CONSENSUAL NON MONOGAMY IN HUMBOLDT COUNTY:

AN EXPLORATION OF INTIMACY, JEALOUSY, AND EMERGENT RELATIONAL

IDEOLOGIES

By

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ABSTRACT

CONSENSUAL NON MONOGAMY IN HUMBOLDT COUNTY:
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Consensual non-monogamy (CNM) is an umbrella term for any agreed-upon sexual or emotional non-exclusive relationship. This study looks at the challenges experienced by people practicing CNM in Humboldt County. I interviewed 12 people with insight into what it is like to live and love in multi-partnered relationships. The results suggest that jealousy, communication, and vulnerability were required to successfully navigate CNM and reimagine intimacy. Reimagining intimacy was contingent on rewriting the feeling rules associated with jealousy and all the underlying emotions that tend to be intricately woven into jealousy. These feelings are fear of abandonment, fear of inadequacy, anger, resentment, and sorrow. CNM discourse, polyamorous theory specifically, has developed a set of alternative feeling rules that have recrafted a different emotion world that situates jealousy as neither unbearable nor inevitable. Rather, my participants aimed to replace jealousy with compersion, a term coined by consensual non-monogamists used to describe the opposite of jealousy. The findings of this study speaks not only to CNM relational configurations, but to the complexity and nuances of opening up to others on a deeper, more vulnerable level.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Why Consensual Non-Monogamy

Initially my research questions revolved around vulnerability and genuine interpersonal connection. I wanted to understand more deeply what allowed for individual growth and how we as people tend to find (or lose) ourselves in others. How, in other words, does relating and relationships affect the individual when it comes to vulnerability, growth, connection, and love? Of course, these topics and questions were so broad, that it was difficult for me as a novice graduate student to formulate a narrow enough question that could be answered by means of the scientific method. In my studies, however, I have gotten closer to what theory can do for me by allowing theory to get closer to the body.

Feeling as an embodied and legitimate form of knowledge has driven my research. Deep emotion and genuine connections that foster those emotions brought me to consensual non monogamy. My parents divorced when I was about six. Every other long term relationship that I observed after that seemed like something that I did not want. Most of these relationships lacked love, compassion, patience, or respect. I could not understand what brought people to monogamy or marriage. So often I recognized that people would lose sight of themselves and their own personhood by falling in love. Growing up queer in a society that strongly and negatively sanctioned queerness made relating to others on an intimate level extremely challenging. On top of my perceived

inability to find someone that understood me, I came to understand that relationships were overrated. When I decided to move nearly six hundred miles away from home to start a new life, I also decided that I would start a new relationship with myself. I decided that that relationship would be a more loving and more accepting relationship. However, I soon realized that in order to fully love and accept myself, I had to do the emotional labor of disentangling myself from others and the emotional wounds that have resulted from years of not accepting myself, of not loving myself. At the time it felt like I began dating for the first time in my life. Mixed with feelings of fear, insecurity, inadequacy, pride, jealousy inevitably took a hold of me. Jealousy revealed itself to be a blanket covering up all of these insecurities and fears.

My own experience with jealousy and relationships seemed like the obvious vehicle for exploring what makes a "good" relationship. I hypothesized that those who do not get jealous are those who are extremely secure in who they are. They are the ones who know who they are. They know where they have been, and they know where they are going. Their identities are set and strong. For if someone believes that they are enough for themselves, there would be no need for being jealous. My research inevitably complicated my initial theorizing and lead me down routes I could not have anticipated. At some point I realized that people in polyamorous and open relationships would be the best people to talk to as they were directly challenging mainstream monogamous culture. They were directly challenging dominant notions of jealousy and intimacy. The fact that there were people forming multiple romantic, sexual, and emotional relationships at the same time to me meant that they had figured out jealousy, and, by extension, self-

acceptance. I do not remember if I thought that jealousy just did not exist for them, or if I thought that they all must be extremely secure in who they are. Is it possible that the people who practice consensual non monogamy were all in love with themselves before loving within their multi-partnered relationships? In any case I wanted to know how they came to their style of consensual non monogamy. I wanted to know who or what influenced them. What were their biggest challenges and benefits to living and loving openly? In what ways were these people getting in touch with themselves in order to better relate to others on an intimate level? How does jealousy manifest itself within CNM, and where does insecurity come into play? In short, I was asking, "In what ways do people practicing CNM cultivate relationships with themselves and others that foster self-awareness, security, and love?"

Glossary

Compersion: The feeling of joy associated with seeing a loved one love another; contrasted with jealousy.

Compulsory Monogamy: "the institutionalized arrangements that compel or force people into monogamous, dyadic relationships (Mint 2004; Schippers 2016).

Compulsory heterosexuality: the institutionalized arrangements and social structures that compel people into heterosexual relationships.

Consensual Non-Monogamy: an agreed-upon, sexually non-exclusive relationship. Umbrella term (Fisher, Garcia, Gesselman, Moors, and Haupert 2017:426).

Closed Relationship: A sexually exclusive intimate relationship.

Don't Ask Don't Tell: An agreement or dynamic between intimate partners where each person does not talk about their sexual encounters that occur outside of their primary relationship.

Feeling Rules: cultural norms that dictate how someone is supposed to feel in a given situation.

Metamour: The partner of a partner in a CNM relationship with interpersonal expectations and responsibilities such as open communication and an ethic of care (Schippers 2016).

Mononormativity: "dominant assumptions of normalcy and naturalness of monogamy, analogous to such assumptions around heterosexuality inherent in the term heteronormativity" (Barker and Langdridge 2010:750).

Monophobia: a critical characterization of monogamy as unnatural, hypocritical, or morally and spiritually bankrupt (Ferrer 2018:823).

Mono Pride: "the psychosocial consideration of monogamy as variously natural, optimal, or superior." (Ferrer 218:821)

Open Relationship: Also known as non-exclusive relationship, is an intimate relationship that is consensually non-monogamous. This term may sometimes refer to polyamory, but it is often used to signify a primary emotional and intimate relationship between two partners who agree to have sexual relationships with other people.

Polyfidelity: an intimate relationship structure where all members are considered equal partners and agree to restrict sexual activity to only other members of the group (Wikipedia 2019).

Polyaffective: relationships are those in which people establish relationships with chosen kin connected by emotional intimacy but not sexuality, either because they have never been sexually engaged or because the sexual portion of the relationship has waned, but they still remain emotionally intimate (Sheff 2016:258).

Polyamory: committed, emotionally and sometimes sexualy, intimate relationships involving more than two persons (Schippers 2016).

Polynormativity: any discourse defending polyamory as the right, best, or superior way of intimate relating" (Ferrer 2018:823).

Polyphobia: (conscious or unconscious) fear of or disgust toward non monogamy (Halpern 1999). Polyphobia is rationalized through discourses that condemn non

monogamy as psychologically immature, morally pernicious, and even religiously sinful (Ferrer 208:821).

Polyromanticism: the situating of polyamory as an antidote to the problems intrinsic to compulsory and serial monogamy (Wilkinson 2010, Ferrer 2018).

Poly Pride: the consideration of polyamory as variously natural, advantageous, or superior (Ferrer 2018:823).

Quad: a group of four individuals who are intimately bonded.

Relationship Anarchy: the belief that relationships should not be bound by rules aside from what the people involved mutually agree upon (Wikipedia 2018).

Sexual Monogamy: the attempt to maintain sexual exclusivity with the partner to whom an individual is pair-bonded (Haupert et al. 2017:425).

Social Monogamy: the tendency to form an intense emotional and physical bond with one person, generally leading to mutual home and family construction (Haupert et al. 2017:425).

Solo Poly: a fluid category that covers a range of relationships, from the youthful "free agent" or recent divorcee who might want to "settle down" someday, but for now wants to play the field with casual, brief, no-strings-attached connections, to the seasoned "solo poly" who has deeply committed, intimate, and lasting relationships with one or more people. Some solo polys have relationships that they consider emotionally primary, but not primary in a logistical, rank, or rules-based sense, and others don't want the kinds of expectations and limitations that come with a primary romantic/sexual relationship (Psychology Today 2013).

Triad:A triad is a polyamorous relationship between three people. . The term can also refer to a "vee" relationships, where two people are both dating one person (the hinge) but not each other. These relationships can be either open or closed (Bustle 2016).

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Consensual non-monogamy (CNM) is an umbrella term for every practice or philosophy of intimate relationship that consensually does not adhere to the sexual and/or emotional standard of monogamy. People who participate in CNM agree with their partner(s) that they may have romantic and/or sexual relationships with others (Atkins, Balzarini, Campbell, Harman, Holmes, Kohut, Lehmiller 2017). CNM comes in many forms and the discourse surrounding CNM tends to blur many boundaries. This makes for very different narratives that often contradict each other. Included under this umbrella term are relationship forms such as polyamory, open relationships, swinging, relationship anarchy, responsible non-monogamy, monogamish relationships, and solo poly (see glossary). While each of these styles of relating are distinct, it should be noted that polyamory and consensual non-monogamy are the two most commonly used umbrella terms that refer to any agreed upon style of relating that is sexually and/or emotionally non-exclusive. In this thesis I will be using the term consensual non-monogamy to include all of these forms of relating in order to capture the scope of alternative styles of relating within Humboldt County's non-exclusive love scene. However, I will also be using polyamory interchangeably due to the fact that it is the most commonly used term used by people practicing CNM.

There has been a growing interest in CNM both in the field of academia and in popular culture within the past few decades. The interest in polyamory, specifically, is evidenced by an increased usage in the English corpora. Rubel and Burleigh (2018)

demonstrate using Google Ngram and the Web of Science database that interest in polyamory has sharply increased since the end of the 90's. Recent studies have found that one in five people have at some point in their life been involved in a CNM relationship (Conely, Matsick, Rubin, Ziegler, and Moors 2014:22). An even more recent study estimated that there are at least 1.44 million adults who "count" as polyamorous in the United States (Rubel and Burleigh, 2018). Despite an increasing number of people considering alternatives, monogamy unquestionably remains the dominant form of "acceptable intimacy." It maintains cultural dominance in our society as many people tend to stigmatize CNM and hold monogamy in the highest regard (Conley, Chopik, Edelstein, and Moors 2015). Monogamy is therefore, "deemed the only culturally valued relationship choice available, and if you stray from its boundaries, you are policed through cultural condemnation, relationship termination and, sometimes, even the threat of physical violence" (Anderson 2012:94). Eric Anderson, in his book titled The Monogamy Gap: Men, Love, and the Reality of Cheating, calls this phenomenon monogamism. It is akin to compulsory monogamy or hegemonic monogamy. Therefore, Consensual Non-Monogamy is an important topic to study within academia, as the discourse grows, popular interest increases, and the need for theoretical understanding and clinical applications with regard to opening up to others intensifies. Special attention to CNM is warranted that we might come to better understand this concept of multi-partner relationships, and by extension, the social construction of intimacy, relating, and emotions.

