

Queering Polyamory: Configurations, Public Policy, and Lived Experiences

By
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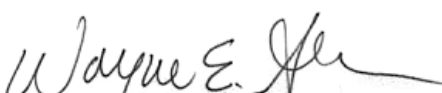
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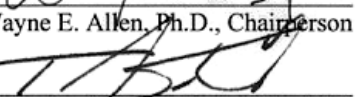
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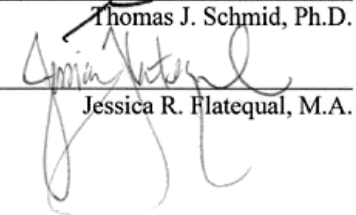
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ABSTRACT

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“Queering Polyamory: Configurations, Public Policy, and Lived Experiences” explores polyamory, a relationship “lovestyle” that involves more than one loving partner, while taking a close look at the social construction of modern day queer polyamory including marriage and sex law. The author states that queer polyamory is socially constructed due to its inclusion of self-identifying gay men, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, gender-variant, omnisexual, pansexual, and queer individuals.

This thesis includes a study of participants involved in queer polyamorous relationships. The study concludes that a population that engages in queer polyamorous relationships is diverse in regards to demographics; this is to say state of residence, age, gender, ethnicity, religious/spiritual affiliation, sexual identity and/or orientation, and relationship identity and/or orientation and ways individuals come to be part of queer polyamorous relationships. The study looks at how “out” the participants are and how public policy is affecting the lives of those who engage in queer polyamorous relationships. In conclusion, this study suggests future research options and ways society and public policy can begin to alleviate some of the stressors those in queer polyamorous relationships feel due to public policy and morality law.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

“The culture of sexuality is changing very deeply in America”
(Perper & Cornog 1999:101)

Polyamory is an umbrella term that means “loving many at one time” (Sonnie 2000:244). It is a neologism and hybrid word of the Greek ‘poly’ for ‘many’ and Latin ‘amor’ for love. The term has been in occasional use since the 1960s, however, polyamory, as a practice has existed far back into history. The coining of the term is credited to Morning Glory Zell Ravenheart in her 1990 Beltane article “A Bouquet of Lovers.” Additional credit goes to Jennifer Wesp who in 1992 created the Usenet newsgroup alt.polyamory (Wikipedia 2005:Polyamory).

Under polyamory some terms are polygamy or having more than one spouse at a time, polyfidelity or group marriages, polyandry or multiple husbands, polygyny or having more than one wife at a time, and other terms as those in the relationship(s) deem fit.

Some individuals and groups engage in what they call “revolutionary polyamory.” Hong and Rivera (2005:24) state, “To us, revolutionary polyamory means purging the seeds of oppression that try to corner us into ownership, control of our bodies, and illusions of security through something outside of one’s self.” They started Revolutionstar Experience as an effort to connect to our larger communities” (Hong & Rivera 2005:24) stating, “It reflects our belief that oppression alters all of our existence

and intimate interactions. Polyamory deconstructs and dismantles within our most intimate lives the systems of sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia and other oppressions” (Hong & Rivera 2005:24). They “try to address how sexual liberation is not just about the sex we have but how it is also hindered by the systemic control of our thoughts” (Hong & Rivera 2005:24). Hong and Rivera conclude, “This is a lifelong journey.”

Emens’s article “Monogamy’s Law” states, “polyamory is not only a practice; for some, it is a theory of relationships” (2004:320). Emens further states, “The principles are aspirational in another way. They are offered by polys not only as functional tools for creating and sustaining intimacy among multiple people; they also represent an ethical vision of how those relationships should be conducted” (2004:320). Through an “attempt to synthesize the content of many sources” Emens states, the principles, while not all unique to polys, “are self-knowledge, radical honesty, consent, self-possession, and privileging love and sex” (Emens 2004:321).

Regardless of one’s theory behind polyamory it is something society grapples with. Most people can understand loving more than one child but loving more than one romantic partner seems to strike hard at the institution of monogamy and those who are within its walls. Monogamy is a hybrid Greek word where monos means single/only and gamos, marriage (Wikipedia 2005:Monogamy). The definition of monogamy is embedded within the institution of Western marriage, thus placing this institution within modern constructs of law, church, and government.

Throughout this thesis social construction and queer theory will be used.

Within the social constructionist strand of postmodernism, the concept of socially constructed reality stresses the on-going mass-building of worldviews by individuals in dialectical interaction with society at any time. The numerous realities so formed comprise, according to this view, the imagined worlds of human social existence and activity, gradually crystallised by habit into institutions propped up by language conventions, given ongoing legitimation by mythology, religion and philosophy, maintained by therapies and socialisation, and subjectively internalised by upbringing and education to become part of the identity of social citizens.

Socially constructed reality can also mean that portion of reality which consists of social or cultural artifacts, see *The Construction of Social Reality*, John R. Searle, The Free Press, 1995 (Wikipedia 2004:Socially constructed reality).

Halperin defines queer as “acquiring its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (Halperin 1995:62). Queer polyamory, through its social construction and necessary inclusion of self-identified gay men, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, gender-variant, omnisexual, pansexual, and queer individuals historically creates this opposition to the norm. The study is mindful of Halperin’s (1995:65) warning:

What makes ‘queer’ potentially so treacherous as a label is that its lack of definitional content renders it all too readily available for appropriation by those who do not experience the unique political disabilities and forms of social disqualification from which lesbians and gay men routinely suffer in virtue of our sexuality.

Chapter II will cover the literature as it relates to the “social construction of queer polyamory” through the topics of: polarity in polyamory and monogamy, queer polyamory and the birth of the construct “homosexual,” queering marriage, normative sexual identity, sex law, and the queering of heterosexual polyamory.

Chapter III will cover the research methods and data collection procedures while chapter IV covers the results of the study. These include: demographics, relationship

configurations, how participants became part of a queer polyamorous relationship, the “out” factor, what is it like to be in a queer polyamorous relationship, benefits and limitations of a queer polyamorous relationship, how public policy, law, and communication affect the participants, and participant views of beneficial public policy, law, and communication as it relates to queer polyamorous relationships.

Chapter V will be a discussion with a critique of this study, as well as a look at future research. Chapter VI will conclude the study. Following the conclusion will be the references and appendices. Appendix A will cover the IRB Approval, B the consent form, C the survey instruments, and D the tables.

Statement of Problem

Monogamy, as an institution and practice, has been challenged in recent years due to rising infidelities, higher divorce rates, women gaining rights and increasing economic stability, as well as by those openly involved in loving multi-partnered relationships. As the queer and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) movements around the world have shown, if there is an institution to be challenged, living proudly in an open way is a powerful means to challenge that institution.

Due to this challenge, it is the intention of this thesis to look at sexuality, relationships, and relationship definitions based on their connotation within the mainstream social discourse as a constructed political and social constructional matrix. Queering polyamory was chosen out of a desire to understand how the world came to know what polyamory was and is, as well as wanting to see how this matrix of

relationships specifically engenders identity within the queer community. This thesis will examine social constructs, inquire into public policy, gather information on current queer polyamorous relationship configurations, and gain insight into the life experiences of those engaging in queer polyamorous relationships.

Bent Flyvbjerg, in his argument for socially meaningful social science states, “I would choose to work with problems that are considered problems, not only in the academy, but also in the rest of society. Second I would deliberately and actively feed the results of my research back into the political, administrative, and social processes that I studied” (Flyvbjerg 2001:156). It is with this intention that this study attempts to understand and gain insight from those who stand outside of an institution that does not allow for choice or equality. Monogamy, as an ideal, is more of a “groupthink” (Janis:361) ideal than it is an actual practice due to the high rate of divorce, infidelity statistics that range from 15 – 50% (Hyde & DeLamater 2000:321; Gershaw 1994) where heterosexually married couples have another sexual partner regardless of gender, and that many people are in fact living in committed loving open multi-partnered relationships that defy idealized monogamy.

“The institution of monogamy itself is never questioned, only the experience of it” (Robinson 1997:150). Monogamy itself must be questioned. We must not continue to question only the *other* but we must question the institution of power itself if we are to protect the disenfranchised minority from the tyranny of the majority.

Need for Study

Currently, there is little information beyond self-help books (see Easton & Liszt 1997, Anapol 1997, and Noël 2004) in the field of polyamory and few articles that look specifically at the queer aspect of polyamory. These large gaps in academic material further marginalize and legitimate the silencing of those who practice polyamory. The intention of this thesis is to bring voice to those who are silenced and to inject academic research into the social discourse and educational institutions of a larger world. The research is intended to provide a descriptive foundation for further work on this topic.

Research Questions

Three research questions of focus were:

1. What are current queer polyamorous relationship configurations?
2. What are current queer polyamorous lived experiences?
3. How do public policy, politics, and law affect the life of those in queer polyamorous relationships?

Using broad-based questions, I intended for the responses to be various and unique to each individual while at the same time representing themes within the population studied.

Limitations

1. Data collection was based on a purposive sample.
2. Data was only collected via the Internet.

3. Because of the limited population sampling, generalizations can only be made about the population studied, and not the polyamorous population at large.

Delimitations

1. Literature used in this study was mainly limited to the availability of inter-library loan and Internet-based material.
2. Information was gathered and recorded via typed Internet forms.
3. Data collection was limited to 100 participants.

Assumptions

1. Questions were answered truthfully and to the best of the participants' ability.
2. Participants may give honest answers that may nonetheless create a different image from what we might find if we researched their actual behavior rather than their stated behavior.

Definition of Terms

Bigamy: "The act of entering into a marriage with one person while still legally married to another" (Merriam-Webster 2004).

Bisexual: "A person who has significant romantic, emotional, physical and/or sexual attractions to members of both sexes. The frequency, intensity, or quality of attraction is not necessarily directed toward both sexes equally" (Carleton).

Closed Relationship: Relationships in which sexual and romantic connections are restricted to the people involved. This can be as few as you to any infinite number of people.

Come Out: “To disclose one's own sexual identity to another.

2. To discover that one's own sexual identity is different than previously assumed.
3. To deal with one's own and others' reactions to the discovery or revelation of one's sexual identity.
4. (“for”) To disclose another's sexual identity with their permission or at their request. (See *out*)
5. Sometimes applied to disclosure of other information than one's sexual identity.”

(Sexuality.org N.d.)

Couple-centrism: “The predominant belief that the pair is the only relationship option” (Potter 1998).

Fluid Monogamy: “An agreement to confine the exchange of bodily fluids to a closed group that has been screened for sexually transmitted diseases” (Potter 1998).

FTM: “Female to male. Used to specify the direction of a sex or gender role change”

(Sexuality.org N.d.).

Gay (man/male) (community):

One who has significant sexual and romantic attractions primarily to members of the same sex (as oneself), or who identifies as a member of the gay community. Sometimes refers only to gay males, sometimes only to gay males and lesbians. Although some people use the term “gay (community)” to refer to all sexual minorities (or the sexual minority community), Lesbians and Bisexuals often do not feel included by it. (Sexuality.org N.d.)

Gender Identity: “How one thinks of one’s own gender. A person may identify as male, female, transgender, or a number of other definitions” (Carlton 2004).

Gender-Variant: “A term for one who does not fit the established gender standards. Often used in place of transgender or transgendered” (Annette 2004).

Group Marriage: “A lovestyle in which three or more partners consciously chose to be primary with each other. Decisions are made by mutual consent. A group marriage may be open or closed. Sexual orientations may vary” (Anapol 1997:177).

