judgment or our best efforts.

Part of the intention of the polyamorist movement is to rebuild emotional and social models of relationships, not as passive servants of emotions but as active creators of their emotional world. For many queer, polyamorous women in my sample, practicing compersion was seen as an act of resistance to conventional discourses on emotion, sexuality, gender and relationship structures. The active pursuit of the emotional pleasure of compersion, particularly embodied pleasure, was often understood by these polyamorists as a feminist practice in itself. This act is seen to be a form of resistance to the dominant discourse in which jealousy is the only legitimate response to a lover's affection for another person.

As described in Chapter 2, both representations in the media and in research reinforce the gender dichotomy which states that men and women are triggered by, experience and express jealousy differently. A brief summary of the typical gender divide is that women are more inclined to experience jealousy when their partner has an (real or imagined) *emotional* connection to another person, while men are apparently more likely to experience jealousy when their lover has a *sexual* connection with another person (Buss, 2000). There is also literature that claims that women respond to jealousy-inducing situations with cattiness, manipulative behavior, or by working on the

relationship, while men respond with anger and violence (Clanton, 1990). Jealousy has been linked to sexual and material property in marriage, the regulation of sexuality, competition, male violence and paternal lineage (Clanton & Smith, 1977; White & Mullen, 1989), all of which are connected to constructions of gender. Representations of gender roles and emotional norms contribute to the embodiment of jealousy, and thus the gender divide becomes self-fulfilling. As Petersen (2001, p. 53) argues, "by learning the culturally prescribed feeling rules for those of their gender, men and women are socialized into different emotional worlds."

There is some validity to gendered stereotypes; some people easily embody society's gender ideal and other people work very hard to fit it. Most people however, fit somewhere within a matrix of patterns and traits associated with masculinity and femininity that shift with time and context. Social ideas contribute to embodied feelings. Emotional norms are repeatedly reinforced through social interactions, similar to the way gender is constructed through repetition, until it seems "natural" (Butler, 1990). My analysis of queer women's polyamory contributes to a critical analysis of the social context of jealousy. While looking at how social ideas are transformed into feelings and how feelings are transformed into social ideas, I also examine how such ideas and consequently their embodiment can shift.

The categories of 'man' and 'woman' are social constructs with fuzzy delineation (Tauchert, 2002), but gender occupies real space in the everyday lives of individuals, whether through the replication of categories or through the continuous displacement of these categories (Butler, 1990). In other words, even those individuals who embody gender/queer existence and who challenge the categories are often confronted with the

172

reification of gender. Thus, while I challenge the gender binary, I remain aware of the importance of these categories to my participants and to the contemporary spaces in which gender is lived.

In my analysis of the interview data, I found evidence that demonstrates stereotypical gendered patterns, but I also found a wide range of stories that point to the vast diversity of emotional experiences. My case study of queer women's polyamory demonstrates the limitations of dichotomizing emotional experiences by gender and it also makes evident the intricate connection between socialized gender discourse and emotional experiences. I address the intersection of gender and jealousy in polyamory by looking at my sample of queer polyamorous women's perspectives regarding feminism, 'promiscuity,' competition between women and emotional control.

My research findings show that the queer polyamorous women in my sample are re-imagining the gendered connection between love and relationships. They challenge many of the ideas entrenched in monogamy - such as the idea that sexual exclusivity is the only way to express love and commitment, and they replace these with alternative values. In particular, they state that jealousy is neither inevitable, nor intolerable, nor is it necessarily tied to fixed gendered roles. Instead one can experience jealousy, navigate it, and move past the negative emotion to a positive one (i.e. compersion). In this way, queer polyamorous women attempt to rewrite the gendered feeling rules regarding jealousy. They do so by constructing new norms, ideas and guidelines that steer their practice as a culture. These norms inform how they structure emotional experiences, actualize gender equality and strengthen what they perceive to be sexual freedom. As many marginalized populations have done, polyamorists both resist dominant structures

173

that regulate emotion, gender and sexuality (which are highly intertwined), and create

alternatives that suite their preferences. Polyamorists re-imagine and re-craft the

emotional feeling rules to facilitate a lifestyle where compersion is not only possible, but

common. These emotional constructs are a creation of the subculture, as opposed to

individuals. However, like most cultural norms, these are not always followed; they are

always in flux and the norms in place to mitigate jealousy and minimize sexism do not

work for everybody. As well, the patriarchal and mono-normative society we live in, and

out of which polyamory emerged requires more than a discursive deconstruction to

adequately be rewired.

Polyamory as a Feminist Practice
"Feminism is ultimately about self-determination for women"

Polyamory is often described as having a feminist framework (Mint, 2007)[48]. In

particular, polyamory is thought to be informed by feminism since many of its most

prominent authors are feminist (Easton & Lyszt, 1997; Taormino, 2008). Feminism and

polyamory share a critique of institutionalized monogamy (Overall, 1998; Robinson,

1999), as well as a political and social critique of sexuality (Easton & Lyszt, 1997;

Ritchie & Barker, 2006).   According to Boler (1999, p. 109),

> The 'feminist politics of emotion' is a theory and practice that invites
> women to articulate and publicly name their emotions, and to critically
> and collectively analyze these emotions not as "natural," "private"
> occurrences but rather as reflecting learned hierarchies and gendered roles.
> The feminist practices of consciousness-raising and feminist pedagogy

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[48] http://freaksexual.wordpress.com/2007/03/27/polyamory-and-feminism/

powerfully reclaim emotions out of the (patriarchally enforced) private sphere and put emotions on the political and public map. Feminist politics of emotion recognize emotions not only as a site of social control, but of political resistance.

Polyamorous discourse reflects Boler's above statement in that it critiques the alleged naturalness and gendered aspects of jealousy. A common polyamorous critique of the institution of monogamy points to the way jealousy functions as a mechanism of social control (Kleese, 2006). Polyamorist theory critiques the function of jealousy as a social control and argues that polyamorous practice constitutes political resistance through the embodied manifestation of pleasure and compersion. While the feminist leaning of the polyamorous movement is well articulated, the range of meaning given to feminism and the ways in which it plays out in polyamorous practice varies significantly. The dynamics of feminist practice in polyamory and the feminist politics of emotion (as identified by Boler) are explored in this section.

Errol (in Crawford, 1992, p. 29-30) argues that, "emotion statements are always evaluative. Most involve moral judgments or moral evaluation." Influenced by radical pluralism, as espoused by Weeks, my aim is to maintain a non-judgmental approach to the sexual practices of polyamory and its attending emotions and thus to analyze jealousy's manifestation without imposing my ideas of 'bad' or of 'ought'. At the same time, I do not wish to treat jealousy as benign since it can be a challenging emotion. I evaluate the stigma and shame attached to jealousy, while recognizing jealousy as a barrier to intimacy and as a limiting factor in polyamorous relationships. To many people, jealousy does not feel good but it plays an important and potentially revealing role. The culture of polyamory creates the potential for a non-judgmental approach to jealousy by developing creative emotional practices to alleviate "ugly" emotions (Ngai,

175

2005). As I once heard in a workshop on polyamory: "don't *should* all over yourself." In other words, replicating the feeling rules of the dominant culture, or even of polyamorous rhetoric will not bring about positive affect. My case study of polyamorous queer women offers insight into a feminist approach to emotions.

Many of my participants viewed their polyamory as a feminist practice. Their understandings of feminism varied, but many strongly believed in the connection between their choice to practice polyamory and the values of self-determination, non-possessiveness, gender equality and sexual freedom. Some participants argued that polyamory was necessarily feminist. Brianna noted,

> I don't even have to say feminist anymore since I've been poly and dating people. It seems like once you say, 'I'm poly,' then it kind of eliminates the need for the feminist part.

Coraline stated,

> My poly wasn't externally informed, it was internally informed. So, it's not that I've chosen poly out of a particular political statement. My political statement supports poly because feminism is ultimately about self-determination for women. In a nutshell. And poly for me is about self-determinationist expression of my sexuality.

According to Courtney,

> Everything I do is connected to my choices about feminism and living life not just as a making me happy thing, but also as an open political statement. The most radical thing we can do as feminists is to treat our happy, open, free lives as if they were simply normal. I am not in rebellion against anything because to do so simply redefines the status quo as quo status. I live my own life in a perfectly normal happy way and that it doesn't happen to match many other people's lives is their loss entirely....I did not remake my life so I could follow somebody else's rules, whether those be interesting or enticing or the most wildly box in the world, it is still a box.

Courtney deemed the pursuit of happiness to be a political action. For many of

my participants, being a feminist influenced their choice of with whom they would

develop a relationship. Alex explained that she would only date people who identified as

feminists. She reasoned that to be in a polyamorous dynamic required people to be able

to take care of and strongly vocalize their needs, which were qualities that defined her

feminist choices. In regard to her feminism, Alasia stated that,

> I don't think I've ever slept with a woman that I found out wasn't
> feminist. And I've grown pretty aware of how I like feminist lovers, male
> or female. But whether it has to do with poly or not? Maybe part of it,
> besides the honesty that I would rather not cheat, and that we don't own
> each other. And if a person is doing something that gives them joy, gives
> somebody else joy, it seems a pinched attitude to prevent them from doing
> that based on some ownership issues. Mainly like 'you belong to me.'

Alasia's statement highlights the polyamorous value of non-possessiveness which comes

out of the critique of monogamy as a form of ownership. Explaining how her feminism

influenced her choices, Grace said, "I see monogamy as dictated by an oppressive

patriarchal culture."

Discussion of non-monogamy has persisted in different streams of feminist

thought, with a variety of emphases, challenges and critiques. These variations in

approach to polyamory were apparent in my sample.   Alasia linked her polyamory to the

socialist feminist argument that non-monogamy was a political extension of the critique

of capitalism, since monogamy was connected to property and ownership. Coraline

discussed how 25 years ago in the queer community, it was,

> Completely unacceptable in that time period to actually be poly...And I
> was pretty closeted. I lived in a lesbian feminist collective household
> *laughter* and really could not talk about my experience of wanting to be
> poly without having a huge amount of judgment.

While polyamory today is taken to be necessarily feminist, 25 years ago non-monogamy

was seen as anti-feminist to many lesbian feminists. While Coraline continued to identify

as a feminist despite the tension between her desire and the political atmosphere in which

she lived, Alyson was more conflicted about her identification as a feminist;

> I used to be [a feminist], but I'm not sure what it means anymore or if I am
> included in the equation, so I don't know... It was also my experience
> coming out in the 80s as a feminist, as a lesbian and then the whole sex
> wars thing erupted and I have never reconciled how do you be sex-positive
> and be a feminist and be a genderqueer. So on a day to day level I
> certainly fight for those things but the word feminist in itself now feels
> like a box and I am on the outside of that box.

Polyamory emerged in part as a response to the 'Free Love' movement and its

separation of sex and love (Zell, 1990). Two of my participants described how their

mothers participated in the Free Love movement and saw open relationships as solely

benefiting men since the boyfriends of their youth would tout emotional non-attachment

to sex and use this to justify their promiscuity. Heloise described this sentiment as, "it's

just sex. It means nothing." However, their boyfriends would not tolerate their enjoying

sexual encounters outside of the relationship. Heloise told this story:

> A lot of my family comes out of the 60s, which is great in many ways, but
> the whole poly/ non-monogamy of the 60s was very different, which
> tended to be that the men got to sleep around and the women didn't. My
> mother's experience was just that. My father got to sleep with other
> people and the couple of times she did, he hit the roof and went ballistic.
> So that is the model of non-monogamy that she had, so she found the idea
> of me being non-monogamous stressful.

Rihanna came of age during the 1960s and noted that from her a perspective,

> The other misconception of polyamory is that it's all for the men and it
> never works for women... that it's the guy who is getting the most benefit
> out of it.

Similarly Brianna, who was active in the bisexual community, noted that many people

still assumed that men were the main beneficiaries of polyamory:

> It's funny because often times when I try to explain it there is a moment
> when the person I'm talking to goes, 'oh, so the women are allowed to
> have partners too?' That's like, ah, wow, yeah. Do I seem like the kind of
> woman who would agree to anything else?

In spite of the fact that many of the women in my sample identified as feminists and

deliberately challenged gender rules, conventional gender stereotypes still endured, albeit

in altered form reflective of their queer culture. There was a subtle reproduction of the

virgin/whore dichotomy dividing the "good" partner from the "promiscuous" partner,

reminiscent of the double standard in heterosexual non-monogamy of the Free Love era.

For example, Nora described a polyamorous couple she knew and how she felt bad for

the partner who she perceived as staying at home with the kids while her wife

"gallivanted" around town on her many dates. Dominique said that people in her

community, including polyamorists, looked at her with pity in response to the seeming

promiscuity of her partner.

> Because I'm less active in it, and even when I'm active people don't
> always know about it because I'm a more private person, I don't always
> let people know what I'm doing. People often come to me and do this,
> you'll love this: *look of dreadful pity* 'How's it going with Leigh? Are
> you alright?' I hate that. When they go on with that shit, that bugs my
> ass... Pity, yeah, and digging around for stories, like drama...Yeah, they
> perceived [that I have] no power, even though for 9 years, I came into this
> when you had a partner and we stayed. People don't look at that. People
> look at the other stuff... I always say, I'm really careful...I do this
> voluntarily. This is consensual, we talk, Leigh is really responsible. If she
> has a date with [coheart] or someone, then she has a really big date with
> me.

In Dominique's case, there was a strong butch-femme dynamic, and the butch/ masculine

partner was perceived as being more active, which exacerbated people's perception of a

power imbalance between them along conventional gender lines. It appears that people still unconsciously buy into gender roles about appropriate behavior for men and women, where a butch person is cast in the man's role. Some polyamorists appear to be harder on masculine people when they appear to replicate male promiscuity. By pitying Dominique and digging for stories, people were casting her in a traditional female role, where women are argued to be more susceptible to gossip in connection to jealousy and envy. This pity is also tied into assumptions about jealousy; the assumption that the one who is more active has more power and hence the less active partner will be more susceptible to jealousy.

Alyson also noted how people felt sorry for her when she was partnered with someone who was actively self-identified as "trampy":

> Well when I went out with [her] and I tried to explain it to people, people just felt sorry for me and it's just like, you know what? I don't need this. I've never come up with a different way, clearly I was delivering the message poorly, but I don't know how you convey that to people and have that just be okay, this is how it is.

As illustrated in the quotes from Dominique and Alyson, there is often an acceptance of a "double standard" in relation to quantity of partners in polyamorous relationships. In other words, far from being pitied, polyamorists found it okay for one person to be dating more people than the other. The goal is not to equalize power by imposing the same rules or same numbers on all parties, but rather to focus on consent, mutual satisfaction and meeting individual needs. That said, many of my participants found their jealousy more easily navigated when they were the person who dated more, and many participants reported that other people were still judgmental of those who did

180

not appear to have equal standards. For example, Orion described how being the partner

who was more active coincided with her experiencing less jealousy in the relationship.

> I haven't lately been the person who experienced jealousy... because I
> have a tendency to be the really slutty one. At least in my past
> relationships I experienced a lot of joy with my partners getting their
> needs met somewhere else because it frees me up a little bit.

Although in this instance Orion focused on each individual having their needs met, many

polyamorists are still susceptible to mainstream socialization and hence training around

jealousy.

Similarly to Orion, Courtney described how it felt to be the one who tended to be

more active and how she would take the brunt of the criticism:

> I find it fascinating that most of the stuff around poly support goes along
> the lines of how the sluttier of the two partners should be very supportive
> to their less slutty partner. And it's very common and stern that they say
> you should go no faster than your partner can deal with. That you should
> be very careful, be very understanding. The fact that your partner spent
> the last 3 hours yelling that K is a bitch and a slut and a whore and that
> she's ugly and she's got spots and her hair is badly styled and she doesn't
> know what you see in her. That you should be patient because that is
> actually your partner's way of saying, I feel frightened now and I need
> reassurance. *laughter* And it's also common for people who are
> marginally poly or who are not poly at all to speak to you when you talk
> about your poly problems as if it were entirely your fault for being trampy.
> If you loved her enough though, couldn't you just dump that other person?
> If you really cared about her though, wouldn't you want to be with her and
> nobody else? Right? So I find that there are very few resources out there
> for the trampiest of poly people, who just want to be in a relationship and
> love someone and also love someone else.