Emergence of Polyamory

It is important to realize that this is not a new phenomenon. CNM has been around much longer than the contemporary CNM movement, but it is has slowly made its way to being a more visible and talked-about phenomenon. Due to the fact that the term consensual non monogamy is better suited for an academic discussion and audience, I choose to conflate the term polyamory and consensual non monogamy. I do this in order to capture a definition or description of CNM that recognizes the variation and multiplicity of consensual non monogamous configurations. As such, the following discussion will be directed towards polyamory, an umbrella term that is more widely used in the community of consensual non-monogamists.

While the term polyamory was not officially coined until the 1990s, there should be no doubt that this form of relating had been practiced by many individuals in western society before then. It should, however, be distinguished from polygamy, an ancient but still widely practiced style of relating that typically involves one male and multiple wives in a harem-like arrangement (Newitz 2006). The term polyamory, on the other hand, emerged as a distinct concept with discursive elements that distinguish it from the other more casual styles of relating. With that being said, what is polyamory? When and why did it emerge?

When and where the term was coined is a matter of contention. One widely circulated anecdote revolves around a woman by the name of Morning Glory who wrote an article "A Bouquet of Lovers" that promoted group marriage and was published in the

Neopagan magazine *Green Egg.* She did not use the exact term polyamory, but she did use a hyphenated version (poly-amorous). This was a response to term polyfidelity, a term that refers to a group of individuals who practice sexual and emotional fidelity. Unlike open relationships or polyamory, polyfidelity means closed and committed to a select few. Kevin Lano defines polyfidelity as a "relationship involving more than two people who have made a commitment to keep the sexual activity within the group and not to have outside partners" (1995:128). The term polyfidelity was established from within the Kerista commune, a polyfidelitous commune in San Francisco. This community proved to be a pertinent element for the establishment of the polyamorous community first in the Bay Area and then nationwide. Morning Glory, along with others, did not want to include fidelity in the term, because they wanted to practice a more open style of relating that did not limit their sexual/loving partners to those to whom they were married.

The term polyamory itself is interesting to unpack when considering why this term has been chosen as an umbrella term. Why polyamorous over non-monogamous or perhaps another configuration like polyphilia? A participant in a study conducted by Klesse (2006) says:

> Polyamory is… well it's a new word really… It comes from the Greek word 'poly' meaning many and then the Latin word, the Latin bit is 'amory'. I guess they went for the mixture of Greek and Latin, because the all-Greek version would be polyphilia, things that are associated by the public with being bad. And of course there was already the word polyandry and polygamy, meaning many people, who identify as polyamorous believe in the idea of more than one relationship, meaning more than one love relationship. And they don't even have to be sexual. (P. 567)

The stigma surrounding consensual non monogamy is therefore apparent outside of the polyamorous community, as well as within the polyamorous community. Those who identify with polyamory are in essence resisting compulsory non monogamy and reframing the way they think and feel. This participant also sheds light on what the word tends to mean to people practicing polyamory, but they bring up another key concept within polyamory as well- *polyaffective*. Polyaffective relationships are those in which people establish relationships with chosen kin connected by emotional intimacy, but not sexual intimacy. This may be either because they have never been sexual together, or because the sexual bit of the relationship has become nonexistent. In any case they still remain emotionally intimate (Sheff 2016).

In the following sections, I further discuss key terms and salient research about CNM and polyamory. I review the CNM literature suggesting two broad themes. The first theme in the research is bracketed under quantitative research on consensual non monogamy. The quantitative research first explores stigma with regard to attitudes, perceptions, and willingness to engage in CNM relationships. I then briefly touch on research on health outcomes of older adults practicing CNM before proceeding to discuss the research that looks at other demographic trends of those practicing CNM. The second theme in the literature is the juxtaposition of monogamy and consensual non monogamy. This section includes qualitative research that has been done to better understand the experience of CNM as it compares to monogamy. Under this area of research is the study of how monogamous individuals and polyamorous individuals express mutual contempt towards each other and why, the poly-mono wars. Another key component of this section

will be how gender and power is expressed, redefined, stretched, and sustained within poly relationships. Lastly, there are specific abstract elements that are central to understanding the discourse on consensual non-monogamy, and with that regard, most of the literature being reviewed is directed towards polyamory as a specific discourse on not only consensual non-monogamy, but on love: A new paradigm of love.

Quantitative Research on CNM

The quantitative research has given attention to stigma surrounding CNM. It considers perceptions of non-monogamous styles of relating, the prevalence of CNM in the United States, and, to some degree, health and wellness of individuals practicing CNM. In the research that explores attitudes and willingness for CNM, researchers study perceptions of each style of CNM. There is evidence of more stigma surrounding open relationships than there is for polyamorous relationships. Although each style of CNM is defined differently, they all tend to (at least discursively) share the common components of honesty, communication, negotiation, and consensus about the terms of the relationships (Barker 2005; Jenks 1998; Klesse 2006; Moors et al. 2015). Furthermore, always accompanying the institution of monogamy is the idea of sexual exclusivity with one partner. Any extra-dyadic sex (i.e. sexual activity outside of the monogamous relationship) is what mainstream monogamist society has labeled "cheating." It follows that cheating is the result of a "failed" love. Anderson (2012) argues that "cheating emerges as a rational response to the irrational social expectations of monogamy." He

describes monogamy in terms of cognitive dissonance and hegemonic power where people want something they do not want and think not to actively question why that is. In other words, Anderson points out that the hegemonic culture of monogamy socializes people into identifying with monogamy while leaving little to no room for exploring their own unique desires. Anderson breaks down why men cheat in his book titled *The Monogamy Gap: Men, Love, and the Reality of Cheating.* It is important to take a closer look at cheating and the stigma surrounding cheating. As will be discussed later, cheating is defined in very different terms within different contexts for polyamorists.

Perceptions and attitudes towards CNM depends on the specific type of CNM relationship in question, as well as political and religious orientation. Altogether, the literature indicates that people tend to be uncomfortable with the idea of multiple sexual and/or emotional partners, especially with regard to casual sex. For most people, sex and love are inseparable, and the idea of their significant other being involved with someone else in any way is unfathomable. The result of such a conceptualization of sex and love is the stigmatization of extra-dyadic relations that are in fact consensual.

Grunt-Mejer and Campbell (2016) did a study with 374 participants who were asked to rate a hypothetical descriptions of people involved in one of five relationship types. These relationship types included monogamy, polyamory, open relationships, swinging, and cheating. As expected, cheating was viewed most negatively followed by swinging, open relationships, then polyamory. A similar study by Conley, Moors, Rubin, Ziegler, and Matsick (2014) provided similar results indicating that people perceived swinging as irresponsible and open relationships as immoral as compared to polyamory.

Polyamory was perceived with stigma, but it was not as stigmatized as the other non-monogamous configurations due to the emphasis on love rather than sex. Both of these studies combined reveal the discomfort most people tend to feel about the strictly sexual relationships typical of some consensually non monogamous configurations.

A year before the study done by Matsick and colleagues, a similar study was done assessing the stigma surrounding CNM. Conley, Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, and Valentine (2013) found that there was strong stigma associated with CNM and also a halo effect surrounding monogamy. That is, monogamy and monogamists were perceived (for the most part) as being "better" than CNM when it comes to sexual satisfaction and

Demographic Trends

Taken together, the literature suggests that those who practice CNM are not unlike the average American. Furthermore, research suggests that CNM is a beneficial intimate practice among a sample of older adults in the United States as well as for young queer men. Much of the demographic research on CNM suggests that people practicing CNM are similar to the average American, but also tend to identify with specific political and spiritual groups.

An important study done by Dr. James R. Fleckenstein and Derrell W. Cox II (2015) examined the association of open relationships, health, and happiness in a sample of older adults. This study of individuals in the United States aged 55 and older who practiced consensual non-exclusive sexual relations consisted of 502 men and women. It

used an online survey to acquire self-reported information about health and happiness, number of sexual partners, and sexual frequency. They then compared their data with 723 similar respondents from the 2012 nationally representative US General Social Survey. They found that those who practiced non-exclusive sexual relationships had significantly more sexual partners, more sexual frequency, better health, and were much more likely to have had an HIV test than the general US population.

A study of short-term mating and attachment styles that questioned if short-term mating was a maladaptive result of insecure attachment showed that short-term mating was often associated with adaptive personality traits like higher self-esteem, especially among young men (Schmitt 2005). In other words, whether it be a hookup or a conscious polyamorous choice, these young sexually liberal men tend to experience an overall positive emotional outcome related to a more adaptive personality type. Arbeit, Shahin, and Watson (2018) found in their study of the hook up culture in British Columbia that hooking up was essentially a coping mechanism for LGBTQ individuals that fostered more positive emotional outcomes than negative. Watson's study also indicates that bisexual men and gay men are oriented more towards the physical connection than the emotional connection, as compared to women engaging in hook ups. There appears to be a connection between LGBTQ culture and willingness to engage in consensual non-monogamy.

Haupert and colleagues (2017) found that CNM was more common among the LGBTQ community (gay men especially) as compared to that of the heterosexual community. Furthermore, research suggests that CNM is very common, perhaps

normative within the culture of dating for gay men (Adam 2006; Bell and Weinberg 1978; Blasband and Peplau 1985; Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Coelho 2011; Kurdek and Schmitt 1985; McWhirter and Mattison 1984; Peplau and Cochran 1981). This may have to do with the more liberal worldviews that many LGBTQ individuals are oriented towards and the general redefining of all aspects of existence juxtaposed to heteronormativity. In other words, the LGBTQ community tends to renegotiate the terms of identity, romance, sexuality, and the social norms surrounding heteronormativity. A 2010 study conducted by Gilliland revealed that self-identified swingers came from a variety of religious backgrounds not unlike the general US population. Two other studies by Kolesar (2010) and Stelboum (1997) indicate that those who practice CNM usually identify with more liberal political and/or religious orientations. Stelboum's research focused on women and what she called "polyfidelity," a form of polyamory, and the tendency of lesbian women to not disclose their stigmatized identity and way of life. Stelboum also notes that the women practicing CNM in her study tended to be in their early twenties, older than forty-five, coastal, urban, well educated, and self-employed. Kolesar's data, on the other hand, suggested that CNM participant religiosity decreased and liberalism increased, as they got older. Kolesar's findings also aligned with those of Gilliland (2010), as the majority of the multi-partnered individuals in her study were raised in conservative Judeo-Christian households similar to national census data. Lastly, Giuliano, Herselman, Johnson, and Hutzler (2016) found that with regard to attitudes, those with more traditional worldviews had more negative attitude about polyamory, aligning with the two studies by Kolesar and Stelboum.