Intersex: “A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male” (Intersex Society of North America 2005).

Intimate Network: “A polyamorous lovestyle in which several ongoing committed relationships coexist. There can be a mix of primary, secondary, and tertiary relationships. The structure may be parallel, circular, or web-like” (Anapol 1997:177).

Lesbian: “A woman whose primary romantic, emotional, physical and sexual attractions are to other women” (Carleton).

Line: “The members of a polyamorous relationship, similar in theory to a family tree” (Potter 1998).

Lovestyle: “The design or structure of a sexuallove relationship. Like the term lifestyle, it implies a conscious choice. *syn.* Relationship orientation” (Anapol 1997:178).

MTF: “Male to female. Used to specify the direction of a sex or gender role change” (Sexuality.org N.d.).

Monogamy: “*archaic* : The practice of marrying only once during a lifetime.

2. The state or custom of being married to one person at a time.
3. The condition or practice of having a single mate during a period of time”

(Merriam-Webster 2004).

Multipartner Relationship: “Any nonmonogamous lovestyle” (Anapol 1997:178).

Nonmonogamy: “A lovestyle which allows for more than one sexual relationship at a time” (Anapol 1997:178).

Omnisexual: (see pansexual)

Open Relationship: Relationships in which sexual and romantic connections are *not* restricted to only the people involved. It is the freedom to love and have sex with others.

Out: “To be open about one's sexual identity with someone or in a situation”

(Sexuality.org N.d.)

Pansexual: “Exhibiting or implying many forms of sexual expression”

(Merriam-Webster 2004).

Poly: “Short for polyamory, polyamorous, or one who practices polyamory” (Potter 1998).

Polyamory: “The philosophy and practice of loving more than one person at the same time” (Potter 1998).

Polyandry: “The state or practice of having more than one husband or male mate at one time” (Merriam-Webster 2004).

Polyfidelity: “A lovestyle in which three or more partners who are all primary with each other agree to be sexual only within their group. More primary partners can be added with everyone’s consent” (Anapol 1997:179).

Polygamy: “Marriage in which a spouse of either sex may have more than one mate at the same time” (Merriam-Webster 2004).

Polygyny: “The state or practice of having more than one wife or female mate at one time” (Merriam-Webster 2004).

Primary: “In a hierarchical relationship structure, the main lover, e.g., a spouse” (Potter 1998).

Queer: “Reclaimed derogatory slang for the sexual minority community (eg. *Queer Nation*.) Not accepted by all the sexual minority community, especially older members.

2. Sometimes used for an even wider spectrum of marginalized or radicalized groups and individuals.” (sexuality.org)

Relationship Orientation: “The preference for sexual relationships or lovestyles which are monogamous, nonmonogamous, inclusive, open, closed, casual, committed, serial, or polyfidelitous, etc. *syn.* Lovestyle” (Anapol 1997:179).

Sadomasochism (SM): “A rather vague term referring generally to fantasies and experiences regarding the introduction of domination, submission, bondage, sadism, masochism, humiliation, and related activities into erotic play” (Wiseman 1996).

Secondary: “In a hierarchical relationship structure, a lover other than the primary lover” (Potter 1998).

Serial Monogamy: “Bonding first with one mate, breaking up, and bonding with another” (Fisher 1982:223).

Sex: “Sex is whatever the people engaging in it think it is” (Easton & Listz 1997:39).

Sexuallove: “The synergic fusing of love and sexuality into a single erotic emotion in an intimate relationship” (Sexuality.org N.d.).

Sexual Minority: “Used as a broad-based term to encompass all those individuals who experience discrimination and oppression based on their affectional or gender orientation” (Atkinson & Hackett 2003).

Sexual Orientation: “Describes the focus of a person's amorous or erotic desires, fantasies, and feelings, the gender(s) one is primarily ‘oriented’ towards.” (Wikipedia 2005:Sexual Orientation). One’s sexual orientation may differ from one’s sexual behavior.

Slave: In the sadomasochism (SM) community is “A person who has an on-going, structured relationship with a dominant. One who assumes the submissive role, often in a highly developed and committed way to a particular person. Calling someone ‘my slave’ generally indicates a relatively sophisticated, ongoing relationship between the two of you” (Wiseman 1996).

Swinging: “Recreational sexual activity in which participants swap partners, usually without forming lasting relationships; though not considered “true” polyamory, this falls under the open-relationship umbrella” (Potter 1998).

Transgender (TG): “Used both as an umbrella term and as an identity. Broadly it refers to anyone who does not identify with his or her assigned gender. As an identity the term

refers to anyone who transgresses the traditional sex and gender characteristics and/or expectations” (Carleton 2004).

Transsexual (TS): “Someone who identifies with a gender other than the one they were assigned at birth, and goes through physical processes of adjustment. Some transsexuals choose to use hormones and/or to have operations to change their physical anatomy to be congruent with their self-perception” (Carleton 2004).

Triad: “A polyamorous relationship in which all three lovers are involved with one another, sometimes without hierarchical distinction” (Potter 1998).

Two-Spirit: is a spiritual identity.

The definition of a Two-Spirit person varies across the Native American cultures in which they appear. In general, Two-Spirit people are born one sex, and end up fulfilling the roles assigned to both sexes, in addition to roles reserved for Two-Spirit people. They are considered part male and part female (or wholly male and wholly female), often revered as natural peacemakers as well as healers and shamans. The term ‘Berdache,’ coined by European explorers to describe people whose gender they did not understand, was replaced by ‘Two-Spirit,’ a term Two-Spirit people use to refer to themselves (GLSEN 2001).

V: “A polyamorous relationship in which one person has two lovers but the lovers are not involved with each other” (Potter 1998).

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

“Queering Polyamory: The Social Construction of Queer Polyamory”

Indeed, one reason monogamy is so important to us is that we are so terrorized by what we imagine are the alternatives to it. The other person we fear most is the one who does not believe in the universal sacredness of—usually heterosexual—coupledom.

- Adam Phillips (Emens 2004:278)

Polarity in Polyamory and Monogamy

People engaging in multiple relationships have experienced considerable denegation from pro-monogamists, especially pro-monogamists in the Western world. Propaganda stereotypes against people engaging in multiple relationships have ranged from child abduction and pedophilia to negative views of gay rights and their role in the downfall of society, to foment against women’s rights and immigration accompanied by nations that such practices undermine marriage and religious teachings.

Unbeknownst to most people, oppression of polygamy, polygyny, polyandry, and polyamory is currently happening within immigrant populations where such practices were traditionally practiced. As in the case of same-sex marriages being denied legal recognition, immigration status into the United States denies any forms of marriage other than monogamous heterosexual ones. If a person has more than one spouse he (or she) is to have legal documentation of his (or her) divorce before entering into the United States.

Bigamy, or “the act of entering into a marriage with one person while still legally married to another” (Merriam-Webster 2004), is illegal in the United States. But the oppression of immigrant “bigamists” who are merely honoring traditional practices can be seen in the health care and housing industry and many other governing institutions. This causes immigrant families to seek other options for legal relationships such as adopting partners in order to circumvent what is in fact an ethnocentric and intolerant legal system.

A common problem area surrounding this issue concerns the separation of church and state within the Bill of Rights in the United States Constitution. In the Fundamentalist Mormon religion, polygyny is both accepted and prescribed and in the Muslim religion the Qur’an decrees, “Marry of the women as seems good to you; two, or three, or four... if you fear that you may not be fair [to several wives], then take only one” (Bishop 1996:76). In reality, however, the separation of church and state in the Bill of Rights does not work because when a Mormon or Muslim citizen wishes to engage in polygyny they are not protected or respected by the governing laws of the United States. This can be seen in the case of the authorities using state-mandated institutionalized religious beliefs to force police officers out of polygynous marriages in the states of Utah and Arizona. “The Peace Officer Standards and Training council (POST) unanimously agreed that such officers live in violation of Utah law and therefore should be stripped of their police certifications” (Canham 2003). Attorney General and member of POST council Mark Shurtleff stated, “They are sworn officers, and they are sworn to uphold the law, but they are openly committing third-degree-felony bigamy” (Canham 2003).

“Shurtleff was backed by the council, composed of sheriffs, police chiefs, state officials and educators” (Canham 2003).

The state authorities are institutionalizing and mandating religious beliefs because they are not separating a recognized religion’s beliefs from state-mandated law. In addition, “if POST revokes the police certification of all or most of the Hildale police force, the Washington County Sheriff’s Office will take over law enforcement responsibilities in the area, according to Sheriff Kirk Smith” (Canham 2003). This means that police officers from predominantly Christian towns, where monogamy is practiced, will be working within Mormon towns and will be given the jobs of polygynous police officers if they are fired. The Salt Lake Tribune notes the “Washington County deputies have spent more time in the Hildale area since a recent polygamy summit” (Canham 2003). Mainstream Christian police officers working within Mormon towns are enforcing a system based on their own religious beliefs, which is embodied in this statement by Sheriff Smith: “If there are people who are fearful of getting out of a relationship, we want them to know that our deputies will assist them in any way possible” (Canham 2003). This statement, as well as the article, never discusses anyone who asked or showed a desire to leave their relationships, nor does it state anywhere what is wrong with a person having multiple partners other than the law of bigamy.

A glimpse into the past of the United States will show that the Puritans had a lot to do with the formation of our current thoughts and laws on monogamy. “Puritanism was at least in part a reaction to the Anabaptists, who encouraged polygamy” during the 16th century (Bishop 1996:96). “The term *Anabaptist* was used to describe and define

certain Christians during the Reformation. These Christians rejected infant baptism, choosing instead believer's baptism. Since many of them had been baptized in their infancy, they chose to be rebaptized as believing adults. So their enemies called them *Anabaptists* – ‘re-baptizers’” (Anabaptist Mennonites). The area of polygamy aided in separating these two Christian sects.

In a study by Ford and Beach in 1951 it was “found that men were permitted to have more than one wife at a time in 84 percent of 185 cultures they studied” (Kilbride 1994:41). Kilbride (1994:41) also found

A common misconception in the West is that polygyny is primarily for sexual satisfaction. That this is not the case can be seen in the sociology of polygynous family life, which reveals that all cultures in which polygyny is practiced share a number of commonalities. For example, ideally, work is divided evenly among wives; the fair practice visiting rule is observed whereby the husband is expected to visit each wife equally; wives usually have separate houses and sleeping quarters; and the first wife is given the more respected status of senior wife. Similarly, in polyandrous households there is a senior husband status with the husband dividing duties among his co—residential males.

Fisher (1982:223) points out:

Perhaps the custom of monogamy will change. As Robin Fox says: “left to their own devices, societies will work out some form of multiple mating system. Monogamy has never worked.” Indeed, this change has already begun. Most Westerners are not by-and-large monogamous. We practice “serial monogamy,” bonding first with one mate, breaking up, and bonding with another. So do people in all other societies. Divorce is permitted everywhere. Yet most individuals around the world who do divorce will proceed to bond again.

Opponents to Fisher's argument face challenges with divorce rates in the United States at 38 percent in 2003 (CDC) and even more non-married couples having children and then moving on to new partners.