Courtney's quote brings to light a dissonance between polyamorous beliefs and

behaviours. Whereas most polyamorous discourse is sympathetic to the partner who is

experiencing the jealousy, the discourse rarely addresses the challenges of being the more

active partner or being the person toward whom this jealousy is directed. She points out

that it is also emotionally challenging to be the partner of someone experiencing jealousy

in response to your (consensual) behaviour. The challenges Courtney faced reflect the

ways in which polyamorous people repeat the conventions of mono-normativity that they

vocally resist in other circumstances. Her statement also makes apparent the social

stigma regarding polyamory's connection to 'sluttiness' that is faced, and at times

reproduced, by polyamorists. In this instance, the assumption continues to be that if one

loved her partner enough, she would not need to seek the romantic/sexual attention of

others.

> In polyamorous culture, there is a complicated reclamation of the word *slut*. After all, the 'bible' of polyamory is called *The Ethical Slut*, named to call attention to the assumption that non-monogamy is an act of promiscuity, and hence taking back its power, much like the reclamation of *queer*. The authors describe their reclamation as follows:
> We are proud to reclaim the word "slut" as a term of approval, even endearment. To us, a slut is a person of any gender who has the courage to lead life according to the radical proposition that *sex is nice and pleasure is good for you"* (Easton & Liszt, 1997, p. 4; emphasis in the original).

Peppermint (2008, p. 22),[49] a popular online blogger, believes that "the poly movement

needs slut pride." He argues that in an attempt to gain mainstream credibility,

polyamorists have downplayed the sexual component of polyamory while emphasizing

the love aspect. One example of this is the often-used comparison of a polyamorist to a

parent who loves more than one child equally. While this strategy has been somewhat

successful, it masks the reality of what draws people to polyamory and what makes such

relationships different - i.e. the sex. As Peppermint (ibid, p. 24) argues "the urge to hide

these aspects of polyamory is counterproductive to our movement: in particular, it makes

for crappy advertising." Also, such a strategy replicates the sex-negativity of the

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[49] http://freaksexual.wordpress.com/2008/01/31/polyamory-is-not-about-the-sex-except-when-it-is/

dominant culture. Minimizing or masking the sexual component of polyamory leads to

the problem of judgment, dividing the good from the bad partner of the polyamorous unit.

By unapologetically embracing the sexual component of polyamory, Peppermint (2008)

argues that polyamorists will more successfully challenge sex-negative assumptions in

mono-normative culture.

In the following quotation, Ren described how she had internalized a sense of

shame in her desire to have more than one lover and how polyamory helped her

overcome the negativity she associated with promiscuity. She had internalized the

monogamous assumption that,

> Because I loved her and I felt like I should be okay with being
> monogamous [even though I] was unhappy for a chunk of that relationship
> [and] was ashamed because I knew I had these major desires...I should not
> want to slut it up. So I think it silenced me. But I saw how destructive it
> was, how I lost so many parts of myself. So now I try to be really
> conscious that if I ever do feel ashamed to really look at it and pull it away
> from me and see that again it's about oppression of people and silencing
> of love.

Ren's polyamorous and feminist choices, as well as participation in the community in

which these ideas took shape, helped her overcome the shame she felt regarding her

sexual expression. Ren described polyamory as an expression of self-love and acts of

pleasure as an important route in her personal reclamation of 'slut pride.' She stated,

> If people are loved and confident then they will start revolutions... And by
> love, I mean self-love, ultimately, the most. That's the biggest. Like all of
> these relationships, my relationship with myself is the only one I can
> guarantee... I think it's a symbiotic relationship where I reflect back at you
> and you reflect back at me and we can both learn and grow and celebrate
> each other. If I try to hold on to something I'm just going to kill it. If I'm
> celebrating and supporting its life, then it's going to grow and I'm going to
> grow and we are going to both benefit. Magic!

Ren's approach to polyamory coincides with the 'esoteric' branch of polyamory, as described in Chapter 3, which emphasizes a spiritual connection to polyamorous love and relationships (see Haritaworn, Lin & Kleese, 2006, p. 522; Noel, 2006).

This reclamation of the 'slut' is not synonymous with "anything goes." My participants were critical of any pressure to have more lovers than they wanted. Cheyenne used the term "poly at all costs" to refer to polyamorists who felt they needed to have multiple partners regardless of the circumstances. My participants often looked down upon this idea and found it more balanced to pick and choose when and with whom to engage in relationships, taking a break when their offspring were young, for example, or when a family emergency arose. Cheyenne noted,

> There were times when we focused in or when we were struggling and not communicating well or not meeting each other well and then we can't be going off with other people if we are not feeling safe or feeling like we are doing this well on our own terms. And I really respect that ebb and flow. If it's all poly all the time, *poly at all costs* then you are not necessarily, in my experience, not listening to myself or listening to my partner. And I think you can be committed to living your life that way, but not all the time... That's the whole point.

At the same time, the needs of one part of a poly configuration should be balanced with the needs of and respect for secondary lovers. In this section, the feminist intentions of my participants are explored with regard to their approach to ethical and egalitarian relationships, sex-positive attitudes and the emphasis on emotional compersion as a political pursuit.

Cohearts and Competition between Women

"I'm sexy and I'm pretty and I look great in a pair of stilettos"

Jealousy's connection to the gender of one's coheart can be traced to socialized competition between women (Barash, 2006). Barash suggests that women are more likely to compete with other women colleagues than with their male colleagues. Similarly, women are socialized to compete with other women in regard to beauty, and the result comes out as envy, gossip or scorn directed at the ones considered more beautiful among them (Fischer, 2006; Tanenbaum, 2000; Wolfe, 1992). Ben-Ze'ev and Goussinsky (2008, p. 208) argue that,

> It has been shown that jealousy increases when the rival's qualities pertain to a domain relevant to one's self-esteem. Thus, individuals who attribute great importance to physical attractiveness are more likely to demonstrate a jealous reaction if their rival is unusually attractive.

This competition played out among the polyamorists in my study. Many participants experienced jealousy when they perceived their coheart to be more beautiful than they considered themselves to be. Tianna noted,

> I'm jealous about the other person, like she's prettier or smarter, or funnier, like it's more of a personal comparison.... Yeah, there was this one girl that she went on a date with that I didn't think was very hot. I looked at her and was like, hmm, no, whatever. But apparently everybody in the whole world thinks this girl is a total knockout... Sometimes I'll remind myself of my good qualities, like with the girl where I felt that little twinge of jealousy, I just told myself she's not all that. I'm pretty hot myself, not to be egotistical but you know, I'm sexy and I'm pretty and I look great in a pair of stilettos and I can work it.

In this example, Tianna replicated the conventional gender norm of beauty and attractiveness as the defining measure of one's worth and of one's place in the

competition. Brianna overcame her sense of competition regarding the beauty of her

coheart in the following way:

> At the beginning I was always worried about looks. I was feeling insecure
> about that for some reason. But then I realized that we really wanted to be
> in a triad so then it became about them finding the best looking partner so
> I would be attracted to them. Best looking to me, but that hasn't really
> worked out because he has different taste than I do...

My participants often compared their experience of jealousy to dominant culture.

Many portrayals of jealousy in Hollywood media, for example, involve two women

competing for the attention of a man, the "other woman" intruding on a couple and

"breaking them up."[50] While Hollywood portrayals do not accurately represent

relationships, these stories do contribute to people's understanding of emotion and to the

ways in which emotion is embodied. Gendered feeling rules are social ideas that are

never statically embodied. As Butler notes (1990), gender needs to be continuously

reinforced through repetition for it to take on a semblance of a reified position.

Socialization impacts people's understanding of not only feeling rules, but also what one

actually does feel. The norms that reinforce competition between women are made

apparent through regulatory bodies and the means by which emotions are learned -

including media, mono-normativity, genderism, heterosexism, sexism, etc. Competition

between women in the polyamorous community is often based in, or portrayed as a site of

potential jealousy. Such competition is actively critiqued by polyamorists, but at times is

also replicated in the subculture.

Many of my participants reported a connection between the gender of one's

coheart and the way they experienced jealousy as a sense of competition. For example,

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[50] For example, Avril Lavinge's music video for *Girlfriend* is a retelling of this classic tale, and is
one of the most frequently viewed videos on Youtube.

Alex, who identified as butch, noted how it was easier when her femme lover dated

people who were not butches. It was people who reminded her of herself in terms of

gender that were more likely to inspire jealousy. This also applied to people who were

similar to herself in terms of other traits, including being a top, older than her lover or

aesthetically similar. Many people are less likely to feel jealous of a person who is vastly

different or removed from themselves, since they are seen as complimentary rather than

as competition. Grace's partner was a female-to-male transgendered person and she said,

"he's often jealous of people with a more masculine gender presentation, or sometimes

lately a genderqueer presentation. It's the gender thing that gets him going." On the

other hand, she found it more challenging when her coheart was differently gendered.

Grace said,

> I used to be really jealous when he would date men, specifically biological
> men. As opposed to the similar gender presentation thing it was the polar
> opposite, like this person can give you something that I can't or I feel like
> I can't... If he is dating men I like to meet them because I find that whole
> male-male relationship rather threatening because I feel so excluded from
> it... With the guy situation, I don't get jealous if I know them or I
> definitely get less jealous if I know them because they're never as
> threatening and beautiful and big bulky boy as I think they'll be before I
> meet them. Which really threatens me, or has in the past and I just get that
> meeting out of the way so it doesn't have a chance to develop there.

 Among my bisexual participants, jealousy regarding the gender of the coheart

took another twist. For example, Brianna noted how her boyfriend at times exhibited the

stereotypical male response to her other lovers, where he minimized her relationships

with women:

> He's internalized a little of the heteronormative stuff in that he is more
> comfortable if I am dating women, but he fully owns that and understands
> that it's not totally cool. So he's a bit more comfortable with me dating
> women.

This criticism of the conventional male minimization of female-female relationships as less threatening is reflected in the polyamorous dynamics. Peppermint (2008) notes how his polyamorous practice reflects a stereotypical straight man's fantasy to have two girlfriends, yet he is critical of such a patriarchal fantasy given his feminist leanings. He describes what Sheff (2005, p. 625) terms 'poly-hegemonic masculinity,' i.e. "the idealized form of masculinity valorized" by polyamorous communities, such as when men glory in achieving the heterosexual male fantasy of having the attention of more than one woman. A variation of this dynamic was replicated among some of the queer women in my study in terms of butch and femme, as noted above by Alex, where a femme-femme dynamic was deemed less threatening.

Most polyamorists in my sample were critical of gender stereotypes in representations of jealousy, yet at times also replicated them. Brianna stated that feminism used to influence her choices in polyamory, until the two were so integrated as to be indistinguishable. For her, identifying as polyamorous implied an explicit critique of the dominant construction of gender and sexuality.

> [Feminism] did [influence my choices] at the beginning, because I didn't want to engage in something that was somehow going to end up being biased against women or that was going to uphold patriarchal structures. But now I find that it doesn't, like my feminist beliefs don't play in in any way they wouldn't in the rest of my life, and in fact they play in less because it tends to be very egalitarian in my little world, very little gender stuff comes up, just once in a while someone gets reactionary and blames it on gender, but typically I don't experience that... Polyamorous people just think so much that they've already thought through gender, typically.

Several of my participants who were bisexual and/or also dated men offered insight *not* into how the emotional experience of men differed from that of women, but rather how polyamorous culture differed from both queer culture and mainstream,

188

heterosexual culture, as well as how gendered interactions affected and influenced

emotional states. For example, Alasia noted how heterosexual culture questioned gender

and sexuality less than queer culture:

> I think I allowed a man more control of me out of his jealousy, at least
> when I was young. The father of my daughter, he was very jealous. He
> would be jealous of me going to see my mother. I don't think he was ever
> jealous of the baby, but he only lasted for 3 months. I only had the baby
> and realized he had to get out. I realized I gave him a lot of power. He
> was jealous of [my pursuits of] acting as well, which was what I wanted to
> be doing. And I accepted it.

Similarly, Heloise argued that jealousy had a lot to do with the way we are socialized to

have relationships, rather than solely the way a certain gender responded to a jealousy-

provoking situation.

> My experience with the men that I have met has been that they are more
> jealous. They are more likely to have a negative reaction with their wife
> being with another person than the wife has with the man being with other
> people. It's funny because when you look at gay men, it doesn't seem to
> be there the same way... It may just be non-monogamy that's the issue.
> But from what I've read and stuff, it seems a little weird, because then it
> would indicate that it has nothing to do with male and female. It has
> something to do with heterosexual relationships.

> Comparatively, Martha argued that men and women, monogamist or polyamorist

did not have different experiences of jealousy, but rather that,

> The context of it would be different. And I especially see that in
> differences between queer and heterosexual relationships... Men are
> expected to be a certain way in this culture. I'm tough and macho and I
> have it together. And it's such a patriarchal thing, but if that is threatened
> in any way, and it's threatened so easily, so the jealousy/ fear is just boom,
> with aggression, with anger. I certainly think there is a difference in the
> way women and men express it, but the expression itself is similar, when
> you bring it to that primary [emotion]...of fear. Women are more inclined
> to nag and cry and men are more inclined to get angry and aggressive and
> partially that is socially constructed.

189

Martha connected the experience and expression of jealousy to the ways in which people related to each other, as circumscribed by gendered socialization into queer or heterosexual cultures. Coraline also described how jealousy was socialized vis-a-vis gender and perpetuated in Western culture:

> I think that a lot of jealousy is driven by our culture and driven by popular culture. I don't just think it, I know it. You wouldn't be able to see all those trash gossip magazines – that's what gossip is all about. It's about inspiring jealousy and reinforcing the feeling of inadequacy over all people so you can sell things to them. Simply... To me one of the driving keys of that cornerstone to it, is jealousy, to continue promoting the feeling of jealousy… and so I know heterosexually identified people experience jealousy differently because they are expected to... feel jealous, not just feel jealous in romantic relationships, but pretty much every relationship they have with every other human being.... Having given my whole little dissertation there, doesn't mean I'm immune to it. I certainly feel it. And it's really interesting being somebody who's always educated myself politically. I've always been politically involved and considered myself to be a social activist, but it doesn't make me immune to jealousy.

The above quotation demonstrates the gap between theoretical critiques of dominant ideas and the actual emotions experienced, many of which are being worked through by polyamorists. Coraline also made an interesting connection between her work as a social activist and an implicit assumption that deconstructing jealousy was an act of political resistance.

Tianna's experience of jealousy fit the conventional expectation that women's jealousy was triggered by emotional connection with other people, while men's jealousy was triggered by sexual connection. She experienced little jealousy when her partner had sexual connections with other people, but found emotional connections with other people much harder. However, she personally did not want sexual relationships where the emotional connection was absent.

I would be perfectly happy if [she] just picks up dates, fucked them for a little bit and never saw them again. But I tend to like deeper connections, so it's always easier on the other side of the fence...Part of it is that I tend to be more uncomfortable with deep intimacy [between my lover and her dates], so the sleepover thing... that's too intimate for me, the snuggling in bed and waking up and having coffee in the morning and watching each other brush your teeth and I think that again, it looks too much like my relationship and I wouldn't want that with anyone else.

Brianna described how many women, in her experience, fit the conventional description of jealousy, but how this was challenged by polyamorists:

I have had [female] friends say to me, 'I don't know how you do it. I wouldn't mind if he slept with someone else, but I wouldn't want him to actually love them.' Definitely I've seen that in other people who have come in and out of our lives, that we are fine with it as long as they thought that he didn't love, but when they realized that he loved me and the extent of that and the commitment then they were gone.... Some of the women that have come in and out have done that whole manipulation thing. But it's hard for me to say because people that are poly tend to discuss things openly and own these things rather than being manipulative because it would fail otherwise.