Satisfaction, Fulfillment, and the Poly-Mono Juxtaposition

In an online questionnaire from 2010 Gilliland asked (but did not answer) the question, "Do swingers experience more fulfilling relationships?" Being that the data was over ten years old and there being a disproportionate amount of male respondents, no definitive conclusions could be drawn. Instead, Gilliland's main finding was that the swingers in their study ascribed to many different political and religious affiliations suggesting that the swingers in their study were very similar to most other Americans. Since then, there has been research done to respond to and create more qualitative questions such as this. A study examining the popular assumption of the benefits and outcomes of monogamy (Conley et al. 2013) suggested that there was a lack of evidence for monogamy being the only viable option. In other words, consensual non monogamy could possibly be just as viable as monogamy when it came to happiness, sexual satisfaction, and fulfillment. Since 2013 there has been much more critical examination of consensual non monogamy as an alternative to monogamy that suggests that CNM is in fact a viable alternative to monogamy. Although it may not be for everyone, social science has shown that CNM is nonetheless an alternative option for those who consider this style of relating.

CNM respondents from a study done in 2017 reported higher levels of satisfaction in CNM relationships with regard to communication and level of openness than respondents who practiced monogamy (Memering, Mogilski, Shackelford, and Welling

2017). Mogilski et al. were specifically interested in comparing CNM to monogamy. Their focus was on comparing the experiences of individuals who practice CNM with experiences of monogamous individuals. They wanted to compare levels of satisfaction with the amount of communication and openness experienced by both CNM and monogamous individuals. There was, however, no significant difference in rating of overall relationship satisfaction. Hilving (2017), on the other hand, wanted to know what affect polyamory might have on one's identity and how their current CNM relationship differed from their past monogamous relationships with regard to power and trust. Hilving found that there was no sense of identity conflict that was a result of a poly lifestyle. Also found in this study was that commitment and satisfaction were reported to be high in polyamorous relationships as compared to participant monogamous relationships? Both of these studies, however, indicated higher levels of satisfaction in CNM relationships as compared to monogamous relationships. In other words, these studies suggested that individuals who practice CNM can and do experience fulfilling relationships. However, it should be noted that higher levels of satisfaction in the study by Mogilski and colleagues was only between the respondent and their primary partner. This did not extend to secondary partners. Research surrounding secondary partners and the concept of a *metamour* (the partner of a partner), is scarce as these aspects of CNM are still being brought to the forefront.

Polynormativity, a key concept within the work that I have been doing, has perhaps received the most attention within qualitative research on CNM. Polynormativity refers to norms or criteria for doing poly the "right way" (e.g. love-based, couple-

centered, or rule-regimented) as compared to other forms of CNM (Klesse, Chin, and Haritaworn 2006; Schippers 2016; Wilkinson 2010; Zanin 2013; Ferrer 2018). Jorge N. Ferrer (2018) extends this description of polynormativity by arguing that this can also include any discourse on polyamory that defends it as the "right," superior, or best way of intimate relating. Ferrer's work reveals the complexity of the issue he calls the mono-poly wars (i.e. mutual competition and condescension among monogamists and polyamorists). At the root of it is what has been termed mononormativity, "the dominant assumptions of normalcy and naturalness of monogamy, analogous to such assumptions around heterosexuality inherent in the term heteronormativity" (Barker and Langdridge 2010:750).

You can call it monogamism (Anderson 2012), monocentrism (Bergstrand and Sinski 2010), or compulsory monogamy (Emens 2004; Schippers 2016; Willey 2015), but currently maintaining cultural dominance is the belief system that places monogamous heterosexual couples as natural, ideal, and ethical. I will stick to the term compulsory monogamy, the institutionalized arrangements that make people choose a monogamous, dyadic form of intimately relating (Mint 2004). It compels people to do this while at the same time stigmatizing CNM as unnatural, unethical, or dysfunctional (Conley et al. 2012; Grunt-Mejer and Campbell 2016; Sheff and Hammers 2011). The monogamist would say to the polyamorists, "you just haven't found *the one."* The polyamorist would say back the monogamist, "Well, you have not yet opened up your mind to the concept of non-possessive loving." Ferrer refers to this stigmatizing of the other as polyphobia and monophobia, and it comes from very real and very human needs.

These needs I refer to include the need for long term emotional stability/security on one hand and also for sexual diversity and novelty on the other (Anderson 2012). Ferrer describes these interlocking psychosocial attitudes- monopride/polyphobia and polypride/monophobia- as key to understanding the mono-poly wars, and argues for a more pluralist stance to avoid universalizing hierarchies of relationships. In other words, there can be both light and dark on either side, and we would do well to avoid dualistically situating one as above the other. Instead, Ferrer argues, we should reject hierarchy and focus more on how and why people actually practice each style of relating. One could ask if any given form of relating is fear-based or life-enhancing, more destructive or constructive, more self-centered or more empathic.

Poly Love: A New Paradigm of Love

I believe that we would do well to spend some time focusing specifically on polyamory as a discourse on non-monogamy, as well as on polyamory as a discourse on love. Christian Klesse, professor of sociology at Manchester Metropolitan University, has published multiple articles surrounding polyamory that help us to navigate polyamory as a discourse. An article by Klesse (2006) lays out polyamory as a discourse on non-monogamy and sheds light on the types of elements that are common in the discourse surrounding polyamory. He found that love was central to the definition of polyamory, and that relational ideologies centered on romantic love were retained in the new paradigm of poly love. In other words, the modern concept of love incorporates old

concepts of love, such as long term commitment and a strong work ethic, with newer concepts of love that revolve around gender equity. He also notes that friendship and blurring of boundaries are another key feature of poly discourse.

Following this article Klesse published an article (2011) situating polyamory as a discourse on love rather than a discourse on non-monogamy. This, he argues, allows for the denaturalizing of emotions and love as social constructs to make way for a more nuanced understanding of emotions such as love and jealousy. In Klesse's (2011) work he theorizes emotions, intimacies and sexualities, and discourses. He uses Jillian Deri's (2015) book Love's Refraction: Jealousy and Compersion in Queer Polyamorous relationships to theorize emotions as socially constructed. Jillian Deri borrows from Arlie Russel Hochschild (1979) by incorporating the term feeling rules, cultural norms that dictate how someone is supposed to feel in a given situation, into her analysis of queer polyamorous women's CNM experiences with jealousy a. Under this theoretical framework emotions such as jealousy are situated as socially constructed and allow for the reworking of those cultural norms by the women she interviewed. Jillian uses feeling rules to describe how these women experience jealousy; how they process it, how they react (or pro-act) to jealousy. Thus, consensual non-monogamy allows for a reframing of these experiences.

Klesse's analysis also suggests that poly discourses, while they challenge compulsory non monogamy, tend to bolster dominant conceptions of love that might perpetuate monogamism. In other words, the contemporary notion of (polyamorous) love incorporates new ideas of love such as gender equity and old concepts of love such as

commitment to long-term romantic love. However, the old more dominant notions of love persist and detract from a new conception of love that challenges dyadic hetero-monogamous love. Furthermore, it must be noted that polyamory is not a unified discourse. There are contradictions within poly culture, and many polyamorists practice polyamory differently. This is essential to keep in mind if we wish to make space for poly discourses as they tend to produce a prescribed "right way" to do poly even though there are many ways that people are practicing polyamory and many contradictions within its discourses.

From Klesse's work (2006) we can begin to visualize the landscape of poly discourses. Through a series of qualitative research methods such as participant observation, interviews, discourse analysis, and focus groups Klesse maps out dominant elements of polyamory as a discourse on non-monogamy. What he finds is that love is central to most (if not all) definitions of polyamory. Polyamory tends to assume less of a sex-based orientation so much as a love-based orientation. In other words, while sex can very well be a strong component of any poly relationship, the emphasis in much of poly discourse is on love and the absence of pleasure centered "shallow" connections. This is in contrast to other forms of CNM that tend to center around sex and pleasure. To be more concise, polyamory tends to be about love and other forms of CNM like open relationships and swinging tend to be more about sex and pleasure.

Second, Klesse explains how polyamory blurs boundaries and creates a spectrum of its own with regard to friendship and intimacy. With sexual intimacy being secondary to love and emotional connection within most poly discourses, the boundary between

friendship and lover becomes blurred. Using Rothblum's work (1999), Klesse shows the

connection between the friendship model and the polyamorous model. Friendship is

essentially polyamorous as we are allowed to love more than one friend. Why does sex

change everything? He argues that the difference between friendship and partnership can

be understood as spectral. One of his participants "describes his approach to polyamory

as a process of moving from friendship to partnership, implying a fluid continuum

between these relationship forms" (Klesse 2006:570). As such, polyamory tends to be a

friendship centered discourse.

Aside from these central themes in poly discourse, Klesse found that there are

also central elements in poly discourse regarding what types of ideas are endorsed in poly

relationships. According to Klesse, these are communication, negotiation, self-

responsibility, emotionality, intimacy, compersion, and honesty. Compersion is a new

term being introduced within CNM culture that, in contrast to jealousy, refers to the

feeling of joy that is associated with seeing or knowing that a loved one loves another.

Honesty, Klesse argues, is the most dominant piece of polyamory as none of the above

elements are possible unless there is a foundation of honesty. In his work on non-

monogamy Nathan Rambukkana (2015) focuses on the tendency of polyamorists to

overemphasize the role of honesty. He argues that although honesty is key, it alone "does

little to address [...] unfair relationships and can instead conceal their unfairness under the

banner of being open and, consequently, equal" (2015:120). Furthermore, polyamory and

consensual non monogamy tend to evoke other styles of relating that are viewed as

morally lacking or irresponsible. As such, how are other forms of CNM problematized by

the poly discourse and the often prescriptive descriptions that arise out of these discourses?