Kinzey (1987:106) further documents this belief in non-monogamy as nature by stating:

The lack of social networks is the major disadvantage of monogamy *per se*. Promiscuity does not normally occur in *any* human society, but polygyny and polyandry taken together are much more frequent than monogamy. They encompass a greater extension of social networks than monogamy; they have greater long-term adaptability, and consequently they are more common. Probably the majority of cultures in the world practice some form of extended family in which the living group contains more than a single pair and their children.

Even within the United States we do not see many people who practice strict monogamy. Most people have close friends who are like family or large families that take on multiple roles within the family unit.

Knight (1995:176) adds,

Among non-human primates, monogamy produces not advanced forms of sociability but a very elementary, simple and sparse social life, with little variety or political complexity to select for novel forms of self-awareness or intelligence. Compared with other primates, those which are monogamous appear to eat lower-quality diets, have an inferior ability to perceive social relationships and have minimal levels of role differentiation (Kinzey 1987:109). Moreover, monogamous primates are known to be “behaviorally more conservative, and ecologically more restricted” than their non-monogamous counterparts (Kinzey 1987:105). The behavior of gibbons, for example, is stereotyped, with little regional variation.

These statements by Knight and Kinzey pinpoint some possible correlations that are problematic in the United States. Overall, U.S. citizens eat lower-quality diets that include an abundance of fast food such as McDonalds and Burger King. They also seem to have an inferior ability to perceive social relationships or role differentiation as demonstrated by the lack of upholding the law even though they practice such role differentiation. Also, U.S. citizens tend to be behaviorally more conservative than many

other nations, as can be seen in our anti same-sex union and sodomy laws. Finally, U.S. citizens are seemingly ecologically more restricted, which is demonstrated by our progressively homogenous culture that we are imposing through capitalism and war around the world.

Queer Polyamory and the Birth of the Construct “Homosexual”

Queer Polyamory is socially constructed through its inclusion of self-identifying gay men, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, gender-variant, omnisexual, pansexual, and queer individuals. To understand the distinction between polyamory and queer polyamory it is important to recognize the birth of the construct “homosexual.”

Foucault would argue that it is impossible for queer polyamory to have existed prior to the birth of the construct we know as homosexual, which he dates to the 19th century. “Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (1990:43). He further states that “the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized – Westphal’s famous article of 1870 on ‘contrary sexual sensations’ can stand as its date of birth” (Foucault 1990:43).

D’Emilio states, “only when individuals began to make their living through wage labor, instead of as parts of an interdependent family unit, was it possible for homosexual desire to coalesce into a personal identity – an identity based on the ability to remain

outside the heterosexual family and to construct a personal life based on attraction to one's own sex" (D'Emilio 1993:470). According to D'Emilio this shift occurred due to capitalism, thus aligning the birth of the constructed "homosexual" along with the growth of capitalism. Many arguments can be made about the outward acceptance and understanding homosexuals have gained as capitalism has taken a stronghold on Western society. Some of these include increasing tolerance with the media, church, and recently the Massachusetts's landmark case legalizing same-sex marriage.

"Capitalism has created the material conditions for homosexual desire to express itself as a central component of some individuals' lives; now, our political movements are changing consciousness, creating the ideological conditions that make it easier for people to make that choice" (D'Emilio 1993:474). Thus capitalism is aiding the way to queer polyamorous relationships by creating a space for homosexuals to construct themselves as such and then allowing them the area of acceptance to explore their lovestyle and develop it into either monogamous or polyamorous relationships.

"Love Community and Human Evolution" quotes social and cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead's statement,

99 percent of the time that humans have lived on this planet, we've lived in groups of 12-36 people. Only in times of war - or what we have now, which is the psychological equivalent of war - does the nuclear family prevail, because it is the most mobile unit that can ensure the survival of the species. But for the whole flowering of the human spirit, we need groups, tribe, community.

It may appear that polyamory is a return to Mead's tribalism, however, those tribes were created upon family groups, hunting groups, kinship ties, and the necessity of a tribe's members to work together for survival. Since the advent of capitalism it is not

necessary for a tribe to work together to live unless one does not have the money for survival. One can pay others to watch his (or her) children, buy food from a supermarket, and even pay others to clean one's house while taking a conference call over the Internet. These modern arrangements may appear as similar to tribes because they represent a connected social group, but the modern situation is driven by capitalist money incentives rather than love or mutual survival.

In modern contexts, religion is often used as an essentialist model for why queer polyamory is unnatural and why monogamy is the way of God. Gayle Rubin answers this by stating “the old religious taboos were primarily based on kinship forms of social organization. They were meant to deter inappropriate unions and to provide proper kin” (1993:12). Here Rubin has implied that while these forms of relating may have been practiced in the past, modern religion is a social construct that has imposed its will through the use of taboos upon those wanting to enter into multiple forms of relating.

While modern critics employ religion in their argument against alternative lovestyles others argue that Bonobo apes (‘Pan pansicus’) are an example of functional, caring, accepting, and peaceful queer polyamory. Bonobos, or pygmy chimps, are human's closest primate relatives sharing “more than 98 percent of our genetic profile” (de Waal 1995).

de Waal (1995) states,

The species is best characterized as female-centered and egalitarian and as one that substitutes sex for aggression. Whereas in most other species sexual behavior is a fairly distinct category, in the bonobo it is part and parcel of social relations--and not just between males and females. Bonobos engage in sex in virtually every partner combination (although such contact among close family members may be suppressed). And

sexual interactions occur more often among bonobos than among other primates. Despite the frequency of sex, the bonobo's rate of reproduction in the wild is about the same as that of the chimpanzee. A female gives birth to a single infant at intervals of between five and six years. So bonobos share at least one very important characteristic with our own species, namely, a partial separation between sex and reproduction.

The problem with comparing humans to Bonobos is that Bonobos are exhibiting pansexual behavior not living in queer polyamorous relationships where one or all of them self-identify as a gay man, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, gender-variant, omniseual, pansexual, or queer individual.

Self-identification is the key component to queer polyamory's social construction among humans. It can be documented back in prehistory that acts we now deem as homosexual have existed for a long time. However, until the medicalization of the homosexual in the 19th century and the rise of industrial capitalism, which led to the separation of the sodomite and the homosexual, there was not a category with which homosexuals could self-identify. Since the legitimation of the homosexual category in the late 20th century, we can now begin to consider the construction of queer polyamory as a legitimate identity in the early 21st century.

Comparisons with primate relatives or our prehistory in tribes, or even a system of marriage where women are seen as oppressed and controlled such as polygyny, become problematic essentialism when one does not utilize all possible biological and social constructs found throughout history to define relating behaviors. In order to bring queer polyamory further into the future it is necessary to utilize both sound comparison and a radical theory of sex. Gayle Rubin states, "A radical theory of sex must identify, describe, explain, and denounce erotic injustice and sexual oppression" (1993:10).

Queering Marriage

“...Both sides in the debate over same-sex marriage seem to agree on one thing: Whatever happens with gay marriage, multi-party marriage should remain impossible” (Emens 2004:281).

Just as Jagose uses Brasell (1995) to argue that “by juxtaposing queerness with nationality, Queer Nation successfully denaturalizes conservative and essentialist understandings of nationhood” (1996:108); polyamorous marriage juxtaposed with queerness denaturalizes the conservative and essentialist understanding of marriage. Queer Nation created multiple and ambiguous concepts of nation, while queer polyamory creates multiple and ambiguous concepts of marriage. It forces those who dogmatically believe in a two person opposite sex monogamous marriage to “turn the mirror” on their own statement of what “the heart of marriage is.” This “turning of the mirror” on one’s own belief can lead to anger and discrimination against polyamorous individuals in the name of safeguarding the children from a “moral abomination.”

Stanley Kurtz (2003), in an article entitled “Beyond Gay Marriage,” states “gay marriage will almost certainly weaken the belief that monogamy lies at the heart of marriage.” Here again, monogamy is reinforced as the “heart of marriage” thus placing queer polyamory in the role of denaturalizing marriage. Kurtz’s argument is well laid out and thorough, with references to the ACLU, Tom Green, Ettlbrick, Ertman, and Minow. The problem within his argument is the presumption that monogamy is the baseline of marriage. This essentialist model is limited, however, because it lacks a look into the historical creation of monogamy. It lacks Mead’s research on the social construction of monogamy due to the effects of war, as well as the high rate of divorce found in Fisher’s

pair bonding research. While pair bonding is the most frequent type of sexual behavior among humans, without taking the social construction of monogamy into account, it is impossible to state that monogamy is at the “heart of marriage.” One may ask whose marriage, what moment in time, what religion, race, ethnicity, gender, sex, class, country, and national origin; along with many other questions to denote exactly what lies at the heart of that particular marriage.

Essentializing marriage down to monogamy is like stating that the heart of fruit is in its round shape. A fruit's round shape is open to interpretation. Its location in history, region, growing season, and genetic makeup is what differentiates an orange from a tangerine, not only its roundness. While marriage is not fruit, the heart of it is open to interpretation.

If monogamy is *not* at the “heart of marriage” then what creates the opposition to polyamory? In an article titled “Monogamy’s Law” Elizabeth Emens argues, “A key reason for the opposition to polyamory is, somewhat paradoxically, the pervasive or potential failure of monogamy” (2004:284). Emens further states that “‘universalizing’ possibilities of a particular minority practice may drive allies away, rather than creating the conditions for solidarity through common ground” (2004:284). “Rather than prompting outsiders to identify with polyamorists, the potential of nearly everyone to imagine him or herself engaging in nonmonogamous behavior leads outsiders to steel themselves against polyamory and to eschew the idea of legitimizing such relationships through law” (2004:284). Emens calls this “the paradox of prevalence” (2004:284).

The institution of marriage and marital benefits come at a cost as well. First, marriage is denied to homosexuals and most transgendered individuals. It denies rights to unmarried groupings and cohabitating adults and it sets a standard of heterosexuality for homosexuality to emulate. Marriage (traditional and monogamous) regulates sexual pleasures and relations and it is designed to discipline those outside of it such as sex workers, divorcees, the promiscuous, unwed parents, and those below the age of consent. It can create in-group hostility and it often ignores other societies practices that it has impact upon (Warner 1999:88-89).

Transsexual, transgender, and gender-variant individuals challenge binary notions of gender. They are therefore not allowed to marry the person of their choice if their birth certificate states that they are of the same-sex. “The power to define sex is left to the individual states” and “generally the most important instrument for the purposes of marriages is one’s birth certificate” (Currah 2001:186-7). Having only fifteen states that allow postoperative transsexuals to change their birth certificates demonstrates the problem of mixing gender and sexual orientation into an institution that does not recognize true diversity and additionally restricts those who are diverse from entering because they do not fit within the parameters of one biological man and one biological woman equals a monogamous marriage. Trans individuals do not even factor into Kurtz’s argument because he can only see that “gay marriage” is going to lead to polyamorous marriage, which according to him “comprises a bewildering variety of sexual combinations.” None of his combinations within the article discuss trans individuals; sexual orientation is presumed upon gender.

Trans individuals represent a problem for poly marriage because they are not accepted within the same-sex marriage movement nor heterosexual marriage and thus, even if Kurtz's argument that "gay marriage" will lead to polyamorous marriages, trans individuals are still left out of official documentation as their own gender leaving trans-identified individuals out of what could be legal gender-recognized queer polyamorous marriages. Also, the heterosexual powers that control marriage are likely to control same-sex, polyamorous, and trans marriage in a continuing tradition of sexual regulation and discourse.