Polyamorists are actively critiquing the dominant gender rules regarding jealousy, even when they do fit the conventional divide. In this section, I described how competition between women is exacerbated by dominant gendered models of jealousy, relationship models and participation in subcultures. Another way in which polyamorists rethink jealousy is through relinquishing emotional control and attempting to ease competition.

Emotional Control and Competition

"Holding on to anger is like grasping hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned." (Parkinson, Fischer & Manstead 2005, p. 19)

Classic Cartesian dualism pits reason against emotion, and male against female.

Reason is considered of utmost importance and emotion is seen as frivolous, something

that needs to be controlled lest it get in the way of proper reason. Boler (1999, p. 109)

argues,

> that the deceptive opposition between a pedagogy that either *invites*
> *expression of feeling* or *engages in intellectual rigor* signals not a
> shortcoming in consciousness-raising practices. Rather this indicates how
> deeply the oppositions between feeling and intellect are built into Western
> paradigms and language that shape education and scholarship. (emphasis
> in original)

Polyamorists revere certain emotional experiences, particularly love, romance and

compersion, while they look down upon other emotionally driven experiences, such as

jealousy, possessiveness and competition. For polyamorists, there is a tension with

regard to the emotion of jealousy, where polyamorists claim jealousy to be a natural part

of romantic life, yet jealousy is understood as a barrier to intimacy. So, despite the belief

that there should be no shame attached to experiencing jealousy, acting on jealousy in

certain ways may be judged negatively. Although it may be considered a normal part of

polyamorous experience, jealousy is also an emotion that, once worked through

adequately, is thought to either dissipate or transform into a positive emotion. This is the

emotional work that is often considered inherent to the polyamorous experience.

Sometimes this emotional work is done by processing to reveal the deeper source of

jealousy (what is it *really* about?) and communicating one's way through it. Supporting

each other through jealousy often starts with a confession of jealousy in the hopes that

this will dissipate or transform the emotion, or that one's partner will offer reassurance to

mitigate the jealousy. This dynamic echoes Jamieson's (1998, p. 1) description of the

ideal of confluent love where lovers are expected to share an "intense disclosing intimacy."

Emotions are sometimes seen as what takes over when one 'loses control' (Lutz, 1990/2008). Several of my participants discussed *controlling* the emotions that would otherwise lead to jealousy, and jealousy arising when this control had ceased. Emotional self-control is commonly portrayed as a masculine ideal and equated with self-mastery as well as mastery over others (Lupton, 1998). Lupton notes that "a major binary opposition in discourse on emotion is that of the 'emotional woman' and the 'unemotional man'" (ibid, p. 105). In her research, Lupton found that people who thought themselves to be unemotional represented emotionality negatively. They often described emotion as a loss of control and their lack of emotion as an ability to "think before expressing one's feelings" (ibid, p. 46-7). By this logic, emotion is understood by what is expressed and what can be controlled rather than what is initially felt, (which may be very strong). There was a general (although not mutually exclusive) divide among my participants between those who dealt with jealousy by allowing it to be experienced without imposing reason or control upon it and those who tried to control their jealousy in order to master and mitigate it. Janelle argued that polyamorous culture encouraged people to experience jealousy rather than deny it,

> So just allowing yourself to even just be jealous is so much more freeing
> and you end up not being as jealous. And also being able to talk to your
> partner and say, 'you know what? This threatens me or I need some
> reassurance, can you give that to me?' And it kind of just
> dissipates. Okay, I'm not so jealous anymore.

Other participants tried to understand jealousy rationally, by finding a reason for the emotion to occur. For example, Orion talked about managing jealousy through rationalization:

> Rationality. I get the very rational side of my brain in gear. The rational side that says, this doesn't change that, this doesn't change that. I'm getting better at asking for what I need.

Some participants spoke of having the ability to choose whether or not they felt jealous. Priscilla explained that she could see a situation where jealousy might occur, and she would make a conscious choice as to whether or not she would feel it. For some people, jealousy was thought to be more legitimate when there was a direct reason. People look for reasons for why they are jealous, such as their lover's actions or personal insecurities. When jealousy is perceived to be without reason, the person who feels it is then considered irrational, suspicious and/or 'crazy.' When jealousy is based on a legitimate reason, it is seen as justified and thus reflects positively on the one who experiences it. Reasons, however, are often placed after the emotion is experienced (Lehrer, 2009). People are apt to infer reasons upon a situation and to create a narrative where previously there was solely an affective experience, thus creating the dichotomy between emotion and reason after the fact or after the act.

Another element of the issue of control is how people attempt to control the actions of others when these actions have an emotional effect on themselves. Some polyamorists argue that the monogamous model is based on the control of other people's actions, often through possessiveness. Resistance to this aspect of mono-normativity was a core reason why some of my participants chose to engage in polyamory. The following quote from

Ren demonstrates how she saw the connection between gender, jealousy, ownership and

monogamy;

> I think in our society we're told to want what other people have. I think
> it's capitalism. I think it's misogyny. I think all of these things play into
> keeping us isolated and dependent on the systems. If I'm inadequate in
> whatever way, I just need to buy this thing... And we're fed all this stuff
> and I think it's a lot about keeping people dependent on power structures
> and money and hierarchy... It's constantly being reinforced, whether I
> look at a magazine or I see some heterosexist advertisement or whatever.
> There are still parts of me, even though I have been radicalized,
> politicized, trying to look at myself and question all of this and break
> down the status quo, it's still reinforced. There are still parts of me that
> think my body is not right. That love is not abundant and therefore I better
> hold on to it even if I don't like this situation, like I have to prove that I
> am better, like some competition that I'm better than this person. Like
> love is finite and whatever is finite. Like I need to hoard material goods
> and love because there is not enough. It's just tools of oppression and I
> think all of this monogamy and sexism and it all inter-plays in a way to
> keep us hating ourselves. And so we keep on buying things and staying in
> gross power dynamics.

 In this comment, Ren demonstrated the connection between jealousy and fear of loss,

fear of inadequacy and fear of loneliness, as well as how some of these fears are

perpetuated in Western culture. Ren also reflected the perspective of polyamory as a

political practice.

Another aspect of emotional control is how jealousy can be triggered when

someone does not feel as though they have control over a situation. Tianna was aware of

her tendency to try to control situations and how jealousy was spawned from this lack of

control. "That's when I want to start to control things because I have a bit of a control

issue." She argued that while she trusted her lover, she was unable to control what her

lover's date was doing or her intentions. For Tianna, this was when her jealousy was

most triggered:

Part of what is hard for me is that, aside from the fact that when I'm doing something I know exactly what I'm doing and what it means to me, and I know exactly where I stand and what my intentions are. Hopefully I know what the other person I'm doing those things with is as well, because I know them and I trust them. And I'm in control of it. But when she's doing something, like you go walking on the beach and you say it's not a big deal and it's not intimate and it doesn't mean anything. But what if the girl walking with you does? And then she's getting mixed messages, and that's where my control stuff kicks in. But you're taking a femme down to the beach! Don't you understand that?

The above example by Tianna speaks to trusting cohearts, the link between control and trust, and also the competition between femmes in the queer community. She had associated walks on the beach with a high level of romance and intimacy. Tianna said,

I never trust the other person. I just don't. I don't trust people. And I don't trust femmes easily because I know there are certainly some, not all of them, but some that, and I think part of it that she is quite a catch. She's gorgeous, she's smart, she's funny, she's sweet, she's loving. She's got a good job, all these things that there are 100 femmes behind me that would kill to have, right? And so I think that, it's not to say that I wouldn't have an unattractive, unintelligent partner, but... there is a fucking scarcity of butches, goddamn it. And so I don't trust the other girl. Not just this one, but not any of them ever. I've never trusted them.

Later in the interview, Tianna disclosed that she did indeed trust the partner of her secondary lover, a femme woman who preceded her by several years with that lover. This kind of chronology was common in how people experienced jealousy. A person can come to trust relationships or obligations that exist prior to the relationship, as one may accept a partner's prior professional or familial obligations (Ben-Ze'ev & Goussinsky, 2008). It was easier to trust the people who came before since the dynamic was already established and likely to not be changing. The people who come after are the ones that present unknown variables, with whom the trust and "control" is still tenuous.

196

The "scarcity of butches" that Tianna described referred to her sense that there were many more femmes than butches and that this skewed the dating pool (for those who dated within the butch/femme community), which contributed to her sense of competition among femmes. For Tianna, this 'scarcity' was coupled with the privilege afforded to masculinity in the queer women's community. This situation makes for a small reversal of power relations in this limited sphere since in dominant culture, feminine women are afforded more privilege than masculine and gender non-conforming women. Alyson was a butch and had this to say about the privilege of butches as well as sexual tops in this small slice of polyamorous culture, and about the responsibility that accompanied it:

> I actually think that because being a top in the world we live in is actually a position of privilege, that one actually gets to go around with a whole bunch of unexamined stuff that is either just fine or is somehow eroticized, so I don't think tops have to work on the painful parts as much as bottoms. Or as femmes do compared to butches or as anybody who is in social demand.... I think [about what] femmes settle for, like you can be an ignorant bastard butch and never be alone on a Saturday night. Where if you have the same behavior and you were a femme, you could be exiled. And you can be a psychotic lunatic as a top and still never be alone on a Saturday night, and as a bottom, you are going to have a harder time. It's just the way the ratios break down and whatever internal, well sexism really, fuels both of those equations; top is better than bottom, butch is better than femme.

Alyson's sentiment also speaks to a parallel 'scarcity' and privilege afforded to tops within the leather community (of which approximately half of my participants participated/identified), and thus competition between femmes and between bottoms, which can inspire jealousy. Tops are seemingly less common than bottoms (a very

197

interesting fact in and of itself[51]), and this increases their position in the social hierarchy.

This kind of power in the established pecking order of queer women, both in terms of

gender and of sexual power-play can translate into jealousy. Clanton (1997) describes

the way these power relations play into experiences of jealousy. For example, the person

who is assumed to be able to find a date more easily upon a break-up is afforded a degree

of power that can result in jealousy on the part of the other partner. Although Clanton's

work comes from a monogamous model, it applies to polyamory as well. If one member

of a couple is highly sought after while the other is less so, this perception translates into

power and can at times lead to a sense of vulnerability and/or jealousy. Thus, the people

who are butch or tops in the leather, polyamorous community are more likely to be

thought to have this kind of power. This power differential and its association with

vulnerability is related to why Tianna was less trusting of femmes than of butches. As I

will describe in detail in Chapter 6, these power relations contribute to emotionally

embodied affects.

Conclusion

Re-imagining the connection between gender, jealousy and monogamy can shift

or mitigate the experience of jealousy. By softening the *feeling rules* of jealousy, aspects

of jealousy are reduced. Critiquing the convention and then recreating modes of

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[51] This finding is replicated in Kleese's (2007, p. 131) study where a bisexual male participant, in reference to the SM scene, described a "massive surplus of bottoms, people want to be dominated."

interaction can shift the ways in which jealousy is embodied. Yet, even after

deconstructing the social roots of jealousy and attempting to cultivate compersion, the

emotion can still persist. The potential for transformative emotional practices is

significant. The barriers to the actualization of these potentials comes not from human

nature, but rather from the structural and regulatory power constructions, that are

experienced on the body. As described throughout this chapter, although my participants

attempt to challenge mono-normative constructs of jealousy and gender, at times they

replicate and reproduce these norms.

Through their polyamorous practice, my participants attempted to reclaim and re-

value what they perceived to be sexual freedom (what is often mislabeled promiscuity),

in respectful and empowering ways, as a means to revitalize their sexual agency. This

process was a central component by which my participants re-imagined the intersection

of gender and jealousy. They critiqued jealousy's socially constructed connection to

mono-normativity, heterosexism, genderism and sexism, and through this critique they

attempted to soften the power of the emotion. They tried to cultivate different emotional

responses than those constructed in the emotion world of institutional monogamy, as a

means of resistance. My case study of polyamorous queer women offers insight into how

a feminist approach to emotions can be actualized. In the following chapter, I continue

the dialogue regarding the gender rules of jealousy by focusing on the intersection of

jealousy, power relations and sexuality as re-imagined, resisted and practiced by queer

polyamorous women.

Chapter 6 - Jealousy Can Be Hot If You Flip It; Working and Playing with Power

"Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage." Anais Nin

Jealousy is an emotion that emerges from social relationships, making it intricately tied to power relations. According to Kleese (2007, p. 115), "complex power relations structure *all* intimate and/or sexual relationships" (emphasis in original). Similarly, "emotionality as a claim *about* a subject or a collective is clearly dependent on relations of power, which endow 'others' with meaning and value" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 4, emphasis in original). Jealousy is linked to fear of loss of a relationship and/or decline in its quality, and such changes in a relationship are embedded in power relations. My case study of polyamorous queer women demonstrates that social ideas have embodied affect, and both social phenomena and their affect are malleable. In Chapter 4, I described how polyamorists develop polyamorous culture with the intention of making possible the embodiment of compersion. In Chapter 5, I explored how polyamorists re-imagine and recreate the gendered feeling rules of jealousy, again with the intention of shifting the embodiment of jealousy. In this chapter, I examine how polyamorists rethink their emotional lives in relation to power, both in their interpersonal relationships and in connection to institutional power structures. I am interested in how polyamorists respond to the emotion world of institutional monogamy by focusing on their emotional outcomes. In my sample, I found that their cultivation of alternative models/uses of jealousy and compersion functioned as resistance to the sexual mores of the dominant culture, although at times they also reproduced the very structures they intended to avoid.

Current literature often posits same-sex relationships as transgressive vis-à-vis hegemonic power; in particular, same-sex relationships are seen as egalitarian in principle (Kleese, 2007, p. 2). Similarly, current writing on polyamory often holds polyamorous practice up as a model of what Giddens (1992, p. 2) calls the *pure relationship*, that is, "a relationship of sexual and emotional equality" which emphasizes trustworthiness, self-reflexivity and consensuality. Barker and Langdrige (2010) argue that such works fit a paradigm that positions polyamory as *celebratory*. This celebratory paradigm is appealing in that it makes queer people seem more progressive and stands in contrast to the pervasive homophobia and heterosexism of the majority of past work on sexual orientation. Similarly, this perspective positions polyamorists as inherently progressive and offers a positive outlook to oppose the invisibility of non-monogamy in discourse on relationships. But, as Kleese (2007, p. 2) points out, such a perspective leads to an "impoverished understanding of the complexity of power in intimate and sexual relationships and encounters." I argue that the celebratory paradigm romanticizes same-sex relationships and does not account for the complexity of power relations. It may be more useful to argue that 'emotional democracy' is an ideal rather than a descriptor of actual queer or polyamorous relationships. This goal is consistent with Weeks (2001, p. 109) who argues that, "the commitment to striving for an equal relationship [...] is the prime characteristic of non-heterosexual ways of being."

Rather than rely on the idealistic equation of alternative sexualities/ relationship patterns with emotional equality, I follow Kleese's (2007, p. 3) lead in challenging "single-issue analysis" and instead look at the "mutual interconnectedness of multiple forms of oppression." I examine the concept of 'resistance' in polyamorist practice. I try

to avoid polarizing categories of good and bad, or analysis that assumes one model of relationship is necessarily more progressive than another. I argue that the effect of power relations on polyamorists' experience of jealousy depends on how they live, interpret and experience power more so than an abstracted notion of power imposed from without. Everyday experiences of power do not always or easily correspond to theoretical constructions of power or to matters of jealousy. My analysis of the circulation of power in queer polyamory emerges from close analysis of participant transcripts and an attentive reading of their individual locations in the socio-sexual realm rather than from any a priori conception of power.