Klesse, however, continued his research on polyamory by reframing his analysis in 2011. Rather than looking at polyamory as a specific discourse on non monogamy, Klesse situates polyamory as a discourse on love. This, he argues, allows for the denaturalization of love and makes room for deconstructing emotions. What he argues in this piece is that love is central to the definition of polyamory and that polyamory challenges hegemonic monogamy, or monogamism (or compulsory monogamy). However, Klesse does note that poly discourse surrounding love still maintains some aspects of the old paradigm of love, romantic love. A distinction is made between romantic love, a paradigm of love that has been challenged as a form of gendered love that tends to follow the logic of domination and oppression, from confluent love, a paradigm of love that situates each partner as equal and communicates their wishes and desires as such. Here he borrows from Anthony Giddens (1992).

We are thus prompted to think up which notions of love are currently dominating our cultural zeitgeist. While poly discourses are argued to have retained elements of romantic love such as long-term bonds, commitment, and intimacy, Giddens (1992) and others argue that romantic love is on the decline. Others like Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) argue that romantic love is taking the place of religion for many people living in secularized societies. Karl Lenz (1998), provides a slightly more nuanced understanding claiming that the new paradigm of love is a mixture of elements from the old paradigm with elements from the new one. As previously stated, ideas of love have historically

been gendered and confluent love, as described by Giddens, has fostered the degendering of love. This change is due to the introduction of ideas such as self-actualization and communication into the new paradigm of love (Rose 1999). It is important to note that the new paradigm of love does not imply that love has been degendered or that all poly love assumes a more egalitarian form of loving (although it sometimes does). Elisabeth Sheff's research (2005; 2006) on gender within poly relationships suggests that polyamorous women take on the majority of emotional labor and "women's work," while polyamorous men still subscribe to what she calls poly-hegemonic masculinity. In other words, poly men still retain dominant notions of what it means to be a man within polyamorous relations (e.g. having many women as a status symbol). However, scholars such as Schroedter and Vetter (2010) view poly love discourses as having emerged from within a historical context. They situate poly love discourses as a response to the ever changing cultural and economic relations, as well as the age old struggle around cultural and sexual hegemony (Schroedter and Vetter, 2010; Klesse 2011).

He also adds here that "the whole debate about polyamory has been driven by a concern with the creation of a less prescriptive emotional and sexual culture. A commitment to diversity is a salient feature of the polyamory debates" (Schroedter and Vetter 2010; Klesse 2011). He is keen to add that poly discourse is not cohesive and that he is simply discerning between the "elements' of said discourse. There are a variety of narratives within this discourse, and not all of the themes discussed are a part of each narrative. They appear in different combinations within different narratives and often contradict each other.

The above literature review can attest to the maturation of the research done surrounding consensual non monogamy. I have laid out the themes from within the literature on CNM and polyamory. From these themes we can make sense of the types of elements that are most salient in CNM discourses. Emotions such as love, jealousy, and compersion are the most common in these discourses, and ideas like commitment, honesty, communication, and responsibility course through these same discourses. CNM as an alternative tends to be analyzed with a focus on happiness, mental/sexual health, and satisfaction with regard to sex and communication. CNM and monogamy are argued to be inferior to one another by opposing sides, and hierarchical, dualistic thinking within mononormativity is at the core. In addition, the literature surrounding CNM situates CNM as a privileged orientation that is most commonly represented by gay men and white women. People identifying with the LGBTQ community also tend to be oriented towards CNM. Taken all together, discourses surrounding CNM are not cohesive and often contradict each other as CNM is an umbrella term with subcategories that contradict from within each subcategory, as well as between subcategories. The point here is that CNM presents us with an eclectic set of ideologies and philosophies that prompt us to explore the ways in which CNM challenges normative social roles and behavior in the West. Daunting as it may be to make sense of this subculture, further research is warranted as insight into these very distinct forms of intimacy will allow for a more nuanced understanding of how we open up to others no matter the form of relationship.

It is important to recognize privilege implicit in the literature on CNM. As previously stated, a majority of the participants in these studies were gay men and/or educated middle class women with a range of sexualities. Previous research has indicated that those who participate in CNM also tend to be white (Haritaworn 2006; Klesse 2013; Sheff and Hammers 2011). In 2006 a special issue on polyamory was published in the journal titles Sexualities. Jin Haritaworn and colleagues (2006) investigated the emergence of and discourse on polyamory with an intersectional lens. Their critical analysis focuses on the ways in which sexual subjects, such as people engaging in consensual non monogamy, tend to be positioned on multiple axes of oppression. This framing of polyamorous discourses situates the discourse as being largely comprised of the experiences of those with the privilege to speak and/or access CNM communities. By taking a more critical stance, their goal is to call attention to positionality as it relates to intersectionality. Some key critical questions that they ask are, "What kind of capital - financial, physical, or cultural- are [polyamorists] able to mobilize [within polyamory]? [...] What community knowledges of sexual entitlement and bodily integrity are available to [them]?" (Haritaworn et al. 2006:517) These are important questions to consider within the experiences of CNM. How are challenges within any given relationship mediated by community knowledges and techniques of conflict resolution, and who has access to said knowledges? In the following section I will take these questions and curate a set of tools for analyzing and understanding the ways in which my participants resist and transform normative responses to jealousy.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORY

Sociology of Emotions and Theorizing Jealousy

My theoretical framework is grounded in the sociology of emotions and symbolic interactionism. In this section I conceptualize more specifically emotion management (Hochschild 1979), as informed by dramaturgy (Goffman 1959), the latter which theorizes all social interaction as scripted and dependent on a series of interlocking cues. I then conceptualize the particular emotion world (Plummer 2001) of polyamorous jealousy, as situated in queer theory at a unique intersection of emotions (Deri 2015). The emotion world of jealousy within mononormative culture and hegemonic feeling rules within this emotion world frame understandings of jealousy within CNM and how individuals are supposed to feel, manage emotions, and communicate those emotions. Within CNM jealousy, as an embodied experience, is redefined through polyamorous theory in some instances, and replicated from mononormative emotion worlds in others.

Feeling rules, a concept taken from Arlie Russell Hochschild (1979) refers to cultural norms that dictate how someone is supposed to feel in a given situation. Hochschild used the term to describe the ways that people manage their emotions to fit cultural expectations surrounding any given circumstance. Within this framework, emotions are understood as something that we can manage, but yet we are supposed to manage them according to a socially constructed concepts of emotion and meaning we

attach to these emotions. When someone you love dies, you are supposed to feel grief. When a long-term relationship ends you are supposed to feel remorseful. These feeling rules are unwritten, but we are able to notice them when they are broken. How would you feel if someone laughed, when you told them that you were mourning a relative's death? How would you feel if someone appeared visibly joyous, if you shared that you had just ended a serious relationship? Additionally, while there is a socially prescribed feeling for any given situation, there are also social expectations and norms surrounding how one is supposed to display their emotion.

Display rules determine how and when these particular emotions are expected to be communicated. Both display rules and feeling rules are gendered. Deri (2015) argues:

> Gender plays an intricate role in romantic relationships and is part of how people relate to each other sexually. Gender means more than the categories of man and woman; it extends to the matrices of ways in which people relate to their identities, roles, and expressions of masculinity and femininity, and to their distance from these categories [...] It is nearly impossible to separate emotion from the constructs of gender, sexuality, and their intersecting regulation.(P.71)

Buss (2000) maintains that men tend to get jealous when their partner has a sexual connection with someone else, and women are more likely to get jealous when their partner forms an emotional connection with someone else. In addition, Clanton (1996) found that women respond to situations that might induce jealousy with manipulative behavior, cattiness, or by trying to work on the relationship in question. Clanton also found that men tend to respond to jealousy with anger and aggressive behavior. These are example of how feeling rules (i.e. cultural norms surrounding emotions) dictate the experience of jealousy and the consequent expression of jealousy. The gendered feeling

rules and display rules surrounding jealousy are connected to larger systems of domination. Jealousy has been found to be connected to male violence and sexual and material ownership (Clanton 1977; White and Mullen 1989). Lastly, Petersen (2004:53) argues, "by learning the culturally prescribed feeling rules for those of their gender, men and women are socialized into different emotion worlds."

Emotion world, a concept developed by Kenneth Plummer (2001) to describe the ways in which a culture's words and concepts shape people's emotional responses. I am using this concept to describe the complex emotion world of jealousy as it has been crafted within our monogamous culture and reimagined through polyamorist theory and, to some extent, practice. An emotion world is a symbolic universe made up of normative response schemes, value assumptions, and emotion words. Within the dominant emotion world of monogamy is the assumption that sexual exclusivity is the epitome of love and commitment. It follows that any deviance from this should be cause for fear of a failed love and lack of commitment. In other words, the dominant emotion world includes concepts like commitment, exclusivity, love, and jealousy (to name just a few). I use this term to describe the ways that cultural expectations shape the emotional experiences of my participants who, through polyamory, attempt to reimagine different emotion worlds with different scripts, values, and norms. These emotional worlds are reimagined against the emotional world of monogamous jealousy.

Recent work has been done by Jillian Deri surrounding polyamorous queer women in Canada and their experiences with love and jealousy as it relates to their polyamorous practice. In her book titled *Love's Refraction: Jealousy and Compersion in*

Queer Women's Polyamorous Relationships (2015) Deri draws from the work of Arlie R. Hochschild and Ken Plummer to formulate specific theoretical tools for making sense of jealousy within multi-partnered entanglements. Originally used for having a conversation about emotions in general, Deri uses the concept of emotion world and feeling rules to have a more nuanced conversation about emotions within the realm of polyamory. More specifically, Deri unpacks the embodied experience and cognitive understanding of jealousy. Deri argues that the goal of polyamorist theory and practice is to minimize instances of jealousy by creating alternative feeling rules within a different emotion world that does not situate exclusivity and ownership at the center of love.

By introducing a term to describe the opposite of jealousy, compersion, polyamorist theory tries to soften the power that emotion tends to have over people in intimate relationships. Compersion is a term coined by the Kerista Commune (1971-1991) to describe feelings of joy or pleasure in response to a partner's sexual or intimate encounters with others. Polyamorists try to rewrite feeling rules around jealousy, and they aim to have jealousy be superseded by compersion. According to Deri's study, polyamorists do this by questioning dominant feeling rules, developing alternative feeling rules, and creating their own norms and strategies for dealing with and renegotiating jealousy. In other words, polyamorist theory has developed rules that help polyamorists negotiate boundaries, disclosure, and initiate communication. Deri states, "According to the polyamorous model, feeling any emotion is appropriate, but acting on that emotion should be tempered with grace" (2015:30).