Drawing upon Foucault we must ask, "Do we truly need a *true sex*?" to which he replies, "with a persistence that borders on stubbornness, modern Western societies have answered in the affirmative. They have obstinately brought into play this question of a 'true sex' in an order of things where one might have imagined that all that counted was the reality of the body and the intensity of its pleasures" (1980:vii).

Foucault consistently deconstructs the discourse and regulations of sexuality. One area where we can see this distinction of gender and sex is in eighteenth century attitudes towards hermaphrodites. "Biological theories of sexuality, juridical conceptions of the individual, forms of administrative control in modern nations, led little by little to rejecting the idea of a mixture of the two sexes in a single body, and consequently to limiting the free choice of indeterminate individuals. Henceforth, everybody was to have one and only one sex" (Foucault 1980:viii). While this refers to hermaphrodites and not trans individuals per se, the correlation to one's assigned sex and gender is clear, as is the

beginning of discourse within the eighteenth century around gender and its relationship to ambiguous gender identity.

From this point forward, “sexology was to propound two powerful ideas: that ‘male’ and ‘female’ are innate structures in all forms of life, including human beings, and that heterosexuality is the teleological necessary and the highest form of sexual evolution” (Herdt 1996:28). When heterosexuality, along with the paradox of prevalence, is placed as “the highest form of sexual evolution” within a system of monogamous marriage it places power in the hands of heterosexual monogamists, denying those who engage in queer polyamorous relationships any rights to “the highest sexual evolution” embodied in the institute of marriage.

Normative Sexual Identity

“In producing a coalition of non-normative sexual identities queer has often been accused of working against the recent visibility and political gains of lesbians and gay men” (Jagose 1996:114). From this standpoint, an argument can be made that queer polyamory is a non-normative sexual identity and through this non-normative construction queer polyamorists will take identity away from those with “normative sexual identities.”

Socially created normative sexual identities will lose some standing through queer polyamorous arrangements but this points directly to the connection between social construction and “normative sexual identities.” If one’s vested interest is holding ground on an identity that in and of itself is socially constructed, then it is likely that anything

can sway those bridges and shake up what it means to be in a “normative sexual identity.” What creates a normative sexual identity changes and shifts over time. Prior to the 19th century homosexuality was not in the category of “normative” but over time and through socially created action and capitalism it has risen to the status of “normative” for a growing sector of the population. In other words, it has gained “cultural capital.” Now, queer polyamorists are moving into the field of “normative” and it rattles the cages of a category that people have isolated and prided themselves in. Queer polyamorists allow for a multitude of definitions and ways for one to identify but they are self-identifying individuals and not victims of a caged-in selection of essentialist jargon and labeling.

Sex Law

A large area of concern for polyamorists is sex law. According to Rubin “sex law is the most adamant instrument of sexual stratification and erotic persecution. The state routinely intervenes in sexual behavior at a level that would not be tolerated in other areas of social life” (Rubin 1993:18). Rubin further states, sex law is harsh, and not a perfect reflection of the prevailing moral evaluations of sexual conduct. Obscenity laws enforce a powerful taboo against direct representation of erotic activities, and that anti-obscenity laws also form part of a group of statutes that make almost all sexual commerce illegal. Additionally, Rubin points out that the “primary mechanism for insuring the separation of sexual generations is age of consent laws” (Rubin 1993:20). For queer polyamorists the most worrisome and essentialist statement that comes out of these sex laws is “the only adult sexual behavior that is legal in every state is the

placement of the penis in the vagina in wedlock” (Rubin 1993:20). “Sex law is similar to legalized racism. State prohibition of same sex contact, anal penetration, and oral sex make homosexuals a criminal group denied the privileges of full citizenship. With such laws prosecution is persecution” (Rubin 1993:21).

Monogamy is central to the enforcement of sex law. Without monogamy as the central key to marriage and the sexual unit, then sex laws are open to further interpretation, and what is obscene is held up to a mirror. Monogamy, religious morals, and law are then put to question. Currently, it is convenient to safeguard monogamy because it allows for the sex law to buttress “structures of power, codes of behavior and forms of prejudice. At their worst, sex law and sex regulation are simply sexual apartheid” (Rubin 1993:21). The juxtaposition of apartheid and sex law shows that there is a strong fear of and prejudice against anything other than married monogamy. Using the historical data to calculate how sex laws have changed and contributed to the birthing of the construct “homosexual” helps to understand the social construction of queer polyamory and monogamy within an apartheid system of sexual bigotry. Neither form of relating is without its construction and relation within society, thus neither can be labeled as the “natural” or “correct” way of being, but simply ways of relating that differ from one another. All are informed and engendered by social construction.

Problems arise when stigmas are attached to queer polyamorous individuals because “sex is a vector of oppression” (Rubin 1993:22). Oppression creates limited, little, or no access to power or wealth, relegating information regarding other ways of relating to the margins. In real terms this often leaves individuals to feel lost and

confused while figuring out their feelings. It creates laws to remove children from “obscene” environments and individuals, and it is a not-so-subtle form of oppression that targets people on the basis of gender, sex, sexual orientation, transgender, age, and differing abilities.

Queering Heterosexual Polyamory

A court case exemplified in Emens’s (2004:311) research helps to answer the question “how are heterosexual polyamorists queered.” At the time of the court case, Shane, April, and Chris were in a V format triad along with Alana, April’s child from a previous relationship. Shane and April were legally married. Their V format triad was arranged so that April had a sexual relationship with Chris and Shane but Shane and Chris did not have a sexual relationship with each other. In this case, Alana’s paternal grandmother filed and won the removal of Alana from her home. The Honorable Herbert Lane used a patriarchal monogamous moral pretense to remove the child from the household. Patriarchy was used in that it was not the man’s choice to decide but “What I have got here is a young lady who has decided to have an alternative life style and the issue becomes is that life style, in fact, detrimental to this child” (Emens 2004:311). Stating she wanted to have her cake and eat it too judge Lane said, “Well, parents can’t do that” (Emens 2004:311). He added, “the child is going to be placed with the Department of Children’s Services with an extended visit in the grandmother’s home until such time as the mother resolves her situation” (Emens 2004:312). Lane never took into account the fact that the men had a choice in this situation as well. In the end by

dominating the mother and her free choice, judge Lane instituted patriarchal monogamous moral law in addition to seeing this grouping as other than heterosexual when stating, “Now I am not about to put that child back into a situation where all three of these people are in the same bed. She has got a legal husband. Make a choice. It is just that simple” (Emens 2004:312).

His entire pretense was based on the idea that “Parents have to set the correct examples for the kids. And part of the statute says that you have to be concerned with the moral upbringing of the child” (Emens 2004:311). It is clear that neither their sexuality nor the healthiness of the child was actually taken into account. However, what was taken into account was the presumed “immoral” upbringing of a child outside of monogamy. The institutionalized laws of patriarchy and monogamy, and their implied morality, worked together to break up this family regardless of the child’s actual state of health.

As this case exemplifies, it does not matter what sexual behavior those in the relationship have stated they do but that those who are polyamorous will be seen in the eyes of the law as having group sex together. With this, and other examples poly individuals have been through, one can only conclude that even heterosexual polyamory is queered in the eyes of the law. And this queering is not due to one’s self-identification but due to misplaced “morals” embedded in laws, accompanied by a lack of insight into the process of human self-identification and behavior. If we abdicate our right to self-identity we submit to narrow identity strictures like institutionalized monogamy. In so

doing we allow society to sew a large pink “Q” on our identity and thus construct us as ‘other’ when we freely choose alternative amorous arrangements.

CHAPTER III

Research Methods

Jurgen Habermas: ““You are talking about skills like hammering and playing chess, but what you really want to do is undermine Western society.’ To which Dreyfus replied, ‘you are right, that’s exactly what it comes to’” (Flyvbjerg 2001:22).

Configurations, Public Policy, and Lived Experiences

“Queering Polyamory: Configurations, Public Policy, and Lived Experience” is a study that focuses on what the current experiences are of those within the poly community, as well as the needs they express. It is an open-ended survey of 100 participants focusing on specific topics in which the actual diversity of the population studied is revealed. This study is merely an introduction to the future studies that need to be conducted. It touches only upon that which needs to be looked at for this present purpose. In order to know more, however, in-depth personal interview studies, as well as topic specific studies will need to be administered. It is these future studies that will aid in fostering understanding, protections, and help for the community at large. This study is simply a real and honest look at personal identities outside of the rigid boxes and binary systems of society.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this exploratory descriptive survey was to survey the current configurations and lived lives of those who are involved in queer polyamorous relationships. Using the lens of queer theory and social construction, this study attempts to bring about a larger understanding of those who are in queer polyamorous relationships. For the terms of this thesis I have defined a queer polyamorous relationship as one in which at least one person in the relationship self-identifies as a gay man, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, gender-variant, omnisexual, pansexual, and/or queer, as well as having at least one individual in the relationship self-identifying as polyamorous. This is a change from the consent form (see Appendix B) and survey instruments (see Appendix C) that included two-spirit and intersexed as well. These were removed from the definition out of respect for the communities and because further research needs to be done if they are to be viably included. For further information on these two communities, please see the “Critique and Future Research” section of this thesis.

Qualitative Procedures

This study includes procedures built upon the basics of qualitative procedures. Qualitative procedures as discussed by Rossman and Rallis (Creswell, 2003:181-3) are:

- Qualitative research takes place in the natural setting
- Qualitative research uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic.
- Qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured.

- Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive.
- Qualitative researchers view social phenomena holistically.
- Qualitative researchers systematically reflect on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study.
- Qualitative researchers use complex reasoning that is multi-faceted, iterative, and simultaneous.
- Qualitative researchers adopt and use one or more strategies of inquiry as a guide for the procedures in the qualitative study.

Concept Advocacy/Participatory Approach

Along with the qualitative strategies and open-ended survey, this study utilized the concept of an advocacy/participatory approach because the “inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political agenda” (Creswell 2003:9). Due to heterosexist power structures and lovestyle (relationship orientation and/or identity) minority status, those involved in queer polyamorous relationships are affected by overt policy and a hidden political agenda. Many cultures, ethnicities, genders, lovestyles, and sexual orientations/identities are present in queer polyamorous relationships thus creating further marginalization that needs to be examined throughout the study. This was used so as “to not further marginalize the participants as a result of the inquiry” (Creswell 2003:10).

This study is expected to boost advocacy and participation in dialogue that promotes an understanding of queer polyamorous configurations and life experiences.

Hopefully, it will inspire work to establish change in the way policy is created around alternative lifestyles.

Role of Researcher

During this research my role as the researcher has been to evaluate my critiques against my own personal biases, values, and personal interests about polyamory, lifestyles, human relating, relationship configurations, politics, and policy. One of my biases is that I believe polyamory is an acceptable and healthy relationship lifestyle. Also, through my studies I have seen that politics and policy have a negative impact on lifestyles, sexual orientation, racism, sexism, and marriage rights. Additionally, I know some of the polyamorists involved in the study.

It is with these known biases that I critically evaluated any lines being drawn on what to disclose. I attempted to address issues of power whenever they arose. It is not my intention to add to the pool of negative polyamory information or to say that polyamory is the only way to be. Rather, it is simply to examine in a scholarly fashion one alternative way of relating.

Finally, as the researcher inquiring about others' lives, I was attentive to their communities and customs.