Power is ever-present in our lives, yet is also intangible and challenging to identify. It emerges from an ever-shifting set of circumstances, relations and interpretations of situations. To understand emotions, it is important to look at the "structure and process of power and status relationships between actors" (Kemper, 1978/2008, p.128). While power relations can have definable features, as with financial matters and status, the extent to which *emotions* are affected by power, I argue, also relies to a considerable degree on how power is perceived. Kemper (1978/2008, p. 128) highlights this proposition when he writes, "*a very large class of human emotions results from real, anticipated, recollected, or imagined outcomes of power and status relations*" (emphasis in original). Thus, jealousy's embodiment is a result of a combination of one's position vis-à-vis intersecting power relations, institutional power structures, as well as our perception of one's own power in interpersonal relations.

In my research, I found that power's connection to the experience of jealousy is revealed through three overlapping manifestations, which are constantly at play in the production of emotions. First, power relations manifest in interpersonal dynamics, as they relate to class, gender, race, ethnicity, age, beauty, quantity of partners, as well as other hierarchalized structures. Second, institutional power is deployed through mono-normativity, heterosexism, and sexism. The third overlapping dimension is *perceived* power. One's perception of power is embodied in an individual's unique affective experiences and emotional responses to the interpersonal and social world. By extension, re-imagining how power is perceived can alter jealousy's affect, (i.e. the physical sensations associated with jealousy and compersion). The perception of changing embodied power relations has embodied emotional outcomes. For example, if you perceive that your partner is fully committed to you, you may be less likely to experience jealousy. This reaction is based on one's perception of the power dynamics in one's relationship, possibly independent of the partner's behaviour. The reverse can also occur: one's insecurity can be based solely on one's perception of a lack of power, again potentially independent of the partner's actions. At the same time, responding to this insecurity by expressing jealousy can shift power relations, shifts that are often marked by experiences of vulnerability, fear and insecurity, as will be demonstrated below. The power plays evidenced in my sample offer insight into alternative ways of dealing with jealousy, and thus alternative embodiments. Contemporary neurological and psychological studies are finding that not only are emotion and reason intricately connected, but that our perception of our circumstances can also have tangible impact on our brain's response with corresponding embodied emotional results (Siegel, 2010).

In his *Relationship Assessment Model*, Clanton (1996) suggests that how and when people experience jealousy is linked to the way power functions in interpersonal relationships. He links power to circumstances such as who loves who more, who is thought to be more likely to find another partner sooner upon break-up, who has access to more financial resources, etc. Some of these factors are tangible (or materially based), while others rely on perception. In a polyamorous situation, if one's partner has a date with a new person, this is a tangible circumstance, but the potential for jealousy relies upon the ways in which one maps power relations upon this new relationship. Interpersonal power relations are intricately linked to one's sense of security in a relationship, which is intricately linked to how and when one experiences jealousy. Jealousy is culturally associated with shame, low self-esteem, insecurity and immature emotional development (Clanton, 1996), all of which can evoke a sense of vulnerability. Thus, exposing one's jealousy may exacerbate power differences, which in turn may increase one's jealousy.

In this chapter, I begin with a description of how polyamorists are affected by the regulation of sexuality and of emotions, and consequently how they respond to mono-normativity. I found that although some of their energy was directed toward advocating for polyamory, the bulk of my sample was mainly concerned with how mono-normativity effected them emotionally and sexually. For example, if one partner had a second partner and the other did not, instead of letting the hierarchy of this disparity interfere with their relationship, they tried to shift the signifiers that underlied this difference, so that "double

standards" did not impede their relationship. I also found examples of practical ways in which polyamorists worked with power imbalances as a means to minimize jealousy, and also ways in which they played with pre-existing power imbalances that minimized the negative emotional affect of such power relations. Even as polyamorists try to construct their emotional and sexual lives around a polyamorous philosophy, dominant power structures replicated themselves in these relationships, in their interpersonal dynamics, in internalized polyphobia and in the way consent is negotiated.

Institutional Power; The Intersecting Regulation of Sexuality and of Emotion

"We are adventurers... We want to know everything. Feel it all. See it all."

Polyamorists attempt to re-craft their understanding of love, sexuality, relationships, and emotions in ways that minimize instances of jealousy, and replace jealousy with compersion. This reframing challenges the idea that sexual exclusivity is the epitome of love and commitment and that any digression from this path should be met with distrust and jealousy. Instead, polyamorists reframe jealousy as an emotion that is neither inevitable nor intolerable, and they negotiate the parameters of their relationships accordingly. Polyamorists reimagine their relationships, and create new norms and strategies that steer their practice as a culture, as opposed to solely individually. These rules include ways to initiate communication, negotiate boundaries, structure disclosure, (as described in Chapter 4), gender norms, (as was the focus in Chapter 5), and most

importantly for this chapter, ways to rethink power. In doing so, polyamorists create a lifestyle intent on cultivating the embodied experience of compersion. While not always successful in practice, these ideas inform the culture of polyamory and the position of polyamorists in a mono-normative world. In this section, I discuss the ways in which polyamorists are affected by the regulation of emotion and sexuality, and the ways in which these two modes of regulation intersect. Social regulation operates across the domains of sexuality and emotion; the experience of emotion affects and is affected by sexual practice.

Mono-normative culture operates through the intersecting formal and informal regulation of emotions and sexuality. With regard to compulsory monogamy, Haritaworn, Lin, and Kleese, (2006, p. 518) argue that,

> Individuals and communities engaging in polyamorous practices are forced to negotiate monogamist normativities which pathologize them as untrustworthy partners and dysfunctional parents. These judgments are based in wider contexts of sex negativity which demonize all but a few practices and desires involving a small range of gendered bodies.

For example, polyamorists are barred from legally marrying their multiple spouses and some polyamorists have faced custody battles over their children. Some examples of informal regulation are; gossip, teasing, and the invisibility of non-monogamy within mono-normativity, all of which contribute to polyamorists remaining closeted, which in turn bolsters mono-normativity. Another example of the informal regulation of emotion is the frequent presentation of love as synonymous with monogamy. For example, the lyrics in many love songs equate true love with the exclusion of other people, or present love in comparison with other people (Ben-Ze'ev & Goussinsky, 2008). Although many

polyamorists are able to persist without direct social regulation (i.e. most polyamorists

are not directly punished for their behaviour),

> Consensual non-monogamies continue to be demonized, pathologized,
> marginalized and subject to the social regulation of ridicule [...], with no
> legal protections for people involved (for example, around child-care or
> relationship status) (Barker & Langdridge, 2010, p. 756).

Weeks (1986, p. 27) argues that,

> Five broad areas stand out as being particularly crucial in the social
> organization of sexuality: kinship and family systems, economic and
> social organization, social regulation, political interventions, and the
> development of cultures of resistance.

Polyamorists are effected by all these areas with regard to both regulation and resistance.

Polyamorists resist the nuclear family system by constructing family units with multiple

partners, often with alternative economic organizations. For example, some polyamorists

have legally incorporated their families to circumvent the monogamous financial familial

arrangement (although no one in my sample has done so). Polyamorists resist dominant

regulatory bodies which structure monogamous marriage as natural and normal. Building

on Weeks' list, I add the regulation of emotions. The regulation of sexuality contributes

to the ways in which emotions are regulated and in turn embodied. Love is deeply

embodied, yet emerges within particular cultural parameters. "Emotions make culture

meaningful and give it the power to regulate conduct" (Turner & Stets, 2005, p. 292).

The feeling rules of jealousy are inseparable from those of sexuality. In my study, I

found that polyamorists created a "culture of resistance" to the dominant sexual model by

developing their own set of subcultural practices, with the goal of shifting emotional

outcomes. In other words, they resisted sexual regulation by shifting their emotional

practices.

While polyamory is mostly invisible within mono-normative culture, the subject has recently received mainstream media.[52] Much of the media coverage has portrayed polyamory from an angle which downplays the sexual and focuses instead on the romantic and emotional aspects. Polyamorists have equally participated in this slanted portrayal (see Mint, 2007). Even so, this mainstream attention is significant in that it acknowledges an alternative to the normative values of the nuclear family, while offering an 'edgy,' or potentially comedic, spin. It should also be noted that this mainstream attention exists as part of the widespread increasing commercialization of sexuality, thus should not necessarily be read as acceptance.

One prominent example of polyamorous activism is the Canadian Polyamory Advocacy Association (CPAA), a non-profit society that works to,

> Promote legal, social, government and institutional acceptance and support of polyamory, and advances the interests of the Canadian polyamorous community generally.[53]

The CPAA membership overlaps with the Vanpoly email list, a social and information-sharing group of polyamorists based in Vancouver. One important project in which the CPAA has been involved has been opposing the recent anti-polygamy law that was enforced to stop the Bountiful community. Bountiful is a polygamist community in BC where there were alleged abuses toward women, and an anti-polygamy law was enforced as a means to prosecute the offenders. The CCPA argued that the law would adversely affect polyamorists since they could also be subjected to this law, and sought to separate the issue of abuse from the issue of multiple marriage, a recurring conflation in the legal case. They organized legal counsel, panel discussions, networking and publicity.

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[52] For example, Newsweek (2009) http://www.newsweek.com/2009/07/28/only-you-and-you-and-you.html, and in Canada, Global TV (2009).
[53] http://polyadvocacy.ca/about

Outside of this organization, much of polyamorous activism has been inwardly focused, with an emphasis on the development of literature to support polyamorous practice and to counter the emotional and sexual effects of mono-normativity. The bulk of polyamorous literature to date emphasizes 'how-to' instructions on polyamory. My sample exemplified this in that they, in part, resisted mono-normative culture by focusing on emotional practices rather than through opposition to formal regulation. The Internet has been a central medium for generating and sharing information on polyamory. The Internet allows polyamorists to circumvent other barriers to organizing that were common to sexual movements of the past, such as censorship or reliance on dominant media to publicize information. The Internet allows polyamorists to connect with one another without being limited by geography and speeds up the circulation of information.

The act of being out about one's polyamorous practice, particularly at work and in some family situations, can make polyamorists vulnerable to derision or even discrimination. My participants talked about how challenging it can be to remain closeted about a significant part of one's life while everyone else is able to talk with ease about their one and only partner, and how it takes conscious effort to omit names from a conversation or to have to choose which partner to bring to a function. Most people assume that everyone has only one significant other, and so polyamorists are often forced to lie, omit or come out. When discrimination is subtle or covert, it can sometimes be challenging to confront since it requires more explanation. Several of my participants noted that being in the marginal position made them realize the frequency with which mention of one's significant other came up in casual conversation.

One way to interpret informal regulation comes from the reaction my participants received from people to whom they disclosed their polyamorous practice. Polyamorists are affected by assumptions, misconceptions and sometimes shaming, which emerges from the emotion world of mono-normativity in regard to their marginalized sexual practice. For example, Courtney relayed,

> I've had people ask me how I can tell my lovers apart. I've had people tell me that poly is okay but they couldn't be poly because they *really* loved their lovers.

Similarly, Janelle discussed the stigma attached to polyamory:

> It's probably harder to explain than being queer. And people mock.... I think there is some stigma attached to poly as well. It's the same response you get when you tell people you are bi. There is no legitimacy. It's like, you can't commit so you are poly. Or it must be your partner who is putting pressure on you. Or you must not love that person.

One strategy for resisting informal regulation was exemplified by Courtney who chose an unapologetic stance in order to avoid the shame and stigma of being accidentally outed:

> Start out and stay out. I don't need to shock anybody. There is nobody who doesn't know. Everybody is my friend because they know who I am. And dark sides as well. And that is really important to me because I don't fear exposure. I don't hide anything. I don't need to look for whether I left the paddle on the dining room table, when my friends come over, I just let them in. And my kink and poly are just a part of me like how I keep a messy house. Like the fact that I dote on my cats so much, like the fact that I don't dust more than once every six months, like the fact that I read a lot of books and have a boot fetish. All this stuff is part and parcel of who I am. And so being poly and being queer and being kinky is just a part of that. No point in hiding it.

It is important to note that Courtney was in a privileged position as a white, urban, able-bodied, educated, queer woman. The ability to live openly as polyamorous is affected by race, class, ability and geography. The privileged background of many

polyamorists is well documented by Noel (2006). It is much easier to live polyamorously

in an urban area than in a rural environment, due to the size of one's dating pool, the

social anonymity afforded to cities, and the ways in which (some) cities tend to support

alternative sexualities. Although their class backgrounds varied significantly, my sample

was comprised of people who had enough privilege and education to be able to persevere

with polyamory, which then also influenced their approach to processing jealousy.

Polyamorists require cultural and social capital, as well as autonomy to support their

lifestyle in the face of marginalization. Polyamorists require enough (leisure) time to

develop their relationships as well as permit them access to knowledge and resources.

> Indeed, Ravencroft (2004, p. 2) notes the following,

> If a given person identifies with the term 'polyamorous,' chances are that
> she or he is a citizen of the United States, raised in a middle-class
> household by a nominally Christian family with moderate-to-poor
> communication skills, where folks were loving and supportive but not
> great at showing how they felt... He or she is most likely of high
> intelligence, has spent two or three years in college, is conversant in
> technology and the Internet.[54]

Although many polyamorists do not quite fit this categorization (myself included), the

culture of polyamorous discourse exemplifies these values. As well, the language

associated with a great deal of polyamorous literature is more accessible to white,

middle-class and Western readers (Noel, 2006).

Polyamory developed partly in response to a critique of institutionalized

monogamy and it exists on the margins of social acceptability, but polyamorists

nevertheless at times reproduce white, middle-class and Western emotional discourse.

Nora, for instance, was stuck in a challenging *polyagony* moment and her struggles were

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[54] Notably, how he came up with such demographics is unclear, but it is definitely American-centric.

exacerbated by another layer of difference, this time difference from the polyamorous

norm. In the following scenario she describes the sexual confidence required to fit into

polyamory's standard expression of self-assuredness and how this differed from her

upbringing. Nora noted that,

> That's something that is strongly culturally perpetuated for me in my own
> history. I'm Asian and that guilt and inadequacy is something that is hard-
> wired into me and always has been. And so I acknowledge that and my
> culture has many great aspects to it, but that particular set of component
> isn't particularly useful in this cultural context. Nor is it useful in a poly
> context at all. So I have those feelings and they feel pretty terrible.

Polyamory requires a particular kind of direct communication regarding one's sexual and

emotional needs, whereas Nora's background taught her a more indirect way to

communicate and demonstrate love. Her "grungies" (i.e. polyagony) were exacerbated

by the clash between the feeling rules of her upbringing and the feeling rules of

polyamory. To the extent that polyamorous culture is dominated by middle-class, white

people, the feeling rules that have developed may be more comfortable for white middle-

class polyamorists. For the purposes of my study, I focus on Western polyamory,

however, it is likely that the cultural values of polyamorous communities in different

cultures may differ greatly.

To several participants in my study, achieving and/or practicing compersion itself

was considered an act of resistance to sex-negative culture because it prioritized pleasure

and the body. Bronski (1998) notes that contemporary society holds a paradoxical view

of pleasure. On the one hand, pleasure is a central pursuit and forms the base of leisure

consumerism, advertising, and entertainment. On the other hand, Western culture

upholds a long tradition of puritanism and repression, which manifests in strict rules of

acceptable sexual and social behaviour. Pleasure is restricted to being an incentive or reward, that must be rationed and partaken of only in small doses. Thus, an act where pleasure is enacted as powerful functions oppositionally. Hence polyamorous practice with its prioritizing and valuing of sex and pleasure, is a powerful reaction to the mono-normative emotional world.

Halperin (1995, p. 60) writes, "to resist is not simply a negation but a creative process." Queer politics, he argues, are not only reactionary, but also creative in their production of alternative ways to live. From this Foucaultian perspective, Halperin politicizes sexuality and bodily pleasures, including the self-transformative practice of gay sex, through what he calls an "art of life." Foucault wrote that "self-invention is not a luxury or pastime… it is a necessity" (in Halperin, 1995, p. 81). For example, Foucault positions sadomasochism as subversive in its transformation of pain into pleasure and its decentralization of sexual intercourse. Foucault argued that SM practitioners were praise-worthy because they "invent new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of the body" (Foucault in Bersani, 1995, p. 79).   Foucault wrote that sadomasochism is a creative form of sexuality and a process of invention that transforms the ever-presence of power and uses this power strategically to produce an affect of pleasure (ibid).