Jealousy, an emotion "at the intersection of contradictory feelings: love and hate, romance and heartbreak, excitement and fear," (Schippers 2015:6) is not unknown within the polyamorous communities. Just as in monogamous relationships, polyamorist, too, experience jealousy. The rate at which jealousy occurs within polyamorous circles is evidenced in the term *polyagony*, a term used to refer to the pain that is often experienced by polyamorists related to feelings of jealousy. However, the way that jealousy tends to be experienced, handled, and channeled is distinct within polyamory. Being that polyamorous relationships are based on the agreement that it is ok to have more than one intimate partner, polyamorous jealousy is reconfigured in such a way that challenges the dominant understanding of jealousy. The introduction of compersion has fostered a new understanding of jealousy, one that situates jealousy as being merely one way of feeling about a partner's extra-dyadic relations.

The emotion world of jealousy is complex in that, as previously stated, jealousy often co-occurs with a variety of other emotions. Be it resentment, anger, pride, sadness, anxiety, fear, pettiness, or bitterness, jealousy is a complex emotion that has been known to be connected to emotional immaturity, overdependence, and possessiveness (Baumgart 1990; Clanton and Smith 1977; White and Mullen 1990; Salovey 1991; Schippers 2015). On a more extreme level, jealousy has been linked to aggressiveness, overly controlling relationships, and patriarchal violence (Ben Ze'ev and Goussinsky 2008; Edalati and Redzuan 2010; Klesse 2006; Speed and Ganstead 1997; Yates 2000; Schippers 2015). It is apparent that jealousy is not only a huge piece of our emotion world, it is a feeling that is experienced in a multitude of ways. "Like other emotions, jealousy is not a singular

and coherent reaction and it is well known to illicit paranoia, stress, withdrawal, and even fits of rage (Klesse 2018). Jealousy, is thus situated at the intersection of a variety of emotions, and the breaking down of jealousy within multi-partner configurations requires a particular know-how that is often acquired from poly discourse and community.

Feeling rules are essentially that know-how. They are a type of subcultural capital (Bourdieu 1994) used within CNM configurations that help to mitigate, redirect, and redefine jealousy. The reconfiguration of jealousy within polyamorous theory and practice reveals a larger point about how the polyamorous community, as a whole, intentionally unlearns a set of feeling rules while simultaneously learning a new set of feeling rules. These feeling rules are incredibly crucial for making these CNM relationships work. Thus, polyamory is not simply a rejection of institutionalized monogamy and traditional feeling rules, but rather, polyamory is a renegotiation of these rules. This happens both at the individual and community level. Within the community as a whole these new rules serve as a type of subcultural capital. In polyamorous circles, by means of cultural experimentation, participants negotiate specific terms of intimacy. Christian Klesse (2018:1112) describes this subcultural capital as a "repository of response strategies for resolving potential conflicts around jealousy". The alternative emotion worlds and feeling rules that have been developed within polyamory are a reimagining of what it means to be jealous; what it means to open up to others.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODLOLOGY

This research is based on semi-structured interviews conducted between July and December 2018 with 12 people who were practicing some form of consensual non monogamy, identified as consensually non monogamous, and/or had experience with consensual non monogamy (IRB number 18-007). Specifically, I asked participants about their experiences with CNM and why they chose their specific style of relating. I also asked about challenges and benefits of CNM. Some of my participants agreed to follow-up interviews; however, not all of the participants in my study were able to meet for follow up interviews. I interviewed four participants two times.

Recruitment

Participants in my study were primarily recruited through a social networking website (Facebook), as well as through a dating application (Grindr). Aside from these recruiting methods, I also used word-of-mouth and non-probability and snowball sampling (Berg and Lune 2012). All interviews were conducted with my participant's informed consent (Appendix A). Before I began the interview, I reviewed the consent form with them, answered participant questions, and asked then asked them to sign the form. Participants were also given pseudonyms. Interviews were recorded digitally, and I transcribed them all myself. All identifiable characteristics were changed or deleted to

protect their identities. All recordings, consent forms, and any other related documents were kept in a secure and private location.

Before my initial attempt at recruiting participants, I attended multiple local events where I assumed I would be able to meet people who identified as being consensually non monogamous. There was one event that openly welcomed the kink community where I met someone who would eventually add me to their kink Facebook group. I found that this allowed for me to enter the culture of those practicing non-conventional forms of intimacy and establish some rapport with the population I was reaching out to. As such, I hoped to take somewhat of an insider approach to my research. I decided to use this Facebook group as a platform for recruiting participants from Humboldt County. Once accepted to this group, I posted my flyer along with a description of my project and a call for participants. Within 24 hours, I had about four responses. However, I ended up only getting three participants from Facebook. My other nine participants were either from the dating app Grindr (5), referral (2), or my own network of friends (2).

The dating app, Grindr, was uniquely useful as the relationship status of everyone on the app was typically listed on their profile. I contacted those who listed themselves as being in an open relationship. Due to Grindr being used by mainly gay males, the majority of my respondents were gay, bisexual, or queer males. I approached the topic as both an insider and an outsider to the polyamorous practice. When I started my project, I had not yet known the breadth of polyamory and how many of us are essentially practicing polyamory without calling it polyamory. Towards the end of my research, I

began to see that some of my intimate practices could be considered polyamorous. Thus, I recognize my positionality as both someone with little cultural capital and someone with enough cultural capital to relate to my participants in a way that was conducive to meaningful conversation around CNM. By cultural capital I mean the cultural knowledge that contributes to the successful navigation and mobility within a society (Bourdieu 1993).

Participants

My participants identified with a range of relationship statuses at the time of the interviews. One participant was in an open marriage. One was in an open relationship, but was not married. Three participants were in a common polyamorous marriage. Four participants were part of a quad dynamic. Two of my participants were single and two were monogamous. There is some overlap with a few of the participants, meaning that some of my participants were both poly and open, a part of a quad dynamic, but also open and polyamorous. The types of CNM configurations that my participants were able to speak to range from open relationships, relationship anarchy, open marriage, poly marriage, quad dynamics, monogamy, and solo poly.

At the time of the interview, the youngest participant was twenty-three, and the oldest participant was fifty-three. Most participants were 23 to 49 years old. The data collected was gathered in Humboldt County, California, and interviewees were living in Humboldt at the time of the interviews.

Interviews

Each interview started with a prompt for the interviewee to describe their current form of relating (e.g. open, polyamorous). I used a semi-structured interview schedule as to allow for flexibility and a more conversational interview. I followed Kathy Charmaz's lead by using semi-structured interviews as a means for providing the opportunity for participants to share "unanticipated statements and stories" (2006:26). The order in which the questions were asked remained relatively the same. However, I ended up adding questions surrounding love for follow-up interviews. Questions that needed clarification were explained. I prompted to participants to explain their answers when I needed more clarification on their part (Berg and Lune 2012). In addition to the questions noted above, I also asked questions about the trajectory of their relational practices and the degree to which their relationship expectations aligned with the reality of their experience. These questions also prompted the interviewees to reflect on their life trajectory and the trajectory of their relational practices and ideologies.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS

Managing Emotions, Reimagining Emotion Worlds, and Communicative Intimacy

The biggest challenges that were most commonly talked about were jealousy, communication, and feeling honored and loved. Jealousy, as already discussed, is a very complex emotion that is usually wrapped around other sentiments like sadness, heart ache, resentment, insecurity, anger, fear, and many other "negative" emotions. I will begin with complicating an already complex feeling by showing how jealousy was experienced differently by people within different contexts. I will then move into a discussion surrounding communication and the ways that communication facilitates (and does not facilitate) strong CNM relationships. Some of my participants actively reimagined their emotion world of jealousy to include strategies for effective communication that normalized discomfort. Nearly all my participants alluded to the common themes within poly discourse of reimagining emotion worlds and renegotiating the terms of intimacy. The most successful relationships hinged on being able to rewrite feeling rules and reimagine emotion worlds. The participants who expressed fulfillment in their relationships maintained open communication, honesty (with self and partner), compassion, and the capacity for vulnerability. These attributes were all configured against the dominant emotion world of institutionalized monogamy. I will conclude with a discussion on how our intimate practices are shaped by larger structures of power such

as institutionalized monogamy, and then I will provide examples of how my participants

reimagined intimacy and assumed emergent relational practices.

Jealousy and Insecurity

Discourse on polyamory maintains that jealousy is neither inevitable nor

unbearable (Deri 2015). Within the emotion world of polyamory, in other words, jealousy

is understood as an obstacle to love. The goal is to decrease instances of jealousy. This is

in contrast to the dominant emotion world of institutionalized monogamy that situates

jealousy as an indicator of love and commitment. However, all of the participants in my

study described jealousy as being a part of their experience with consensual non

monogamy. Tyler says:

> The jealousy thing. I used to think…. I think of myself as not a jealous person, but
> no matter your level… I feel like jealousy is something that cannot be avoided, at
> least in my personal experience. You can do things to kind of calm yourself and
> relax a little bit better. But jealousy… I think jealousy was just one of the things
> that I was not expecting. But yeah, it's something that you have to deal with
> appropriately in an appropriate manner while pursuing an open relationship.

Tyler alludes to a few challenges of living and loving openly. He first posits that

jealousy is something that he finds to be unavoidable, but he also describes the process of

working through jealousy as that of an individual one that requires self-coaching. This is

the emotion management work theorized by Hochschild. Here Tyler not only works to

control the externally read emotional state (i.e. emotional display), but he articulates in

"calm yourself" the deep emotional work of actually changing how he feels inside to align with the feeling rules associated with jealousy as configured within CNM. This is a common narrative in the poly community that situates jealousy as a personal issue that needs to be worked through individually. That's not to say that support isn't sometimes needed, but the issue, at its core, is something for the individual to overcome. In other words, the feeling rules around jealousy in polyamorous relationships is that jealousy does not need to be unbearable. Rather, jealousy should be something that is worked through openly and with grace. Lastly, he situates jealousy as something that requires a prescribed way of handling, another common theme in discourses surrounding polyamory. Jesse, another participant in a polyamorous marriage speaks to this same theme and adds some more insight when he says:

> Yeah, I mean it's just human nature as far as I am concerned. It's going to happen. You just have to work out why you are jealous in the first place. And if you do that most of the time, at least for me, there's not really a reason for me to be feeling this way. It's just kind of irrational and I just have to remind myself that. Yeah because like, maybe he is going out with some other guy, and I get kind of jealous. Then it's like, ok why am I feeling like this? And generally it's like, ok now there's other stuff that I'd kind of rather be doing right now anyway. Like, he's cute but maybe I'm not that interested or anything. It's not necessarily a big deal so why is my brain making me go crazy? [*Laughter]*

Jesse's understanding of jealousy is similar to Tyler's in that he describes jealousy as being a natural part of the equation, but it need not be debilitating or an obstruction in the relationship. He demonstrates what this self-coaching looks like and how it can be used to navigate feelings of jealousy. His thought process starts with the event of his

partner being with someone else, but he directs his attention back to himself and prompts himself to ponder the underlying reason for his jealousy. Metacognition becomes the essential tool for redirecting the focus from the inciting external event to the internalized programming that has resulted from past experiences. These feelings of insecurities, then, could have nothing to do with their partner being with someone else. They are feelings rooted in a personal narrative of inadequacy or fear. Sometimes there are rational and irrational fears, and participants like Jesse described coming to the conclusion that most of his jealous feelings were irrational, and that his energy should go towards looking inward to address the root cause of those feelings.