Data Collection Procedures

Personal polyamorous contacts, the Internet, as well as the snowball technique were specifically selected because polyamorous people represent many cultures and live

throughout the United States. It is important to note that self-identified polyamorous individuals are throughout the world, however, this study focused on the United States.

LiveJournal (<http://www.livejournal.com>) was chosen as a source of contact because they are host to many intentional discussion communities for self-identified polyamorous individuals. Some of these include: polyfamilies, ethical sluts, poly r people 2, and polyamory. Additionally, an ad for this study was e-mailed to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender centers on the National Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Community Centers website (<http://www.lgbtcenters.org/>) and the LGBT Campus website (<http://www.lgbtcampus.org/directory.htm>).

I was a known researcher studying the lived experiences of polyamorists. This aspect was beneficial because I was able to collect data as it was revealed. Information private to poly individuals and communities I worked with may have limited the study, however, I worked to limit this dissonance as much as possible through the consent form and open-ended questions.

In order to ensure participants' anonymity when needed, as well as not revealing private information in a public forum such as study writing, I used an open-ended interview survey format (see Appendix C) and a consent form that allowed for the participant to be quoted by their "name of choice" (see Appendix B). Consent forms and surveys were conducted through the Internet. Non-protected documents such as newspapers, books, journal articles, journal writings, pamphlets, and any other form of paper or electronic media possible were collected to build upon the history and social

construction of queer polyamory, especially in regards to life experiences, relationship configurations, public policy, and politics. No voice or video equipment was used.

Data Recording Procedures

Survey recording only took place via the Internet consent and survey form. A documents and materials protocol was employed with a distinction between primary material (i.e. information directly from polyamorists, policy makers, and situations) and secondary material (i.e. secondhand accounts of polyamorists, policy makers, and situations) (Creswell 2003:190).

Data Analysis Procedures

For the data analysis portion I used the 1998 outline by Rossman and Rallis (Creswell 2003:190).

It is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing memos throughout the study. It is not sharply divided from the other activities in the process, such as collecting data or formulating research questions.

It involves using open-ended data, for the most part. This requires asking general questions and developing an analysis from the information supplied by participants.

In the end, the research involved a detailed description of individuals in queer polyamorous relationships life experiences with relation to configurations, public policy, and politics followed by an analysis of the data for themes or issues.

Narrative Structure

The narrative structure of this study is description, clarification, and definition. The narrative outcome was compared to queer theory through an analysis of Halperin's (1995:62) definition of queer and its relation to the social construction of queer polyamory, relationship configurations, public policy, and polyamorists. Further, the findings were compared to literature that speaks on polyamorous life.

Ethical Issues

This study ensured the right to voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time. The participants understood the purpose of the study, procedures of the study, and had the right to ask questions, obtain a copy of the confidentially form, and have their privacy respected. Other ethical issues revolved around the use of the word participant instead of subject and using language that was not biased against the members of any group. One anticipated goal was to write the study in such a way that it would not be used against the people I am studying.

In order to ensure that ethical guidelines were met, this proposal went through an Institutional Review Board at Minnesota State University, Mankato (see Appendix A).

Significance of the study

The study hopefully will encourage more queer polyamorous studies, an area lacking within the literature. This study represents an attempt to build upon the knowledge base of polyamorous and queer studies. It is the intent of this study to aide in

teaching, educating, and learning about queer polyamory. Hopefully, others will study and continue to build upon the field of polyamorous studies. Further findings will be developed as future research is conducted and reviewed.

Preliminary Pilot Findings, Budget, Timeline

The study had no budget or preliminary studies. It was done in 2005 throughout the month of March and capped at 100 participants.

CHAPTER IV

Results

“Let us speak for ourselves.”
- Catie, a participant

Demographics

There were 100 participants in this survey. First, participants were asked for general demographic information. The results revealed that the population who took the survey was diverse in regards to state of residence, age, gender, ethnicity, religious/spiritual affiliation, sexual identity and/or orientation, and relationship identity and/or orientation. Ultimately, the population was more female, White (or Caucasian), Bisexual, and polyamorous than a purposive sample might predict. The break down and diversity of these categories may be seen on tables located in Appendix D. Two individuals that participated in the study but whose identities were not represented in the demographics are one self-identified Army reservist and one self-identified Anarchist.

Relationship Configurations

Once the demographic information was complete, participants were asked to describe their current relationship configuration. This proved to be a tricky task for both participant and researcher. As one participant stated, “If you can work that out without resorting to graph paper, I’m impressed.”

This participant's response held true for most of the participants due to the self-created and communicated relationships that included a variety of individuals. Some examples of who was part of the relationship configurations were spouses, partner's partners, boyfriends, girlfriends, friends, platonic relationships, sexual encounters, sadomasochism relationships, and/or anyone the participant considered family. Additionally, relationships varied between open sexual and/or emotional relationship, as well as closed sexual and/or emotional relationships. Due to every relationship that was given being different, a few examples that represent the diversity of responses are included below:

- Chuck a “gender queer-female bodied, woman loving, more than butch” Quaker has lived “with a female partner for 22 years” and has “a second partner of more than a year.”
- Lori, a bisexual white female Asatru Pagan is “married to a male, but it is open to allow [her] to date females.”
- Wolfgang, a hetero Hispanic male of sexual spirituality is in a polyfidelity “V format: two wives, one of the wives having a male partner.”
- Kellen, a queer gender-variant White individual is “in a committed relationship with a primary partner.”
- Justin, a Bisexual White Jewish male (FTM) states, “I’m in a primary relationship with another man (who is also trans) and we both have casual sexual partners and friends with whom we also have sex, together and (my partner) separately.”

- Tom, a Bisexual Unitarian Universalist male states, “I am currently living in an open quad square with my wife (S), my girlfriend (M) and her husband (B). My wife has an outside boyfriend (O). B is only romantically involved with M, and no one else inside or outside the square. S, B, and myself are all bisexual, M and O are heterosexual. B’s predominately identified as homosexual, but remains in his marriage because of his commitment to his vows.
- Lady Hilary, a leatherdyke queer Irish Pagan female states, “I live in my home with my primary slave; my second slave lives 1.5 miles away and our 4th in the dynamic lives in the next city. I make the decisions about basic household life for both slaves. We are all emotionally monogamous to the group. Each has a different need or desire for outside casual sex needs, all of which come back to me for approval.”
- An unnamed queer Catholic Caucasian female states, “I am in a gender-monogamous open marriage. Outwardly, it looks a lot like a conventional heterosexual marriage.”
- Ace, a queer butch dyke White Ashkenazi Jew states, “I am married to my primary partner and we are starting a family together. We are both queer, and he has casual sex or relationships with other men while I have the same with other women. But our relationship always comes first, and is the only long-term committed relationship in either of our lives at the present time.”

This is by no means inclusive of all queer polyamorous relationships. However, as these examples show, queer polyamorous relationships are dynamic and diverse.

While they may appear to be, as Kurtz's (2003) has stated, a "bewildering variety of sexual combinations," it is important to note that the participants stressed that their relationships are consensual, openly communicated, and adamantly honest. From the participants point of view, the only bewilderment comes from those who are not allied to or part of the polyamorous community.

How Participants Became Part of a Queer Polyamorous Relationship

Here again the ways varied from a simple statement of, "Love grows" to "I fell in love with the guy, and we're both queer and poly" to "I made a conscious choice after a 7 year monogamous relationship with someone who consciously tried to make me jealous. Their failure to make me jealous caused much self-reflection. My current marriage began with us mutually exploring the ideas of polyamory, on the net and in books. We did not actively pursue any outside relationships until after 7 years of marriage."

Many responded with polyamory "linking" or as being "natural" to them and most stated they entered into their current relationship by "choice."

Below is a selection of additional responses:

- An unnamed "very sexually open" Caucasian Pagan female stated, "By amazing luck!!! We met through the Internet. Alt.com to be exact."
- Joel, a Jewish White polyamorous male states, "The polyclan of which I was a part started with the merger of two triads, and added several other 'sidecar' relationships over time. I'm not sure how many participants identified as queer, gay, or bi; it didn't seem important at the time."

- Crowraven Shea, an Omnispiritual Italian American “heterosexual female that is open to a loving bisexual relationship” states, “I fell in love with a man who is polyamorous and was introduced to the concept of loving more [than] one. It fit me since I have had many times in my life where I would have to choose one person over the other or I was the other person in a triangle relationship. I believe in the spiritual concept of one love.”
- An unnamed White bisexual female states, “My partner and I started talking about, ‘Have you ever thought about having a 3-some?’ As ‘cloud’ talk. It went positively (we had similar ideas about non monogamy). That was about 11 years ago. We’d been going to a local bisexual social group and heard people talking about ‘polyamory and we kind of thought ‘Yeah, that’s us! That’s (more or less) how we feel.’”
- An unnamed Native American/White MTF Transsexual Witch states, “The idea was proposed to me by my partner who I began to develop feelings for and I decided to give it a try”
- An unnamed Puerto Rican/White Jewish Queer Female states, I “Found that a close friend had romantic/sexual interest in me, and took a chance!”
- Spike, a Queer White male states, “I have been legally married to one woman for ten years; five years ago we met and fell in love with another woman and she has become more and more an important part of our life every since. We’ve all moved in together (along with our two year old daughter) a year ago.”

- An unnamed Bisexual Pagan White Female in a bi-ogamy relationship states, “It was tough, but I finally found the right girl.”

Again, as with the diversity of configurations, so too is the diversity of ways one may become involved in a queer polyamorous relationship. It is important to note that those who explicitly stated a feeling on their relationship said things such as, “I am freer to be myself” and “it is about being myself, and being complete in and of myself.” This was typically linked to the idea of being more comfortable to be oneself and not being everything to one person in order to love another as a complete person. This correlates well with Easton and Liszt’s statement that, “the fundamental sexual unit is one person; adding more people to that unit may be intimate, fun and companionable, but does not complete anybody” (1997:35).

The “Out” Factor

Polyamorous individuals work through their feelings of who to be “out” to, just as sexual and transgender minorities do. Following how one came to be part of a queer polyamorous relationship, the participants were asked how “out” they were about their relationships. Responses ranged from “Out? There is an option other than?” to “Not very just yet. I’ve told a few close friends and my mother.” Common responses were to be out to friends and possibly some family while not being out at work and/or school.

Some more specific examples were:

- Lady Hilary, a leatherdyke Queer Irish Pagan female who stated, “All social situations are out, we make choices to socialize in circles that understand/support

us. Two out of the four bio families know/understand. I graduated last year from Mills College and everyone at school knew. Work, some of my peers know that I'm different, but not much more. I work as an emergency psychiatric nurse."

- Quietlywatch, a White, "deviant," "male, although not wholly" states, "Out about the queer part, certainly, but as for the polyamorous part-- usually I keep that part quiet unless it comes up (i.e. unless there's somebody I'm checking out, or somebody he's checking out) because in my experience the majority of folks, whether they're queer or straight, don't react well to polyamory. Rather than spend an hour justifying my love life to someone I barely know, I choose / we choose to keep the flexibility quiet. My friends are all in the know, and most of my family, too-- with the exception of the parental units on both sides, who are a touch too old and traditional to really grasp it."
- Uncle Nono, a Baha'i intersexual "Filipino, English, German, Irish, Polynesian, Spanish, Chinese, etc." male states, "I don't find any reason to parade my life style anymore than the need to parade that I was the product of a mother and a father. The closeted aspect of my life is only as the result of those who don't want anyone to know about it. I personally don't care if the whole world knows if I am intersexual (meaning that my sexual attraction is not limited to gender alone, but personalities)."
- An unnamed Caucasian 80% Hetero Gnostic Christian states, "It depends. As a reservist in the armed forces, there is a definite requirement that some parts of the relationship remain 'in the closet' until retirement. We are out with our closest

friends and in some social circles (SCA). We were somewhat ‘outed’ to both sets of parent[s], though their approach has been very ‘don’t ask’ and ‘we don’t want to know or think about it as long as you don’t make us’.”