Approximately half of the participants in my sample stated that they engaged in some form of sadomasochism. Many who did not engage in SM noted that their polyamorous practice was informed by SM discourse, such as the discourse of 'safe, sane and consensual' play (see Sheff, forthcoming). My participants played with power in ways that paralleled SM practices in that they took power that already existed in the larger world and in their relationships, and worked with it instead of against it. The

overlap between polyamory and kink is significant in that both are subject to similar

regulations of the body, both convert dominant ideas of power into acts of pleasure, and

both maintain a playful approach to mitigating challenging emotions.

One of my participants, Coraline, saw the overlap between polyamory and SM

this way,

> Identifying as a leatherdyke specifically is about identifying yourself as
> being sexual. I haven't met a leatherdyke yet who just wore leather for the
> sake of wearing leather. It's a signal saying I'm sexual.

This quote from Coraline highlights the keen interest in sexuality shared by polyamorists,

and their strong affiliation with sex-positive discourse. Another participant, Leigh,

argued,

> I believe we do D/S [dominant/submissive play] because there is power
> imbalance everywhere and we just actually acknowledge it and work with
> it consensually. Because everywhere we live there's power imbalance in
> everything we do. And the only difference between that outside and what
> we do is consent. And we actually acknowledge it and we do it in a
> cognitive sense. How does that relate to poly? Well, when we are doing
> well, I think it relates in the way Dominique just wants me to be happy.

By happiness, Leigh was referring to her and her partner's pursuit of other lovers to fulfill

their kink-related desires. Leigh and Dominique transformed existing power structures

into acts of pleasure in their polyamorous relationships. The consent of which she speaks

will be further explored below.

On the overlap between sadomasochism and polyamory as it merges in acts of

pleasure, Dominique said,

> I think we like to explore and we like to travel. I think those are places
> you can do that in. We are adventurers... I think we just really want to
> explore. We want to know everything. Feel it all. See it all.

Similarly, Cheyenne said,

> There's a big overlap between the ways we want to fuck and who we want to fuck and with how many people and what the dynamics are. It's about feeling it out and finding your own path. And just being really true to yourself and not feeling locked in if that's important. If who you are is about all these other paths, then really exploring them... And so I end up gravitating towards the people who are even pushing those boundaries. Just saying whoa, there is not just one way of living outside the box and we all need to support one another because we can't start creating these exclusive communities because that's what we are trying to fight against. I don't feel like there is always an easy path in those communities. You always have to find the people who are pushing it sometimes a step further.

Cheyenne demonstrated how she built community with both polyamorists and other people who explore alternative sexualities. Klarissa described the overlap between poly and kink this way:

> One is that you have broken down the barriers in your mind about what is real sex and what is pleasurable. If you are able to get beyond the missionary position in your mind and say I'm into power... If you are secure enough in yourself and are open to those things then it naturally leads to... I mean they told me that missionary position married sex was the only thing, well I got beyond the missionary position, then maybe married is not the only thing, which naturally leads to breaking down barriers. The second thing is that especially with kinky stuff is that it's extremely unlikely that one person is going to give you everything you think and want. You might fall completely in love with someone who is squicked by needles and you might love to be pierced. And so it's very easy for someone to say you know what, I can't give you this but I know someone who can who I trust so I will "let you" get that from someone else... I think that leads to ideas about how maybe I don't have to be sexually exclusive.

Klarrisa pointed to a common defense of polyamory namely, that one person is unlikely to meet all one's emotional or sexual needs, and that by being polyamorous, one can have their needs met by other relationships. Klarrisa extended this argument beyond simple needs to include pleasure and sex. She also mentioned the 'slippery slope' argument

where breaking one social taboo made it more likely that one would engage in other such acts.

Regardless of their rejection of dominant models of sexual practice and emotional normativity, my participants were not immune to feeling jealous. Coraline:

> So the thing I was saying earlier about how in the poly community and judging people who are monogamous – that's a form of jealousy. Really at the root of it, it's about the fear of other and fear of other is usually based on some power dynamic and so I realize that at a certain underlying level, jealousy is fear and fed by fear that it's really easy for me to judge the wealthy, to judge the right... But what it really is, is jealousy about a power dynamic, which is ultimately about fear about an unequal power dynamic.

Coraline discussed how true polyamory was difficult and that there was hypocrisy in the polyamorous world:

> We are still very constrained by the whole model, the whole binary of monogamy and it makes it difficult for people to actually talk about poly. It's really easy for us to sit here and have this – an abstracted very logical conversation about poly. But let us actually sit at this table and talk about say ourselves or friends that we know who are actually having a difficult time with poly and I find unfortunately that even people who are really poly-positive, practicing poly themselves, start to trot out really judgmental stuff that actually belongs to the old binary.

The above quotation demonstrates one way in which mono-normativity influences polyamorous dynamics, even as polyamorists try to resist it. Coraline implied that a lack of jealousy in polyamorous practice was equated with being politically progressive. The "binary" here is of the construction of good versus bad sexuality. Some polyamorists claim that polyamory is a more progressive and/or evolved way to conduct a relationship, while simultaneously perpetuating the very hierarchical and coercive dynamics they vocally reject. One example is the belief among some polyamorists that they must be

good at mitigating jealousy when this assumption itself actually impedes the process of achieving compersion since it is accompanied by a denial.

Given that polyamory has become the accepted norm in certain subcultures, such as the leather community in which several of my participants participated, a certain privilege is afforded to polyamorists. Alyson argued that a monogamist would have trouble finding a date in the leatherdyke community. Coraline stated that the "posturing of poly cool" functioned as a transvaluation of values, privileging polyamorists over monogamists. Thus, power is never a static possession. Instead, power and status shift in relation to particular affiliations that have bodily and discursive effects.

Institutional mono-normativity also affects polyamorists through the internalization of polyphobia. Polyamorous people sometimes complain about how it is challenging to come out to people, particularly families and coworkers. There are real consequences that come from being labeled (or being thought to be) a sexual deviant, including exclusion from family, loss of employment or having children apprehended. Often polyamorists fear being stereotyped as promiscuous, immature or unable to settle down. Hence sometimes judgments made by polyamorists against one another come from an internalization of this polyphobia and/or the shame attached to transgressing mono-normativity. Ren noted the following internalization of polyphobia:

> My date had dated other people, but it's a lot different if it's a family unit living together because all of a sudden that's the big heavy, that's when people take it seriously because it's money and rent and bills and babies are involved. Like woah, that's a *real* relationship. Like that's somehow the valid one.

Ren was describing how non-poly people often think polyamory is an immature stage that will shift once one enters into a relationship with 'real' responsibilities. While she

217

was critical of this logic, it still affected her thought process and caused her a sense of shame. So while polyamorists do actively critique mono-normativity, at times they also internalize and replicate the values of the dominant culture in their emotional responses. The ways polyamorists respond to institutional power also intersects with how they work and play with power in their interpersonal relationships.

Interpersonal Power

Although power is mobile and does not attach to a particular person, power does have physical and emotional effects. Clanton (1996) argues that jealousy results from an imbalance of power and suggests that minimization of jealousy can be achieved from a move toward equalization of power in relationships. This section asks the following questions: In the context of polyamorous relationships, how does perceived power and its re-imagining translate into embodied jealousy or compersion? How does working through power shift the experience of jealousy? What kinds of power emerge in polyamorous relationships and how do polyamorists work with/through such power? Can *playing* with power shift one's experience of jealousy? Can jealousy be overcome in ways other than balancing out power?

How Power is Perceived in Polyamorous Interpersonal Relationships
"Nobody wants to get demoted."

Whether or not one person in a relationship has a discernible manifestation of power, the *perception* of a power imbalance in some circumstances can lead to actual emotional affect. For example, the person with more dates, or more significant dates may be thought to hold a certain kind of power. The person who experiences more jealousy may be thought to have less power, and this is due in part to how being jealous exposes one's vulnerability or may even exacerbate one's sense of vulnerability in a dynamic. Power is also particularly precarious at the start and at the end of a relationship, when roles and commitments are less known, less secure and/or in flux. For some people there is more jealousy at the start of a relationship because the dynamics are uncertain, and for others there is less jealousy at the start because there is less investment in the relationship.

Some of the situations which correspond to heightened jealousy and insecurity, whether or not there is another person involved, include the following. For example, when a partner in an existing relationship starts dating someone new, there is often a shift in dynamic in the couple(s) and a degree of uncertainty regarding the outcome. Age is also an element tied to perceived power. An older person has a certain potential or perceived power connected to experience and wisdom, while youth holds a powerful physical appeal, especially in a culture obsessed with youthful beauty. In queer women's dynamics, there are also power differentials associated with masculinity and femininity. Feminine women are more culturally acceptable, but masculine women, in some limited queer circles, hold another kind of cultural privilege (Halberstam, 1998). Power is also

tied to sexuality; the person who wants sex less may be thought to have more power (Clanton, 1996). The person who is thought to be more sought after sexually by people outside the relationship may be perceived to hold more power. Between cohearts, there is power connected with closeness/affectional ranking (primary versus secondary). There may also be a status/hierarchy associated with which relationship began first. A person who has been one's lover longer holds a certain kind of seniority, but a new lover has a kind of *new relationship energy* appeal. Power relations also play out in negotiations of time, such as who gets to attend certain functions with whom, who has dates for certain holidays or vacations. Economic, financial and career status are also connected to power relations in conventional hierarchies. A person who has more experience with polyamory may be thought to have more power. Finally, the person who appears to experience less jealousy may be perceived to have more power. All such power relations do not add up to a simplistic equation, but rather intersect in a multiplicity of ways with a multitude of outcomes. Power is neither a possession nor a zero-sum game; how power manifests and is understood can translate into embodied jealousy.

One participant, Courtney, argued that "people sometimes define power as who is most or least willing to break off the relationship." Martha stated that power was inversely related to who liked whom more. She claimed that the one who loved less or had less investment in the relationship had more power:

> I want this person to really be into me. Like *really* be into me. And I
> don't want them to know how much I am into them, because that feels too
> vulnerable. There's this fear that, oh I don't want to put in too much too
> soon. What if I am overbearing? What if it's too much? What if it's
> smothering? And I really want you to be into me.

Such imbalances and uncertainties about a partner's degree of affection can lead to

experiences of jealousy. Regarding other inequalities, Alasia said:

> That long-time lover of mine was also the more powerful one in the
> relationship. She wanted sex less often. She had more money. She had
> more time. So it might be just connected to power that you get to express
> your anger. So it might not be just with men, but men are more likely to
> have more power, socio-economically.

Some of what Alasia described is applicable to monogamous relationships as well, but

the practice of polyamory further complicates power dynamics by adding more people

into the mix.

Ren described power in relationships as being related to levels of affection, role

and time. She noted that "when one person is more emotionally invested than the other,

that's a power dynamic and it can definitely bring out jealousy." Ren also observed that,

in BDSM dynamics, power was discussed more explicitly than in polyamorous

negotiation.

> With power roles within kink stuff, it's easier to lay it on the table than
> 'how much do you like me? What percentage do I occupy in your heart or
> your time? Oh you see that person twice a week , but you only see me
> once a week.' Whatever... People don't want to be demoted and how
> much time [is spent together represents value].

Ren implied that an explicit discussion of power could reduce the negative consequences

of such power, but she also listed more factors connected to power and jealousy,

including time spent together, factors that may not shift jealousy even if they were

explicitly discussed. Indeed, many issues cannot be worked through. Ren linked power

and thus potential jealousy to differing skills, emotional investment and time. She

brought up an important point about the importance of recognizable potential outcomes

of power - loss or fear of loss. The notion of "demotion" within polyamory refers to a

movement from primary to secondary status, or potentially to a break-up.

Due to the upfront negotiations required for polyamory to function smoothly,

polyamorists acknowledge the importance of directly confronting issues associated with

power in a polyamorous dynamic. Nora discussed how imbalances of power impeded her

ability to be poly:

> We don't split things to the center or anything like that, but that equality is
> fundamental to our trust really. If there isn't that equality and that power,
> if one person has more power than the other I find that I'm in danger of
> feeling disempowered. And when I feel disempowered, that has a really
> bad effect on the rest of my life. Disempowerment for me feels like a loss
> of agency. And once I've lost agency, how am I supposed to negotiate
> poly with any sort of authority whatsoever?

Nora described agency as being contingent upon equal division of emotional power, but

not on equalizing features associated with power. Polyamory necessitates discussion and

negotiation of the features of one's relationship, and thus power becomes a necessary

aspect of this discussion.   In the example above, Nora did not try to confront power by

forcing her and her partner to have the same experience, but rather she looked for a way

to address the emotional outcomes that are an affect of the perceived power imbalance.

Although polyamorous discourse emphasizes the importance of processing one's

emotions, the act of negotiating jealousy in certain situations can also place an individual

in an emotionally vulnerable position.

"It takes two people to start a relationship, but it only takes one to end it."

According to Berlant (2006, p. 20),

When we talk about an object of desire, we are really talking about a cluster of promises we want someone or something to make to us and make possible for us.

Berlant argues that when we enter relationships or when we say, "I love you," we are implying a promise of loving and being together in the future as well. With the expectation of a future in a relationship comes the potential for loss. Jealousy can arise from this fear of loss of a relationship or its quality, from an imbalance of affection, from a set of expectations, or from the loss itself. In these ways, experiencing jealousy puts one in a vulnerable position and disclosing the feeling can exacerbate the (sensation of) vulnerability. To expose oneself as feeling jealous may feel like a declaration of the other person's power. Clanton (1996) argues that the person who has more power is the person who loves the other less, a notion that was expressed by Nora above. Although this is not necessarily the case, this interpretation/belief can influence how power is perceived and thus how jealousy is embodied. To express jealousy can be interpreted as the other person having power, or it can shift perceived power. In mainstream culture, jealousy on the part of a partner can be interpreted as a sign of care or love, but for polyamorous people, a partner's jealousy is more often seen as a barrier to intimacy. Jealousy can represent a lack of trust and can lead to processing and emotional work, and may even lead to a decrease in one's emotional involvement outside the relationship in question, which is not the intended goal for most polyamorists. Thus, demonstrating or exposing power can exacerbate the intensity of jealousy.

As Alasia cleverly noted, "it takes two people to start a relationship, but it only takes one to end it." In other words, the "power of goodbye" may be brought up by the person feeling jealous, the one who seemingly has more at stake in the relationship. Experiencing jealousy may be cause to leave the relationship, and at other times a partner's jealousy may lead to the demise of the relationship. Courtney noted how many of her relationships "ended because of jealousy, but this jealousy was not mine." Alyson stated that experiencing jealousy in regard to her long-term lover's new date made her feel like the "old shoe" while the new coheart was "shiny and easier" as the new relationship did not yet require much emotional work. Jealousy, however, is not solely experienced in the realm of suspicion. In several instances, the jealous partner's suspicions were true, and the person did leave her/him for the other lover, thus presenting a case of *fait accompli* jealousy.

The vulnerability experienced in conjunction with jealousy is connected to jealousy's assumed root in low self-esteem. Baumgart (1990, p. 121) argues that jealousy is tied to self-esteem since people connect infidelity to "injured honor." This sense of injured honour may explain why one's jealousy is so often targeted toward the "rival" rather than one's lover. In polyamory, this sense of injured honor may not relate to an adulterous partner since outside relationships are known and consented to. However, the sexual acts and/or promiscuity of one's partner may still be linked to shame. One participant, Orion, experienced jealousy in terms of the embarrassment she would feel when other people saw her partner behaving in a sexually overt manner with someone else:

> I would just be sick with jealousy. But a lot of it was about
> embarrassment, like I remember being at a party with her and Toby and

224

she had all these marks all over her from getting down with him, and I was
so scared of people watching my reaction to what was so obviously really
overt sexuality with somebody else. So I was very guarded and... I was
really concerned with saving face over people who were watching me
have to be face-to-face with their relationship.