Participants reported feeling jealous when their partner(s) devoted too much time outside of the relationship, when they felt like their identity as a parent was being threatened by their metamour, and when their partner's attention or affection towards others brought up feelings of inadequacy. In these instances the intensity of the jealous affect embodied by the individual being interviewed ranged from a small twinge that would subside on its own to an unbearable feeling that needed to be dealt with quickly.

When Tristian and his wife Jasmine decided to open up their marriage, they made the decision with the understanding that their marriage was sacred and rock solid. They would never let anything threaten their foundation, and polyamory would only strengthen their bond. However, Tristian remembers opening up their marriage being a "wakeup call" that revealed to him the ways in which gender and sexuality determines one's experience within polyamory. He explains:

When a monogamous couple decides to be polyamorous, and they go out in the world to start to seek dates, it is a wake-up call for every single man. They do not understand what is about to happen. Because of the aggressiveness of other males in the world and the neediness of men predominantly wanting sexual contact and looking for it so constantly, the woman in the monogamous relationship will see a tidal surge of interest in her. There will be dick pics, and solicitations, and people telling her she's beautiful and awesome and funny. People blowing smoke up her ass for days, and on the guy's side… crickets. Unless you're like Rob Lowe or Brad Pitt, then I guess you'll probably get some more response. But if you're just the average man, then you put yourself out there, and you put your face on the internet and you say "Hi, I'm a nice person and I'm in interested in, you know … I'm in an open relationship…." You've killed it. Like 95 percent of the women who would have considered you are like, "What, you have a woman, but now you want me too? You're an asshole".

Tristian's experience with gender, sexuality, and polyamory can be contrasted with another one of my participants, Benny, who reported having "mirror experiences" with his primary partner. They both had found someone that they were able to form friendships with that also involved sexual and emotional intimacy while maintaining their primary relationship. On top of that, both of their partners were considered temporary, as both of their respective partners were preparing to move away. Them both being gay men who had access to dating apps that facilitated hook ups more than actual dating contributed to the mirroring experiences and mitigated feelings of jealousy. Being gay men with the ability to find sexual partners with relative ease and the understood temporariness affected their experiences with polyamory in a positive way.

Tristian's perception of how gender affected his experience, on the other hand, is telling of how a hetero couple might experience polyamory. Equal opportunity and accessibility for sexual or emotional intimacy is suggested here as a buffering factor and one aspect of their relationship that attributed to the struggles of being in a polyamorous

marriage. Within the first few months of opening up their marriage he told her, "I don't know if I could do this, this is killing me. I am miserable all the time." He made no secret of his distress, and explained that he was very communicative of his every emotion with his wife. It should be noted that Tristian never used the word jealousy. Instead he referred to his feelings as insecurity. He felt insecure with regard to the amount of attention she was devoting away from them. He presented a number of traumatic experiences with insecurities of his wife pulling away and prioritizing herself and her outside relationship(s) over their marriage and family. Within Tristian's emotion world was a deep sense of insecurity that was exacerbated by his wife's breaking of the feeling rules and display rules associated with a partner being in distress. He provided a recounting of a specific time where his feelings of insecurity were excruciating. Tristian tells me:

> I had to remove myself so I wasn't just slobbering at the dinner table in front of the children. I went into the bedroom, laid down, and went into the fetal position and cried because she was going to go have sex with this other guy, and I was just feeling awful like I was losing her. And she really didn't seem to care. Like, she was really way more excited to get down the road and have sex with him. That was priority for her. That's what she wanted to do. So my feelings became an inconvenience.

This is just one example of how jealousy is experienced as unbearable and very painful. By that same token, this is also an example of how feeling rules are not always followed by polyamorists. The feeling rules regarding a partner feeling distressed is compassion. In this scenario Tristian describes his wife being unconcerned and without compassion towards him and his distress. However, most of my participants did not

discuss jealousy as being a personal issue. Rather, the jealousy in their experiences was talked about as being a personal issue of their partner's that in turn affected them and their relationship. One participant, Dan, talks about his main challenge in his open marriage being protecting his partner's feelings and shielding him from his extradyadic sexual encounters within their don't-ask-don't-tell dynamic. He reported having a very high sexual drive, and also links his libido to coming out late in life. He describes it as making up for lost times. Dan told me that they opened up their marriage just before getting married and that the sex in their marriage had long dried up. He reported still loving his husband, but enjoyed variety and often hooks up outside of their marriage. At the same time Dan struggles with the fact that their agreement is don't-ask-don't-tell. Dan told me:

> I don't know what it is. I've tried. I've tried asking the question. Um… but I don't want to push anything. I just wonder what's going on in his head sexually. Not that there's anything wrong with being a-sexual, or just having a low sex drive. But, um… I'm just curious where the…. Like how the jealousy factors into that, right? Like, if he's feeling jealous about that, what's motivating that? Is there something that I could be doing to ease that for him?

In Dan's case his partner was not as communicative as he wished he was. He described his partner as having a difficult time opening up emotionally. The capacity for vulnerability and the ability to enter into difficult conversation became an issue within their relationship and an obstacle to overcome in order to better relate. In this case, the prescribed emotion world of polyamory does not necessarily translate into their relationship. Open communication, a polyamorous staple, is obstructed by a lack of

willingness to be vulnerable. In any case, this is an example of how many of my

participants struggled not with their own jealousy, but with that of their partner's.

Some individuals explained that it would take a lot for them to get jealous. Their partner

having sexual encounters or feelings for others alone was not enough reason for them to

feel jealous as it may be for people within monogamous relationships. One participant,

Tedd, attributed their lack of jealousy to them just being "wired that way". A partner of

Tedd's, Cody, feeling similarly says:

> Um, you know for me just like with my past relationships, I have never really had…. I don't get jealous easily. I think my partners would agree with that. I just don't get it. I can see certain situations where I could become jealous, but so far it hasn't happened. I think it would really take a lot for that to happen. I think it would literally take one of us to have a relationship outside of our quad and for one of us to be spending enough time and energy on that relationship to where it became a detriment to our relationship.

I do not doubt that some of my participants downplayed the effect of their own

jealousy in their experience, but many participants spoke of their struggles with

vulnerability and honesty. Within hetero monogamous coupling it is almost unfathomable

that some people do not experience jealousy, but this is a part of the polyamorous

doctrine. Jealousy is neither inevitable nor unbearable, and so the creation of and

endorsing of this ideology may have caused some of the participants to espouse such a

compersive attitude. Compersion, a concept central to this study that refers to feelings of

joy when your partner feels joy with another, will be discussed in the last section of this

chapter.

Another participant, Mckayla, provided yet another type of experience with jealousy. Among her struggles with being in a polyamorous marriage were regarding her position as a woman and her position as a mother. She tells me about a specific time when she felt particularly jealous and insecure.

> I was out of town for a few weeks, and this was early on. My husband's girlfriend was coming over and interacting with my kids, and I was not comfortable with her doing that while I was out of town. And so I said, "I only want her to be around the kids if I am there," and all of that was rooted in my own insecurities about my place as their mom and that...um… And I guess my husband like … I wasn't able to fully communicate that because he kept having her over when I wasn't there. Like he kept doing it even though I had said don't! And so somehow that communication just wasn't working. So then I kinda had to get her involved and say I am trying to tell my husband not to have you over when I am not here and he is not respecting that and um… she didn't feel like that was for her to have to take care of, that's between you and your husband. And I was l like well IM TRYING [*laughter*] but he is just not understanding. So sometimes like, like that whole thing was based on my insecurity. And so I'll have a lot of emotions and insecurities that are totally irrational. And so I don't feel like I should make a request based on an irrational feeling, but I'm finding that if I don't, if I try to just um, say, "I'll be ok with it," I won't be. And then ugly feelings will fester, and I'll get passive aggressive. So it's better to say hey I'm having this irrational feeling, and it would really be great if you didn't have her over when I'm not here. And when that finally happened like it just takes time you know eventually, now it's fine. It's been years since that happened and now like we are at a place where it doesn't bother me as much.

In Mckayla's situation, she recognized that her feelings were possibly irrational, but she found that she needed to voice them regardless of it being irrational or not. For Mckayla, she had crafted her own feeling rules for her jealousy informed by polyamorous discourse. She allowed herself to feel jealous or insecure, but she recognized that simply communicating those insecurities to her husband brought her a sense of relief. Her

anecdote about her being insecure about this other woman stepping in and performing the role of mother to their children draws attention to the fact that sometimes jealousy is experienced as a response to a perceived threat to someone's identity. Her status as mother, to her, was being threatened by her husband's girlfriend. Furthermore, this is also an example of how communication alone does not promise the complete erasure of insecure feelings. Corey, another participant practicing CNM from within a mostly hetero context, recounts to me a similar experience where his open and honest communication was not enough to maintain a fulfilling relationship. When asked what makes for a successful polyamorous relationship he responded with:

> Communication, just in general. The same thing that makes any relationship work, non-monogamous or not. Communication. Communication of needs and desires, or communication of hurt. It is not just the person communicating but the communicatee like being able to understand and really actually listening instead of just going uhuh, uhuh. That and self-awareness. That way you know what your needs and desires are so that you can express and communicate them.

Corey's main challenges in his experiences, according to him, were at the same time the keys to maintaining a fulfilling relationship. This opens up for an in depth discussion about communication and where it fits into consensual non monogamy with regard to better relating to others on an intimate level.

Communication

      Jealousy and communication were often talked about in connection to each other. Participants talked about how vital communication was to their individual sanity, as well as to the success of their relationships. The ability to communicate honestly was necessitated in times of stress related to insecurity, and it required the capacity for vulnerability. In other words, in order to move past feelings of insecurity, fear, or jealousy, participants had to be honest with themselves and allow themselves to be vulnerable by communicating their fears. This was exemplified in Mckayla's situation and her insecurities with her husband's metamour interacting with her children. Her ability to move past her feelings of insecurity involved self-reflection, honesty, vulnerability, communication, and lastly, time. I did not focus on the role that time played in the context of mitigating jealousy, but it should be noted that many of my participants mentioned time as a salient factor that contributed to their process of transforming their negative emotions. In any case, her experience shows how effective communication necessitates honesty, vulnerability, and self-awareness.