What is it like to be in a Queer Polyamorous Relationship?

After responding to how “out” they were, participants were asked to “expand on what it is like to be in a queer polyamorous relationship.” Responses ranged from “Can you explain what it’s like to be married? It’s like that, with more people” to “It’s good to have the freedom to express how I feel and not be restricted by who came first or what gender they happen to be” to “It’s definitely not for everyone!”

Yarrow, a Bisexual Caucasian Pagan female of English and Scottish ancestry, gave a story that collectively resonated with many responses. She stated,

All the light in the world. It’s like a door opens inside your heart, and when you step through it, the whole wall it was in disappears, and you’re living in the open light of love. It’s beautiful and empowering. I would not live any other way. It’s fulfilling on so many levels that a monogamous relationship is not. It’s new all the time, and there is so much love! When one partner needs space, they can have it, and another is there with love and affection. You don’t have to depend on one person for all your emotional needs. In fact, one depends on oneself for most things, and takes what one receives from others as a gift, and when we all do that together, we find ourselves shining with radiance and love and gratitude that our choices have led us to such a beautiful space. And there is sexual and intellectual variety all the time, and polyamory allows for a fuller expression of each individual’s Self. The relationship balances so that everyone’s needs are met, and compromises don’t mean giving in with a token appeasement.

And it’s busy as all get out. We joke often that poly is actually all about calendars (though our busy-ness is as much because of our deep involvement in the pagan community and six other things as because we’re poly. We’re just busy people). Good communication is EXTREMELY important. It’s the key to everything. When someone is

experiencing an imbalance, they need to talk about it, find what's wrong, and figure out what they need that they're not getting, or what they're getting that they don't want, so that the others can help correct the issue.

Additionally, Uncle Nono stated, "It's fulfilling. I prefer it" while Moose stated, "It's work. You have to constantly check in with your partners, make sure everyone is being taken care of (including yourself!)." Other responses that pointed to this kind of relationship being work, as well as, challenging at times are below:

- Raven, a Bisexual many-sided Caucasian female stated, "It is a challenge, but also very rewarding."
- An unnamed, Caucasian 80% Hetero Gnostic Christian stated, "It was confusing, stressful, loving, caring, and spectacular all at the same time. It infects almost every part of your day, from sleeping arrangements, to rides to work, to social appearances. It is stressful in that you really learn where you have insecurities."
- An unnamed, heterosexual Bi-curious White female stated, "I like it. I would like it more if he would acknowledge that we are together. I sleep at his house EVERY night."
- Victor, a Wiccan/Pagan White Gay male stated, "It's liberating, fun, lots of sexual options, but it's also hard sometimes"
- An unnamed pansexual Strong Agnostic German American male stated, "Having a polyamorous relationship has strengthened our own, in that there are no secrets between us and there is always a lot of communication. It's definitely been an acquired behavior, but one well worth acquiring."

Benefits and Limitations

Additional questions looked at the benefits and limitations of queer polyamorous relationships. Predominantly, the benefits discussed circled around the concepts of exponentially expanding love, companionship, being true to oneself and partners, freedom of sexual expression, increased support, more minds, trust, and intimacy. Beyond the many participants who responded that there were no limitations, common limitation responses were time, increased possibility for conflict, jealousy, and feeling marginalized.

Tom, a Bisexual Caucasian Unitarian Universalist male, gives an in-depth description of 8 benefits when he states,

The benefits for me are

1. I have no need to be all things to one person. I am freer to be myself, without being relied on for another's happiness.
2. My girlfriend is a silly, playful person who wrestles, plays games and has more emotional demands so I feel needed. My wife is a dedicated professional, with fiery independence, so I feel taken care of. She is a more quiet cuddly private romantic. Both sides of my personality feel tended and met. I feel more complete a person.
3. Money. Four incomes for one household.
4. More people to cook, clean, wash dishes, run errands, etc... Yes there's more to do, but with each person more than one, add 5 jewels of labor, and

10 jewels to complete them. The more you have equally helping out in some way, the easier it becomes.

5. Entertainment: there is never a shortage of people to do things with. No one ever really feels alone.
6. Fresh fuel: Polyamory creates an absolute need to always communicate. All polyamorous 'handbooks' stress communication over all. The necessity to check in because we are in alternative situations creates more clarity and more communication. Though the needs are the same as in a monogamous relationship, the demands to meet those needs are stronger, and prevent complacency. When relationships become challenged, more people are involved to make things smoother and make sure everyone is fair and reasonable.
7. Support: As I write this, two household members have been in a car wreck within the last 48 hours. The other two are pitching in and taking care of them during this time. Extra care, extra support.
8. Being true to myself: I could live in a monogamous relationship. I did it for 7 years. However, I would not be living up to my full expectation of who I am. On the whole I am happier and more complete by living the way that my heart tells me is right.

Tom states, "there are more advantages, but I think most of them probably go back to those basic 8." Additionally, Tom gives three in-depth descriptions of the

limitations of being in a queer polyamorous relationship stating, “all other limitations I can think of go back to these basic three”:

1. Time, time time: Though social time is increased, alone time is decreased by necessity. In addition, every relationship (of all sorts) requires time investment. Romantic relationships usually (though not always) require extra time. The more you spread out that time, the more difficult maintaining becomes. Time management is the poly nightmare.
2. Conflicts: Two people, in a monogamous relationship will have conflict. 4 people will have 16x the amount of conflict. (Each possible combination of interactions). This increases exponentially with each additional person. However, you also have an equal amount of resources for dealing with them. In short you have more work, and more ways of doing that work. Still the extra work can be a drawback.
3. Discrimination: It does exist. M lost her job. B, S, and O live in constant fear of losing their parents forever. B is pretty sure that is going to happen in the very near future, as certain things have come near to light. Some potential friends have wandered off. We have received hate mail. Society does not accept our choice. We have been ostracized from our church, a theoretically loving and accepting faith.

Public Policy, Law, and Communication

Following with the research on sex and marriage law, as well as the discrimination of sexual and transgender minorities, this study asked if and how public policy and/or law affected the participant's life. A common response is summed up by Nalani's statement that "Public policy hasn't affected my relationships, yet." Beyond this response there were many responses that included a lack of options, bigamy laws, concern over their children's welfare, loss of ones employment, hospital visitations, lack of health benefits for partners and families, and having to spend "a good chunk of money at the lawyers drawing up contracts and wills and powers of attorney to try and replicate some of the basic rights & responsibilities of marriage." As one participant stated "I've put a fair amount of thought into figuring out how to codify and protect my core family."

Wolfgang, a hetero Hispanic male of sexual spirituality who is in a polyfidelity international relationship commented on public policy by stating,

It has forced us to walk all over a fine line where given our international mix we are married to partner A in one country and partner B in another. Have health insurance that covers all the children under one plan and the health insurance from a non-primary partner cover them as if it were and so forth. We would prefer to have a better way, but it is the best solution we can have in order to cover critical basic necessities.

An unnamed Androgynous Pansexual Asatru White androgyne (genetic female) who is in the Army reserves gives three ways that public policy and laws have affected their relationship. This participant states,

1. I cannot marry more than one partner, and I can only marry a partner who is legally considered male in the state where the ceremony is performed.

Marrying a transsexual could result in the invalidation of my marriage if we go to a state that does not recognize sex changes.

2. I work for the Department of Defense and my job requires a security clearance. If a coworker or supervisor raises questions about my reliability or honesty, my clearance could be in jeopardy. I know that others at the same workplace have had extramarital affairs that were public knowledge and it didn't seem to affect them, but I still worry sometimes; it may just depend on the policies of the supervisor(s) who know.
3. At one point, SW and I discussed possibly joining the Air Force - he as a pilot and I as a chaplain. If our orientation or lovestyle were discovered, we would be forced to leave - and it's hard enough to be quiet about my lovestyle already; I'm happy and wouldn't mind telling everyone in the world if it didn't involve backlash. I definitely won't be enlisting, though he's said he might eventually.

These responses show that public policy and law affect every aspect of an individual's life. Additionally, these responses show there are many problems within a social system that requires people to continually stay in the "closet" about their lovestyle.

Beneficial Public Policy, Law, and Communication

When asked, "what public policies, laws, and/or communication do you believe would be beneficial for those in queer polyamorous relationships" the responses varied

from ending the legal recognition of marriage and granting universal healthcare to redefining marriage where it would include sexual and transgender minorities, as well as, poly individuals to creating some form of adoption, Limited Liability Company (LLC), C/S corp., Heinlein's contract marriage, and civil unions. Most participants felt it was not the government's business to define benefits based on whom and how many they should be attracted to. Additionally, education and visibility were mentioned as ways that could benefit those in queer polyamorous relationships.

An unnamed Muslim White Queer male gave a slightly different look at the situation and yet still resonated with many of the responses. His response was:

Really, I think the most important changes that would benefit people in queer polyamorous relationships are fighting the systems that do the most damage to people generally--white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, fatphobia, etc. I think civil marriage should be abolished and every one in the country "illegally" should be given legal status without marriage. I think the government should stop trying to enforce a single model of an acceptable way to have relationships and families. We need affordable housing and universal healthcare, not just ways for those of us with property to leave it to our lovers and ways for those of us with private health insurance to put our partners on our plans.

A final note on public policy comes from Uncle Nono of the Baha'i faith where he states, "I think if we consider the words of Baha'u'llah we should know how I feel about public policies, laws, and/or communications. He said, 'Hatred and religious fanaticism is a world devouring fire no violence can quench.'"

In summary, these results affirm that within the population studied there was a diversity of demographics and life experiences. Additionally, this study concludes that without equal legal protection, those engaging in queer polyamorous relationships must

expend a great deal of energy to secure such protection through complicated legal constructs and lawyers. Many of these same protections are automatically granted to persons in monogamous heterosexual relationships. At the end of the survey participants gave a variety of suggestions on how, as a society, we can begin to support those who engage in queer polyamorous relationships (see Discussion).

CHAPTER V

Discussion

“She [the polyamorist] is a heretic within a community of heretics.”
(Loulan 1999:37)

I enter the discussion with Loulan’s quote because it is fitting for those who engage in queer polyamory. They are not accepted by the mainstream heterosexual monogamous society nor are they readily tolerated let alone accepted within the queer community. This desire to be heard, accepted, and part of the fight for equal rights was echoed many times in the responses of those who participated in the survey. Some showed concern for speaking up too much and hindering the same-sex marriage movement while others adamantly stated that it was equal rights they wanted to fight for and not one group’s rights.

One area that would merit additional study is the social class of the participants. As one trans-masculine multisexed FTM stated, “many legal issues I could probably talk about here would reflect my middle-class white privilege, such as marriage, adoption, etc.” The frequency of responses desiring marriage (or some form of legal union) and changed health insurance raises questions about the fight for equal rights, social class, and the queer movement.