Orion's sentiments also point to a sense of embarrassment about being polyamorous,

which connects to the above discussion regarding internalized polyphobia and mono-

normativity. She may have been projecting monogamous values onto her polyamory, and

hence experiencing shame that her partner appears to not be under her control. The

jealousy seemed to be sparked by her fear of losing that control and was heightened by

the imagined response of her peers.

Ren described how jealousy for her was exacerbated by shame and vulnerability

and how she needed security in order to feel safe in situations of jealousy in polyamory.

Jealousy seems to only come up for me when linked to my primary
partner's deep heavy shit and then someone else comes into the dynamic.
And shame is usually linked to me as fear of exposure, even if I have
major trust with my partner, and that's the big thing if I am going to start
sharing deep things with them. Like deep raw parts of me, they need to
understand what they can share and what they can't share. If something
was in the dynamic that brings things up for me and I get really sad or
emotional, knowing that they are going to hold that in a sacred place and
not share that with some casual date... Even if I know that my partner is
not going to talk about it, there is shame or feeling vulnerable and
exposed.

Ren noted that exposing her vulnerability, as people often do with intimate lovers, could

place her in an uncomfortable position since her partner may also have other intimate

partners. Thus she feared that her personal information would be exposed outside of the

couple. Although she trusted her partner, there was no guarantee that intimacy would last

forever. The emotions of fear, vulnerability, pride, shame and jealousy were highly

intertwined. For Ren, the experience of jealousy was both a vulnerable position to be in,

and also a valuable opportunity to build intimacy through the work they did to alleviate jealousy. Thus, Ren made a connection between vulnerability and intimacy, where jealousy was the vehicle for exploration and personal development. Ren was among many of my participants who valued polyamory for its challenges and opportunities for personal growth.

As described in Chapter 4, jealousy holds a unique position for polyamorists since it is at once highly criticized for its roots in compulsory monogamy and also stigmatized since some polyamorists think they should be "over it already." Thus the vulnerability associated with jealousy is doubled. Alyson noted how hard it was to talk about jealousy sometimes because of the stigma attached to it, both in the mainstream and in polyamorous culture. This was compounded when dating someone who experienced less jealousy and was more sexually active.

> I certainly have my reactions to people and sometimes they are real, sometimes they are imagined and I guess I often, well not often, but I ended up feeling stigmatized because I'm the petty little jealous person and she's very "highly evolved." But the thing we don't talk about that she brings to the table is years of having the same conversation with people she's having a significant relationship with so really very quickly into it she loses any patience for that conversation and just thinks you are either trying to wreck her good time and so that's the block.

Alyson's account makes apparent the ways in which jealousy, even as it is criticized, can at times retain the dominant culture's view of jealousy as the result of low self-esteem or immaturity. Her statement also demonstrates how jealousy in polyamory is assumed to infringe on a relationship and be a barrier to intimacy.

Coraline challenged polyamory's particular stigmatization of jealousy by being explicit and open about her experience:

226

My way to deal with it is to talk with other poly people about it. When it comes up and they go 'I never feel jealous." I say, 'I feel jealous all the time." And they look at me like I've said the total unmentionable. People will be like, 'are you having problems?' This is also why people are afraid. I'm like 'no, I'm not having a problem, I'm feeling jealous. It's not a problem actually. It's only a problem if you make it a problem. And it is also a problem if you deny it. Any other emotion that you deny gets bigger and bigger and bigger. And it's really interesting because I've only had three distinct experiences where someone brought that up and I automatically responded, and each of the times I was in a group of people who all identified as poly and I said, "Oh, no, I feel jealous all the time" and then the floodgates open and everybody was like, 'oh my God…' and they felt free to actually talk about it, which was really interesting to me and really enforced to me that we are all just making this up as we go along and it's so easy for us to get caught in this posturing of cool poly, right?

Coraline reduced her sense of vulnerability associated with jealousy by naming her experience. By exposing her own experience of jealousy and breaking the silence, Coraline allowed others to feel more at ease to admit their own jealousy. She also pointed to the importance of understanding that emotions are what we make of them, an active creation rather than an external imposition.

Berlant (2006) describes *Cruel Optimism* as the attachment we have to objects (subjects, or even ideology) that causes us to fear its loss. Instead of enjoying the present moment she argues, we attach to what is not yet lost, or "the condition of maintaining an attachment to a problematic object in advance of its loss" (ibid, 2006, p. 21). Her work is applicable to jealousy in that such an emotion emerges from a fear of loss and in a sense an attachment to the idea of permanence of a relationship. The act of clinging to the attachment according to Berlant, is what soothes the vulnerability and thus we *indulge* in this optimism. As an escape from cruel optimism, Berlant calls for a new mode of

227

relating to our object of desire, which is what the polyamorists in my sample attempted to do. Polyamorists are trying to shift their mode of relating to each other in a way that challenges the assumed necessity of experiencing jealousy in connection to a partner's outside sexual/emotional relations. Polyamorists retain an emphasis on commitment and thus an assumption that a declaration of love is connected to a future together, but they shift the signifiers that represent such commitment. To do so, some polyamorists embrace vulnerability as a means to access deeper levels of love, and without attachment to conventional representations of love, particularly sexual exclusivity.

Limits to Consent
"Sometimes your dick gets in the way"

One of the overarching goals of polyamorous philosophy and practice is to remove constraining rules of emotion, particularly in regard to the mono-normative construction of jealousy as inevitable and intolerable in response to third-party sexual encounters. Within polyamorous philosophy, participants aspire to a *pure relationship*, in which each person is able to reach their full potential, without needing to have each partner have the same experience in order to equalize power relations. By this philosophy, polyamorists attempt to work with power imbalances that already exist due to the mono-normative culture from which they emerge, and bring them to a mutually

supportive balance. However, Kleese (2007) argues that despite the good intentions of such a pure relationship, power relations warp the playing field when it comes to *negotiating* in non-monogamy. Negotiation is central to emotional democracy (Giddens, 1992) and a significant portion of the negotiation in polyamory is done to counteract or prevent instances of jealousy. Optimistic guides to polyamory and non-monogamy stress the importance of conflict resolution through "negotiation, self-knowledge and emotion management" (Kleese, 2007, p. 116), but these models can fall short if they do not address deeper power imbalances that may exist just because the relationship is same-sex, polyamorous, queer or feminist. Klesse argues that those in dominant positions of power, such as in regard to race, ethnicity, class and/or age, have an upper hand in such negotiations. For example, he argues that if one member of the couple wants an open relationship and the other prefers monogamy, the conventional hierarchy of power relations tends to influence such negotiations. Indeed, there are limits to consent and some people consent to agreements that are not their preference.

Some of Kleese's sample includes couples in which only one member wanted to be non-monogamous while the other would have preferred monogamy. By recruiting self-identified polyamorists, my intention was to only interview participants who prefer polyamorous dynamics. One of the central features of polyamory is the production of consent, with a particular emphasis on honest awareness among the party of lovers, with all wanting to be in the configuration. In theory, if these criteria are not met, actions could border on cheating. But consent in sex and polyamory does not always play out simply. In a handful of cases in my sample, there were instances of reluctant or blurry consent.

One poignant example was Tianna who brought her partner, Georgia, "kicking and screaming" into polyamory.[55] They were in a long-term and serious relationship, but Tianna described their sex life as "too vanilla" and so she wanted another lover with whom she could "fulfill [her] need" to engage in BDSM sexual practices. To Tianna, this was the only reason she wanted to open the relationship. To actualize her BDSM desires, Tianna required not only a sexual, but also an emotional connection with a top, but it would otherwise be a secondary relationship, and this was a stipulation of them getting together. My interview was conducted approximately 7 years into the relationship between Tianna and Georgia, at which time Georgia had arrived at tolerance, but not compersion. Georgia had also on occasion joined in for a threesome (to Tianna's absolute delight). For the bulk of their relationship, Georgia had several lovers of her own, but none became serious, which suited Tianna quite fine. However, the most recent relationship that Georgia had became serious, which triggered a great amount of jealousy in Tianna. After years of working particularly hard to bring herself to a place of tolerance for Tianna's secondary lover, the resentment Georgia faced from Tianna in response to her new lover felt quite unfair. The power relations in this dynamic complicated the ease with which consent in polyamory can sometimes be reached, making consent blurry. The unspoken power relation at work was that of differing sexual desires and of sexual 'inadequacy' (with its likely association with bruised pride).

In popular self-help literature, such as the best-selling book *Grounds for Marriage* (Crosby, 2005) there is an understanding that certain facets of one's desire should be discussed in advance of a commitment. For example, if one person wants to be

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[55] I only spoke with Tianna and not to Georgia.

monogamous and the other would prefer to have an open relationship, they are likely going to encounter some difficulties. But it is rare that such clear negotiations are made when one chooses whom to love. When negotiations take place during this early period of relationships, in the throws of *new relationship energy,* compromises are made that people may believe at the time are viable. For example, Georgia may have believed and thus agreed to try an open relationship, when her heart (and body) were motivated by new relationship energy, even if she knew it was not ideal for her. People make promises (and thus vocally *consent*) to certain behaviours that they may actually temporarily believe when, as Tianna eloquently stated, "sometimes your dick gets in the way."

In another situation, the unspoken power imbalance was inspired by "lesbian bed death." In the case of Martha, she and her primary partner of three years were in a position where sex had fallen to the wayside. Opening up the relationship was Martha's response to her growing dissatisfaction with their differing sexual desires, and her partner was very reluctant. Thus Martha was exercising a kind of "power of goodbye," indirectly threatening to leave if this "need" was not fulfilled, and proposing polyamory to have her sexual needs met outside the relationship, thus enabling them to preserve what was still working in their relationship (emotional intimacy, financial interdependence, cohabitation, etc.). As in Tianna's scenario above, Martha's draw to polyamory was proposed as a solution to a deficiency in the relationship. Martha had experience with polyamory years prior to this relationship, but she and her current partner had only been monogamous together. While this kind of compartmentalization works on the notion that one person cannot possibly give you everything you need, the emotions involved in a scenario when one is not meeting one's partner's sexual needs are more fluid and

intimately tied to power relations. As in Tianna's situation, Martha's primary partner was reluctant to embark on a polyamorous relationship, but was working toward tolerance of the situation. Again, the power relations involved in this scenario blurred the lines of consent.

Not surprisingly, compersion tends to come more easily for those who feel secure in their relationships and when they feel they have power and/or control in their relationships. In the two latter scenarios, both Tianna and Martha were in positions of power because they perceived their partners to be in some sense sexually inadequate, (or at least incompatible with their current sexual desires). Compersion here was not linked to feeling as though all their needs were being met, but rather a sense of entitlement in feeling they deserved to get all their needs met inside and outside the relationship. They exercised power in the form of an ultimatum (i.e. you let me do this or I will leave) in order to secure a reluctant consent. Another interpretation however, is that they were clearly stating and pursuing their emotional and sexual needs.

Orion reported that her past relationships ended primarily due to her attraction to someone outside of the relationship. Thus she was caught in a cycle of serial monogamy where she caught herself lying, a dynamic that she found unsatisfying. As a way to break the cycle and avoid infidelity, she pursued an open relationship with her partner, Hanna.[56] She was in that relationship for several years, but it had ended shortly before the time of my interview. That partner was reluctant to engage in polyamory but was informed that the alternative was a short-term relationship with Orion that would likely end in her pursuit of someone else. Orion stated that she gave Hanna full knowledge of her history of lying, and Hanna reluctantly agreed to open up their relationship. According to Orion,

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[56] Again, I only spoke to Orion and not to her partner.

Hanna was frequently jealous and unhappy with polyamory, and dealing with her jealousy became a burden to Orion. In this scenario, Orion exercised the *power of goodbye* with difficult and vulnerable honesty (i.e. you have all the information, this is how I come to you, take it or leave it). Their different desires regarding polyamory and monogamy, along with the jealousy that such a dynamic provoked, was the cause of their eventual break-up. Although they were both aware from the beginning of their opposing orientations and of the potential outcome, they pursued the relationship anyway, likely because their short-term desires at the beginning of the relationship overrode their long-term plans. Orion's next series of relationships were much more successfully polyamorous, which points to the fact that often learning the ropes of polyamory can take time and a few failed attempts.[57]   Even with the etiquette and social norms of polyamory, for most participants, it is still a work in progress. As Coraline aptly points out "we are all just making this up as we go along."

Working and Playing with Unequal Power

"If you want to just stand in one place and not move, don't choose poly."

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[57] Of course, many people also have to try a few monogamous relationships in order to learn how to make them work.

Halperin (1995) observes that many queer and feminist activists have adopted Foucault's ideas about resistance. Instead of trying to equalize power among the members, a feminist collective, for example, may formulate relationships that work with pre-existing unequal power relations and produce creative strategies, such as a mentorship. Polyamorists also utilize this strategy in their relationships by working with unequal power instead of trying to impose sameness. Instead of enforcing parallels, such as by imposing a rule of having the same quantity of dates outside the relationship for each partner, they attempt to address the outcome of power differentials by easing emotional troubles. Instead of trying to convert jealousy to compersion, some polyamorists find other creative ways to work (and *play*) with the intensity of jealousy, on both emotional and erotic levels. Both such responses to power are discussed below.

The ways in which my participants responded to differences in power were varied. Most did not try to equalize power differentials by making all factors the same. They found more interesting ways to compromise than to default to the lowest common denominator. For example, if one person had another partner and the other person did not, the couple did not require one to get rid of their partner or force the other to get a partner. Instead, they worked with this difference and focused on trying to bring about a feeling of compersion in both partners. If there were no 'hard feelings' then the 'power difference' was not an impediment (or potentially, not even a power difference). Similarly, my participants did not require that each partner spend the same amount of time with each lover, but rather tried to minimize challenging emotions so that this did

234

not matter. In other words, sameness was not necessary to balance power. To counter

the power of jealousy, some participants tried to work with the suffering they experienced

rather than attempting to avoid it. Thus, avoiding potentially jealousy-provoking

situations was not the only way to attain compersion, (nor was it necessarily an effective

option); working through the challenging emotion appeared to be the more successful

route for the participants in my study.

> Lupton (1998, p. 71) identifies,
>
> [Two] notions of emotion that are circulating today... The first is a product
> of the negative discourses on emotion that position it as dangerous,
> disruptive or humiliating, and portray emotionality as evidence of lack of
> self-control. The second is the contrasting positive discourses on emotion
> that represent it as authentic evidence of humanity, selfhood and the
> proper basis of judgment and morality.

In my study, both of these notions came into play with regard to jealousy. Jealousy was

at once seen as shameful, disruptive, uncontrolled and/or rampant, while at the same time

it was also described as an authentic and legitimate part of sexual and intimate

relationships.[58]

Polyamorous theory reevaluates conventional notions of love, in particular sexual

exclusivity as representative of love or commitment. Polyamorists aspire to a version of

confluent love, which Giddens (1992, p. 61) describes as "active, contingent love, and

therefore jars with the 'for-ever', 'one-and-only, qualities of the romantic love complex."

Further, Giddens (ibid, p. 63) argues that sexual exclusivity is not what holds confluent

love together. Rather, it is the "acceptance on the part of each partner, 'until further

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[58] Notably, both negative and positive emotions can be judged in reverse. For example, even love or ecstatic joy can be perceived as turning one into a naïve fool. The lack of passion and disinterestedness that typifies Western 'coolness' is frequently glorified.

notice,' that each gains sufficient benefit from the relation to make its continuance

worthwhile." Brown (2000, p. 39) argues that,

> Although confluent love (as an ideal type of love) tells us what we should
> do with our feelings (disclose them, open them up), it is dependent upon
> the idea that our capacity for rational decision making can overcome
> irrational obstructions with increased levels of self-reflexivity.