      Emotional labor was the means for understanding themselves and what their own individual history does in the present, in their relationships. Individuals who had more beneficial relationships had done the hard emotional work where they reflected on what was the underlying cause of their insecurities or jealousy. For one participant, jealousy and insecurity was recognized as coming from expectations around gender. Mckayla did a great deal of self-reflection when it came to her insecurities and her jealousy. When

asked if she believed that the gendered stigma around what others think about

polyamorous women who are married is a part of the struggles she faces, she says:

> I wonder if part of it is being female… And then also a lot of my self-esteem comes from positive like people looking at me in a positive way. So a lot of my decisions and actions and reactions are always filtered through how is this going to be perceived. And so um, I have a lot of fear about people thinking badly of me because I am poly or I am not a good enough wife or I am a slut or you know it can go in so many different ways that I am often just like….. There's a lot of voices in my head telling me those things that I have to grapple with. There's a lot of jealousy about if his girlfriend is better than me. There's challenges with um, like fear about the kids… um, there's just all kinds of insecure voices that I am getting better at saying, "that's just that insecure voice," and then to tell him about them also. Not that he needs to fix them, but just for him to know that this is what's going on in my head.

She ultimately found that communicating her feelings was necessary for her to

move past her negative feelings. She worked at getting to the core of where they were

coming from and is sure to note that communicating her feelings to her husband wasn't

always an invitation for him to fix the problem. She recognized that her feelings were her

own: they were insecurities, and she needed to communicate them. We see again how

emotion management helped to cultivate the capacity for emotional alchemy whereas

Mckayla was able to do the emotional work (i.e. identify the insecure voices in her head)

to craft a different emotional world. The situation called for her to practice vulnerability

by having the courage to tell her husband about her fears, even if they were irrational or

made her look foolish. Moreover, she highlights another gendered component around

hetero-polyamory and the stigma of being a polyamorous woman. For many of my

participants, fear of abandonment was at the core of their jealous feelings.

In Dan's open marriage, the absence of vulnerable and open communication on his husband's part was an issue for him and often made for an unhappy marriage. For Tyler, the issue around communication had to do with trying to figure out when would be the best time to approach his primary partner about things that could cause some tension in the relationship. In both of these instances, discomfort is an obstacle that prompts them individually and collectively to figure out how to better relate. The question then became, "what practice can we incorporate in our multi-partnered style of relating that would cultivate a more honest, vulnerable, loving, and communicative relationship?" Jesse, gesturing to the answer to this question, brought a key component of his successful polyamorous marriage. A podcast that focuses on polyamory taught Jesse about a structure for communicating that helped to normalize discomfort that comes from heavy conversations.

According to Jesse, the acronym, RADAR, had helped him and his husband cultivate a relationship that held structured communication at the core of their loving relationship. RADAR stands for Review, Agree, Discuss, Action, and Reconnect. Jesse explained:

> I actually came across a podcast recently called multiamory I believe. And they were talking about this kind of a monthly check in kind of list. An acronym, RADAR. They have different general subjects. Throughout the month the idea is to if you think of something that you know like…. Stuff comes up all the time in any relationship where it's like ok I don't really want to bring this up now because it might turn into a big thing where we were just being happy and watching TV but I thought of this thing so I don't really want to ruin this now. This is kind of something that you can just do at a set time. You know? There might be some heavy subjects. But you have this time set aside so you know that's going to happen. So you can just do these weird awkward or kind of heavy subjects that you don't really want to do during your day to day life and yeah

we've done it for like a couple months now and it's really nice actually. 'Cuz yeah there's stuff that I think of randomly but it's like ok but there's no need to really bring this up right now it's not an emergency or anything. You know I'll just do it at the next RADAR thing instead of just saying eh, I'll do it eventually. It's nice having a set time.

He briefly mentions that he thinks this would be a great idea for anyone, monogamous or not, to use in their intimate relationships. As a society we tend to avoid discomfort, and this avoidance of having uncomfortable conversations has a lot to do with the uncertainty of if and when these conversations will be had. Jesse explained to me that having a set time for the uncomfortable conversations to be had removes a lot of the anxiety and apprehensions people tend to have around having these conversations. Having something like RADAR normalizes the uncomfortable feelings and destigmatized feeling uneasy in the first place. As part of the practice Jesse also notes the importance of remembering the purpose of RADAR throughout the conversation. It's not about winning or intentionally hurting others feelings. Rather, he notes:

The whole point is to kind of get a firmer footing on your relationship you know that's why you're doing it because the whole point is to kind of get a firmer footing in your relationship. That's why you're doing it. You're doing it to benefit. You're not trying to make anyone sad. So you want to make sure that everyone leaves with some sort of positive.

This is just one example of how some of my participants maintained open communication. Katie, a heterosexual woman in a polyamorous quad marriage, made it very clear that communication was the most important thing for her and her partners. She did not use the term RADAR, but she did tell me that in her quad dynamic, "Family

meetings, as cheesy as they may sound, THAT'S the business. Once a month we sit

down, we plan finances, who's going on trips when." The same thing goes for the other

quad polyamorous family Cody, Tedd, and Mark. Each of them describes their group as a

quad but also as a family. Their long-term polyamorous configuration and the success

they felt with regard to maintaining a fulfilling relationship for everyone can be attributed

in part to their constant communication and capacity for vulnerability. Similar to Katie,

these three (I did not interview the fourth) also spoke of communicating their needs and

desires regularly.

The above testimonies are both parallel to monogamous relationships and unique

in that each of my participants are intimately relating to others with the agreement that

they can have sexual and/or emotional relations with others. This relational ideology, as

we will discuss, opens up avenues of jealousy that create opportunities for self-reflection,

vulnerability, growth, and connection. Monogamous and consensually non monogamous

individuals alike deal with feeling of jealousy and communication. However, Corey

describes the difference when he said:

> [Polyamory is] really no harder than monogamy. Like…. Honestly to make
> monogamy work you need to communicate. You need to draw boundaries, and
> you need to respect each other's needs and desires. It's the same thing with
> polyamory. The difference I feel that right now, with monogamy being an
> assumed default, you never actually discuss those things which is why I think so
> many people are serial monogamists. Their relationships fall apart because they
> think that relationships should just work, and that is NOT true. Never has been
> never will be. Relationships are work. Real love is probably the hardest thing
> you'll ever do in your life but it's also going to be the most worth it.

Corey gestured toward compulsory mononormativity and how people tend to assume that monogamy, being the only valid form of relating, should just work because it is the natural way of intimating. He begins to bring home the main findings of my work and the importance of said findings. I will now move into a discussion surrounding the reimagining of intimacy, what that means, and what emergence means in the context of polyamorous ideology and practice.

Reimagining Intimacy

I think that expectation is not necessarily reality. And I think that sets a lot of people up for unhappiness to think like, "Oh, this is what a relationship looks like." Then they can't get to that, or they're on their way to that, and then their partner does something that doesn't fit their picture and then they get pissed. So I think we can create whatever we want in our relationships, if we just let go of all that indoctrination.

Each and every one of my participants was somehow reimagining intimacy. It can be argued that anyone practicing intimacy is in a way reshaping and reimagining intimacy to suit their own personal needs, desires, and worldview. Yet my CNM participants were co-creating alternative worlds in which the feeling rule was to replace jealousy with compersion. Accomplishing compersion required excruciating vulnerability, an emphasis on intentional discomfort to be worked through in love, and non-hierarchical conceptions of intimacy. The above quotation from Mckayla attests to the situation many monogamist find themselves in when they realize that their intimate

wants and needs do not align with the dominant narrative of monogamous intimacy. The

quote ends with a point that is central to my work here: we have the ability to create

whatever world we wish to live in.

One of the biggest contributions that have been made by and for the community

of people practicing CNM is the term compersion. Compersion, contrasted with jealousy,

is a term that refers to the feeling of joy associated with seeing a loved one love another. I

had not heard of this term before I began interviewing, but it quickly became an integral

piece for understanding the polyamorous ideology, practice, and experience. I began

asking my participants how compersion fit in their relationships. Corey explained:

> Jealousy won't necessarily go away. I think it can but can't. I don't know. I think compersion comes with advanced emotional understanding of the whole non monogamy thing. You have to work on... As I have said before, we have grown up in a society that takes relationships as belongings, and they are not. And I think that if you have worked on yourself enough to the point where you have been able to at least start to step beyond that ownership feel in a relationship. That's the first step towards compersion. 'Cuz once you realize they don't belong to you. You don't get to make their choice. You start to apply your love just to them rather than what you want them to do. When you start to apply your love to them rather than just what you want them to do and want them to be. When you know that they are happy that makes you happy and sex is happy ha. Or at least it should be. I think that's where people can get to with compersion. I think that compersion is an amazing goal. I think anybody that is going to be in any kind of non-monogamous relationship should at least look at working towards that because I think that's the point: To love someone for who they are rather than what you want them to be. And once you get to that point I really feel like compersion just comes. Once you let go of that ownership. I think that jealousy comes from that ownership. Like they shouldn't be sleeping with anyone else because they are MINE. So once you get beyond the mine part I think that's where it comes from.

Here Corey brings together the ways in which larger structures (e.g. heteromasculine compulsory monogamy) and smaller scale (individual self-reflection) are in conversation with each other, constantly negotiating the terms of intimacy. We have been socialized to believe that true love has a strong component of ownership and, as Corey explained, ownership and entitlement is a part of the issue of jealousy and feelings of inadequacy. He shed light on how larger structures shape our intimate practices, but he also shed light on how the CNM community resists these larger structures. One of the ways that it is resisted is polyamory and the creation of a new emotion world. Within this emotion world is another piece of resistance, the creation of a term that directly challenges our concept of jealousy. Compersion, then, is an example of how polyamorists create their reality by describing it. This reality is a direct challenge to the dominant narrative of monogamy, an institutionalized form of relating that upholds heteromasculine patriarchical domination.