Whose rights are we fighting for if not equal rights? A Post-Gender Jewish XY Semitic stated, “Even in MA [Massachusetts], there is no movement towards truly equal marriage. The rest of the queer community has conspired to sacrifice the needs of the

polyamorous community - and to allow institutionalized discrimination against us - for their own benefit so as to ‘not rock the boat’ too much.”

This concern of “not rocking the boat” or a group being told the community is not ready for their rights yet, can be seen in many civil rights situations throughout time. One that is particularly becoming more visible is the fact that Bayard Rustin was essential in the civil rights movement of the 1960s, however due to him being a “known homosexual” he was not asked to speak or be at the pulpit for the 1963 March on Washington that he organized. It would be interesting to see where this is happening today in regards to the queer polyamorous community. How often are those who are in queer polyamorous relationship not allowed to speak because “the community isn’t ready yet?”

Again thinking on marriage and equal rights Parry (1995:10) states,

In a society where women have long been regarded as men’s “property”, it is only to be expected that everything will be geared towards monogamy, from the legal system to the commercial exploitation of “romance” and dating agencies which promise to find your “perfect partner”. (...) Lesbians and gays in particular are only accepted (if at all) by straight society if they live in a monogamous partnerships - they can be dismissed as “just like us really, except that they’re queer.”

While this may bring rights to one group it leaves out those who are queer and poly, as well as, all those who are somewhere outside of the institute of marriage. In a means to circumvent the conservative interpretation of marriage many brought up the fact that they either lived in or chose to live in a more liberal state. One example from a Queer White female that inferred this was, “Because my partner is an M-T-F transsexual, we’ve had it easier than most queer couples in establishing domestic partnership rights in

the eyes of the law. Basically, it was signing some papers.” While only two states in the United States specifically have laws that will not change birth certificates for transsexuals, a more liberal state is inferred here because many trans individuals have trouble even in the states that have statues allowing transsexuals to change their birth certificate sex; thus causing problems for those who wish to enter into a legal marriage. Again, whose rights are we fighting for and are transsexual rights part of the same-sex marriage fight?

Another area for discussion is the topic of bisexuality. As this study had many self-identifying bisexuals, it brings into question the accuracy of the stereotype that all bisexuals have multiple partners at one time. While stereotypes do exist, and the bisexuals who were part of this survey did identify as being with more than one partner at a time, it is important to remember this is only a sampling of the population and there are many texts and examples of bisexuals who choose varying relationship orientations from celibate to monogamous to polyamorous and everything in-between.

Speaking on the topic of bisexuality Parry (1995:9) states,

It is perhaps no surprise that many bisexuals react negatively to the concept of “threesomes” – it smacks of the seventies image of bisexuality, of the shock-horror of “kinky” sex seen through monogamous heterosexual eyes, as well as the porn images of two passive women performing for a man’s pleasure. The way in which we have been used as scapegoats is linked in many people’s minds with promiscuity and irresponsibility. A sharp division is drawn between monogamy (= sensible, normal, mature) and promiscuity (= irresponsible, perverted, immature) which in turn creates a false picture of sexuality – everyone is either living in a state of cozy, domesticated fidelity or jumping into bed with the nearest person to hand at any available opportunity.

Here is where Rowan (1995:17) states,

Non-monogamy is about taking sex down from the pedestal that most people keep it on and bringing it into the realm of reality. And as soon as you look at sex as a real activity instead of a mythical quality you begin to ask what makes it so different from activities like eating and conversation.

With being “non-monogamous,” queer, and/or polyamorous comes the topic of language and how we speak of sex and relationships. Loulan states, “in a community that often demands conformity, we must find language that includes other ways of being” (1999:35). To allow for the expression of developing community language, this study intentionally utilized open-ended questions. Due to this, some of the most interesting aspects of the study have come from the ways participants self-identified. It shows that the surveyed population specifically has a multitude of identities and does not easily fit into one category such as “male” or “female.”

In a comparison of studies, participants in the “Queering Polyamory” study stated many of the same reason for being in a polyamorous relationship as did those in Ramey’s 1975 study titled “Intimate Groups and Networks: Frequent Consequence of Sexually Open Marriage.” Ramey’s study identified these ten reasons for being in an “intimate network:” “more personal freedom, sex accepted as normal between friends, adds depth to social relationships, sexual exploration in a non-judgmental setting, strengthens bond with spouse, new personality aspects emerge relating to more people, new experiences, being loved more, feeling desired and wanted more, and a sense of belongingness” (1975:519). All of these resonated with the responses from the “Queering Polyamory” study.

Additionally, the “Queering Polyamory” study related to Ramey’s study in being non-typical because it included a large diversity of people such as those of different

relationship statuses, sexual and non-sexual minorities, and various ethnic backgrounds. Here again, the “Queering Polyamory” study has similar findings to Ramey’s in that the “participants are much more likely than the general population to be involved in community and political activity” (Ramey 1975:522) and “they are more likely to have egalitarian attitudes toward gender role equality and minority groups -including sexual minorities-and to express these attitudes in their behavior” (Ramey 1975:522).

Part of this may be due to advertising through LGBTQQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Ally) centers nationwide and in intentional Polyamorous and LGBTQQIA LiveJournal communities. These centers and intentional communities tend to attract people who are more politically active. This was specifically shown in the “Queering Polyamory” study through participants who had started poly gatherings and support groups, and Nathan, a participant who is intending to be instrumental in building the “Foundation for Christian Polygamy and Polyamory.”

Critique and Future Research

As a person who works in the field of queer studies, I know how sensitive people can be about their sexuality, biology, and identities. Despite my experience, however, my original survey questions contained one categorization that received critical comment. I have specifically brought the following critiques to the surface because they need to be noted, and because they illustrate the complexity of spiritual identities, and emerging sexual and gender identities. Due to being as inclusive as possible this study brought in three categorizations, two-spirit, transgender, and intersex, that were not justly discussed

or rightly appropriated within the context of the questionnaire. It is likely because of this that no participants self-identified with being intersexed or two-spirit. Through an E-mail from the ISNA (Intersex Society of North America) I learned that some intersex groups believe that “Intersex is not an identity” (letter to author, March 9, 2005). ISNA states that intersex is, “a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male” (2005) hence, many may have *not* identified intersex as a gender and certainly *not* a sexual identity or orientation. A “T” for transgender was misplaced under the sexual identity and/or orientation section of the questionnaire, which could have led to fewer individuals self-identifying as transgender. My work with transgender individuals creates a basis for me to know that transgender is not a sexual identity or orientation but a gender identity and orientation, however, this oversight happened due to the frequency that I type the acronym “LGBT” and because I rarely need to separate the gender identity and orientation from the sexual identities and orientations. Additionally, at a lecture given by two-spirit Native American Dr. Terry Tafoya I learned that “two-spirit” is a spiritual identity and *not* a sexual identity or orientation. I am thankful for the learning these experiences have fostered and I apologize to the two-spirit, transgender, and intersex communities for the misrepresentation of these identities. With this information, I urge future researchers to be informed, learn from their mistakes, and to be cautious of misrepresenting these and other communities.

With 94 of the 100 participants stating I could contact them for further detail and information this study has shown that there is a large community of people who are ready

to speak and are willing to be part of a study. The participants indicated areas where they perceive future research is needed, and expressed enthusiasm and gratitude that this subject was being addressed in an academic context.

Among the participants' responses, common suggestions were to debunk myths, publish accurate data, and widely publicize the material for all populations to read. Topics suggested for future study include investigating specific categories of public policy and how to fight for rights in those areas. Others were to research how those in polyamorous relationships can acquire health benefits for their families; continue research that will specifically educate those in the psychology profession; survey the nation and world to compile an accurate account of the polyamorous population; study those who are poly with children and people of poly families to gain an accurate account of the healthiness of children who grow up in poly families; and beyond that, to educate as many people as possible on this topic.

Personally, I agree with all the above statements, however, beyond those statements more studies need to include a relationship orientation and/or identity demographic along with the demographic categories of gender, ethnicity, and etcetera. If this were included in various studies the population would begin to be known for its diverse areas of interest, as well as, educate the populace about alternatives to monogamy without the populace specifically needing to look up the community. Additionally, this would aid in taking polyamory and alternative relationship orientations out of the non-normative relationship category and begin to place it in the normative category. Published material with this type of demographic listed would not change the world on its

own but it would begin to put the population on the radar of the majority, just as the inclusion and study of sexual minorities has aided to move the lesbian, gay, and bi population towards the category of normative.

Research needs to be done on the polyamorous community of color, as well as the polyamorous community of differing social classes. Noël's research focused on the six major polyamorist authors and how their texts, "written by white, middle class, educated female authors fail to address how race and class intersect with gender and sexuality in the theory and practice of polyamory" (2004:5). Noël states, "polyamory cannot transform oppressive relationships and family structures without addressing racial and economic inequalities" (2004:5). Noël concludes, "in order for polyamory to successfully transform relationships and family structures, polyamorists must form coalitions with others who share common concerns and goals around issues such as marriage and capitalist consumerism" (2004:5).

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

“Life is a patchwork quilt of experiences, each part fitting into a pattern.”
(Anne Dal Vera 1999:11)

Relating is a complex and ever-changing social construct; nothing in the world is static and there are many ways of loving. As noted earlier, Easton and Liszt state, “the fundamental sexual unit is one person; adding more people to that unit may be intimate, fun and companionable but does not complete anybody” (1997:35).

Expanding upon Rothblum’s statement, “The genitally sexual definition of what constitutes a lesbian relationship ignores the reality of women’s ways of relating” (1999:78). This thesis broadens the scope to include Rubin’s “radical theory of sex” (1993:10) and the many various polyamorous ways of being.

In order to combat this situation of polyamory versus monogamy, society needs to let go of its essentialist thinking about relationship configurations, and realize how connected our lives are to the social and biological constructs around us. We need to realize that churches, governments, policy makers, sex workers, polyamorists, and monogamists are both social constructs of their environment and carry biological traits as well. Additionally, it is important to realize that the inclusion of homosexual individuals in polyamorous relationships creates a unique type of social construct that was not possible until capitalism and the birth of the construct “homosexual” in the 19th century.

Finally, if polyamory is to combat problematic public policy, prejudice, and ignorance, people need to continue building cross-cultural communities, while researchers need to widely investigate and publicize this topic across disciplines.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval



March 1, 2005

Dr. Wayne Allen and Timothy Gardner
Ethnic and Multicultural Studies
109 Morris Hall
Minnesota State University, Mankato

Re: IRB Proposal, Log #2295 entitled "*Queering Polyamory: Configurations, Public Policy, and Lived Experiences*"

Your IRB Proposal has been approved as of February 26 2005. On behalf of the Institutional Review Board I wish you success with your study. Remember that you must seek approval for any changes in your study, its design, funding source, consent process, or any part of the study that may affect participants in the study. Should any of the participants in your study suffer a research-related injury or other harmful outcome, you are required to report them to the IRB as soon as possible.

The approval of your study is for one calendar year from the approval date. When you complete your data collection, or should you discontinue your study, you must notify the IRB. Please include your log number with any correspondence with the IRB.

The IRB reserves the right to review each study as part of its continuing review process. Continuing reviews are usually scheduled, however under some conditions the IRB may choose not to announce a continuing review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "F. Delgado".