As discussed in Chapter 4, self-reflective disclosure is a central means by which

polyamorists re-craft emotional scripts. Self-reflexivity is commonly achieved through

communication with one's partner(s), often with the intention of working through power

imbalances in order to cultivate compersion. Although they noted the difficulty of this

work, many of my participants celebrated the challenge and the ensuing reward that came

as a result of their work. Power was rarely equalized, but the dynamics in the

relationship were brought to a place of emotional fulfillment and compersion. Thus, the

equality sought in confluent love was mediated through compersion, not sameness.

To many participants, the emotional challenge of polyamorous practice was

beneficial since it was understood as a good place to learn, grow and develop oneself.

Some polyamorists even pursued polyamory *because* of the challenges it obliged

practitioners to confront. Coraline valued the lessons learned through practicing

polyamory:

> If you want to just stand in one place and not move, don't choose poly.
> Because the ground has shifted all the time. It's moving all the time...
> Poly doesn't make you a better or a worse person but it sure makes you
> ask those questions about yourself. And I really love that aspect of it.
> Sometimes I find it exhausting, but when I find it exhausting I just step off
> for a while.

Though she welcomed the challenges that accompany polyamory, Coraline was also

willing to acknowledge and choose when to take on those challenges. Ren was

particularly forthright in welcoming polyamory's challenges. For her, jealousy in

polyamory was a good place to work through personal issues.

> For me jealousy is just a barometer to show my own issues, like what I
> have to work on. Like if I am jealous, I have to assess why that is
> happening. It's never someone else's fault.

For Ren, not only jealousy, but also sexual relationships in general were a good place to

work through power:

> I like my sexual relationships to be a place where I work through stuff.
> Like I use kink as a tool to work through emotional stuff... because I want
> to live wide open, I prefer to have relationships that are really raw and
> emotional and big and for a purpose.

Ren approached sexual and emotional practices, in both polyamory and kink, as a space

to do personal development work.

Power in polyamory is entangled in dynamics that link pleasure and pain,

compersion and jealousy, challenge and growth. Power relations manifest not only in

relation to sexuality, but also materially in regard to economic and financial matters,

which can translate into jealousy and/or envy. Financial power is certainly relevant in

monogamous arrangements, but in polyamorous dynamics, financial power is

complicated by the number of partners sharing resources.[59] Fidelities not only occur in

emotional or sexual circumstances, but in many other ways, including financially. In a

discussion about trust in relationships, Rihanna offered an example of *financial fidelity*:

> There still needs some sort of emotional support base because there are
> lots of types of infidelity. There is certainly the sexual infidelity and a lot
> of people will give sexual infidelity a total pass, as long as safety is
> maintained, but can't handle emotional infidelity. And then there's other

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[59] Other material manifestations of power further complicated by the multiple relationships in
polyamory that are not addressed here due to lack of space include, child-care duties, parental
care, dis/abilities, health care and housework.

people who are okay with some of the others, but are not into financial infidelity. [I can handle] "don't ask don't tell" about sex, but [not] financial infidelity...That's another way that people can be unfaithful and another object of jealousy can be money.

Another participant, Heloise, described how she minimized financial power differences between her and her wife who was a stay-at-home parent, in a way that was likely not much different from what may be done in a monogamous relationship:

At this time I feel like I really know that we will be together for the rest of our lives. And yet I take what I think are appropriate steps just in case we are not, like I want Priscilla to have her own credit card, because she is the one at home. I bought her a diamond ring so she has something to sell if I kick her to the curb. *laughter* I'm joking, but I'm not.

Another interesting way in which polyamorists work with power differences is through their acceptance of 'double standards.' Instead of equalizing power by making everyone's experience the same, polyamorists find ways to work with multiple, differing desires. Rihanna talked about having a relationship, which she called "mono-poly," in which she had other lovers, but her boyfriend did not. He preferred to be a secondary lover to her and did not want to have other lovers. Similarly, Alex had two steady long-term partners, one who had many other casual lovers, and the other who was not currently dating anyone else. According to Alex, all members of this poly configuration were satisfied with their situation. Fo had one primary and one secondary girlfriend, neither of whom had other lovers, and according to Fo, were satisfied with their status in the primary/secondary hierarchy. She also stated that they were all open to changing the configuration in the future as the opportunity arose. Such double standards are at once simple and yet also highly innovative and involve reflection on the deeper intentions of

one's polyamorous practice. Fo described how in her approach to polyamory, she focused on relinquishing control:

> So many things are not within our control and we have this desire to control it. To me there is something very empowering about letting go. Honestly, what does control get you? Does it get you a real authentic experience? Not really. Because if you are busy controlling something, you're actually busy manipulating it and it's not what it would be if you just let it be. It's like in martial arts; it's all about self control, it's not about external control. Martial arts in its true form is not about aggressing on someone else. It's about redirecting their own physicality. They punch at you, you turn that punch back. It's about them receiving their own punch.

In the above quote, Fo demonstrated how she worked with difficult experiences of jealousy rather than trying to avoid them in order to live a lifestyle that better suited her desires. As Fo's martial art metaphor makes clear, polyamorists can take the power in jealousy and redirect this energy into positive emotional experiences, into compersion or into sexual energy.

As further demonstrated in Fo's narrative, jealousy and power overlap in regard to matters of control. Some people express jealousy as an attempt to control the actions of another person, as a way to regain a sense of control over their partner's actions, how they feel or their life outside a relationship. Some polyamorists are drawn to this lifestyle for the challenge of overcoming this need to control. Rihanna described her experience of compersion in the following way. "Instead of a clutching at the heart where it's closing in, it's more like it's opening up." Rihanna described a sense of caring without trying to control someone or the parameters of the relationship, having a sense of peace and security from a relationship. Relinquishing control can be a matter of vulnerability. Opening up a relationship can indeed be risky to one's heart. A common sentiment among my participants was the importance of allowing oneself to be vulnerable in order

239

to inspire more intimacy in connections. This challenge of overcoming emotional

constraints, along with its ensuing reward, was itself a motivation for many of my

participants to pursue polyamory.

Approximately one third of my participants, cited some sort of spiritual practice

in relation to their practice of polyamory and compersion. For example, some practiced

non-possessiveness (lack of material attachment) by trying to love unconditionally and

thus allow their partner(s) to live life to its full extent. Polyamory requires a kind of

letting go of one's hold over a lover's actions. Many of my participants found this to be a

vulnerable yet gratifying position. Some were initially fearful about allowing a lover to

explore their sexuality outside the relationship (fear of loss, fear of them preferring the

other person, etc.), yet once they delved into it, the fear vanished and the power it had

over them in terms of jealousy dissipated. Some participants found other ways to

respond to jealousy's powerful grip, in particular, with a sense of play.

Playing with Power
"I would love to go into a jealous rage, that would be totally hot."

De Visser and McDonald's (2007, p. 473) study found that "rather than seeking to

eliminate jealousy, swingers may manage their jealousy in order to increase sexual

excitement and arousal." Similarly, some polyamorists in my study found ways to play

with the erotically charged emotion of jealousy in a way that increased overall libido. In the following quote Ren described how her partner's sexual encounters increased her sexual energy:

> I've found that if I'm not feeling very sexual and my lover goes out, because they are feeling fulfilled and wanted, I want to get close to that again. Even if I wasn't feeling [it before], like I am having a hard winter and all of a sudden my partner comes home smelling like pheromones with a smile on their face and they are like 'I'm going to make you breakfast in bed.' They are energized by that. They feel hot. The world looks sparkly. They're feeling good. Then I'm like, oh yeah. That feels good. I want to get closer to it. It's magnetic. It keeps on coming.

This quotation reveals a positive unintended consequence of increased sexual feelings that arise in situations that are related to jealousy.

My study revealed that along with increased libido, some polyamorists did not convert jealousy into compersion, but rather eroticized and played with the emotional intensity. Though this may be considered a kind of compersion, it still retained sensation of jealousy, an erotically charged pain rather than joy. This kind of power conversion parallels a sadomasochistic practice where sexual power is intentionally exaggerated and played with, shifting the negativity of power differentials (Califia, 1994), and thus it may be called *emotional masochism*, or a kind of erotic anguish. Heloise recounted the following story that began when our interview was interrupted by a personalized ringtone from her wife to the song *Banging on the bathroom floor* (by Shaggy).

> It's a song about cheating. It's not a song about monogamy, it's a song about cheating. Priscilla and I have this whole fantasy about cheating. Well okay, this is how it started. I was like, 'wouldn't it be so hot if you took an ad out in the paper?' Because she's at home while I'm working, this was before we had kids and she was home. You put out an ad, 'Housewife at home, looking for someone totally discreet. My wife is at work. Come on over.' You have a few dates, then one day I come home,

241

and it serves her right. She's helping someone cheat on their partner. I come home and I catch them in bed and I go into a jealous rage. She'd run off and we'd have mad passionate sex because it would be so kinky... I would love to go into a jealous rage, that would be totally hot. *laughter*

Heloise's narrative demonstrates the ways that she and her wife eroticized and played with jealousy. For ethical reasons, they decided to keep this scenario as a fantasy rather than actualize it.

Leigh argued that "possession and ownership is absolutely eroticized in our relationship. Absolutely." Similarly, Ren found a way to sexualize jealousy:

Jealousy can be also hot if you flip it. If you play with that and you know that ultimately you are taken care of and if you are like okay this doesn't feel good anymore so everyone stops. But like, I'm going to tie you up while I make out with this person in front of you. "Aren't you jealous? You want to be here. You wish this but it's totally making you super hot." Like that, I like a lot... As long as it's safe, jealousy can spark hotness. Possession and playing with the idea that I own you and that you're mine, like oh, "that person may have gotten a taste of you but *whispered* you're mine." That's a fun thing to feel because you can be held, it's like being restrained. I'm going to put you in shackles because I hold you and you're safe. So I'm going to possess you. You are mine. I may permit you to be around other people or whatever. Playing with that is good.

Ren's exhibitionistic/voyeuristic arousal demonstrated the complicated connection between jealousy, power and arousal.   Also noteworthy in these quotes is how jealousy is not simplistically negative but can also inspire positive feelings that are distinct from compersion.

Jealousy is invariably caught in a complex web of power relations. Polyamory is a marginal sexual practice that is subject to formal and informal regulations. In this chapter, I set out to understand how polyamorists rethink power relations both in their interpersonal relationships as well as in response to institutional mono-normativity. As the analysis of my data in this chapter demonstrates, I found instances where polyamorists both resisted and reproduced dominant power structures. For example, negotiations were at times done with attention to the emotional needs of all parties involved. Other times people reproduced dominant power structures with manipulative versions of "consent." In my study, compersion was sometimes achieved by my participants as a form of resistance to mono-normativity, and in other instances, jealousy was the painful outcome. At times, they devised creative ways to work with power imbalances; other times, the dominant paradigm was replicated in their relationships.

Because "sexual acts are burdened with an excess of significance" in our culture (Rubin, 1984, p.285), having more than one lover remains culturally challenging. Polyamorous relationships are not necessarily a form of resistance to dominant power structures. And, as noted by the (copious) descriptions of polyagony, not all polyamorous practice leads to compersion or to embodied pleasure. However, working, and playing, with the emotional challenges that are seemingly inherent to polyamorous practice can lead to greater intimacy, self-assuredness and personal strength. For

polyamorists, resistance to dominant relationship models often starts from a place of self-care and prizes emotional acts of pleasure.

After reading and analyzing hundreds of pages of transcripts of accounts of poly*agony*, I believe that polyamorous practice indeed requires a great deal of courage, (hence the opening quote of this chapter by Anais Nin). Polyamory can have significant rewards, but the work required to achieve such success is no small feat. Polyamorists overcome jealousy, personal challenges and social criticism, as well as internalized polyphobia. Polyamorists requires courage to open their hearts to vulnerable emotions, to resist conventions and to live out a marginalized lifestyle. I commend my participants for their courageous efforts and thank them greatly for their willingness to share their stories with me.

Polyamory's Social Influence and The Challenge of Jealousy - Concluding

Remarks

Jealousy is at once common and complicated. Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to enrich conventional understandings of this very common emotion and also make comprehensible this particularly complex emotional experience. I began with a description of the problem faced by polyamorists: in a monogamy-centric culture, any act or desire for extra-relationship encounters is expected to be met with the inevitable and intolerable experience of jealousy. Jealousy is thought to be a sign of love, and thus a partner's jealousy is a sign of commitment to the relationship. Polyamorists intentionally engage in sexual and emotional relationships with multiple people. They view jealousy as a barrier to love and to romantic pursuits. Pursuing other relationships is not considered reason enough to be jealous and jealousy is not considered a reason in and of itself to halt the pursuit of another relationship. And yet, many polyamorists dislike jealousy and idealize compersion in its stead. Thus, I asked how and why polyamorists mitigated jealousy and how they reorganized their emotional lives in order to make compersion possible. What I found was that polyamorists created their own cultural norms with the intention of enabling compersion. Among my participants I encountered vibrant stories of successfully compersive polyamory, and yet in other instances, some of them replicated the dominant cultural norms they were trying to escape. For example, some of my participants argued that jealousy was irrelevant in a

particular circumstance, but then found jealousy's grip inescapable. They would reflect

upon their desires, negotiate with the best intensions and still encounter polyagonous

results. This tension between intentions and outcomes was apparent in all three of my

analysis chapters. As one participant, Coraline noted, "we are all trying to figure it out as

we go along." Although non-monogamy has a long history in practice, polyamorists

have historically been disconnected from this history and seem to reinvent the wheel

every few generations. As polyamory gains momentum, as well as mainstream attention,

I suspect some of the tensions that result from mono-normativity will be minimized. And

the polyamorous influence on mono-normativity and on conventional understandings of

jealousy could be profound.

McLuhan and McLuhan's "Laws of the Media" (1988) can help us understand the

actual and potential influence of the culture of polyamory on monogamy, mono-

normativity and on conventional understandings of jealousy. McLuhan argues that new

technologies influence culture in four ways: they make certain technologies *obsolete*,

retrieve/renew others, *enhance/remix* others, and *reverse* previously available

technologies, each of which is briefly described here. Technology is not solely a set of

tools or artifacts, rather, technology can be seen as a social practice and includes systems

and processes that create and integrate ideologies (Franklin, 1990; Kelly, 2010; Travers,

2001).[60] I argue for a view of polyamory as a sexual and/or relationship technology (or

perhaps a technology of "relational understanding" (Haritaworn et al, 2006, p. 518) in

that it comprises cultural and social ideas translated into action that have the potential to

transform society. As a social technology, polyamory exerts all four effects not only on

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[60] Kevin Kelly uses the word "technium" to refer to the cultural and social dimension of
technology (2010).

the polyamorous community, but also on dominant cultural conceptualizations of monogamy and jealousy. While only practiced by a small minority, polyamory and its philosophy is increasingly gaining popular attention and a degree of mainstream credibility (Mint, 2007), such that the sociocultural technology of polyamory is beginning to have reverberations outside the polyamorous community. Ideas themselves can spur social change.

Although McLuhan's categorization is useful, Kelly (2010) argues that no technology ever becomes absolutely *obsolete*. Rather, technologies transform other technologies or they become less common in some areas but most are still in use somewhere in the world. Polyamory will never make monogamy obsolete, but polyamorists hope to outmode the mono-normativity implicit in dominant culture today. Polyamorists attempt to break the silence and stigma attached to non-monogamy. What makes the practice and socio-cultural construction of polyamory potentially radical is the ways in which polyamory problematizes and challenges whole sets of stagnant social norms that are taken for granted in mono-normativity. Polyamory challenges the gender stereotype that women are naturally monogamous and men naturally inclined towards non-monogamy, and thus the idea that only men would want to have multiple partners. In Western culture, men are subjected to an interplay of competing archetypes. On the one hand, men are scolded for engaging in or even wanting extra-marital affairs, but men's masculinity can also be called into question if they do not want multiple partners. Women's desire for non-monogamy is usually met with disproportionate scorn or regulation (Ryan and Jetha, 2010). As this notion is challenged, ideas about the way men and women *should* act are subsequently changing. Polyamory shifts the notion that

247

jealousy is the inevitable and intolerable outcome of one's partner having sex and/or

relationships with other people. Polyamory helps reveal the socially constructed link

between the mono-normative model of love and conventions of jealousy and challenges

the seeming 'naturalness' of these assumptions. Polyamorists are trying to make obsolete

the notion that jealousy should be used as a form of manipulation or control (as is often

portrayed in dominant media), such as the use of jealousy to obtain something you want.