Another way that polyamory has challenged dominant notions of intimacy and, by extension, larger structures of domination, is by fostering a non-hierarchical understanding of love. Participants who expressed being in long-term fulfilling relationships all described their relationships as egalitarian. In other words, the participants who described their relationship as more beneficial than detrimental believed in a non-hierarchical idea of love. Their notions of love had changed and expanded to make room for multi-partnered loving in such a way that they let go of being the only special person in their partners life. They found ways of being okay with that. Mckayla exemplified this point when she said:

Originally when we opened our marriage and then became poly like, part of why I said yeah let's do this was that I thought, oh I'm always going to be his wife. I'm always going to be like the top of the pyramid or whatever aha and now that all this time has gone by, and he has this other person in his life, I don't know that I'm necessarily like on top of the pyramid anymore, and so that's been a lot for me to grapple with. Like oh I don't necessarily hold the trump card, and I don't want to, but it's been hard to redefine my marriage you know because at first it was defined as like I am his wife and what I say goes. You know what I mean? I'm the most important thing. I'm the best, and I think that has been one of the hardest things for me to grapple with. Like oh that's not the way that is. I could get mad about it and throw a fit but that's not going to help. So trying to figure it out like oh the picture of my marriage needs to change for us to like continue to get along. You know? It's not about best or more, it's just about if my relationship with my husband is important than I will invest time and energy and thought into maintaining that relationship and I'm…. whatever happens with anybody else, it doesn't have to affect that.

Jesse also said something similar when he said, "Yeah just even with friendships or whatever different people you are going to have different relationships with, not necessarily better or worse, but just different and fun and yeah." Both Jesse and Mckayla allude to nonhierarchical positioning of their relationship. I say positioning because at this point it become an intentional effort to disentangle their understanding of intimacy from the common understanding of intimacy. They both recognize that they do not necessarily have to believe that some relationships are above another relationship (although in some cases they may be), but they create their own emotion world where they look within to find the root of their insecurities, they communicate them, and they reimagine what intimacy is. This is all done to better their relationship with themselves and their partners. The key here is that they first work on themselves. As Corey said

earlier, it is hard work, but ultimately, if the purpose is to learn how to live well and

relate better, than it is worth it.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

The participants in my study and their experiences with CNM shed light on the types of challenges people practicing CNM struggle with while attempting to reimagine intimacy. Within the recrafted emotion world were feeling rules that were rewritten to better suit the multi-partner relationships. Within CNM relationships jealousy is redefined and reworked with the purpose of mitigating and decreasing jealous instances. For my participants, jealousy was something that could be worked through and even replaced by compersion. Working through jealous feelings means deep self-reflection and the capacity for vulnerability. Through vulnerability my participants aimed to better understand themselves and their fears. This emotion management, emotion work, and emotional alchemy (in theory) is understood by my participants as a means for being in right relation with themselves so that they can be in right relation with their partners. The finding of this study speaks not only to polyamorous relational configurations, but to the complexity and nuances of opening up to people in general.

A limitation unique to this study was the fact that all my participants were white. All of the participants had in some form cultural capital that allowed for them to feel comfortable telling their story. None of my participants identified as trans or people of color. Future research should focus on how trans folk and people of color experience CNM in Humboldt County. Also, due to the convenience of Grindr, most of my participants were gay or bisexual men. Future research should focus on trans women of color and how they experience CNM.

The purpose of this research is not to place CNM above monogamy. I do not wish to place CNM or polyamory on a pedestal as a superior way of relating. Rather, as Mimi Schippers (2016) argues, "institutionalized monogamy as a compulsory relationship form, upholds and perpetuates hetero, white, and patriarchal domination" (p. 26). It may work for many people, and that is ok. However, it is important to unpack monogamy and its implication for upholding the status quo, as much as it is important to unpack polyamory and its implications for resisting and transforming systems of power. Polyamorous ideology and practice have the potential to challenge mononormativity in such a way that could help undo some of the systems of domination (Schippers 2016).

My contribution to this small corner of sociology is the application of the concept of emergence to the phenomenon of polyamory and CNM. I view the relatively small interactions and practices of polyamorists as contributing to the creation of alternative and better ways of relating. These alternative forms of relating, in turn, have the potential to move from relatively small interactions to becoming a part of larger systems and patterns (i.e. mainstream culture). In other words, I borrow from Adrienne Maree Brown (2017) when I say that these alternative relational ideologies are emergent. Brown writes,

> Emergence is our inheritance as part of this universe; it is how we change. Emergent strategy is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for. (P. 7)

The participants in my study intentionally create different emotion worlds, feeling rules, and practices that aim at being in right relation with themselves and each

other. The goal is to increase their capacity for love and, by extension, a more liberated

world. One participant, Mark, hit this point I now make when he said:

> I think the more examples of how people do it differently impacted my life to realize that we have the choice to live our lives the way we want to. And as long as those things are mutually agreed upon then why not? You know, yes you might be butting up against the system that is modeled a different way but my hope is that gay marriage will give the straight community permission to do it differently.

He continues:

> Gay roles have evolved into many types of open relationships, varying types of open relationships. In my own experience in relating to straight vs gay counterparts, I have seen that the gay counterparts have more open relationships and develop those earlier. And I have had a lot of conversations with my straight counterparts who say "God I wish I could do that. I could never mention this to my partner. I don't think that would work." our society has said this is what it's supposed to look like and created this image, It could work for some people if that's what's right for them. But our society has said this is the ONLY model. My hope is that when people can see that a gay couple can get married and still have a poly relationship or other ways of having a relationship that don't destroy their marriage. You know that aren't deceitful or lying, that maybe they can go oh we can decide to do it this way? Or we don't have to get divorced? Or we can agree to do it a different way? For me I realized that gay marriage made our relationship more visible and more open and out to the general community and by the general community being able to look inside our relationship and as they get to know us they are going to see how people are defining their relationships in ways that might not be traditional.

Monogamy, is not the issue here. The issue is that monogamy, as the only

acceptable form of relating intimately, tends to obstruct us from exploring relational

components such as jealousy in deeper ways. Mark's understanding of what being open

about who you are and what you are doing can do for you and your community is a

crucial point I'd like to make. Polyamory offers a window through which we can unpack

intimacy, much like how breaching any social norm opens up pathways for seeing and

talking about things we take for granted. By deliberately breaking social norms surrounding intimacy, and unpacking the struggles surrounding that experience (e.g. jealousy, communication, and love) we see how people practicing polyamory formulate and practice alternative forms of relating that aim not only at ameliorate their strife, but at reimagining a more world of infinite love. Being in right relation and relating better becomes a purpose that they actively work towards. Being in right relation with each other and living well is what these people ultimately want, and this can only be made possible by allowing for vulnerability, honesty, and communication. In the emotion world of polyamory, all of this emotional work is done with intention, collaboration, and compassion. I recognize that this is not always the case, and there are instances of unethical CNM. My point is that there is potential for these communities and their practices to shape the way we all relate, CNM or not. Being vulnerable not just in their solitude, not just in their intimate relationships, but allowing for vulnerability in the communities they love allows for these communities to see alternative ways of relating that foster depth, understanding, and connection. We are wounded in relation, and we heal in relation.

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Appendix A

<div align="center">

Informed Consent
Research on Open Relationships in Humboldt County

</div>

You are invited to participate in a study about open relationships in Humboldt County.

My name is Isaac Torres, and I am a graduate student in Public Sociology program at Humboldt State University. Through this study I hope to gain a deep understanding of how people belonging to this subculture experience intimacy in relation to social expectations and disapproval. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete an open-ended interview that will take between 30-60 minutes. The interview will be recorded. The recordings will be transcribed and then destroyed within 6 months of the interview date.

The risks involved for participants are no greater than the normal stress experienced in your daily life when reflecting on your experience with your romantic and intimate relationships. You may find benefits from the opportunity to think and talk about your experiences with open relationships.

Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to discontinue the interview at any time without penalty.

All interview data will remain confidential. You will be asked to select a pseudonym. Only aggregated demographic information that could not be used to identify an individual will be reported out.

The transcripts will be maintained in a password protected electronic file and will be destroyed within 10 years. This consent form will be scanned and stored in a separate password protected file for the same time period. Original paper consent forms will be destroyed after they are scanned and stored.

If you have any questions about this research at any time, you can email my thesis advisor Michihiro.Sugata@humboldt.edu . If you have any concerns with this study or questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at irb@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-5165. You can also contact me, Isaac Torres, at iwt1@humboldt.edu or (213) 294-5590

I am at least 18 years old. I have read and understood the above information and agree to participate in this study.

_____   _____ _____
Signature Printed Name   Date

Appendix B

Consensual Non-Monogamy

Introduction: My name is Isaac. I am here with _____. It is [date & time]. I am going to be asking you a series of questions about your relationships, why you chose this style of relating, your experience within this style of relating, and how all of this has affected you. Remember that it is okay if you want to skip a question, for any reason. We can also take a break, if you need. Any questions before we get started?

Entry
   1. Can you describe for me what what kind of relationship(s) you have and what you would call them? Would you consider yourself open, poly, or something else?

2.   How long have you been involved in this type of relationship style? Were you monogamous before this?
a.   Can you tell me more about your relationship history?
b.   How did you first get involved in an [insert preference] relationship?

         (Significant people - how influenced, How old were you, location, what else happening? How is this different/ similar from other relationship styles that are considered more "open"?)

3.   What were your expectations about this form of relating before you entering your first open/poly relationship? (How shaped? How changed? Compare to experiences?)

4.   What were the biggest challenges to living and loving like this?
5.   What were the biggest benefits to living and loving this way?

Salient Experiences

6.   Can you tell me about a person, or perhaps people, who have most impacted your experience with [insert preferred style of relating]?

7.   Has your understanding of sex, gender and sexuality changed at all from since choosing this style of relating? (Significant events/experiences)

8.   How are ideas about sex, gender and sexuality communicated within the open/poly community?
         (Formally/informally?)

<u>Relationship with Personal Life</u>

9.   How has being in a [insert preference] relationship affected your personal life?
        (Who knows? Friend choices? Family? How do you talk about your relationship with new acquaintances? Your relationships?)

<u>Love</u>

Gift Giving, Quality Time, Physical Touch, Acts of Service (Devotion), and Words of Affirmation

1. We didn't really touch on love in our last interview, can you tell me where you think love fits into this? Is love a part of this?
2. How do you define love?
3. What does love look like in your relationship
4. How, if at all, has your idea of love changed?
a.   If it hasn't changed, why do you think it hasn't?
b.   What has changed about it?
5. What do you feel shaped your older conception of love?

<u>Closing</u>

10.   As you look back on these experiences, are there any other events that stand out in your mind? Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during this interview?

12.   Is there anything else you think I should know to better understand your experiences with your relationship(s)?

Is there anything you would like people in general to know about living and loving this way that

we did not quite cover?