Dr. Fernando Delgado
IRB Administrator

cc: file

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
115 ALUMNI FOUNDATION CENTER · MANKATO, MN 56001
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APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Queering Polyamory: Configurations, Public Policy, and Lived Experiences

Consent Form

You have been invited to be in a research study to explore configurations, public policy, and lived experiences of queer polyamorous relationships. You have been selected as a possible participant because you live in the United States of America and self-identify as an individual in a queer polyamorous relationship. Please read this form and ask any question you may have before agreeing to be in the study. This study is being conducted by: Timothy Joseph Gardner, Graduate Student of Ethnic and Multicultural Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Background Information:

The purpose of this research is to explore the current configurations and lives of those who are involved in queer polyamorous relationship. Specifically the goal is to bring a larger understanding about those who are in queer polyamorous relationships.

The researcher qualifies queer polyamorous relationships as those in which at least one individual in the relationship self-identifies as queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, dyke, intersex, two-spirit, third sex, gender-variant, omnisexual, and/or pansexual, as well as, having at least one individual in the relationship self-identifying as polyamorous.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would like to interview you about your relationship configuration, lived experiences you have had, and your experiences with public policy. This interview will vary in time but thirty minutes to an hour is expected. Additionally, I will ask if I can contact you again if further clarification or information is needed.

Risks and Benefits in the Study:

The benefits of being in this study are that you will be adding to the knowledge base of queer polyamorous studies. Risk factors are that information you give may become public knowledge and others may deduce who you are from this information.

Confidentiality:

Completed interviews and observations will be kept secure, and will only be available to the researcher. I would like to have your permission to publish statements you give throughout the course of the study. Statements provided by you can be attributed to you by your name or by a pseudonym to protect your privacy.

Please select one of the following preferences for use of your interview information in this study:

Yes, I grant you permission to publish statements given by me in the course of this study, and you may associate them with my name. Please attribute all quotations to me using my name of choice:

No, I do not want you to publish statements given by me in the course of this study. You may use my responses for statistical purposes only.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Minnesota State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Timothy Joseph Gardner. If you have questions at any time, please contact him at Timothy.Gardner@mnsu.edu or by phone at 507-389-5131.

At the end of the study, you will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and have had the opportunity to ask questions and receive answers. I consent to participate in this study.

I am at least 18 years of age, and I currently reside in the United States.

Your legal name:

(This will act as your signature.)

[Proceed to Survey](#)

APPENDIX C
Survey Instruments

Queering Polyamory: Configurations, Public Policy, and Lived Experiences

Survey Questions

ALL QUESTIONS ARE VOLUNTARY.

* The researcher qualifies **queer polyamorous relationships** as those in which **at least one individual** in the relationship self-identifies as transgender, intersex, two-spirit, bisexual, third sex, gender-variant, lesbian, omnisexual, pansexual, gay male, and/or queer; as well as having **at least one individual** in the relationship self-identifying as polyamorous.

There are a total of 17 questions.

1. What U.S. state(s) do you reside in?

2. What is your age?

3. Gender?

4. Ethnicity?

5. Religious/spiritual affiliation?

6. If you self-identify with a sexual identity and/or orientation (i.e. queer, LGBT, two-spirit, heterosexual, etc.), please describe it.

7. If you self-identify with a lovestyle, relationship identity, and/or orientation (i.e. polyamorous, monogamous, polyfidelity, polyandry, line marriage, polygamy, etc.), please describe it.

8. Please describe your current relationship configuration:

9. How did you come to be part of a queer polyamorous relationship?

10. How "out" are you about your queer polyamorous relationship? What about at work, school, personal, and/or social situations?

11. Please expand on what it is like to be in a queer polyamorous relationship:

12. What do you think are the benefits of being in a queer polyamorous relationship? What are the limitations?

13. Has public policy and/or law affected your relationship? If so, how? Please give one or more examples you feel comfortable explaining in further detail.

14. What public policies, laws, and/or communication do you believe would be beneficial for those in queer polyamorous relationships?

15. How can I as a researcher help your community and those engaging in queer polyamorous relationships?

16. Please use this space to add any further information you feel is pertinent to this study.

17. If needed, may I contact you for clarification and/or further information?

- Yes
 No

If YES, then please enter your contact information of choice below.

To complete the survey and send in your answers, please click the button below.

Submit survey

APPENDIX D

Tables

Table 1.1. Ethnicity of Participants

<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Number of Participants in category</i>
White	38
Caucasian	27
Irish	2
Jewish	2
Native American	2
1/2 Puerto Rican, 1/2 European Mutt (Irish, English, German, Austrian)	1
1/2 White, 1/2 Mediterranean	1
All American Mutt - White	1
Blank	1
Caucasian & Native American	1
Caucasian (English/Scottish, long time ago)	1
Caucasian (Irish-Italian)	1
Eastern European Jewish	1
Euro mutt/White - Italian & Welsh, primarily	1
Euro-Mutt	1
European	1
European and Native American	1
European/Caucasian	1
Filipino, English, German, Irish, Polynesian, Spanish, Chinese, etc.	1
German-American	1
Half-Yankee, quarter Boston Irish, quarter Polish	1
Hispanic	1
Hispanic & European	1
Irish/Ashkenazic Jew	1
Italian American	1
Lots	1
Middle Eastern, American Indian, African American, Jewish, German	1
Dutch	
Native American, White	1
Other	1
Puerto Rican/White	1
Scottish/German/Russian heritage - White American	1
Semitic	1
White Ashkenazi Jew	1
White/Hispanic	1

Table 1.2. Gender of Participants

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Number of Participants in category</i>
Female	54
Male	25
FTM	3
Woman	3
Female Bodied - Gender Queer	2
Androgyne (genetic female)	1
Butch Female	1
Female Geek	1
Gender-variant	1
Male although not wholly	1
Male to Female Transsexual	1
Mostly Feminine	1
MTF	1
None	1
Other	1
Transgendered male	1
Trans-Masculine multisexed FTM	1
XY	1

Table 1.3. Religious/Spiritual Affiliation of Participants

<i>Religious/Spiritual Affiliation</i>	<i>Number of Participants in category</i>
None	13
Pagan	12
Jewish	8
Agnostic	5
Atheist	5
Unitarian Universalist	5
Agnostic/Buddhist	2
Buddhist	2
Catholic Pagan	2
No Answer	2
Pagan/Wiccan	2
Asatru	1
Asatru – Pagan	1
Atheist - Pagan friendly/participatory	1
Baha'i	1
Buddhist/Other	1
Catholic	1

Continued: Table 1.3. Religious/Spiritual Affiliation of Participants

<i>Religious/Spiritual Affiliation</i>	<i>Number of Participants in category</i>
Christian	1
Eclectic, life affirming, natural, spontaneous ritual	1
Gnostic Christian	1
Heathen (Germanic Reconstructionist Pagan)	1
Inclusivist Gnostic Christian	1
Jewish Agnostic	1
KemetiC, Feri student	1
Lapsed Catholic	1
Liberal Christian	1
Many-sided	1
Muslim	1
My Own	1
N/A	1
Neo-Pagan	1
No	1
Non	1
Not really	1
Omnispiritual	1
Omnitheist	1
Pagan (Reclaiming)	1
Pagan, Eclectic (mostly Celtic and Fae)	1
Pagan/Christian	1
Pagan/Panentheist	1
Progressive Christian/Spiritual	1
Protestant	1
Quaker	1
Recovering Catholic	1
Sexual Spirituality	1
Spiritual	1
Spiritual, not religious	1
Strong Agnostic	1
Unitarian Universalist/Pagan	1
Wiccan	1
Wiccan, Blue Star Tradition	1
Witch	1
Zen	1

Table 1.4. Relationship Identity and/or Orientation of Participants

<i>Relationship/Identity/Orientation</i>	<i>Number of Participants in category</i>
Polyamorous	60
Polyamory	7
Non-Monogamous/Polyamorous	2
Polyamorous/Open	2
Polyfidelity	2
“Open” long term relationship	1
Balanced Polyamory	1
Bigendered bi sexual *technically* silly odd otherkin girl	1
Bi-ogamy: a long-term relationship with one person of each sex.	1
Blank	1
Dominant controlled polyamorous dynamic	1
Don't choose a label	1
Don't see point in labeling love	1
Gay and Polyamorous	1
Gender-monogamous open marriage	1
Het Poly	1
Lesbian high femme Dominant/ Owner	1
Monogamous	1
Non-Monogamous	1
Open Monogamy	1
Open, honest, and responsible relationships	1
Opportunistically polyamorous	1
Poly	1
Polyamorous and Swinging	1
Polyamorous of the ‘intimate network’ variety	1
Polyerotic	1
Polyfidelitous	1
Polyfidelity, polygamy, polygyny (in that order)	1
Relationship Radical	1
Responsibly Non-Monogamous	1
Sex with other people but only as a couple	1
Whatever type of relationship any relationship develops into	1

Table 1.5. Sexual Identity and/or Orientation of Participants

<i>Sexual/Identity/Orientation</i>	<i>Number of Participants in category</i>
Bisexual	36
Queer	12
Bisexual, queer	4

Continued: Table 1.5. Sexual Identity and/or Orientation of Participants

<i>Sexual/Identity/Orientation</i>	<i>Number of Participants in category</i>
Gay	2
Gay Man	2
Heterosexual	2
Homosexual	2
Lesbian	2
No answer	2
Pansexual	2
Bisexual transsexual attracted primarily to other FTMs.	1
I don't believe in labels	1
80% Hetero	1
Androgynous Pansexual	1
Attraction toward an individual does not involve gender	1
Between lesbian and bisexual	1
Bisexual leaning towards heterosexual	1
Bisexual polyamorous woman	1
Don't choose a label	1
Functionally straight but heavily bicurious	1
Gay Male	1
Gender queer-female bodied, woman loving, more than butch	1
Het Poly	1
Heterosexual bi-curious	1
Heterosexual female: open to a loving bisexual relationship	1
Intersexual	1
Leatherdyke first, queer, lesbian only by definition	1
Lesbian High Femme	1
Omnisexual	1
Pansexual and transsexual	1
PB&J Dyke: Poly, Bi and Jewish Dyke	1
Polyamorous	1
Polyamorous heterosexual male	1
Post-Gender	1
"Deviant" meaning "one who wanders from the road".	1
Primarily attracted to people for emotional reasons rather than gender/sex	1
Queer Butch	1
Queer Butch Dyke	1
Queer femme dyke	1
Queer, fag, bottom, boy	1
Queer, Non-Gender Specific	1
Queer, pansexual fag, gay, homoflexible	1
Sapiosexual	1
Very sexually open person	1

Table 1.6. States Participants Reside In

<i>State</i>	<i>Number of Participants</i>
CA	14
MA	11
OR	8
IN	7
NY	7
IL	6
WA	4
MD	3
ME	3
NM	3
PA	3
WI	3
CT	2
DC	2
GA	2
KS	2
MI	2
MN	2
SC	2
TX	2
AZ	1
CO	1
FL	1
IA	1
KY	1
MA + MI	1
NC	1
NJ	1
OH	1
TN	1
WA + AZ	1
WA + ID	1

Table 1.7. Age of Participants

<i>Age</i>	<i>Number of Participants</i>
30	9
27	8
34	8
23	6
24	5
25	5
38	5
20	4
22	4
26	4
35	4
40	4
28	3
29	3
36	3
19	2
21	2
32	2
33	2
41	2
46	2
48	2
53	2
18	1
31	1
37	1
42	1
44	1
45	1
47	1
52	1
58	1