Polyamorists also challenge the healthiness of being flattered by a partner's jealousy, and

the idea that a partner's jealousy is indicative of their love and commitment to the

relationship.

Polyamory also inspires the *retrieval* of knowledge concerning non-monogamy.

For example, lesbian non-monogamy went out of fashion during the 1980s partly in

reaction to HIV/AIDS and its subsequent link to promiscuity (Kleese, 2006)[61] and also

due in part to shifting feminist politics (particularly the feminist 'sex wars' which

associated non-monogamy with promiscuity and hence with patriarchy). Non-monogamy

is having a cultural and academic renaissance (Barker and Langdridge, 2010), due to the

convergence of political dialogues and emergence of the Internet as a means to connect

(as described above). Polyamory has led to the retrieval of knowledge of earlier forms of

consensual non-monogamy, for example publications of historical practices (see

Anderlini-D'Onofrio, 2009) and scientific research on the evidence of prehistoric non-

monogamy (see Ryan and Jetha, 2010). Arguably, these ideas were never 'lost,' but their

greater awareness in Western culture and peer-reviewed scholarship is a form of retrieval.

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[61] The ways in which polyamorists respond and protect themselves from HIV and STIs will be
discussed in Chapter 4.

McLuhan also argues that technology can *enhance/remix* social life and other technologies. Much of polyamorous discourse and activism is aimed at enhancing the communication skills and romantic/sexual experiences of polyamorists. Polyamorous discourse and activism also increases the number and kind of relationship choices available. Whereas people in the past may have practiced monogamy as the only possible option, and thus potentially fallen into serial monogamy and/or cheated, polyamory offers another option. Arguably, more options do not themselves lead to enhancement of social life. However, greater societal awareness of polyamory means that those who find they desire non-monogamy have, at the very least, an expansive vocabulary with which to describe their desires and arguably, are better able to act upon them. Polyamorists sometimes argue that denying outside attractions (especially if they are taboo) often leads to increased desire and/or infatuation, whereas communicating about them could minimize *suspicious* jealousy since all the factors are known. People may make better choices if their preference for monogamy or polyamory (or other relationship styles) is upfront and less socially and culturally stigmatized. Also, in some instances polyamory can enhance overall sexual libido (as will be evidenced in Chapter 4).

Polyamory is still a relatively new idea in most social circles, but in communities that are receptive, it is often perceived as a progressive or 'evolved' way of having relationships. Within some queer communities, polyamory is increasingly becoming the new 'cool' and some people actually feel pressure to be poly. Thus, within these small pockets, this *transvaluation of values,* or McLuhanian *reversal,* can at times have a negative pressuring effect. Also, it is the intention of polyamorists to reverse the

249

experience of jealousy and convert it to compersion. With the overt knowledge that one could experience pleasure from a partner's intimate or sexual encounters outside of the relationship, people may be more apt to experience compersion. This intended emotional reversal was an ongoing theme throughout this dissertation.

I opened my dissertation by presenting the two most common responses I receive when I bring up the subject of polyamory, questions regarding jealousy and time. My sense is that these questions about polyamory are really concerned with the viability of loving more than one person and sustaining such relationships. The question of viability is confounded by society's conception of romantic love. Feminists have been apt to "deconstruct and deride" romantic love (Brown, 2006, p. 3), yet as Jackson (1993) aptly notes, "even sociologists fall in love." Even as we critique the social construction of relationship structures, we can still be joyfully swept away by the delightful tug of love or overwhelmed by the sadness that accompanies its loss. There is indeed a discrepancy between the theoretical critique of romantic ideology and embodied desire when one is in the midst of a romantic affair. Polyamory could be seen as the epitome of the romantic ideal since polyamorists sustain multiple long-term romantic relationships, or it could be interpreted as a departure from such ideology since it defies the central tenet of romantic ideology, i.e. sexual exclusivity. Still, the experience of jealousy comes in to complicate the experience of love.

In the first three chapters, I described polyamory in regard to its history, philosophy, politics and practice, as well as the polyamorist critique of jealousy and cultivation of compersion. In Chapter 4, I applied a theoretical framework of feminist

intersectionality, sociology of emotion and critical sexualities that integrated biological

and social explanations of emotion to investigate how queer, polyamorous women

navigated experiences of jealousy. I found that through their critique of the feeling rules

embedded in mono-normative emotion worlds, they developed cultural norms with the

intention of inspiring the experience of compersion. Thus, while jealousy tended to be

experienced on the individual level, emotions were intricately connected to one's social

and cultural interactions. While polyamorous philosophical critiques were profound, the

embodiment of their pursued emotional experiences did not always correspond. And yet,

to many participants, the compersive benefit and emotional growth that ensued from their

polyamorous practice was gratifying and worth the effort.

In Chapter 5, I continued my exploration of polyamorists' cultivation of the

emotional experience of compersion, but this time focused my lens on gender. Research

and cultural representation of jealousy tends to emphasize differences between men's and

women's expression and experience of jealousy. I investigated queer polyamorous

women's critique of the gendered feeling rules of jealousy and their construction of

alternatives. To do so, I explored their approach to feminism, promiscuity, emotional

control and competition between women. I found that within queer, polyamorous

women's community, the simplistic gender differences cited by many researchers with

regard to jealousy were not dichotomous. My participants both exemplified and

complicated the dominant gendered feeling rules of jealousy.

Jealousy is connected to power relations, thus, in Chapter 6, I investigated

jealousy among queer, polyamorous women in terms of their resistance and replication of

dominant power relations. I examined how they were affected by and engaged with

power in three intersecting ways: through the institutional power of mono-normativity, in their interpersonal relationships and on the basis of how they perceived power. The latter is included because the way people interpret power relations significantly affects their *emotional* experience. Many of my participants resisted dominant power relations by focusing on modifying their emotions. Repeatedly in my study, I found evidence of the rewriting of power relations as well as the reproduction of conventional power relations.

When discussing polyamory, I am often confronted with "but what if" statements. People ask me, "but what if your lover *does* leave you for their new lover?" "But what if you *do* like her better?" "But what if you just don't have the time to maintain the relationship and all the processing it requires?" Polyamorists often reply to these statements with examples of times when polyamory is successful. For example, "the chances are just as high for a lover to leave if the relationship is monogamous." "They are more likely to stay with me *because* of the freedom afforded to polyamory than if they were forced to stay within the confines of monogamy." "The risk of them liking the other person more is more likely if the situation is left taboo." "I can make the time to pick up a new hobby like aerial dancing or to incorporate a new friend into my life, so I can also make the time for another relationship."

That said, among the array of stories I heard from my interviewees and from the larger polyamorous community, there were circumstances when the "but what if" scenarios were actualized. For example, one polyamorist left her primary lover to settle down in a monogamous arrangement, and another polyamorist broke up with her secondary lover because she did not have the time to give to her primary lover. I have

heard several accounts of people who were non-monogamous in their younger years until they met the 'love of their lives' with whom they settled down.

Instances of polyagony should not be used to challenge the viability of polyamory as a whole. When monogamous relationships break down due to infidelity or boredom (which are monogamy's most common "but what if" equivalents), people do not generally blame monogamy for the relationship's demise (with the exception of Ryan and Jetha (2010) who do exactly this). Thus my interest is directed to the intersection of individuals' experiences in relationships, social institutions and power structures. Importantly, sexuality is fluid and people fluctuate in their sexual expression. For many people, polyamory is a temporary phase - something to try out for its excitement, its sexual charge and the variety it offers. For other people, polyamory is a long-term commitment and/or lifelong identity and practice. Whether their practice was a temporary experiment or a long-term commitment, for my participants, polyamory had many benefits and seemed to be a vibrant addition to their romantic, sexual and emotional lives, and I extrapolate such benefits to many other polyamorists.

I have mentioned some ideas for future research throughout this dissertation. In particular, a multi-year study researching jealousy among active polyamorists would highlight how emotions shift with experience. I would like to talk with people who once were but are no longer polyamorous to find out if their approach to jealousy is influenced by their experience with polyamory. Since everyone in my sample was polyamorous at the time of the interview, they may have had a more optimistic approach to the mitigation of jealousy, whereas, perhaps some *ex-polys* gave up polyamory because they were unable to overcome the negative effects of jealousy. I would also like to better

understand how polyamorists manage resource allocation and financial aspects of non-monogamy. I would like to further explore how polyamorists manage time, and in particular how they find enough time for multiple relationships, processing in these relationships, as well as maintain other areas of their lives. I would like to pursue research comparing the culture of flirting in polyamorous, swinging and monogamous communities. In addition, I would like to explore how jealousy in polyamory overlaps and influences other emotions, such as anxiety, fear and sadness. I am also interested in further examining how internalized polyphobia creates and/or exacerbates fear and jealousy.

My intention with this study is neither to make any claims about polyamory's viability as a whole nor to make claims about individuals' ability to be polyamorous or compersive. Instead, my intention throughout this project has been to examine the feeling rules associated with the emotion world in which mono-normativity resides, and to identify how polyamorists rethink and reconstruct their own set of feeling rules. These rules and their effect on people are never a direct cause and effect relationship. Indeed, the boundaries between the individual and society, biology and culture reveal themselves to be intersectional. I have described the emotion worlds connected to mono-normativity and how polyamorists are affected by, and re-examine ideas about jealousy, gender, love, and relationships. In short, I examined how social ideas turn to facts and how they become embodied into emotional experiences. Indeed, polyamorists at times are able to eschew mono-normative feeling rules and embody experiences of compersion, as well as counteract dominant power relations.

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STATEMENT OF ETHICS APPROVAL

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this work, either:

(a) Human research ethics approval from the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics,

or

(b) Advance approval of the animal care protocol from the University Animal Care Committee of Simon Fraser University;

or has conducted the research

(c) as a co-investigator, collaborator or research assistant in a research project approved in advance,

or

(d) as a member of a course approved in advance for minimal risk human research, by the Office of Research Ethics.

A copy of the approval letter has been filed at the Theses Office of the University Library at the time of submission of this thesis or project.

The original application for approval and letter of approval are filed with the relevant offices. Inquiries may be directed to those authorities.

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Appendix B: Subject's Informed Consent Forms

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent By Participants In a Research Study

The University and those conducting this research study subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of participants. This research is being conducted under permission of the Simon Fraser Research Ethics Board. The chief concern of the Board is for the health, safety and psychological well-being of research participants.

Should you wish to obtain information about your rights as a participant in research, or about the responsibilities of researchers, or if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the manner in which you were treated in this study, please contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics by email at hweinber@sfu.ca or phone at 778-782-6593.

Your signature on this form will signify that you have received a document which describes the procedures, whether there are possible risks, and benefits of this research study, that you have received an adequate opportunity to consider the information in the documents describing the study, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

Title: Don't You Get Jealous? A Sociological Inquiry into Polyamory, Jealousy and Gender

Investigator Name: Jillian Deri

Investigator Department: Sociology

Having been asked to participate in the research study named above, I certify that I have read the procedures specified in the Study Information Document describing the study. I understand the procedures to be used in this study and the personal risks to me in taking part in the study as described below:

 Purpose and goals of this study:

The goal of the study is examine sociological and gendered influences on the emotion of jealousy by examining lesbian, bisexual and queer women who practice polyamory (open-relationships).

What the participants will be required to do:

You will be asked a series of semi-structured, open-ended questions during a recorded interview of approximately 1-2 hours. You have the option of skipping any question or providing pertinent information that is not on the question list.

Risks to the participant, third parties or society:

There are no identified risks to you, third parties or society.

Benefits of study to the development of new knowledge:

The benefit of this study is the development of new knowledge. The majority of work on the emotion of jealousy comes from psychological research and there remains of dearth of literature on the sociological influence on the emotion. Research on polyamory is an emerging field, yet there remains little information on lesbians, Canadian communities or academic studies of jealousy from a sociological perspective. My research on polyamory calls into question the presumed naturalness, inevitability and gendered aspects of jealousy. My research provides new understanding of how alternative relationships and family life can be structured and practiced in ways that nurture trust, reciprocity and love.

Statement of confidentiality: The data of this study will maintain confidentiality of your name and the contributions you have made to the extent allowed by the law.

The interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed by myself only. I will give you a pseudonym and all identifiable information will be changed or deleted to protect your anonymity. Recordings, transcriptions and signed consent forms will be kept in a secure location.

Interview of employees about their company or agency:

n/a

Inclusion of names of participants in reports of the study:

I will give you a pseudonym.

Contact of participants at a future time or use of the data in other studies:

In order to preserve confidentiality, the interview transcripts will not be available for other studies.

I understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time. I also understand that I may register any complaint with the Director of the Office of Research Ethics.

Dr. Hal Weinberg
Director, Office of Research Ethics
Office of Research Ethics
Simon Fraser University

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Multi-Tenant Facility
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hal_weinberg@sfu.ca

I may obtain copies of the results of this study, upon its completion by contacting:

Jillian Deri jhderi@sfu.ca

I understand the risks and contributions of my participation in this study and agree to participate:

The participant and witness shall fill in this area. Please print legibly

Participant Last Name:
Participant First Name:
Participant Contact Information:
Participant Signature (for adults):
Witness (if required by the Office of Research Ethics):
Date (use format MM/DD/YYYY)
Contact at a future time / use of data in other studies

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

1. Demographics: age, location, highest level of education, occupation, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, any other significant identifying characteristics.
2. Describe your current relationship structure. What structures have you tried in the past?
3. Define polyamory.
4. Describe your ideal polyamorous structure.
5. Do you identify as queer? Please explain what queer means to you.
6. Where do you go for support regarding polyamory? Do you utilize to any polyamorous resources?
7. Do you consider yourself part of a polyamorous community? Queer community? Do you interact with other polyamorous people?
8. When and how did you become aware that polyamory was an option?
9. What about polyamory is challenging?
10. What does jealousy feel like for you?
11. How do you manage jealousy within your polyamorous relationships? Describe a hard jealousy moment. How did you deal with it?
12. What kinds of situations make you jealous? Do any non-sexual/ non-romantic situations make you jealous?
13. How do you support your partner(s) if/when they are experiencing jealousy?
14. What do you need from your partner(s) when he/she go on other dates?
15. What does it feel like when a partner introduces a new lover into the picture? Is it different if this person is someone you already know? Do any characteristics of this person matter, such as gender?
16. In what ways have you learned to be jealous? Did you actively unlearn/ reshape your jealousy?
17. Do you think heterosexuals and/or men have a different experiences with polyamory? With jealousy? Do you think monogamous people have different experiences with jealousy? If so, how?
18. Are polyamorous relationships with men different than relationships with women?
19. How does power in the relationship relate to jealousy?
20. How does resources and financial security come into your polyamorous relationship? To your experience of jealousy?
21. Do you have children? Do you plan to have children? How does/will this affect your polyamorous choices? Your experience of jealousy?
22. Have you ever lived with a polyamorous partner?
23. Describe an experience of compersion.
24. Do you think polyamorists share some kind of culture that makes jealousy different?
25. What other emotions come into poly?
26. Do you experience female rivalry? With your lover? With cohearts (people who share the same lover)? How do you deal with rivalry?
27. Are you a feminist? How do your feminist ideals come into your polyamorous practices?
28. Tell the interviewees stereotypes of gender and jealousy and ask them to comment.

29. What have you learned from being polyamorous?
30. Have you ever tried to make a partner jealous?
31. Have you ever cheated? Have you ever been cheated on? Ever in polyamorous situations?
32. What are the benefits and rewards of being poly?
33. Is polyamory as identity, philosophy, politic, practice, other?
34. What are some of the myths or misconceptions about polyamory?
35. Where do you meet other polyamorists? Other dates?